

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AND STAFFING

Introduction

Great Start Readiness Programs (GSRP) must comply with Public Act 116 of the Public Acts of 1973, as amended as well as the [Licensing Rules for Child Care Centers](#). Michigan State Board of Education criteria for the GSRP require adherence to the *Great Start Readiness Program Implementation Manual*, and the State School Aid Act requires program adherence to all standards in the [Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Birth to Kindergarten](#) (ECSQ). The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) requires grantees to address program quality. All programs must participate in [Great Start to Quality](#) and maintain at least the Enhancing Quality level. In addition, programs must utilize both the applicable program evaluation tool and child assessment tool to gather and analyze outcome data for continuous quality improvement (see the [Program Evaluation](#) and [Child Assessment](#) sections of this manual for more information).

All entities which operate GSRP must comply with state licensing regulations governing child care as stated above. GSRPs must maintain a license in good standing from the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA), Child Care Licensing Division. All regular child use areas must be approved for use. Relocations must be completed with the knowledge and approval of the Intermediate School District (ISD). The ISD and a GSRP Consultant must be notified within 24 hours of an incident being reported to licensing, of a special investigation being initiated, a change from a regular to a provisional license, or continued provisional status. For more information contact the [Child Care Licensing Bureau](#) at 517-284-9730.

Programming Decisions

School-Day, Part-Day, and GSRP/Head Start Blend Option

Classrooms in place for more than one academic year, including relocated classrooms, offering the school-day, part-day, or GSRP/Head Start blend option must operate 4 days per week for a minimum of 120 days spread over at least 30 weeks. New subrecipients and newly licensed classrooms offering the school-day, part-day, or GSRP Head Start blend option must operate for a minimum of 80 days spread over at least 20 weeks of classroom sessions, but more are strongly recommended to support child outcomes.

Extended Program

Classrooms in place for more than one academic year, including relocated classrooms, offering the extended program option must operate 5 days per week for a minimum of 180 days spread over at least 36 weeks. New subrecipients and newly licensed classrooms offering the extended option must operate for a minimum of 130 days, but more are strongly recommended to support child outcomes.

When planning the program year, scheduled breaks, holidays, and possible inclement weather days should be considered and sufficient days and weeks scheduled to ensure that the minimum number of full program days and weeks is met. When excessive unexpected closures occur (e.g., inclement weather days) and reduce the number of days/weeks children will attend to less than the minimum required, make-up days must be planned. All program options, besides part-day, may count partial days of school as a day of instruction as is allowed for K-12 students. For example, a program may schedule an early release periodically to provide teacher planning time or schedule early release for several days in one week to accommodate for family conferences. For classrooms operated by school districts, this may be in alignment with local calendars.

In alignment with K-12 practice and for extended programs only, up to six (6) instructional days may be forgiven for inclement weather cancellations. Additionally, up to six (6) days may be scheduled and counted as instructional days for home visits or family conferences and up to three (3) professional learning days of five (5) or more hours may also be scheduled and counted as instructional days. ISDs are responsible for ensuring that program schedules are set before school begins and do not take unfair advantage of either of these options. Programs should only make use of these options to the extent necessary to accomplish GSRP requirements.

When an LEA/PSA has been provided up to three (3) days forgiven by MDE, this forgiveness can also be applicable to the GSRP classrooms housed within the same buildings. This same allowance may be provided to GSRP CBO partners. The ISD is responsible for developing the application/request form for their partners. Final decision for approving additional forgiven time of up to three days lies with the ISD.

School-Day and Extended GSRP

School-day and extended preschool programs must operate for at least the same length of day as the local school district's/public school academy's first grade program. A classroom that offers a school-day or an extended program must enroll all children for the same length of the day to be considered a school-day or extended program.

Part-Day GSRP

Part-day preschool programs must provide for a minimum of three hours of teacher/child contact time per day, for at least four days per week.

GSRP/Head Start Blend Classrooms

An ISD or subrecipient may partner with Head Start to create a GSRP/Head Start "Blend" within a classroom. This is accomplished by blending GSRP and part-day Head Start funding resulting in a school day of preschool programming. The funding for the GSRP portion of the day is the same as Part-Day GSRP. See the [ISD Administration of GSRP](#) section of this manual and [resources](#) for that section for more information.

GSRP/Head Start Blend preschool programs must operate for at least the same length of day as the local school district's/public school academy's first grade program. A school-day, versus a part-day daily routine must be implemented. A child may not participate in GSRP for a part-day session in one classroom and then transition to a Head Start part-day session in another classroom.

All Head Start and GSRP policies and regulations must be applied to the blended classrooms, with the highest standard from either program adhered to. All children funded by the GSRP/Head Start Blend must qualify for and be concurrently enrolled in both programs. Classrooms that include GSRP/Head Start Blend enrollment meet Head Start requirements on days-in-session.

For classrooms that include GSRP/Head Start Blends and where Head Start has the preponderance of responsibility, Head Start is contracted as the GSRP subrecipient. When the subrecipient delivering GSRP/Head Start Blend classrooms is other than Head Start, considerations include collaboration on features such as enrollment, attendance, classroom tools and forms, cost allocation for the teaching team and classroom services, comprehensive services, and monitoring of requirements for both programs. The responsibility for each of these program requirements must be addressed in the formal agreement between Head Start and GSRP.

Educational guidance for the teaching team warrants special consideration. As with all GSRP classrooms, the GSRP Early Childhood Specialist (ECS) is the educational leader, ensuring that the program evaluation tool is administered and monitoring child assessment data. The ECS must also collaborate with the Head Start Education Manager as detailed within the written agreement. If both the ECS and the Head Start Education Manager are to support the classroom, they must also collaborate on feedback sessions and goal setting so that there is a systematic approach with consistent messaging and manageable expectations for teaching teams.

Class Size and Ratio

A 1:8 adult/child ratio must be maintained at all times. A consistent third adult must be present in any classroom where 17 or 18 children are enrolled. Class size must be capped at 18 children with three consistent adults. When a teaching team is composed of three adults, an exception allowing a 1:9 adult/child ratio may be allowed only during rest time to allow staff breaks.

Comprehensive Programming

The ECSQ and GSRP legislation require comprehensive programming. In partnership with families, the GSRP provider supports:

- Children's health (mental, oral, and physical), nutrition, and development across domains in responsive environments that celebrate diversity;
- Professional learning for staff to make referrals for needed services and to document all follow-up efforts; and

- A team approach toward child-specific plans for goals related to overall health and development.

Philosophy

Administrative and program policies are undergirded with a statement of beliefs about teaching and learning. A philosophy statement is a means of thinking deeply about preschool teaching and the beliefs upon which decisions are made. This is separate from a mission statement, which answers the question, "Why do we exist?" and articulates the preschool purpose both for those in the organization and for the public.

The written philosophy statement is developed and reviewed by administrators, staff, and GSRP advisory groups. It is included in the program's Family Handbook. It establishes a framework for program decisions, goal setting, and is aligned with the ECSQ and grant requirements and expectations. The philosophy statement also addresses local, social, economic, cultural, and family needs; and is promoted widely via websites, recruitment materials, classroom newsletters, the family participation group, etc.

Consider the following as the philosophy statement is crafted or reviewed:

- Why preschool is important: What is the purpose of preschool? What is the preschool provider's role?
- Those we serve: How do we support diversity among enrolled children? How do we define our community of learners? What is our relationship with the community, families, teaching colleagues, and administration?
- Approach and content: What are our beliefs about how children learn? How do our beliefs affect our work?
- Program administration: Curriculum selection; instructional strategies AND teacher-child relationships; child assessment; program evaluation; and program improvement efforts for individuals, the classroom, and program.

Staffing

The GSRP staff must have appropriate credentialing, sophisticated knowledge of early childhood education, and practice a team approach. Staff is scheduled to provide the maximum consistency for children from day to day and throughout the year. Additional staff members must be available to allow all staff time for breaks.

The classroom teaching team is supported with the active involvement of an Early Childhood Specialist (ECS). Refer to the [Early Childhood Specialist](#) section of this manual for specific credentials and responsibilities of this position. **One person may not be employed to fill both a lead teacher position and an Early Childhood Specialist position.**

Staff Planning and Instructional Time

To achieve maximum consistency for children and allow intentional support for learning outcomes throughout the day, teaching team members are required to implement all facets of the curriculum and program day with children, e.g., music, technology, outdoor/physical activity time, meals and rest time. See “Specials” at the end of this section. The ISD and program administrators must ensure sufficient paid time for all staff to participate in instructional planning, child assessment, professional learning, and family engagement activities outside of the child attendance schedule. These activities are time-intensive and valuable and are best accomplished through collaboration of teaching team members.

Thus, programs typically operate four days of classroom programming per week, with the fifth weekday set aside for these activities. If the program operates five days per week, the weekly schedule must still include paid time for instructional planning, child assessment, professional learning, and family engagement for each teaching team member. The ISD, assigned ECS, and program administrators must collaborate to establish a staff schedule where the Lead and Associate Teachers are in the classroom when children are present and engaged in planned activities and ideally outdoor time and meal/snack time. If teaching team members are granted non-contact time for planning, etc. while children are in program, every effort must be made to schedule this time during rest time.

Credentialing - Lead Teachers:

Lead Teachers must meet the GSRP qualifications upon hire. A Lead Teacher will be considered credentialed for the position with minimally any of the following:

- A valid Michigan teaching certificate and an Early Childhood Education (ZA) or Early Childhood-General and Special Education (ZS) endorsement, Birth-K, or PK-3 endorsement; or
- A bachelor’s degree in early childhood education or child development *with a specialization in preschool teaching*. The transcript will document a major, rather than a minor, in child development or early childhood education.

The option to hire a Lead Teacher who holds a valid Michigan teaching certificate along with a valid CDA has been discontinued. Lead Teachers hired between June 25, 2012 and June 24, 2014 with MDE-approved compliance plans to acquire a CDA who completed the CDA as required within the approved timeframe, may continue to work as a GSRP Lead Teacher. Personnel hired into a GSRP Lead Teacher position with a valid Michigan teaching certificate along with a valid CDA before June 24, 2014, are also ‘grandfathered in.’ In both instances, MDE requires no further action as long as the person continues to work as a GSRP Lead Teacher in the same or another GSRP. If there is a break in service to GSRP, a ‘grandfathered’ Lead Teacher must meet new credentialing requirements before working again in the position of GSRP Lead Teacher. MDE will also honor a valid Michigan teaching certificate with PPI/Early Childhood Special Education Approval.

Credentialing - Associate Teachers:

An associate teacher must be added with the 9th child in a classroom. Public Act 62 of 2011 altered credentialing requirements for the position of associate teacher with the GSRP. The provision for 120 Clock Hours as a Child Development Associate credential (CDA) equivalency has been discontinued; personnel who currently have a 120 Clock Hour approval letter from the MDE are 'grandfathered in.' MDE requires no further action as long as the person continues to work as a GSRP Associate Teacher in the same or another GSRP. If there is a break in service to GSRP, a 'grandfathered' Associate Teacher must meet new credentialing requirements before working again in the position of GSRP Associate Teacher.

Any GSRP associate teacher hired after June 21, 2011 must minimally have one of the following:

- An associate degree (AA) in early childhood education or child development or the equivalent; or
- A valid Center-Based Preschool CDA credential; or
- An existing 120 Hour approval.

The AA and the CDA are formal training options that uniformly and systematically prepare staff to be effective team teachers in preschool classrooms.

Other Classroom Staff:

Third Staff Person:

- Is added when the classroom enrolls 17 or 18 children;
- Is a consistent member of the teaching team; and
- Meets the LARA, Child Care Licensing Division requirements as a "caregiver."

Relief Staff:

Are appropriately oriented and trained in program procedures relevant to their roles (e.g., responsive adult-child interaction strategies, child development, special needs of enrolled children, family-style meals), and receive ongoing supervision.

Substitute Staff:

A substitute teacher should have a minimum of a valid Center-Based Preschool CDA. Any long-term substitute (more than one month) must meet qualifications for the position being filled.

Classroom Volunteers:

A program must ensure licensing rules are adhered to for all adults in the classroom, including volunteers. A program must ensure children are never left alone with volunteers.

Staffing Noncompliance

Gains in a young child's development are increased when the child has meaningful relationships with responsive adults who have a sophisticated understanding of early childhood education. For this reason, it is critical that GSRPs hire qualified teachers.

If a program is unable to hire a qualified candidate for either a Lead or Associate Teacher position following extensive staff recruitment efforts as described below, the most qualified candidate may be hired with a compliance plan. When a subrecipient hires staff who are not fully credentialed, the subrecipient and the ISD are in noncompliance status until credentialing is completed.

Staff recruitment efforts must be documented in local administrative files. Recruitment efforts can include the following: identification of the search and screen committee, including individuals outside the hiring unit to serve as committee members, and should minimally include hiring procedures, position descriptions that include GSRP credentialing requirements, evidence of advertisement(s), form letters and notices, evidence of journals, publications, electronic bulletin boards, institutions, departments, professional organizations, meetings, and personal and professional networks to which advertisements and notices are sent (or offices/individuals with whom contacts are made).

Compliance plans for staff who are not fully credentialed are submitted annually to the ISD and reported within the Staff Information Report to MDE. The compliance plan must outline educational training and include an anticipated compliance date within required deadlines stated below. It must be signed by the program's ECS, the ISD Early Childhood Contact (ECC), and the staff member.

Individuals hired on a compliance plan must complete the plan within three years. It is the responsibility of the ECS to monitor the plan throughout, to assure compliance will be met within the appropriate number of years from the date of hire with GSRP.

The ISD must ensure that the ECS classroom ratio/contracts reflect the intensive support and additional classroom visits, coaching, and consultation that staff with incomplete credentialing require. MDE's Office of Educator Excellence provides a [list of approved early childhood education endorsement programs in Michigan](#) for teachers seeking to add a ZS endorsement to their Michigan certificate.

Staffing Noncompliance – Lead Teachers:

If a program demonstrates to the ISD that it is unable to hire qualified lead teachers, persons who have **significant but incomplete training in early childhood education**, or child development, OR who have five or more years of experience as a GSRP associate teacher, Head Start, or licensed child care center may be employed. Individuals hired in the 2023-24 grant year with at least 3 years of experience and significant training in early childhood education or child

development, based on the recommendation of the intermediate district after a classroom observation may be employed.

When GSRP Lead Teachers are employed without proper credentialing, a written compliance plan that includes administrative monitoring must be a condition of hire. The compliance plan must outline educational training/certification to be obtained that will result in the Lead Teacher being fully qualified. The plan must include an anticipated compliance date that is within the number of years from the date of hire into the GSRP Lead Teacher position as explained above. Progress toward completion of the compliance plan must minimally consist of two credit-bearing courses per calendar year. Minimum GPA requirements may be included in the compliance plan as well as considerations for financial support and release time. It must be signed by the program administrator or person who signs the GSRP contract for the subrecipient, the classroom's Early Childhood Specialist (ECS), the ISD Early Childhood Contact (ECC), and the Lead Teacher.

As stated above, it is the responsibility of the ECS to monitor the plan for its duration, and support successful completion. The ECS provides support by helping to connect the Lead Teacher with an institution of higher education academic advisor who can arrange a schedule of coursework to meet the required timeframe, encourage the Lead Teacher through coursework by discussing the new learning, and supporting practice of new strategies. The ECS can help the Lead Teacher to advocate with the subrecipient if release time or financial assistance is needed for courses, fees, or textbooks. As with all teaching staff, the ECS ensures that the new Lead Teacher has formal training in the curriculum, the developmental screener, ongoing child assessment tool, and has orientation to GSRP and the position of Lead Teacher. Formal training is defined as training completed by the publisher of the curriculum or tool, or a person certified by the publisher as a trainer.

Staffing Noncompliance – Associate Teachers:

If a program can demonstrate to the ISD that it is unable to hire qualified associate teachers, persons who have minimally completed one course that earns college credit in child development or early childhood education may be employed. Individuals hired in the 2023-24 grant year who enroll in a child development associate credential with at least 6 months of verified experience in early education and care may be employed.

When GSRP Associate Teachers are employed without proper credentialing, a written compliance plan that includes administrative monitoring must be a condition of hire. The compliance plan must outline educational training to be obtained that will result in the Associate Teacher being fully qualified. The plan must include an anticipated compliance date that is within the number of years from the date of hire into the GSRP Associate Teacher position as explained above. Progress toward completion of the compliance plan must minimally include two credit-bearing courses, 60 clock hours, or an equivalent of training per calendar year from an approved training institution or agency. Minimum GPA requirements may be included in the compliance plan as well as considerations for financial support and

release time. It must be signed by the program administrator or person who signs the GSRP contract for the subrecipient, the classroom's Early Childhood Specialist (ECS), the ISD Early Childhood Contact (ECC), and the Associate Teacher.

Family Handbook

Families are provided with policies and procedures that are easy to read, sensitively written, and brief. Refer to [resources](#) for the *Reporting and Monitoring* section of this manual for additional guidance on developing or reviewing family handbooks. Features specific to GSRP must be included in handbooks: use of grant name, logo and 'funded by' language. GSRP providers must have written policies and procedures that include the following:

- Program overview including a philosophy statement and curriculum, developmental screening, and ongoing child assessment information;
- Family engagement information, including formal family contacts, e.g., home visits and family conferences;
- An emphasis on the importance of partnership between families and teaching staff for child development (in school and at home);
- Opportunities for decision-making activities within the local advisory structure and opportunities to serve on other bodies;
- Child recruitment plan that includes procedures for enrollment and placement. Children must not be denied enrollment or excluded from GSRP programming based on challenging behavior, developmental delays or identified disabilities (e.g., toileting needs, speech, motor function, aggressive behaviors, and cognitive delays);
- Referral policy to meet child and family needs, including follow-up procedures;
- Confidentiality policy;
- School calendar;
- Daily classroom routine that includes what adults and children do during the day. (See [resources](#) for this section for sample daily classroom routines);
- Attendance policy;
- Illness or injury exclusion policy written to describe procedure for management of short-term injury or contagious illness that endangers the health and/or safety of children or others. **Children must not be excluded or expelled from classroom programming or transportation services for behavioral, toileting, or other non-health related needs.** Programs should reach out to the ISD for information on mental health supports for children and follow the process set by the ISD to obtain help. (See also the *Seclusion and Restraint* subsection below);
- Weather policy with provisions for temperature (wind chill/heat index) and air quality;
- Meals and snacks policy;
- Rest time policy (applies to GSRP/Head Start Blend and School-Day programs);
- Medication policy;
- Health policies and practices on physical activity and nutrition for children;

- Accident and emergency policies, including how parents/guardians are notified of emergency events;
- Child discipline/conflict resolution policy;
- Policy for reporting child abuse/neglect;
- Sliding fee scale of tuition;
- Grievance policy that clearly describes the steps to be taken when a family has concerns or a grievance; and
- Passive consent notice of program evaluation. See the [Program Evaluation](#) section of this manual for sample language.

Seclusion and Restraint

In December 2016, the State of Michigan adopted laws restricting the use of seclusion and restraint in schools. As required by the laws, the Michigan State Board of Education (SBE) developed and adopted a [state policy](#) in March 2017 regarding the use of seclusion and restraint in the public schools. Not later than the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year, local education agencies, including intermediate school districts (ISD), were required to adopt and implement a local policy that is consistent with the state policy. Specific distinctions for preschool-age children should be included in the policy consistent with the SBE policy. As GSRP is a state-funded program and as ISDs are the sole grantees for GSRP funding, the local policy adopted by the ISD must be applied to all GSRP classrooms regardless of the entity responsible for implementing the program: local school districts, public school academies, community-based organizations (public or private), college/university. The ISD must monitor both ISD-run and subrecipient-run classrooms for adherence to the policy.

Transportation

Providing child transportation to and from the center contributes significantly to family access to GSRP, but this service is not required. Where transportation is offered, families must not be charged transportation fees. GSRP funds may be used to pay for transportation but must meet the guidelines set in the [Budget](#) section of this manual.

LARA Child Care Division [Licensing Rules for Child Care Centers](#) include requirements for the transportation of preschoolers. Licensing rules assure the safety and welfare of children, that children are properly supervised while being transported, and are not confined in a vehicle for long periods of time. Licensing rules apply to both routine and field trip transportation. There are specific rules for center-owned vehicles, vehicles of staff or volunteers, or other private transportation, and also specific guidelines for public school bus transportation of preschoolers. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recommends preschool-age children transported in school buses always be transported in properly secured child safety restraint systems. Grantees must ensure:

- Parents/guardians give permission for their children to be transported;
- Children are escorted by adults to and from vehicles;
- Children are offered adult assistance when entering and exiting vehicles;

- There is one caregiver, in addition to the driver, when there are over 10 three-year-old children, or over 12 four-year-old children on the bus; and
- Children are not to be in a vehicle for more than one continuous hour.

Meals/Snacks

Grantees must adhere to the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)/National School Nutrition Programs [nutritional guidelines](#). In addition, all programs must follow guidelines of the LARA Child Care Licensing Division [Licensing Rules](#) for Child Care Centers. Foods served should reflect the home and community cultures and be high in nutrients and low in saturated and trans-fat, added sugar, and salt. GSRP requires Part-Day programs minimally provide a snack. School-day and extended programs operating less than seven hours per day must minimally provide one snack and lunch. All children should eat the same foods unless there is a documented allergy, special need for individualization, or a signed Flexibility in Meal Service agreement is in place (see *Flexibility in Meal Service* subsection below). Depending on income level, families may be required to pay tuition but incur no cost for program elements such as any aspect of meal service, and may not be asked or expected to send in snacks or meals from home. The program incurs the cost for necessary individualization at meals unless individualization is part of a special education Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

School cafeterias are problematic areas for GSRP to utilize as snack/meal sites due to time for transitioning, size of tables/chairs/serving materials, auditory and visual overstimulation, and the loss of quality time for adult-child interactions. All meals/snacks must occur in space approved for use by licensing and must occur in the GSRP classroom unless there is documented approval from the ISD due to extenuating circumstances. Adults in the classroom sit at the table, eat, or sample the same foods children do, and participate in child-initiated conversation. All GSRP meals/snacks must be delivered family-style, supporting children to do things for themselves. Classroom staff may opt-out of receiving meals. In this case, the program should order and pay for only enough meals so that the adults can sample provided foods alongside the children during meals and snacks to allow for adult modeling of healthy eating, use of utensils, and trying new foods. Adults must not eat outside foods during family-style meals and snacks with children.

Subrecipients are evaluated each year on family-style meal service with nutritious food. When the menu includes breakfast pizzas, corn dogs, French-toast sticks, etc., and subrecipients question whether foods are creditable or nutritious, a formal request can be made to **not** receive specific items. Subrecipients participating in the School Nutrition Program (SNP) can address concerns with the school district's local wellness committee or reference the local wellness policy that each district is required to implement. Subrecipients can work with school districts and school boards to ensure that the local nutrition plan is written with quality features, e.g., foods that are high in nutrients low in saturated and trans-fat, added sugar, and salt. The Great Start Collaborative, School Readiness Advisory Committee may help subrecipients to advocate that local nutrition plans include quality menus that reflect the home and community cultures.

If food items from home are permitted for classroom celebrations, consider providing a 'nutritious food list' within the GSRP Family Handbook. Include special notation on allergies, a companion list of foods with low nutritional value, potential choking hazards and a contact person for questions.

Flexibility in Meal Service

More and more families are adopting specialized diets or desire food that reflects the home and community cultures, is high in nutrients and low in saturated and trans-fat, added sugar, and salt. Some of these features are not easily met by programs. ISDs and local programs may adopt meal service policies allowing families to provide meals and/or snacks for their children. There are several conditions that must be met:

- Families must not be expected or encouraged to provide food for their child or the program. The program must continue to provide meal and snack service meeting Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)/School Nutrition Program (SNP) requirements;
- Families choosing to provide their own meals and snacks must sign an agreement stating their intent and their understanding of the requirements (for a sample form, see [resources](#) for this section);
- When a family has signed an agreement, the program is not required to provide a meal or snack when the family is providing it, however the program must have a plan for addressing times when a meal or snack is forgotten, spilled, or insufficient;
- All licensing requirements for food service must be met;
- In GSRP/Head Start Blend classrooms, the highest standard from either program must be adhered to;
- Family-style meal service must continue. Children of families who provide food intermingle with the rest of the class at snack/meals, sitting and eating with the rest of the class and participating in all other aspects of the family-style meal; and
- Meals and snacks provided by families must also meet CACFP/SNP requirements except when documented food allergies or intolerance or family beliefs prohibit. If inappropriate foods are provided, teaching staff with the support of food service providers, program administrators, and ECS must work with families to meet the requirements or utilize the provided meals.

Programs will also want to consider several situations that may occur if flexibility is offered. These and more should be incorporated into program policies, staff training, and written guidance provided to families.

- Will refrigeration be provided for meals brought from home? Will families be limited to foods that do not require heating/warming?
- How will staff manage possible child reactions to their own or other's meals?
- If families choosing this option do not send in food for their child as expected, how will the program ensure there is sufficient food to provide meals and snacks for that child?

- If a child brings food that does not meet the requirements, will they be allowed to eat it, or will it be replaced? Who will communicate with and advise the family?

This added flexibility for families does not remove the requirement that families must incur no cost for program elements, unless in this case only, they choose to supply their child's food. This guidance also does not remove the requirement to evaluate subrecipients each year on family-style meal service with nutritious food.

Family-Style Meals

Snacks and meals in GSRP are part of the curriculum. Decisions regarding meal service should not be made based on ease and efficiency for adults. Snack and mealtimes provide daily opportunities to demonstrate the program philosophy in a visible way through the practices of participatory learning and authentic conversations that build relationships between children and adults. Below are quality features of family-style meals, where adults and children eat together in the classroom.

Planning for Meals

- Plan enough time for meals and snacks. When children assist with set-up, passing and clean-up, expect meals to take 40-45 minutes. Snacks will take 15-20 minutes;
- Center-based programs must follow LARA Child Care Licensing Division [Licensing Rules for Child Care Centers](#);
- Assure there is enough food for each meal and snack. See the [CACFP](#) meal pattern. A sufficient amount of food must be available to provide the full, minimum servings of each of the required food components for all children along with adult(s) sampling foods or choosing to eat full meals family-style with the children. Note that while the CACFP/SNP Preschool meal pattern charts list the minimum required serving sizes for reimbursable meals and snacks, best nutritional practice would be to plan for a bit more vegetables, fruits, and milk;
- Foods served should reflect the home and community cultures and be high in nutrients and low in saturated and trans-fat, added sugar, and salt;
- Children's eating behaviors, food preferences, and willingness to try new foods are influenced by the people around them. Up to 12 experiences can be necessary for a child to try and then accept a new food! GSRP teachers help by encouraging children to explore and taste new foods; and
- Children may have never experienced a meal served family-style. Preschoolers love to serve themselves and will easily succeed with some guidance and encouragement. Be prepared to offer intentional support at the start of each school year, with newly enrolled children and after breaks from school, such as long weekends and holidays. Use real food service materials to set up "meal" provisions in the house area, water table and sand table so that children can practice.

The Meal Service Environment

- Meals take place in the classroom, away from high traffic areas. Noises and distractions are minimized or eliminated;
- A non-carpeted surface provides for easier clean-up;
- Children have enough space at the table for serving, passing, and eating comfortably;
- Serving utensils are child-size with comfortable handles. Small scoops, tongs, and spoons may work best. Measuring cups with handles can be ideal for supporting both fine motor and concept development. Use small pitchers with handles and pouring spouts for serving beverages where possible. Bowls with wide lips are most easily handled by young children. Plastic serving bowls are light-weight and don't conduct heat;
- Plates, bowls, glasses, cups, and eating utensils are child sized. Consider using plates with limited patterns and designs so that the focus remains on the food. Consider using smaller lunch or salad plates because dinner plates can be difficult for children to handle; and
- A gallon ice-cream container or sand-pail, along with cleaning cloths, make fine clean-up materials for child use.

Characteristics of Family-Style Meals

- Children assist to prepare for snack or mealtime by assisting with washing and setting tables;
- At the beginning of the meal, children bring food to the table in serving bowls, plates, or baskets that children can use comfortably. There are serving utensils for all food;
- Children choose where they will sit. At least one adult sits at each table where children eat and eats or samples the same foods children do. Adults typically position themselves in a mid-table position, to more easily provide support and have rich conversation with all children;
- Food is passed from one person to another;
- Typically, an adult begins passing each food item, modeling with action and words as they serve themselves. For example, "Today we have yellow string beans. I am taking one spoonful of beans and then I'll pass them to my friend Tamilla. Tamilla, here you go! You might want one or two spoonfuls of beans." Adults provide verbal descriptions as they model how to pass bowls and show children how to use two hands while holding a bowl on the outside so that their fingers do not touch the food. Adults model how to pour and scoop using appropriate utensils. Adults model conventional table manners, such as waiting for turns, passing foods and saying "please" and "thank you";
- Children are offered each meal component and make their own food choices based on individual appetites and preferences. Children choose whether to eat, what to eat, and how much to eat. Enough food must be available to meet meal pattern requirements and to allow for seconds;
- Rather than acting as servers, adults sit at the tables with children throughout the snack or meal, unless more food is needed from larger or high-temperature containers;

- Everyone serves themselves. Children are encouraged to take a portion of each food component. Family-style meal service affords some latitude in the size of initial servings because replenishment is immediately available;
- Adults offer minimal assistance as needed. In the rare instance where one child needs more help than others, the adult can encourage peer support, and/or the child can be encouraged to sit near an adult at the start of the meal;
- Some food will spill as children serve themselves. Be prepared for this with a nearby pail of soapy water and paper toweling. The adult remains seated as the child (and sometimes peers) is calmly supported to clean up spills, wash hands, and return to the meal;
- Adults participate in child-initiated conversation; and
- Children help clean up by clearing their places at the table, disposing of their leftovers, washing the table, and pushing in their own chairs. Preparation suggestions include having a nearby pail of soapy water and small cloths. If a cleaning bucket is used, it is cleaned after each meal service and cloths are either disposable or laundered after each meal service. Adults do final cleaning/sanitizing after the meal has ended and children have left the table.

“Specials”

GSRP classrooms housed within an elementary school are sometimes offered additional programming referred to as “specials,” such as library, computers, physical education, music, and/or art classes. It is questionable whether a classroom in which the GSRP teacher is implementing a comprehensive program (as required) has need of additional programming. In addition, the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) requires all regular child use areas be approved for use, and MDE requires GSRPs maintain staffing guidelines with staff who have significant credentialing in early childhood education. However, teaching staff may make use of other available space, approved for use by licensing, to support children’s learning. The following should also be considered:

- Children who are at risk of academic failure benefit most from developing strong and positive relationships with the GSRP classroom teachers. How would multiple teachers throughout the week affect a child's sense of safety, security, and emotional development?
- When staggered “specials” are in place, what are the effects on the consistent daily routine for children?
- How would “specials” impact the provision of an appropriate amount of time each day for other parts of the daily routine?
- What effects on children will emerge with the additional transitions that will be required of them?
- In following the ECSQ, GSRP classrooms integrate attention to ALL learning domains throughout the day; if this is already in place in the classroom, is there really any need to implement “specials?”
- How can the grantee bring the expertise of the “specials” staff to the classroom as a normal part of the classroom experience? Consider team planning to ensure developmentally appropriate activities which adhere to

the ECSQ. The “specials” teacher could be incorporated into the classroom as the lead for large-group or small-group time(s), assisting out-of-doors, etc. Even in this case, the “specials” teacher should have activities that reflect what is currently going on in the classroom, as opposed to isolated art, music, or physical education lessons.

- How can “specials” staff contribute anecdotes for use in child assessment?