



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL F. RICE, Ph.D.
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 4, 2020

TO: Local and Intermediate School District Superintendents
Public School Academy Directors

FROM: Dr. Scott M. Koenigs knecht, Deputy Superintendent
P-20 System and Student Transitions

SUBJECT: Inclusion of the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) in Continuity of Learning and COVID-19 Response Plans

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE), Office of Great Start/Preschool and Out-of-School Time Learning has received a number of inquiries regarding suspension of in-person instruction and school building closures and the impact on the implementation of the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), Sections 32d and 39 of the State School Aid Act.

[Executive Order 2020-65](#) (COVID-19) states that in-person instruction for pupils in kindergarten through grade 12, GSRP program delivery, and early childhood programs is suspended for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year and requires the development and implementation of a GSRP plan for distance learning. Plans must be compliant with the executive order, as well as with this guidance issued by MDE.

Intermediate school districts (ISDs) should coordinate and collaborate with their GSRP subrecipients in districts *and* community-based organizations, for providing learning at a distance services to children and families that would otherwise be delivered in Section 32d funded GSRP classrooms, to the extent possible under the current circumstances, within their Continuity of Learning and COVID-19 Response Plan (plan).

The provision of coordinating, collaborating, and learning at a distance GSRP services should be aligned with the beginning date specified in the district's submitted plan and need to begin no later than May 7, 2020.

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Every GSRP child must be provided an opportunity to participate in a plan for learning at a distance. Each ISD will work with its GSRP subrecipients in barrier-busting to make that happen.

Each GSRP subrecipient must complete or be included in a [Continuity of Learning and COVID-19 Response Plan](#). The Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) has developed [Remote Learning Guidance](#) that provides valuable information about engaging families, focusing on family needs and the whole child, and supporting children and families with opportunities for learning at a distance. As the plan was developed by MCCSA/MDE/MAISA for district use k-12, LEA/PSA/CBOs completing a plan regarding GSRP may disregard questions #9 and #15. If an LEA/PSA plan has already been completed without GSRP, the local GSRP administrator can simply address each of the questions in an addendum that can be submitted to the ISD for review and approval.

Also, attached is a plan review form that ISDs must use to review and approve submitted plans regarding GSRP. These plan review forms must be kept on file for future GSRP monitoring purposes.

The Michigan Department of Education through this guidance is also outlining GSRP model deliverables that will be adjusted or waived for the remainder of the program year. During the COVID-19 emergency declaration period covered by Executive Order 2020-65, MDE will continue to work in partnership with ISD Early Childhood Contacts (ECCs) and respond in the most flexible manner possible, including within GSRP program and transportation budgets, given the requirements found in Sections 32d and 39 of the State School Aid Act and Michigan State Board of Education approved Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Pre-Kindergarten.

For current and up-to-date information regarding COVID-19 visit <http://www.Michigan.gov/Coronavirus>, <http://www.michigan.gov/mde>, or <http://www.CDC.gov/Coronavirus>.

As additional questions arise, ISD ECCs may contact Pat Sargent at sargentp@michigan.gov.

Attachments

cc: Michigan Education Alliance

GSRP Guidance for Learning at a Distance

During this time of crisis, we know that the families of GSRP children and staff are among those most likely to be facing high levels of stress. While programs are expected to develop and implement plans for learning at a distance, we recognize the need for maximum flexibility and are grateful to our partners as they implement programs with empathy and patience. See MDE's [Learning at a Distance Guidance](#) for additional considerations.

To that end, first contacts with staff and families should focus on determining their health and well-being and then address their ability and resources for supporting ongoing child learning. The MAISA [Remote Learning Guidance](#) document includes a [Wellness Checklist](#) that programs could use to guide conversations with families. Programs should be prepared to offer referrals and resources for families to secure basic needs including health and mental health, food, shelter and utilities.

Recognizing that recommendations and online resources for learning at a distance are now plentiful, this document focuses on the considerations and requirements for ensuring children enrolled in GSRP are provided every opportunity to continue their learning and growing with the best possible outcomes as they and their families look forward to the kindergarten year ahead.

GSRP Requirements

The Continuity of Learning and COVID-19 Response Plan created by each program must consider the unique aspects of their location, resources, connectivity, and staff. Children and families must remain the central focus of every effort and initial activities should focus on reconnecting and re-building relationships between home and school.

In GSRP we think of learning at a distance as "home learning." It serves to remind us of the importance of the home as our environment for planned learning routines and experiences, regardless of whether outreach activities are provided via technology, U.S. Postal Mail, phone calls, or packets included with food pickup/delivery.

ISDs must ensure each enrolled child has the opportunity to participate in a plan that provides active, participatory learning in a manner that is as consistent as possible with the philosophy of GSRP. While the 120-day requirement for GSRP has been waived, plans should minimally continue until the last day of the 2019-2020 school-year calendar previously established for each program.

In a learning at a distance context, there is no difference in scope or duration required for the plan offered to children who attended school-day or part-day programs. However, teaching teams with children from both an AM and PM class

should be provided additional supports and flexibility to allow for connecting with twice the number of children and families. Head Start Blends should ensure full coordination with Head Start.

As plans are implemented, flexibility and realistic expectations are key. Most "ordinary" GSRP requirements have been relaxed or waived, allowing the ISDs the ability to exercise discretion and to determine appropriate expectations for the classrooms they and their subrecipients run.

Minimally, ISDs must ensure:

- GSRP funds are available to be used for staffing, purchasing needed supplies, equipment, and resources, to allow a staff member or a family to connect remotely, to provide families with home learning kits, books, supplies, or other resources needed to support their children's learning;
- all teaching team members are engaged in supporting learning and communicating with families;
- programs document learning from a distance including outreach efforts and family contacts (such as frequency, type, duration, and family response);
- each plan includes a year-end "conference" with each family; and
- every effort is made to reach every child and family for the duration of the plan, with respect and allowance for family choice regarding their level of participation. If a family should turn down the option to participate in the plan, the date of the parent optout should be documented.

Teaching teams should:

- Focus on relationships first;
- Strive to include activities, outreach, or connections that replicate the child's experience at school, to the extent possible. Consider implementing a condensed version of customary daily routines like large group time, music and movement, or small group time, with a suggestion each child create a plan for something they will do before your next connection with them;
- Provide simple, clear directions for activities, remember that less is more;
- Ensure that activities for children include guidance for families in how to follow their child's lead and ask open-ended questions that encourage critical thinking (e.g. "How did you know that?", "Tell me about your drawing.", "How could you figure out...").
- Utilize the ongoing assessment tool to identify learning goals and plan for group lessons and individual learning suggestions to families (note: assessments will not be required to be submitted as a spring program requirement);
- Utilize curriculum resources and goals to ensure the skills, knowledge, and concepts for all domains of learning continue to be supported;
- Document "observations" during live contacts (virtual/phone) or from anecdotes, pictures, or work samples shared by families; and
- Continue ongoing assessment for each child to the fullest extent possible to allow for intentionality as the plan is continued (note: assessments will not be required to be submitted as a spring program requirement).

The plan for learning at a distance should, to the extent possible:

- Provide for a learning activity or event at least four times weekly;
- Strive for at least one weekly contact with every family;
- Establish “office hours” or specific times a family can contact a member of the teaching team;
- Help families create predictable routines for learning and play in whatever way works best for them;
- Encourage families to read with their child every day or as often as possible; and
- Include information, activities, and/or resources for children and families to facilitate the transition to kindergarten.

Early Childhood Specialist (ECS) Roles

ECSs are critical to the effectiveness of providing quality learning experiences for children and families. The knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices, child development, and trauma will be essential in their support to programs. ECSs should continue to work with their assigned teaching teams while working together to support each other, when possible.

ECSs should consider surveying teaching staff to determine needs including access to technology and devices, classroom materials, and professional learning needs around technology, supporting children and families in crisis, and strategies for learning at a distance. The ECS will advocate for material needs to be met by subrecipients and identify and support access to professional learning.

In place of classroom visits, ECSs should provide virtual supports to teaching teams including opportunities for staff from multiple classrooms and/or programs to work together. This will include more frequent coaching of teaching staff who are doing learning at a distance for the first time, as needed. Classroom evaluation observations (PQA-R/CLASS) completed prior to closures should be entered and finalized in the applicable online system. **All other classrooms will not be required to have an end-of-year evaluation completed.**

Policies

ISDs and subrecipients should review policies and procedures identifying changes necessary to accommodate staff working from home, varying methods of communication between parties, and the use of personal technology and devices.

An attention to confidentiality and ensuring privacy of children and families must be considered when working remotely with children and families. Precautionary measures should be taken when transferring or using child and family files, sharing contact information and family situations, and including children in group virtual experiences.

Despite all ISD efforts to support, if a subrecipient is unable to provide a plan for enrolled children, the ISD must enact provisions for the children impacted to ensure learning from a distance is provided. ISDs should consider an amendment to the

written agreement modifying responsibilities including funding of program materials and activities.

Staff compliance plans should be reviewed to determine any concerns with timely completion. Any variance from the compliance plan due to the current situation should be carefully documented.

ISDs are required to complete the *GSRP Continuity of Learning and COVID-19 Response Plan ISD Review and Approval of Subrecipient Plans* form for each subrecipient. These completed forms should be kept on file as documentation for possible future monitoring.

Fiscal Considerations

OGS-P&OSTL has received several questions about using GSRP funds for Continuity of Learning and COVID-19 Response Plan implementation. Addressed here are the commonly asked questions from across ISDs with answers. Additional ISD specific questions can be addressed to your assigned GSRP lead consultant.

General Questions

1. Will ISDs continue to be paid for GSRP?

A district/ISD with an approved CoL plan is eligible to receive continued payments for the 2019-2020 school year.

2. Will the funding for curriculum change/training under 32d(24) still be allocated this year?

While the process may be slightly delayed due to COVID-19, OGS-P&OSTL plans to allocate curriculum funding as previously communicated.

3. Should programs refund the sliding scale tuition for over-income families who paid the entire amount in advance?

Programs should refund a prorated amount for over-income families who have prepaid the entire amount in advance. The amount to be refunded should include the portion of the tuition covering March 1, 2020 through the end of the year. Any other over-income families who have not prepaid should not be billed after March 1, 2020 for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

4. Some CBOs will be looking into the Paycheck Protection Program/Small Business Association (SBA) loans that will be forgiven if used to keep staff paid. What do we need to know regarding GSRP funds going forward?

Monthly payments for 2019-2020 to ISDs will continue via State Aid payments for GSRP through August 2020. CBOs will need to consult their financial institution to determine how the Paycheck Protection Program through the SBA will impact their business. The SBA guidance is located at: <https://www.sba.gov/funding-programs/loans/coronavirus-relief-options/paycheck-protection-program-ppp>.

Paying Staff and Layoffs

5. Can GSRP teachers that work in tuition-braided funding programs be laid off?

Teaching teams and Early Childhood Specialists will be needed to operate a plan for learning at a distance and are expected to remain employed and receive at least the proportionate share of their wages normally covered with GSRP funding. All children enrolled in GSRP for 2019-2020 must be offered a learning at a distance program.

For GSRP/Head Start Blend Programs:

The Office of Head (OHS) is directing programs to continue to pay wages and provide benefits for staff unable to report to work during center closures necessary to address COVID-19. Further information from Michigan Head Start Association can be found at: <https://www.michheadstart.org/covid-19>.

6. Can staff who have been laid off for a portion of their weekly hours receive unemployment?

Employees who are working less than normally scheduled may apply for unemployment. Those laid off due to COVID-19 but working some hours may be able to receive partial state unemployment. If they do, they will also automatically receive the \$600 weekly supplement provided through the new federal unemployment safety net program, Pandemic Unemployment Assistance. More information on unemployment under this program is available from www.Michigan.gov/uia.

7. Can only a portion of the teaching team be paid?

Teaching teams and Early Childhood Specialists will be needed to operate a home learning program and are expected to remain employed and paid with GSRP funding.

8. If subrecipients are closed and staff are collecting unemployment, can they spend GSRP monies on anything else?

Every GSRP subrecipient is expected to operate a learning at a distance program. The expectation is for GSRP funding to be used as was approved within the Program Implementation Plan (PIP) budget. The ISD will need to work with the subrecipient to determine how any unspent funding within approved budget categories can be used and/or carried over. Please refer to the GSRP Implementation Manual for allowable uses of funding. The ISD should contact their assigned GSRP lead consultant with further questions.

Payments to Subrecipients

9. Can the ISD pay invoices from subrecipients so staff can be paid during this period? Can lease or rent still be paid even though the program is not currently operating in the building?

Yes, OGS-P&OSTL issued guidance on March 13, 2020 encouraging that GSRP staff be paid. The expectation is for GSRP funding to continue to pay for ongoing expenditures through the end of the 2019-2020 school year such as staff, utilities, leases, and rent for space that was used for GSRP programs prior to COVID-19.

Use of GSRP Funds

10. Can GSRP funds be used to support families with supplies and materials for learning at a distance? Can funds be used to support families with needed technology to access learning?

Yes. Use of GSRP funding to purchase materials, supplies, and technology to carry out each local plan submitted by subrecipients and approved by ISDs is allowable. Decisions must be based on what is included and necessary to carry out each approved Plan.

11. What Function Code should be used for materials that staff purchase for families to use at home?

The materials (e.g., crayons, paper, glue, and simple hands on activity learning kits and books for GSRP families) sent home should be charged in the same manner as GSRP classroom materials, under Function Code 118.

12. What if programs determine a need that is not currently allowed under GSRP guidance? Who should the ISD reach out to?

ISDs and subrecipients should follow the current guidance within the GSRP Implementation Manual and contact the assigned GSRP consultant with further questions. Once a plan is approved by the ISD, MDE's intent is to work with the ISD to cover necessary expenses.

13. Will there be an expectation of budget modifications considering spending changes?

Subrecipients need to work closely with the ISD if a deviation of more than 10 percent in a spending category is expected. ISDs should contact the assigned GSRP lead consultant when an existing PIP budgeted category will deviate more than 10 percent. ISDs should also contact the assigned GSRP lead consultant for questions about the approvability of unusual items.

Transportation

14. Can transportation funds be used to deliver materials to families who can't access GSRP services in other ways?

Yes. GSRP transportation funds can be used to pay a proportionate share of transportation costs for materials delivered to GSRP children.

15. Can vehicle lease payments continue even though transportation is not being provided?

Yes. Lease payments for GSRP should continue in the same manner as before COVID-19.

16. What will happen if transportation funds remain unspent?

It is advised that each ISD consider the following related to their current GSRP transportation budget in order to fully expend allocated transportation funding:

- Ongoing costs (e.g., lease payments for busses, staff costs);

- Upcoming proportionate share costs for delivering materials;
- Recoding transportation expenditures from the regular "slot" (i.e, programming) budget to the transportation budget; and,
- Revisiting subrecipients' original transportation requests along with actual expenses incurred for transporting GSRP children in order to reimburse a greater proportion of expenses that exceed funds awarded.

After these points are considered, if funds remain, they may be carried over for 2019-2020 grant year **only**. This is being done in response to the close of programs due to the COVID-19 emergency and to provide the greatest flexibility possible in use of the funds in this unprecedented time.

GSRP Continuity of Learning and COVID-19 Response Plan ISD Review and Approval of Subrecipient Plans

Instructions: ISD GSRP Early Childhood Contact (ECC) or designee must complete one review and approval form for each subrecipient Continuity of Learning and COVID-19 Response Plan submitted. Maintain a copy of the plan with the completed approval form on file for each subrecipient. The plan covering GSRP may either be submitted as a part of a local district plan or be submitted directly to the ISD.

Review and approval of each subrecipient plan must assure, to the fullest extent possible:

- learning at a distance plan fosters active, participatory learning that is dependent on engagement among the teaching team, adult(s) in the home, and the child;
- learning experiences offered are personalized for the strengths, interests and needs of each child, in consideration of their family, community, and culture;
- all members of the teaching team participate in the plan and are engaged in supporting learning and communicating with families;
- every effort is made to reach every child and family for the duration of the plan, respecting and allowing for family choice regarding the level of participation. If a family should turn down the option to participate in the plan, the date of the parent optout should be documented;
- programs document learning from a distance including outreach efforts and family contacts (such as frequency, type, duration, and family response);
- each plan includes a year-end, "conference" with each family;
- if teaching team members have been assigned to work in disaster relief child care centers, consideration is given to allow for provision of learning at a distance; and
- GSRP funds are available to be used for staffing, purchasing needed supplies, equipment, and resources, to allow a staff member or a family to connect remotely, to provide families with home learning kits, books, supplies, or other resources needed to support their children's learning.

Subrecipient Name: _____

Has the ISD reviewed the plan in its entirety and confirms plan assurances, including those specified above for GSRP for home learning, are met?	YES:	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments:				
Does the plan satisfactorily address how outreach/connections with children and families will be accomplished?	YES:	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments:				
Does the plan ensure that families and staff have/will have the needed supplies and resources to participate in/implement the plan?	YES:	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments:				
Has the ISD reviewed the plan for feasibility (e.g., approaches to required outreach and family connections are both sufficient and reasonable in scope – number, frequency, format, duration)?	YES:	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comments:				
Does the ISD approve the plan?	YES:	<input type="checkbox"/>	NO:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Date Approved:	Click or tap to enter a date.			
Name of ISD ECC/ECC designee:				