

# EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIALIST

The \*Early Childhood Specialist (ECS) is the educational leader and catalyst for continuous quality improvement for each Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP). Through observation and feedback, the ECS supports teaching teams and site administrators to provide high-quality preschool with fidelity to the GSRP model. The ECS confidently advocates for children, families and teachers to ensure appropriate decisions be made about the program. The ECS position is prominently featured in the ISD Program Evaluation policy.

Intermediate School Districts (ISDs) may employ/contract with qualified ECS to carry out the requirements specific to GSRP or may allow some or all subrecipients to contract with a qualified ECS to carry out the requirements specific to the grant. One person may not be employed to fill both a lead teacher position and an early childhood specialist position. The local program administrator may be the ECS, if qualified.

To be hired or contracted as an ECS, a candidate must have:

- A graduate degree in early childhood education or child development.
- Five or more years of relevant job experience in early childhood education (such as working with young children in a group setting, program planning and implementation, program evaluation, staff supervision/development and program management).

At times, ISDs are unable to identify a well-qualified candidate to fill an ECS position after an extensive search. In that case, the Early Childhood Contact (ECC) should contact the assigned consultant.

Before or immediately after being engaged, the ECS must acquire:

- Knowledge of the [Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Pre-Kindergarten \(ECSQ-PK\)](#).
- Knowledge of GSRP requirements as outlined in the [GSRP Implementation Manual](#).
- Knowledge of State of Michigan [Licensing Rules for Child Care Centers](#).
- Formal training in the selected approved developmental screener, comprehensive curriculum, authentic child assessment, and program evaluation tool of the classrooms supported. Formal training is defined as comprehensive training in full implementation of a tool, completed by a certified trainer of the tool.
- Status as a Reliable Assessor/Certified Observer in the applicable program evaluation tool(s):

### [Preschool Program Quality Assessment \(POA\)](#)

Each ECS without formal training in POA must complete Online POA training. ECS successfully completing POA training are required to complete reliability testing for two consecutive years and then the reliability test is required every two years (testing required year 1, 2, 4, 6, etc.). Should an ECS have a gap in Reliable Assessor status for any reason, the ECS is required to take the reliability test for two consecutive years before going back to a two-year cycle of testing.

### [Preschool Program Quality Assessment-Revised \(POA-R\)](#)

ECS successfully completing POA-R training are required to complete reliability testing for two consecutive years and then the reliability test is required every two years (testing required year 1, 2, 4, 6, etc.). Should an ECS have a gap in Reliable Assessor status for any reason, the ECS is required to take the reliability test for two consecutive years before going back to a two-year cycle of testing.

### [Classroom Assessment Scoring System \(CLASS\)](#)

A Certified CLASS Observer is a person who has attended an in-person CLASS Observation Training and who has passed a CLASS Reliability Test within the past year. Each ECS using CLASS must be a Certified CLASS Observer. An annual recertification test is required to maintain CLASS Observer status.

The ISD must ensure that those employed or contracted to fill the ECS position are able to perform the following functions for each assigned classroom:

- Support each teaching team to meet grant expectations around the learning environment, daily routine, adult-child interactions and partnership with parents as outlined in the [Classroom Requirements](#), [Curriculum](#) and [Parent Involvement](#) sections of the GSRP Implementation Manual.
- Provide monthly coaching to teaching teams, offering support by observing to provide feedback on techniques or interactions, modeling strategies with children, attending home visits/conferences, meeting with teaching teams to discuss feedback, strengths and needs, plans, etc. Meetings may be in person or through electronic means. However, the ECS must visit each classroom at least once every two months. 'Walkthroughs' that last only a few minutes are not sufficient to meet this requirement.
- Support each teaching team to implement the comprehensive curriculum and ongoing child assessment tool with validity to the exclusion of supplemental curriculums and assessments unless the process for approval by the ISD has been completed and approved. The ECS monitors formal training in the tools for both the lead and associate teacher.
- Monitor quantity and quality of narrative anecdotal evidence entered into the child assessment tool by each teaching team, supporting continuous purposeful analysis of child progress to inform intentional parent partnerships, lesson planning and foster meaningful, intentional whole group instruction, as well as respond to small group and individual child needs.
- Participate in consistent documentation of work across the ISD, documenting each coaching session. For example, coaching models offer a system to help

ECS to document approaches with unique teaching teams, coaching logs, observation summaries, coaching plans/goal-setting, coaching reflections and follow-up with teaching teams.

- Be available for teaching teams between visits as needed.
- Administer the selected program evaluation tool, during the time frame established by OGS. Only an ECS who is a Reliable Assessor/Certified Observer completes the observations, interviews and scoring of the program evaluation tools(s). The ECS must be assigned to the classroom that is observed/evaluated/coached. Each ECS participates in the recertification process to maintain status as a Reliable Assessor/Certified Observer. See the [Program Evaluation](#) section of this manual for related information.
- Use program evaluation results and child outcome data with each teaching teams to set goals for the classroom and identify areas for professional development.
- Ensure each teaching team has access to necessary professional development. The ECS approves early childhood professional development calendars for the lead teacher, associate teacher and support staff.
- If applicable, monitor and support successful completion of compliance plans for lead and associate teachers. The ECS signature is required on each compliance plan. The ECS can provide support by helping to connect teaching staff with an institution of higher education academic advisor who can arrange a schedule of coursework to meet the two-year timeframe, encourage staff through coursework by discussing the new learning and supporting practice of new strategies. The ECS can help to advocate with the subrecipient if release time or financial assistance is needed for courses, fees or textbooks or connect the staff member to the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H) program at the Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children (MiAEOYC). The ECS contract accommodates the intensive support and additional classroom visits, coaching and consultation that staff members with incomplete credentialing require.

Additional ECS responsibilities may have unique assignment configurations across ISDs. ISD requirements that **may** be assigned to an ECS, depending on the unique configuration of each ISD:

- Acting as a leader in local or subrecipient-level data analysis team (See the [Program Evaluation](#) section of the Implementation Manual for more information on the data analysis team).
- Ensuring that program evaluation reports are shared with the GSRP Early Childhood Contact (ECC), subrecipient administration and GSRP Parent Advisory Committee(s).
- Helping to design annual, data-driven professional development (PD) calendars for teaching teams.
- Facilitating meaningful professional development.
- Acting as a primary program contact with subrecipient administration.
- Providing input on classroom needs to ensure program funds are used appropriately, particularly using knowledge of classroom needs when recommending approval/rejection of capital outlay requests.
- Supporting alignment of GSRP with K-12 and children's transition into kindergarten and protecting hallmarks of early childhood education such as

learner-centered, active, participatory learning and authentic partnership with families in their child's development. (See the [Transition](#) of the Implementation Manual for more information.)

- Supporting programs to access resources, including Michigan Department of Education (MDE) sponsored PD, Resource Centers and the Great Start to Quality Rating System.
- Assuring documentation of strong and positive parent engagement, such as completion of formal parent contacts where there is a reciprocal exchange of information about the curriculum and their child's development, with aligned strategies to promote and extend children's learning at school and at home, as well as partnership on referrals to meet child and/or family needs.
- Following up with the appropriate administrators, including the ECC, if aware that licensing requirements are not met.
- Attending ISD ECS meetings and professional development.

Additionally, the ISD must ensure that each ECS has support to engage in appropriate professional development opportunities to remain up-to-date with: early childhood education theories and practices; supported developmental screening, ongoing assessment tools, comprehensive curricula; and, coaching and mentoring processes.

- The ECS attends meaningful, high quality professional development events, such as MDE sponsored PD, the MiAEYC Michigan Professional Learning Institute and/or the HighScope International Conference and Research Symposium.
- The ECS has opportunities to reflect on the ECS role and responsibilities with peers more than once per year.

Each ISD has a unique system for meeting the requirements of the program. Within those systems, the ECS is the key to ensuring that each child engages in a high-quality preschool experience that has fidelity to the GSRP model. It is this experience that leads to the child outcomes GSRP has been proven to deliver.

In determining ECS classroom assignments and other duties, the ISD is responsible first and foremost for assuring the ECS's role in coaching and supporting the teaching team. As the ECC designs the system of ECS supports for the ISD and assigns classrooms to individual ECS, the following elements are considered:

- Required ECS functions and the hours needed to complete them.
- Additional functions the ISD assigns to ECS and the hours needed to complete them.
- Expertise and experience of the ECS.
- Experience of the subrecipient and teaching team(s) with operating a preschool program, maintaining a child care license, and meeting GSRP requirements. For example, the ECC may plan additional classroom visits and/or more intensive support for beginning teachers, teachers new to GSRP or teachers that have less-than-expected program quality.
- Number of assigned subrecipients, sites, and classrooms.
- Geographic location of the assigned classrooms and amount of travel time between sites.

- Relationships between the ECS and teaching teams, especially if ECS are monitoring teaching staff as well as coaching them.

It is the responsibility of the ISD to ensure that all ECS requirements are being met. The following documentation must be completed or reviewed by the ECC and kept on file for review during on-site monitoring visits.

- A master calendar for all ECS activities, which aligns with reporting requirements on program evaluation, scheduled professional development calendars and meetings such as ECS peer group, the local parent advisory meetings, school readiness advisory committee, and superintendent/school board meetings.
- Copies of the ISD-provided coaching documentation forms used for each session. The form must include at a minimum the date, the intention of the session method of feedback with the lead and associate teachers, observational notes reflecting the session, any expected follow-up on either the part of the ECS or the teaching team, and confirmation that all members of the teaching team and the ECS participated in the session and agree to the content of the form. The ECS must keep a copy of the form and provide one to the teaching team. The ECC should review documentation periodically to see that teaching teams are getting the support needed and that the ECS team members are fulfilling the requirements of the position.
- A position description for every ECS, whether employed or contracted by the ISD or subrecipient, that includes the amount of time to be dedicated to GSRP work for the year. All position descriptions must be clear in the expectations to meet GSRP requirements: classroom observation/program evaluation, feedback, ongoing support, meetings, professional development, etc. All must include a requirement to attend ISD ECS meetings and professional development required for the ECS as well as being available to the ISD or MDE as needed as part of the monitoring process. References to meeting the requirements included in the position description must be included in all subrecipient contracts where the subrecipient provides the ECS.

## **Program Evaluation throughout the Year**

GSRP requires that the program be evaluated to provide answers to a few key questions:

- What is working and what needs to be improved?
- What professional development do staff need to be fully prepared to carry out the program with fidelity? Have teaching teams received professional development on data availability, accessibility and use?
- What experiences need to be added or improved in the classroom for the children?
- Does the program get the results it should for the children?
- How are parents engaged as active decision makers for the program and in an exchange of information around goal setting and progress for their children?

The ECS sets the stage for answering these questions by supporting each teaching team in high fidelity use of the comprehensive curriculum, ongoing child assessment tool, and through the administration of an approved program evaluation tool. The ECS also considers how grant expectations are met as outlined here and throughout the Implementation Manual.

### Learning Environment

- In a visual scan of the classroom, the teacher's philosophy of early childhood education should be evident in the room arrangement, materials on the shelves and posting on the walls.
- Ensure that interest areas are clearly defined through strategic placement of furnishings.
- Address classrooms that have a large "learning rug" for used only for whole group instruction and/or have a cluster of tables for group activities such as journaling, penmanship, or worksheets instead of utilizing all available space for interest areas.
- Visual clutter may negatively affect some children's learning. For example, shelves and walls crowded with excessive materials; materials posted above children's eye level or hanging from the ceiling; "teacher areas" with overcrowded surfaces and shelves.
- Items for adults should be posted at adult-eye level and are fine to have in the classroom (i.e., emergency procedures, problem solving steps, etc.). Children's work should be displayed at children's eye level as much as possible and located in a place where children and families can readily see and talk about it.
- The outdoor learning environment is utilized daily. It has adequate space and includes both stationary and portable equipment for various types of play, e.g., climbing, pouring, jumping, pretending, playing alone or with peers, playing with manufactured toys or materials which appeal to multiple senses.

### Daily Routine

- Programs may use different terminology for each portion of the day. Names for each portion of the day should be easily understood by children. Portions of the day must be reflected in the written schedule posted on the wall for adults, on the visual schedule for children, and reflected in the teachers' lesson plans.
- The daily routine must include all required parts with an appropriate amount of time designated. Implementation must follow the written daily routine and must be consistent day to day and week to week throughout the program year with rare exception. For example, the GSRP daily routine should not include weekly "specials" like P.E. or music, or school assemblies. See the [Classroom Requirements](#) section for more detail on parts of the daily routine.
- The ECS should learn if teaching teams work with consistent groups of children for planning time, recall time, small-group time and home visiting, as this tends to strengthen relationships and home-school partnering for child development.

## Adult-Child Interaction

- Together, learner-centered and learner-driven play = playful learning. Adult-initiated GSRP classroom activities include large group, small group and transition times. During these portions of the daily routine, adults select concepts, activities and materials based on children's strengths and interests. Adults plan possible scaffolding strategies for children at emergent, middle and later developmental stages. Adults comment on what children are doing/saying, imitate and add to children's actions, use materials with children and support children as leaders. Children are engaged as active, participatory learners during adult-initiated activities. Children contribute their own ideas and are involved at their own developmental levels. Children have the highest level of control during uninterrupted child-initiated play, where children make many choices about where and how to use materials and carry out their activities. In this portion of the day, adults are partners in children's play; they observe and listen before entering play, assume roles as suggested by children, follow children's cues about content and direction, imitate children, encourage children to talk about what they are doing, use children's words and comment specifically on children's activities.
- This is truly the "heart and soul" of any classroom. It is especially important that ECS regularly observes a range of interactions that happen throughout the day. Consider what adults are doing and saying, how children respond during interactions with adults, and how adults in turn respond to children's statements, observations and questions.
- During regular observations the ECS documents what adults are doing and saying throughout the day. A 'rule of thumb' for analyzing specific interactions: to be considered highest quality, there should be at least three examples positively illustrating the indicator and no negative indicators.
- Be sure to regularly observe all staff. If Teacher A has appropriate interactions consistently and Teacher B does not, the result may be lower quality classroom practices.
- Regularly observe the types of questions the adults ask to determine if questions relate to what the child is doing and are open-ended or if there is a pattern of adults asking many questions or questions with predetermined correct answers.
- Regularly observe when adults make comments to determine if children are consistently encouraged to interact with each other and to determine if children's individual efforts are acknowledged and supported.

## Curriculum Planning and Assessment

- In high quality team teaching, an observer would have difficulty discerning the Lead Teacher from the Associate Teacher. All adults conduct and participate in children's activities; there is not a pattern of one adult leading and another adult playing minor, nonteaching roles such as sweeping floors or wiping tables.
- Similarly, in a quality classroom, curriculum and authentic assessment are seamlessly interwoven, so that children's classroom activities are not interrupted for direct assessment.

- The ECS examines teacher resources for curriculum planning and assessment at the teacher's planning area/desk as well as on shelving and in file cabinets. Curriculum will be visible in the room arrangement, words for the areas of the room, portions of the daily routine, lesson plan/daily activities, Parent Handbook, etc. Note that 'using' the comprehensive curriculum and authentic child observation tool are key; having resources 'available' is insufficient to document high-quality practice.

## **Facilitating Continuous Improvement**

The ECS designs a relevant and useful PD plan each year, taking into account patterns in child data, individual needs of the staff, as well as the overall training needed to address aggregated data. PD is connected to the ECSQ-PK and the curriculum. Participatory child-learning requires intentional teachers; think of this as the 'plan-do-review' sequence for adults! The PD calendar should address program orientation, how new staff members are mentored, developmental screener/curriculum/child assessment training, in-service training, monthly training topics, and contract PD days.

Effective approaches to professional development may include establishing professional learning communities (PLCs) among GSRP teaching teams, where the focus is on using data to support the continuum of teaching. In PLCs, teaching teams find support as they hear new ideas, encourage each other and discuss implementation issues on an on-going basis.

Though the PD plan may be created by the ECS, it should be presented annually to the local Advisory Committee for input; this ensures their support of the process. The ECS makes sure all materials needed to meet the goals will be in classrooms in time for the start of the school year, and that all training designated is included in the professional development plan for in-service and the upcoming school year.

ECS facilitate children's smooth transition into GSRP and support a strong and predictable schedule throughout the school year. Before the children's program begins, the ECS works with teaching teams to ensure that planned daily routines and classroom arrangements meet GSRP requirements and reflect the comprehensive curriculum model. This review could occur individually with teaching teams, or within a PLC with members sharing strategies that have been successful for them and conclude with suitable daily routines.

Shortly after the school year has started and the teaching team and children have adjusted, the ECS schedules a visit with each returning teaching team to review the results from program evaluation that was completed the previous spring when the program- and classroom-level goals were developed. An observation centered on those goals takes place. The ECS sets up a time, within two weeks, to meet in a comfortable place with the teaching team without interruptions to discuss the program evaluation results and child outcome data. Depending on the needs of the teaching team, feedback may be discussed as a whole, in part, or by item in one/or multiple meetings. Strengths are discussed first and then areas for improvement. The ECS is objective, factual and keeps the child in the heart of all discussions.



The program evaluation tool is administered for new teachers to establish a baseline. It is especially important for newly hired teachers to receive multiple visits and feedback early in the school year. This will allow the ECS to positively impact classroom environment and habits of routine and interactions. When a new associate teacher is assigned to a classroom, the ECS in partnership with the ECC and program administrator may determine if a baseline program evaluation is necessary.

Early, monthly visits set the stage for a strong collaborative relationship among the teaching team and ECS. Together, and with curriculum resources, a continuous improvement plan is generated to support operating a high-quality classroom. An effective plan will:

- Identify the goal;
- Identify related program evaluation indicator(s) or child outcome objective(s);
- Set strategies and activities to improve teacher knowledge, (e.g., watching a training video together, videotaping with teacher reflection, visit another classroom with teacher reflection, making visual cues, over-the-shoulder coaching or a focus strategy;)
- Supply needed materials;
- Make changes in indoor/outdoor learning environment and daily routine;
- Include specific timelines and a person responsible for each activity; and
- Determine how progress will be measured (e.g., teacher completion of actionable strategy and reflection form, strengthened program evaluation scores and/or child outcome data.)

Throughout the academic year, the ECS continues to monitor use of the ongoing child assessment tool while also using the program evaluation tool(s) to monitor progress toward meeting the goals. Close attention is provided to ensure valid and reliable child outcome data at each data checkpoint, meeting requirements outlined in the [Program Evaluation](#) and [Child Assessment](#) sections of the GSRP Implementation Manual. Feedback follows the same process as above, documenting strengths and any areas still needing improvement; the continuous improvement plan may be modified.

Between March 1 and May 15, the ECS observes each unique teaching team for one full session to administrate the formal program evaluation tool and document how well classroom grant requirements are met; data are due into the tool's online system on May 31. Following the completion of comprehensive program evaluation in the spring, the ECS and teaching team set classroom-level goals and develop a plan for continuous improvement that may include professional development and modifications to the classroom environment.

The ECS ensures that data are available by classroom. When the end-of-year program evaluation is completed in the spring and beginning and ending child assessment data is aggregated, final progress toward the year's designated goals will be measured. This will provide gain scores which will be used to evaluate the success in meeting the designated program- and classroom-level goals. These data reveal program strengths and challenges to use as the basis to prioritize program

improvement efforts. At this time, the team that analyzes data and sets goals will choose program-wide goals for the following school year and create a plan to reach those goals. The plan could include a facilitated, rich staff discussion around a journal article, or contracting with a trainer from the curriculum or child assessment vendor, and will also include supports for implementation such as observation-feedback, peer modeling, coaching, and self-assessment. Curriculum materials should be available, purchased or readily created to implement the strategies.

Information relating to both the status of meeting the current year's goals and the goals set for the following year is shared with local advisory committees, parents, staff, administration, and the school board. Finally, the GSRP ECC leads activities to aggregate all subrecipient data collected by the ECS, and together they evaluate and broadly share the success in meeting the designated goals.

\*Use of the term ECS throughout this document refers to a singular ECS or to the multiple members of an ECS team.