# RECRUITMENT AND ENROLLMENT

## Residency

All children who attend a state-funded Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) must live in Michigan. This includes migrant children during the times they are living in Michigan. Children, who live in bordering states, even if their parents/guardians work in Michigan, are not eligible for GSRP.

## Intermediate School District as Fiscal Agent

Public Act (PA) 62 of 2011 shifted all revenues to the School Aid Fund and distributed funding to Intermediate School Districts (ISDs) and consortia of ISDs. ISDs may choose to directly administer GSRP classrooms or develop agreements with eligible subrecipients to provide GSRP. Eligible subrecipients are: school districts, public school academies and public or private, non-profit or for-profit agencies.

Children who reside within the geographic boundaries of the ISD can be enrolled by any subrecipient. However, it is suggested that each ISD and its subrecipients within the ISD form an agreement regulating the enrollment of children across subrecipient boundaries. This may prevent competition among subrecipients. If the family moves after the child has enrolled, the program may continue to serve the child for the remainder of the program year, with the family providing transportation.

PA 196 of 2014 included language providing for the cross-ISD enrollment of children and requiring the resident ISD to pay the educating ISD the per-slot amount for each child enrolled. To utilize this provision, before enrolling a child from another ISD, an ISD must enter into a written agreement with the resident ISD. The written agreement must contain the components that form a binding agreement between two or more parties, including an offer, acceptance of that offer and consideration of what each party gives of value that each would not normally be legally obligated to provide. The agreement must include:

- The number of children to be enrolled by the educating ISD;
- The program option to be utilized;
- The process for communication around children applying to be served outside of the resident ISD;
- Acknowledgement of the responsibilities of each ISD in accordance with GSRP requirements including payment of the per-slot amount for each child enrolled under the agreement; and
- A dispute resolution process.

Children served in a non-resident ISD will count as slots filled by the resident ISD. The slots associated with children enrolling in a non-resident ISD will remain with the resident ISD for the calculation of succeeding years' allocations. Therefore, the resident ISD must be responsible for all required reporting, including the reporting of the children in MSDS. Children served in a non-resident ISD will count as slots filled by the resident ISD.

## Interagency Collaboration

GSRP and Head Start programs in Michigan are required to collaborate in preschool recruitment and enrollment activities. Best practice is to utilize one preschool application for all state and federally-funded programs and share one waiting list. The local Great Start Collaborative should be asked to facilitate this work to ensure that as many of the community's children as possible take part in a program. If a program enrolls a child who is *eligible for or dually-enrolled in* another funded preschool program, it prohibits another child from participating in the GSRP who only may be eligible for GSRP. Refer to resources for this section on collaboration.

## Guidelines for Developing a Recruitment, Referral, and Enrollment Protocol

Although GSRP and Head Start are designed to serve two different populations of children/families, both programs share a common goal: to ensure as many at-risk children as possible are able to benefit from high-quality preschool programs. Therefore, each school readiness advisory committee must establish a written protocol for assisting parents in selecting the program best suited to their needs. The protocol must be reviewed annually to assure the goal of serving the greatest number of children is met.

While each region will create a protocol that is unique to area needs and resources, a strong recruitment, referral, and enrollment protocol will include specific items:

- Contact information for each program including name of person(s) having responsibility for recruitment, title(s), telephone number(s), e-mail address(s), and preferred mode of communication;
- Eligibility guidelines for each program;
- Recruitment and enrollment policies that allow families to learn about each program for which their children are eligible;
- Processes and timelines for mutual referrals among all available programs; and
- Appropriate signatures.

A protocol exhibiting best practice will include a common application. The common application should collect the required information from parents/guardians of each child:

- Documented age of child;
- School district/county of residence;
- Documented annual income;
- Potential risk factors;
- Health information and proof of immunizations; and
- Parent permission to share information among programs in order to determine proper placement.

## Recruitment

A well-developed plan for recruiting the children most at risk of school failure is essential. The local GSRP parent advisory committees and the regional school readiness advisory committee should be involved in drafting the plan. Efforts to connect with families might include:

- Information given to home visit specialists through the ISD and community mental health agencies;
- Posters displayed at local health departments, doctors' offices, libraries, post offices, hospitals, and businesses that draw young families such as laundromats, and grocery stores;
- Flyers sent home with children enrolled in elementary school;
- Informational articles in the local newspaper;
- Door to door census;
- Recruitment tables at local area fairs and festivals;
- Electronic community bulletin boards;
- Information on local cable stations; and
- Displays at kindergarten orientation.

## Referral of Head Start-Eligible Children

GSRP legislation requires specific collaboration when a child is eligible for Head Start. **An eligible child must be referred to Head Start.** The referral process within the protocol must identify which program is responsible for contacting families to inform them of the eligibility for Head Start. Once parents are aware of the eligibility, Head Start should contact the family to describe the services available. Families should be guided to make the program choice best suited to their needs. See the Office of Great Start memorandum on family choice in the *Resources* for this section.

The Head Start program should follow-up with the referring GSRP regarding the parents' decisions. It is not recommended that families be responsible for the completion of a referral form and/or returning a referral form to GSRP.

A referral form from GSRP to Head Start should include:

- Date of referral, date forwarded to Head Start, and date received by Head Start;
- Family contact information: parent and child names, mailing address, phone number, e-mail address;
- Signatures of sending and receiving program representatives;
- Program placement decision;
- Explanation of family program preference (preferably written by parent);
- Parent signature acknowledging parental choice and repercussions of the decision i.e., if choosing GSRP, their child will be included on a GSRP waiting list until the referral process with Head Start is completed;
- Date returned to GSRP; and
- Signature of Head Start representative.

GSRP enrollment is deferred while the referral to Head Start is completed. The completed referral form is documentation that agreed-upon procedures have been followed and also reports the placement outcome for each family that has been referred. The completed referral may document acknowledgement from program representatives and parents that the family is income-eligible for one program and will be enrolled in another. If Head Start does not return the referral form, the GSRP grantee need only retain on file the original dated referral form to meet program requirements.

The protocol should detail the referral turn-around timeframe before a family is removed from the GSRP wait list. Then, as openings occur, all of the children on the list are considered so that the family with the greatest need according to the *Participant Eligibility and Prioritization Guidelines* is contacted first. This critical portion of written protocol helps to ensure common understanding among programs and service to the highest number of eligible children/families.

## Head Start Referrals to GSRP

In addition, a protocol that formalizes a strong collaborative relationship among partners will document the Head Start program's steps for referring both applicants that do not qualify for Head Start and qualifying families on Head Start's waiting list to GSRP. Section 642(e) of the Head Start Act of 2007 details Head Start's requirements for collaborating with state-funded preschool programs. Refer to resources for this section for select sections of the Head Start Act of 2007.

## Enrollment

While the recruitment process begins in the spring of each year preceding the start of the program, prospective grantees are cautioned to delay enrollment until the State School Aid Bill has been signed and allocations/awards have been announced. Parents may be told they are on a waiting list and if expected funding is maintained, will be formally considered for enrollment using the GSRP prioritization process once the funding of the program has been finalized. Please see the *Eligibility* section of the GSRP Implementation Manual for information on child eligibility.

Ninety percent of all children enrolled by an ISD or consortium of ISDs must qualify with family income under 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). PA 196 of 2014 provided a mechanism by which an ISD could serve children from families with incomes up to 300% FPL. Any intermediate school district requesting to utilize the option to serve more than 10% of children above 250% FPL or greater, must contact the assigned GSRP consultant at MDE and, if requested, be able to provide documentation of due diligence to identify and enroll all children at or below 250% FPL. At a minimum, ISDs must be able to demonstrate:

- Geographic location of GSRP classrooms compared to the population of GSRP eligible children and documentation of attempts to place classrooms in areas of high need;
- Recruitment efforts across the ISD and targeted to areas of high need;

- Enrollment of all identified eligible children below 250% FPL in GSRP or Head Start or documentation of reasons not enrolled; and
- Lack of eligible children at or below 250% FPL on waiting lists for both GSRP and Head Start.

In the event that an ISD is able to serve children up to 300% FPL, that ISD would then be able to fill up to 10% of slots with children from families with incomes above 300% FPL.

## Prioritization

Public Act 60 of 2013 focused eligibility for GSRP on family income. Legislation further requires that each applicant be ranked by family's FPL and that programs enroll children with families with the lowest income first following these procedures:

1. As GSRP preschool applications, including income level and other risk factors, are collected, each family's Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is calculated. Follow current guidelines in the *Eligibility* section of the GSRP Implementation Manual to calculate the family's income. Poverty level calculators are available online and may be helpful, such as Federal Poverty Level Calculator.
2. Each child is then placed on a list of applicants from lowest to highest family poverty level. Children whose families are at the same poverty level should be ranked according to other collected risk factors. Any children who are homeless or in the foster care system or who have an individualized education program (IEP) recommending placement in an inclusive preschool setting must be considered to be in the zero to 50% of FPL quintile. This, along with additional risk factors must be considered when prioritizing children for enrollment.
3. Any child eligible for Head Start by income or other factors is referred to Head Start by GSRP following local written protocols, in compliance with the Implementation Manual. The process must be complete before enrolling any Head Start eligible child in GSRP.
4. Once final allocations are posted and subrecipients are notified regarding number of distributed slots, programs may begin to fill slots in accordance with Section 32(d)(9) of PA 60. Enrollment must begin with children from families between zero and 50% of FPL (who have completed the Head Start referral process) and continue with children from families between 51 and 100% of FPL (who have completed the Head Start referral process), between 101 and 150%, between 151 to 200%, and between 201 and 250%.
5. Finally, up to 10% of total slots may be filled with children from families above 250% of FPL with extreme risk for low educational achievement as determined by number or severity of existing GSRP risk factors. Careful documentation of the risk factors for these children must be kept in each child's file. These families must also be charged tuition based on the ISD's adopted sliding fee scale.

Refer to the *Participant Eligibility and Prioritization Guidelines* in the resources for this section for detail about the specific prioritization process of risk factors that grantees are required to implement during the recruitment and enrollment process.

Each ISD must utilize a written prioritization process that provides clear direction for all GSRP staff. Based on the required income quintiles explained above, it may also include weighted priority for local considerations such as lead exposure and for special cases such as 'early' enrollment of children turning 4 years old by December 1, cross-ISD enrollment, and the enrollment of children with IEPs. It should include impartial guidance for staff on situations where children present with similar income and risk factors. Many programs "hold open" a few slots, anticipating that some of the most eligible families may apply as the school year is beginning.

## Combining Eligible and Non-Eligible Children in Preschool Classrooms

Many areas in Michigan do not have sufficient numbers of children eligible to offer individual program classrooms, but do have enough children in total to offer high-quality preschool programs. Some programs have combined Head Start,

Title I, and other funding streams to provide viable classrooms. Other programs have accepted tuition-paying children through their community education programs to serve children who are not at risk. When braiding, each classroom would optimally include children who are not at risk along with targeted and at-risk populations. The following issues must be addressed in administering combined programs:

- When even one child in a classroom is funded through GSRP, all GSRP guidelines must be followed: staff credentialing, curriculum, assessment, parent involvement, etc.
- The funding for each enrolled child should be clear: Title I funds can be used to supplement GSRP funds, but a child cannot be enrolled in two such programs within the same program year.
- Additional at-risk children who meet the GSRP guidelines for eligibility may be enrolled beyond the funded number if the program can accommodate them, but additional funding is not available through MDE grants.
- Additional children, whether at risk or not eligible, can be enrolled in a GSRP classroom, thus rendering it a braided-funding classroom. However, GSRP funding cannot be used for the children who are not eligible. There must be documentation that the tuition charged or other sources of cash and in-kind funding are equivalent to the amount of state funding which supports each GSRP child (i.e., if audited the GSRP must be able to show that GSRP funds were not spent on children not eligible for GSRP). Programs where administration and facilities are provided by the subrecipient as in-kind must maintain careful documentation clarifying cost share.
- When braiding GSRP and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), an issue for discussion may be whether or not the program would generate a full-time equivalent of special education funding; the interface between the Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education and the State School Aid Act warrants considerable attention.
- Over-age children who are eligible for kindergarten, cannot be enrolled in GSRP, no matter what their individual levels of development might be. This is explicit in the legislation and will require return of the state funding for each over-age child served. "Holding out" or "redshirting" of children has

not been effective in increasing children's academic performance; children who are "over-age" for their grade, no matter the circumstances, tend to do more poorly in school. However, GSRP cannot dictate the parameters around enrolling children with other funding; therefore braided-funding classrooms may include over-age children.

## Special Education Eligible Children

Local districts may determine, through the IEP team that the GSRP is the least restrictive environment for children who qualify for special education services. A child may be placed in a GSRP classroom in two ways:

1. By qualifying for GSRP and receiving additional ECSE services, or
2. Through the blending of programs and braiding of GSRP and ECSE funding.

In any case, the IEP team should have representation of parents and the GSRP teacher as it considers the following questions:

- Do all parties feel that the IEP fully meets the child's needs?
- Does the IEP declare the GSRP as the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)?
- Was the GSRP teacher a part of the IEP team?
- Are consultation meetings between special education staff and the GSRP teaching team written into the IEP?
- Can the child's needs for special services be met in the context of GSRP?
- What additional support or accommodations will be necessary so the child can participate fully in the activities and environment of GSRP?
- What percent of children in the classroom have IEPs? Individual classroom needs and resources are taken into consideration, such as the variety and degree of disability as well as adult/child ratio in a classroom. Best practice for inclusive classrooms limits the percentage of children with IEPs to no more than 25 percent.

Planning for a child to attend both part-day GSRP and part-day ECSE, is not typically supported. If discussed as a possibility, there are many additional considerations. Transition between programs is critical to consider. Is it in the child's best interests to participate in two programs, possibly with different facilities, staff, peers, routines, behavior, and academic expectations? Could the child's needs be met with placement into GSRP and special education services occurring in a play-based setting, within the GSRP classroom? If the child transfers each day between programs, how are his/her lunch and rest period accomplished?