

CLASSROOM QUALITY

Introduction

Each Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) selects an approved curriculum from the list within the [Curriculum](#) section of this manual. Regardless of which approvable curriculum is used, teaching teams implement equitable learning opportunities through a comprehensive, child-focused, constructivist curriculum model for all enrolled children, as is widely espoused for PreK and supported by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Curriculum models are essential to implementing high-quality programs. They guide adults in:

- Determining program content:
 - Skill progression;
 - Knowledge; and
 - Overarching concepts;
- Planning for learning experiences;
- Training and supporting staff;
- Providing high quality environments;
- Creating and maintaining a consistent yet flexible daily routine;
- Engaging in responsive adult-child relationships;
- Supporting development across domains;
- Utilizing intentional teaching practices to support decisions about:
 - Individual learning objectives;
 - Methods to accomplish objectives;
 - Addressing specific child interests through use of emergent curriculum; and
 - Structuring activities that can be adapted to meet the needs of all developing children, including but not limited to dual language learners and children with Individualized Education Plans; and
- Promoting equitable family engagement opportunities.

Classroom staff also attend to Michigan’s [Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Birth to Kindergarten](#) (ECSQ), the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential, Child Care Licensing Division [Licensing Rules for Child Care Centers](#), and program and intermediate school district (ISD) philosophies, guidance, and rules for GSRP. This section of the GSRP Implementation Manual is intended to provide an overview of the state-level requirements for classrooms implementing the GSRP model. Support for how to implement any of these high-quality elements should be directed to the program administrator and assigned Early Childhood Specialist. Any teachers acting as the licensing designee should also carefully review the [Program Administration and Staffing](#) section of this manual for more information on program requirements.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

The National Association for the Education of Young Children’s (NAEYC) [Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education](#) position statement recommendations emphasize that early childhood programs are responsible for creating a welcoming environment that respects diversity, supports children’s ties to their families and community, and promotes both second language acquisition and preservation of children’s home languages and cultural identities. GSRP provides high quality programs that build on cultural background, language, and experiences while supporting adults in their understanding of implicit bias, anti-bias, and equity.

Key Elements of High-Quality Early Childhood Learning Environments: Preschool

The [Key Elements](#) draw from national and state standards for early childhood and are based on research in child development that exemplifies proven practices in early education. Developed in 2020 and approved by the Michigan Department of Education in 2021, the Key Elements provide a condensed framework for implementing high-quality programs for children and should be adhered to by all GSRP classrooms. Additional GSRP-specific requirements are detailed below.

Key Element #1 High Quality Learning Environments

The environment is designed to promote high quality learning and interactions in all domains throughout the day.

A high quality GSRP classroom embeds all of the requirements listed below.

- Classroom environment must reflect the GSRP approved curriculum being implemented by the program.
- All Licensing requirements are adhered to with fidelity.
- Learning materials and visuals reflect every child’s family, local community, abilities, first language, and cultural identity.
- Children have access to varied, plentiful, and open-ended materials that are rotated over time. These items promote independence and include natural elements and real items vs. plastic/toy replicas.
- Interest areas do not have any artificial limits imposed by adults.
- Adult-made displays are relevant to children’s interest, topic of study, and essential to the implementation of the curriculum.
- The outdoor learning area allows adequate space to encourage various types of play and activities (e.g., stationary equipment, portable items, and materials to support content areas).

Key Element #2 Consistent Daily Routine

A consistent daily routine is implemented to promote balanced participatory learning through all portions of the day.

Required parts of the GSRP classroom schedule are described below. Refer to sample daily routines in the [resources](#) for this section. Classrooms may have alternate terms for parts of the routine, as long as names are used daily and are easily understood by children. A visual daily routine should also be posted at children’s eye level, and referred to throughout the day. A consistent daily routine must include appropriate amounts of time each day for children to:

- Participate in a three-part sequence of child planning, choice and child recall. In child **planning**, children indicate their choice time plans to adults, in a variety of ways, and in ways that are consistent with individual developmental levels. Children will have a minimum of one continuous hour of **choice time** to carry out their plans and make many choices about where and how to use materials. Adults support children’s efforts by listening, encouraging children’s language, imitating children’s ideas and words, and commenting on specific attributes of children’s work. Children complete the sequence after **clean-up time**, by **recalling** and discussing their choice time activities.
- Engage in discrete **small group** activities which may be adult-initiated, but not adult-dominated.
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- Have **snack or meal time(s)** where staff and children eat together family style and share the same menu to the extent possible. (See *Meals/Snacks* in *Program Administration and Staffing* section of this manual).
- Experience planned transitions that are limited and actively engaging.
- Have **outside time** where adults provide equipment and materials to intentionally plan, support and extend children’s activities.
- Have an opportunity for **rest** in a school-day, extended program or GSRP/Head Start blend program that is scheduled for no longer than one hour, accommodates for the needs of individual children, and includes alternate activities for children who do not sleep.

Key Element #3 Adult-Child Relationships

Responsive adult-child interactions promote secure relationships that support learning throughout the day.

The structure of the physical environment, daily routine and activities presented, and the adult(s) approach all have a direct influence on the adult-child relationship.

Required parts of high-quality adult-child relationships in a GSRP classroom are described below.

- Meet children’s basic needs by allowing children to use the toilet as needed. Their wet or soiled clothing is changed when uncomfortable or unhealthy for the child. Injuries are attended to promptly with empathy and compassion.
- Support children with sensitivity during transition times throughout the day (arrival, during daily routine, departure). Their feelings are acknowledged, and children are allowed to transition into and out of activities at their own pace.
- Provide a warm and caring environment by focusing on children throughout the day. Adults respond to children with calm and respectful tones and attend to them when they are upset.
- Acknowledge individual children’s accomplishments. Adults avoid using praise and rewards by acknowledging children’s individual efforts (e.g., repeating the children’s words and commenting on what they are doing, allowing the children to evaluate their own work and efforts).
- Use the following strategies that support children’s communication skills:
 - Allow the child to initiate conversations, speak first, converse in a give and take manner;
 - Use open-ended questions;
 - Acknowledge and seek children’s ideas;
 - Encourage children to talk about what they are doing; and
 - Use children’s words and comment specifically on their work.
- Encourage children to interact with one another. Use the following strategies for partnering in children’s play:
 - Observe, listen, and follow cues;
 - Assume roles suggested;
 - Imitate and extend their play; and
 - Encourage children to do things for themselves like solving problems with materials and tasks.

Social Emotional Learning

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is crucial to helping children learn to manage their feelings and to interact successfully with others. Research shows young children who struggle with behavioral and emotional problems have a fifty percent chance of continuing to struggle into adulthood. There is additional evidence that high-quality early childhood education can minimize challenging child behaviors when it focuses on child-initiated learning activities and is most effective when offered to children through a system based on positive relationships with children, families, and colleagues.

SEL skills are foundational and categorized into four types: behavioral regulation, friendship skills, emotional literacy, and problem-solving skills. Teachers should spend ample time supporting children’s SEL development, especially at the beginning of the year. As the year progresses, and as children begin to develop these skills, teachers should continue to embed these skills into daily routines and classroom learning.

The following instructional strategies have been shown to be effective in promoting positive social interactions.

- Teach children how to regulate their emotions through calm down strategies such as breathing, counting, drawing a picture, etc.
- Embed friendship skills into classroom activities, focusing on how to communicate with others, greet each other by name, and play cooperatively.
- Provide opportunities for children to learn emotions, both positive and negative emotions, role playing the identified emotion and how to navigate those emotions.
- Involve children in resolving conflicts with their peers. The following conflict resolution steps are taught to the children and implemented by the adult:
 - Approach conflict calmly;
 - Acknowledge children’s feelings;
 - Gather information from the children on what happened;
 - Restate the problem to the children;
 - Ask children for solutions and encourage children to choose a solution together; and
 - Support children in the implementation of their solution.
- Reference a high-quality framework for teaching social emotional skills that target challenging behaviors, for example, the [National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations](#).
- Children must not be denied enrollment or excluded from GSRP programming based on challenging behavior, developmental delays or identified disabilities (e.g., toileting needs, speech, motor function, aggressive behaviors and cognitive delays). Programs should reach out to the ISD for information on mental health supports for children and follow the process set by the ISD to obtain help.

Key Element #4 Intentional Teaching

Adults use intentional teaching practices to support continued growth in all aspects of children’s development and learning.

Intentional Teaching is dependent upon adult expertise in fundamental child development and the developmental continuum together with authentic assessment and appropriate observations of each child to establish learning goals and continuously inform instruction.

Intentional teachers rely on all members of the teaching team to affect the on-going assessment cycle by observing and assessing, reflecting, and planning, and implementing instruction.

Intentional Teaching Practices:

- Encompass everything the teaching team does to facilitate children’s development, including organization of the indoor and outdoor learning environments, the nature of adult-child interactions, and strategies for transitions and grouping.
- Promote active play through intentional, hands-on learning, using open ended, real materials, during all portions of the daily routine.

- Offer real life learning experiences individualized for the strengths, interests and needs of each child, in consideration of their family, community, and culture.
- Establish and support an inclusive environment, mindful of family, child, and staff unique and diverse situations and needs.
- Use technology with intentionality, which may thoughtfully include being used as a tool during play.
- Select books, music, and materials that reflect not only the culture of the children in the classroom but also the broader community while avoiding stereotypes.

Utilize the following for further details on high-quality indicators of teaching practices:

- Chosen curriculum and resources;
- [Early Childhood Standards Quality for Birth to Kindergarten](#);
- [Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy for Prekindergarten](#);
- [Essential Instructional Practices in Early Mathematics: Prekindergarten to Grade 3](#);
- [Key Elements of High-Quality Early Childhood Learning Environments: Preschool](#);
- [WIDA Early Years Michigan Connections for Multilingual Learners](#); and
- Program evaluation tool (CLASS or Classroom Coach).

The following teaching strategies are not aligned with the *best* teaching practices and should not be utilized in a GSRP classroom:

- Use of workbooks, worksheets, flashcards, and/or other materials that do not engage children’s thinking in active learning;
- Whole class extended, rote activity (e.g., calendar);
- Letter of the week; and
- Homework.

See your Early Childhood Specialist (ECS) for additional guidance and support.

Team Teaching Model

In team teaching, each staff person is fully engaged in planning curriculum, implementing curriculum both indoors and outdoors, child assessment, and supporting family engagement through home visits, conferences, professional learning, and family meetings. The work is collaboratively shared and a high-quality GSRP dedicates time for staff to plan on a daily basis:

- All teaching staff participate equally in planning activities; ensuring associate teachers do not play minor non-teaching roles (e.g., wipe tables, prepare meals, etc.).
- All teaching staff conduct and participate in children’s activities (for all parts of the daily routine).

- All teaching staff recognize their responsibility for the health and safety, growth and development of all children.
- All teaching staff will be supported with and responsible for appropriate planning, instruction, assessment, and program implementation including needed accommodations to the daily routine, behavior challenges, and family communication for children with IEPs when special education staff are not present.

Key Element #5 Engaging families

The relationship with each family is valued and strengthened by seeking multiple ways to partner in their child’s development and learning.

Family engagement is critical to positive child outcomes. The GSRP provides a variety of opportunities for families to become involved in the program and regularly seeks input from families and involves them in decision making for the program. Families must not be required to volunteer in the classroom or participate in group meetings as a condition of enrollment, although all efforts should be examined to engage all families based on their ability and comfort level.

GSRP teaching teams conduct four formal family contacts annually; these typically occur in two home visits and two family conferences. Family conferences can be completed virtually if the family prefers. Refer to the [Family Engagement](#) section of this manual for more information.