



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

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STATE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 14, 2020

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

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

SUBJECT: MI Safe Schools: Michigan's 2020-21 Return to School Roadmap – Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) Roadmap: Return to Learn Guidance – MEMO #COVID-19-109

[Public Acts 147-149 of 2020](#) were passed and signed into law in August without mention of the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP). A number of you have asked if this is indicative of a lack of support for GSRP in the coming school budget. Based on discussions with the Governor's office and members of the legislature, the answer is no. There continues to be widespread support for GSRP among the governor and her administration, the legislature, educators, and members of the business community.

Intermediate school districts (ISDs) and their GSRP sub-recipients can use FY 2019-20 fund balances to begin the year. [Executive Order \(E.O\) 2020-142](#) extends [E.O. 2020-65](#), which allows for in-person and virtual GSRP based on local decisions through September 30, 2020.

In light of the MI Safe School: Michigan's 2020-21 Return to School Roadmap, as outlined in E.O. 2020-142, the Office of Great Start (OGS)/Preschool and Out-of-School Time Learning is providing this guidance **specifically for GSRP**. The roadmap and the executive order are meant to be read and implemented together.

The roadmap and E.O. 2020-142 are written for traditional school districts and public school academies (PSAs). Some provisions can apply to intermediate school districts (ISDs). Because grantees for GSRP are ISDs and their subrecipients are local school districts (LEAs), public school academics (PSAs), and/or community-based organizations (CBOs), all provisions within the roadmap and E.O. 2020-142 that apply to a district will apply to an ISD and/or its CBOs for purposes of GSRP.

The Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) has updated its re-opening guidance (found on the [LARA Child Care website](#)) for child care licensing

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on the following topics to ensure alignment with the roadmap and E.O. 2020-142: monitoring symptoms, responding to symptoms, reporting of data, group size, and masks.

Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP)

First and foremost, GSRPs must follow reopening requirements established by E.O. 2020-142 and the accompanying *Return to School Roadmap*, as well as the *child care licensing guidance* found on the [LARA Child Care website](#). While a re-opening plan is required by each of these guidance documents, all requirements can be outlined in a single comprehensive plan.

Michigan Department of Education (MDE) guidance for GSRP is limited to requirements that fall outside of the child care licensing guidance, the roadmap, and/or E.O. 2020-142. The information that follows highlights additional considerations and provides guidance for developing plans and conducting programming. Also detailed are flexibilities in applicable GSRP requirements for 2020-2021.

COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plans/Extended COVID-19 Learning Plans

Intermediate school districts and their GSRP sub-recipients funded to operate GSRP must have or be included in a plan, per E.O. 2020-142. Plans for GSRP must adhere to all applicable requirements outlined for pre-kindergarten in the roadmap. The [COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan template](#) was the preferred tool for use for submissions. For any CBO whose board was not able to approve within the E.O. 2020-142 timelines, the ISD Early Childhood Contact (ECC) should have been the one who approved the GSRP plan. An ISD was allowed to create a plan that encompassed multiple sub-recipients. ISDs were required to collect plans and transmit them to the superintendent of public instruction and to the state treasurer, per directions provided by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE). If GSRP was not originally in a submitted plan and a plan needs to be edited to include GSRP, or an addendum added for GSRP, and resubmitted, ISDs should contact their assigned MDE GSRP consultant.

In alignment with E.O. 2020-142, intermediate school districts and their GSRP sub-recipients funded to operate GSRP may be included in extended COVID-19 learning plans required under [Public Act 149 of 2020](#).

Option to Remain Open in Phases 1-3 of the MI Safe Start Plan

As licensed programs, and in accordance with child care licensing guidance, the roadmap, and E.O. 2020-142, GSRP classrooms may remain open in Phases 1-3 of the MI Safe Start Plan to provide child care for eligible families. In the event that the state moves to Phases 1-3, eligible families will be defined by executive order.

If a GSRP classroom is shut down within a child care center that remains open for other child care, any GSRP child attending that child care center must not be charged for care during the hours GSRP would ordinarily be in session.

Administration of GSRP for 2020-21

Wherever possible, customary requirements outlined in the [GSRP Implementation Manual](#) and associated resources continue to provide the structure and expectations for GSRP. Despite the certainty of challenges in the year ahead, serving children and their families with a developmentally appropriate, impactful preschool program must remain a high priority. However, as plans are implemented, flexibility and realistic expectations are also key. Many “ordinary” GSRP requirements have been relaxed or waived (as outlined in this memo), allowing the ISDs the ability to exercise discretion and to determine appropriate expectations for the classrooms they and their sub-recipients operate.

ISD policies and procedures, sub-recipient contracts

ISDs should consider reviewing policies and contracts to discuss necessary updates/changes for 2020-2021 with sub-recipients. Processes for virtual monitoring of sub-recipients should be considered, including an allowance for electronic signatures.

Program eligibility considerations

ISDs should ensure all parties engaged in enrollment processes are fully informed of enrollment considerations for income verification due to the pandemic, including key dates for confirming enrollment of children within the ISD’s prioritization process.

COVID-19 exposure or positive cases in a classroom

ISDs should refer to child care licensing guidance, the roadmap, and/or E.O. 2020-142 documents for steps required in the event of a COVID-19 exposure or positive case in a GSRP classroom. Close coordination with the local health department will be critical. Recommendations for classroom or building closure will be determined by the local health department. Should a classroom/program closure be required, the program must immediately inform the ISD.

Professional Development

Professional learning opportunities should be provided to early childhood specialists (ECSs) and teaching teams as they prepare to engage instruction and virtual coaching. An emphasis on quality interactions as well as developmental appropriateness should be embedded into all professional learning. The MDE GSRP team continues to facilitate meetings of the ECS Professional Learning Advisory Committee, which will continue to inform OGS on needed professional learning for the upcoming year. The committee is also examining the potential opportunities for regional and/or statewide professional learning.

GSRP Local Advisory and Data Analysis Team Meetings

To the greatest extent possible under the current circumstances, GSRP local advisory groups and data analysis meetings should be convened, and meetings held, to support programming as would typically occur. Local reopening phases and decisions will inform whether these meetings are held in-person or virtually.

Three ISD-level data analysis meetings must be planned for 2020-2021. As ISDs prepare for these meetings, a broad range of data sources and types should be considered with the understanding that traditional data sources may not be available. Additional/alternative data sources may be pertinent due to differing local decisions and conditions. Possible data sources should minimally include local advisory feedback and child outcome data.

Monitoring

MDE program and fiscal monitoring of ISDs will continue to be completed as desk reviews until further notice.

Classroom Requirements

The health and safety of the students in the classroom are of utmost importance. To support the program's COVID-19 response, some of the GSRP and program quality requirements have been relaxed for the 2020-2021 school year.

Sub-recipients must review all child care licensing, the roadmap, and E.O. 2020-142 documents thoroughly and work with their ISD and local health department to implement additional health and safety measures.

Developmental screening

Developmental screening of every child at the beginning of the program year is still required. If in-person screening is not possible due to regional/local closures, ECS should work with teaching teams to determine how screening can be conducted virtually and to what extent.

Group size and ratio

GSRP group size and ratio requirements remain unchanged from MDE's program requirements.

Classroom environment

Programs should follow requirements/recommendations in child care licensing guidance, the roadmap, and/or E.O. 2020-142, for use and cleaning of classroom materials. In accordance with health and safety protocols, careful consideration should be used when setting up the classroom and choosing materials. Allow for adequate spacing throughout the learning environment to permit children to spread out.

Daily routine

With support from the ECS, daily routines should be developed that ensure the GSRP model is upheld to the greatest extent possible. This is done while providing for flexibility to meet the needs of the children and the program as well as requirements/recommendations in child care licensing guidance, the roadmap, and/or E.O. 2020-142. For example, adjustments may be necessary to accommodate additional time needed for ongoing cleaning/sanitizing, additional handwashing, transitions that require children put on face masks, or social distancing requirements that change playground availability.

Child assessment

Intentional teaching practices form the foundation of the GSRP model. The intentional teaching cycle relies upon, and is not possible without, ongoing child assessment to individualize experiences and support growth and development. As such, ongoing child assessment must be continued to the maximum extent possible. The requirement for three assessment checkpoints remains for the school year. Completion of 75% of each domain of the tool at each checkpoint is ideal. However, it may not be possible if closures have interrupted the program delivery plan. Flexibility should be considered when circumstances necessitate, with ECS oversight of quantity, quality, and scoring of entries.

Meals and snacks

Family-style meal service requirements have been suspended for 2020-2021. Programs should follow requirements/recommendations found in child care licensing guidance, the roadmap, and/or E.O. 2020-142, as well as any guidance provided through federal food programs, as applicable. It is anticipated that for health and safety reasons, staff will be required to facilitate serving food and tending to the needs of the children, thus limiting opportunity to sit and engage in the meal/snack alongside children. As such, the requirement to purchase adult meals/snacks is also waived. If staff eat with the children, modeling healthy food choices remains a program expectation.

Substitute staffing and staffing shortages

The requirement that temporary substitute staff minimally possess a child development associate (CDA) credential is waived.

For the 2020-21 school year, substitute staff must minimally meet child care licensing requirements. In instances where a qualified long-term substitute is required but unavailable, ISDs should contact their GSRP consultant.

If teaching team absences due to illness or quarantine requirements cannot be filled by substitute or other available staff, and the adult-child ratio cannot be met, classrooms may need to be closed on a day-to-day basis.

If a staff member chooses not to work due to concerns about the risk of exposure/contracting COVID-19, programs should follow the program's own personnel and staffing policies.

Classroom visitors and field trips

Decisions involving classroom visitors and field trips must be determined locally. Programs should follow child care licensing guidance, the roadmap, and/or E.O. 2020-142 requirements/recommendations. See the early childhood specialist (ECS) subsection of this document for more information on ECS visits to classrooms.

The Early Childhood Specialist (ECS)

The programming and child development expertise of the ECS, as well as coaching, consultation, ongoing support, and technical assistance provided to teaching teams is more critical than ever. Ongoing support and coaching must continue to occur at

least monthly, prioritizing teaching teams with the highest need. Where possible, more frequent contact should be facilitated, particularly as programs begin the school year. ECS and teaching teams should utilize phone calls, texts, email, and virtual meeting platforms to maintain regular contact. When transitions are required due to a closure, the ECS should work with the teaching team to support and facilitate a smooth transition and robust implementation of the preparedness plan.

Classroom Visits

ECSs should strive for the required minimum of three physical visits to classrooms during the school year if the program is operating. ECSs should wear a cloth face covering, wash hands frequently, and practice social distancing when visiting sub-recipient sites. When in-person visits are not advisable based on COVID-19 safety concerns or status of risk phase, virtual observations should be considered instead. ISDs should work with subrecipients to plan these visits and comply with COVID-19 safety measures put in place by the sub-recipient.

Program quality assessment can be used locally to orient and coach new teaching team members. Its primary use, that must be reported in the chosen tool's online system each year, is to set quality improvement goals at the teaching team, site, subrecipient and Intermediate School District levels for the following year. It is also used at the state level for analysis and reporting in the GSRP Program Evaluation done by Michigan State University. Due to COVID-19, it would be impossible to get valid data at either level. Therefore, program evaluation is suspended for the 2020/2021 program year.

Family Engagement and Communication

Building relationships and engaging families will be imperative this school year. A strong initial relationship with families will support responsiveness throughout the year.

Home visits and parent-teacher conferences

ISDs and their sub-recipients should collaborate to assess risk and staff/family comfort level when determining if initial teaching team contacts with families should occur in person or virtually. Families and staff should be given a choice about how and where these meetings occur. In-person or virtual meetings are permitted.

If in-person meetings are being considered, consult [MDE OGS guidance](#) about conducting in-person meetings via home visits. Scheduling these visits to take place in the classroom instead of the family's home may be considered in order to limit teaching team exposure to numerous settings and individuals, and may provide a larger space to accommodate social distancing during the meeting.

ISDs and sub-recipients should assess risk and staff/family comfort level when planning for parent-teacher conferences and additional home visits. In-person or virtual meetings are permitted. Noting the type of meeting that took place and the setting for the meeting are a required part of the meeting documentation. Electronic signatures from parents and staff are acceptable.

Parent advisory and data analysis team meetings

Programs should be creative in engaging families for parent advisory and data analysis team meetings. Virtual meetings were reported as increasing participation in many areas during spring 2020 and may be considered and preferable for the 2020-2021 school year. See the section on GSRP local advisory and data analysis team meeting under "Administration of GSRP for 2020-2021" earlier in this document for more information.

Parent handbooks

Programs should review their parent handbook making necessary updates to align to their plan, addressing child care licensing guidance, the roadmap, and/or E.O. 2020-142 requirements/recommendations, local health and safety protocol. It may be advisable to include updates in the form of an addendum to the regular handbook for this school year.

GSRP Fiscal Flexibilities and Considerations

Staffing

GSRP teaching teams should continue to be paid if classrooms/programs are shut down due to a COVID-19 exposure/case or regional shifts to Phase 3 of the MI Safe Start Plan or lower. Programs may continue to pay other staff members who may be fully or partially funded through GSRP. Determining if non-teaching team staff are paid during a closure is dependent upon the program's own policy, resources, and ability to do so. Child care centers that remain open for child care while GSRP classrooms are closed may not utilize GSRP funding to pay staff to work in other areas of the center.

GSRP use of funds

Personal protective equipment (PPE): Programs are responsible for PPE and may use GSRP funds to purchase supplies of PPE as needed for staff who are paid with GSRP funds and for enrolled children in GSRP. The program must provide face masks to children as needed. Programs may not ask/require parents to provide masks for their children, though parents may choose to provide their own face masks. It is the responsibility of the program to maintain proper inventory levels and have a plan in place for possible shortages. PPE purchased for classrooms should be charged in the same manner as other classroom supplies under Function Code 118. PPE purchased for ECS or ECC use should be charged in the same manner as other ECS supplies under Function Code 226.

For those programs operated by school districts, CARES Act funding can and should be utilized to assist in purchasing supplies for GSRPs. There is currently no funding for PPE purchases in programs operated by CBOs for 2020-2021. PPE procurement source suggestions for licensed sites are available on the LARA webpage: https://www.michigan.gov/lara/0,4601,7-154-89334_63294_63296---,00.html.

Ongoing expenses during a closure: In the event of a closure, ongoing expenses for the maintenance of GSRP classroom space (e.g., lease/utilities) should continue to be charged to GSRP.

Transportation funding

ISDs should seek MDE GSRP consultant guidance for COVID-19 related costs not typically allowed by GSRP.

Vehicle lease payments should continue in the event of a closure that suspends transportation.

Transportation funding may also be used to purchase PPE needed for staff and children while riding buses to and from home/school.

If child care remains open with busing allowed, buses owned by GSRP can be used, but costs associated with transporting children to and from child care cannot be charged to GSRP.

Tuition

Sliding scale tuition charged to over-income families should be applied per regular GSRP requirements.

Other Questions

If questions remain after reviewing child care licensing guidance, the roadmap, and/or E.O. 2020-142 alongside this document and the GSRP implementation manual, the early childhood contact (ECC) should contact their assigned MDE GSRP consultant.

Other Resources

Child Care COVID Response and Preparedness Plan – Build a Plan Online Tool:
<https://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/5610786/Child-Care-COVID-Response-Preparedness-Plan>

cc: Michigan Education Alliance
Confederation of Michigan Tribal Education Directors