

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. To utilize this provision, before enrolling a child from another ISD, an ISD must enter into a written agreement with the resident ISD. See the subsection, *Cross-ISD Enrollment* in the [Budget](#) section of this manual for details on enrolling, formulating written agreements, and accounting for cross-ISD children.

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 may only 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 benefit from high-quality preschool programs. Therefore, each school readiness advisory committee must approve a collaborative recruitment and enrollment process to assist parents in selecting the program best suited to their needs. A signed collaborative agreement includes the process and procedures,

including timelines, for recruitment and enrollment. The ISD monitors to see that the procedures are followed by subrecipient staff.

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 program eligibility factors placing the child at risk of educational failure;
- Health information and proof of immunizations; and
- Parent permission to share information among programs to determine proper placement.

*The [MDE Pupil Accounting Manual](#) addresses the documentation of child age as required for local and intermediate school districts under Section 1135 of the Revised School Code (MCL 380.1135). It states:

(1) Upon enrollment of a student for the first time in a local or intermediate school district, the district shall notify in writing the person enrolling the student that within 30 days he or she shall provide to the local or intermediate school district either of the following:

(a) A certified copy of the student's birth certificate.

(b) Other reliable proof, as determined by the school district, of the student's identity and age, and an affidavit explaining the inability to produce a copy of the birth certificate.

The Manual provides examples of "other reliable proof" that may be accepted: baptismal certificate indicating date and place of birth; court records; county, military, or immigration records; doctor or hospital records with sworn statements; certain family records; life insurance policy; or a sworn notarized statement from a parent or guardian. (A district must never deny enrollment or expel a pupil simply because the parent(s), or legal guardian, did not provide a birth certificate.)

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 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 [Authorization for Requirement to Collaborate](#) in the 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 this manual for information on child eligibility.

Prioritization

Public Act 60 of 2013 focused eligibility for GSRP on family income. Ninety percent of all children enrolled throughout an ISD or consortium of ISDs must qualify with family income under 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). 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 program eligibility 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 this [Federal Poverty Level Calculator](#). The family income, family size, and exact FPL must be recorded in each child's file, preferably on the enrollment form. The FPL for each child will be reported within the Michigan Student Data System (MSDS).
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 program eligibility 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 program eligibility factors must be considered when prioritizing children for enrollment. The actual FPL for a family with a child with an IEP will be reported in MSDS while children qualifying because of a foster care placement or homelessness will be reported within the 0 – 50% FPL quintile.

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 the ISD notifies each subrecipient regarding the award and when enrollment may begin, according to local policy. 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, if the ISD determines that all eligible children are being served and that there are no children on the waiting list who live with families with a level, the ISD may then enroll up to 10% of children who live with families with a household income above 250% of FPL with extreme risk for low educational achievement as determined by number or severity of existing GSRP program eligibility factors. Careful documentation of the program eligibility 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. Each fall, MDE provides an opportunity for ISDs to formally request an exception to this requirement. See the [ISD Administration of GSRP](#) section of this manual "15. Sliding Scale of Tuition" subsection, for details.

Refer to the [Participant Eligibility and Prioritization Guidelines](#) in the resources for this section for detail about the specific prioritization process 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 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 program eligibility factors. Many programs "hold open" a few spaces, anticipating that some of the most eligible families may apply as the school year is beginning.

Unique Enrollment Situations

Occasionally families with unique situations apply for enrollment in GSRP. When a child's parents are separated, special considerations must be made when calculating the FPL; the [Eligibility](#) section of this manual addresses methods to use based on the specifics of the situation. Enrollment decisions may also be effected when the child spends time with each parent. If parents disagree about the

enrollment or if one is unable to transport the child to a mutually agreeable program, program staff are encouraged to work with both parents to support a decision in the best interest of the child. In no case may a child be enrolled in two GSRP classrooms at one time.

Additionally, each year some families will move. When a move is made to a nearby location, even if outside district boundaries, a child may remain in the current program as long as transportation can be arranged. When a family moves farther, every effort should be made to assist the family to enroll in another program based on the availability of space and funding and on the appropriate prioritization of families on the waiting list, if any. This includes the transfer of the GSRP application, enrollment file, and screening and assessment data. A family moving to a new program should not be required to complete duplicate enrollment paperwork for eligibility determination. A child found eligible at any point during the program year remains eligible for the remainder of the year.

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 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?