

FUNDING

Intermediate School Districts (ISDs) are the subcontractors for Strong Beginnings. ISDs receive funding for the program from Clinton County Regional Educational Service Agency (CCRESA). An upfront payment will be made the first year each classroom is awarded funds for durable equipment and supplies, including child safety restraint systems for transportation, or minor renovations. Funds for program operation and transportation will be made on a reimbursement basis monthly, every other month or quarterly at the ISDs request. The first invoice for payment for each year must be submitted by mid-November in accordance with the date specified on the Strong Beginnings Calendar for each school year. The first invoice may contain expenses beginning on July 1 of the current school year. Program and transportation funding will not be available until the ISD budgets for school year funds have been approved. Local agreements detail the process and timeline of how funding is flowed to program providers.

Strong Beginnings funds are appropriated annually based on a July 1 to June 30th fiscal year. If funds are awarded during, rather than at the beginning of the year, they will still have an ending date of June 30th. ISDs are to ensure that revenues and expenses related to services and materials purchased for their respective fiscal year are recorded in their accounting system for that same year. Revenue is not allowed to be earned on any Strong Beginnings funds. ISDs receive an allocation to implement the program and a transportation allocation as well as start-up funds for classroom equipment, materials, or small renovations the first year a Strong Beginnings classroom is operating. No Strong Beginnings funds are available for carryover.

Eligible Applicants

Strong Beginnings subcontracts for the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years were funded from the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (PDG B-5), Grant Number 90TP0055 from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services received by the Michigan Department of Education and allocated through a contract to CCRESA. Strong Beginnings subcontracts for the 2022-2023 school year were funded by section 32t of Public Act 144 of 2022 and allocated to CCRESA through a contract with the Michigan Department of Education. Strong Beginnings subcontracts for the 2023-2024 through 2025-2026 school years are funded by section 32t of Public Act 103 of 2023 and are allocated to CCRESA through a contract with the Michigan Department of Education and/or the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential. CCRESA awards subcontracts from these funds to ISDs for piloting the Strong Beginnings program.

Awarding of the Allocation

The Strong Beginnings Pilot project is a demonstration project to assess both the scalability and efficacy of a three-year-old preschool program. A competitive RFP process in 2020 and again in 2023 was used to rank ISDs based on scores obtained on a rubric. Because it is necessary to study implementation across different settings, however, final site selections were based on a combination of factors such as geographical distribution and the site's contribution to a diverse, balanced sample as well as the score obtained on their proposal.

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Initial Funding

Each Strong Beginnings classroom will receive a one-time award of \$20,000 their first year of operation for purchasing durable classroom equipment and supplies, including child safety restraint systems for transportation, buses/vans for child transportation or minor classroom renovations. Labor and inspection costs related to these items may also be covered by the initial funding. Finally, inspection and licensing costs relating to adding the Strong Beginnings classroom to an existing child care license may be covered by these funds. If funds are utilized for equipment that will also be used by children not enrolled in Strong Beginnings, Strong Beginnings funding may only be used to pay for a justifiable portion of the equipment. Only one \$20,000 payment will be made to two part-day programs operating in the same physical location.

The \$20,000 per new classroom payment will be sent to ISDs within 30 days after the receipt of their signed contract between the ISD and CCRESA. The budget for these funds is due to CCRESA in the early fall in accordance with the date published on the Strong Beginnings calendar for that school year. Funds may be spent before or during much of the school year and the final expenditure report (FER) for these funds is due at the beginning of June in accordance with the date published on the Strong Beginnings calendar for each school year. Funds may be distributed to program providers on an upfront or reimbursable basis. Any funds of the initial allocation of \$20,000 that are not spent on supplies, equipment or renovation will be subtracted from the final reimbursement for program expenses and should be applied to those. Any individual item or project, such as a bathroom renovation, that costs in excess of \$5,000 is considered capital outlay and the ISD must obtain prior approval from the CCRESA Implementation Consultants. For more information, see the subsection on Capital Outlay in the Budget and Financial Guidelines section of this Implementation Manual.

Program Funding

The funding an ISD will receive for each school day Strong Beginnings classroom serving 14 children will be determined by July 1 of each school year. This funding, which covers both the classroom and the Child/Family Supports components of Strong Beginnings, is based on a per child allocation and is specified in the yearly contract between CCRESA and each ISD. Due dates for the budgets, invoices and

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Final Expenditure Reports (FERs) for the operating funds are in accordance with dates specified on the Strong Beginnings Calendar for each school year. The budget is generally due in mid-September and the FER for operating expenses is generally due early the following August, about five weeks after the contract period ends.

In the event that class sizes are limited to fewer than 14 children for reasons related to COVID-19 or other issues, or full enrollment is not achieved, full funding for each classroom will still be available. The subcontractor operating the classroom must be able to document that all preschool programs they operate and not just Strong Beginnings classrooms have lower than typical enrollment caps and/or steps they have taken to fully enroll the classroom. Funding will continue if the program must be closed due to executive orders or child care, health department or LEA/CBO rules relating to program or classroom closures relating to COVID-19. While no virtual learning is expected during that time, families should continue to be provided with support, resources, and information regarding unmet basic needs or family issues either virtually or in person.

Requesting and Awarding of the Transportation Allocation

Transportation funding is available for Strong Beginnings. A minimum of \$500 per child for the school years of 2023-2024 through 2025-2026 will be available. The current amount will be specified in the yearly contract between CCRESA and each ISD. Each year the ISDs will be asked to collect total projected transportation costs for Strong Beginnings from subcontractors offering transportation to their programs including community-based organizations (CBOs) seeking reimbursement for costs related to parent or guardian accompanied public transportation. Programs may only request funding for parent or guardian accompanied public transportation if their Parent Handbook includes information on the process used for this type of reimbursement. A total transportation request for Strong Beginnings will be forwarded to CCRESA from each ISD by the date in mid-September specified in the Strong Beginning Calendar for each school year. If the total request from all ISDs is equal to or less than the total pool determined by multiplying the number of children funded for Strong Beginnings by the per child allocation for that year, each ISD will receive the requested amount. If the total of the projected transportation budgets exceeds this amount, CCRESA will prorate the total amount available. Each ISD will receive at least the minimum child allocation for each child transported for each school year. CCRESA will notify ISDs of their final transportation allocation about the end of September and the ISD budget for this allocation will be due to CCRESA no sooner than two weeks after this date as specified on the Strong Beginnings Calendar for each school year. The Final Expense Report (FER) for transportation will be due to CCRESA about five weeks after the end of the contract year on the date specified on the Strong Beginnings Calendar for each school year.

The ISD may accept all or only a portion of the transportation allocation. If an ISD receives less than the total projected transportation budget submitted, the ISD may distribute funds they do receive either equally based on child FTE or equitably based on actual costs or other such factors to all programs providing

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transportation. The ISD must document the process used to distribute funds and share it with the School Readiness Advisory Committee.