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NEWS RELEASE

June 26, 2009

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CO-TEACH PRESCHOOL AT UM RECEIVES STATEWIDE AWARD

MISSOULA —

The Co-Teach Preschool Program at The University of Montana was recognized this week for exemplary instruction by the Montana Behavioral Initiative.

The Early Childhood Exemplar School designation is given to one early childhood school in the state each year. With the award, Co-Teach Preschool joins a prestigious group of educator teams and schools that meet the highest standards for promoting a positive educational environment and children's safety. The initiative is sponsored by Montana's Office of Public Instruction and aims to help develop attitudes, skills and systems to ensure the success of public school students regardless of ability.

Co-Teach is an inclusive early childhood education program for 3- to 5-year-olds with diverse abilities. It is part of the Institute for Educational Research and Service at UM.

"The Co-Teach Preschool has been the foundation of our work with early childhood education for so many years now," said Stacia Jepson, associate director of the program. "We're humbled and really excited to be recognized like this."

During the past 27 years, more than 1,000 children have graduated from Co-Teach.

“We’ve worked hard to create more inclusive classrooms with positive behavioral support systems,” said Rick van den Pol, director of the Institute of Educational Research and Service. “On the cusp of our 30th anniversary, it’s very meaningful for us to have our efforts recognized like this.”

Co-Teach specializes in early intervention strategies for kids, families and communities with accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Montana Department of Health and Human Services.

Mary Finnegan, manager of Co-Teach, recently was named Montana Special Educator of the Year by the Montana Council for Exceptional Children. She is the first early childhood professional to be selected for the award.

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