

OVERVIEW

This Strong Beginning Pilot Implementation Manual is designed to serve as a guide for all Strong Beginnings pilot administrators and staff. It contains specific information related to piloting Strong Beginnings for three-year-old children as well as to the overall implementation of Strong Beginnings. The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) requires adherence to this manual and all standards in the Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten (ECSQ-PK). Other resources critical to implementing high-quality preschool programs are an approved comprehensive curriculum, an approved ongoing and authentic child assessment tool, and an approved program evaluation tool. Additional information about these resources can be found in subsequent sections of this manual.

Purpose

Michigan offers the Strong Beginnings pilot for three-year-old children, all of whom have factors which may place them at risk for low educational attainment. The program is administered by the CCRESA Strong Beginnings Implementation Team under the direction of the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Great Start (MDE-OGS). Research on two-year preschool programs indicates that children provided with a high-quality preschool experience for the two years preceding kindergarten show significant positive developmental differences when compared to children from the same backgrounds who attended a high-quality preschool program for only one year.

To strengthen learning at home and strengthen positive child outcomes, programs must provide for active and continuous involvement of *parents in the learning process. In Strong Beginnings, this includes a Family Partnership Process that utilizes individualized goal setting to explore parents' hopes and strengthen their skills and confidence for the future.

Depending on income level, parents may be required to pay tuition, but parents are never charged additional fees for program elements such as transportation or meal service. Through advisory committees, parents assist to evaluate and make recommendations about the program.

History

The Department of Education Appropriation Act, in fiscal year 1986, designated one million dollars to identify appropriate program models for the operation of preschool pilot projects for four-year-old children. Fifty-three projects were funded and served 694 four-year-old children. In fiscal year 1987, Section 36 of the State School Aid Act, and the Department of Education Appropriation Act provided funds for targeted early childhood programs. Programs began operating after September 1, 1988. Specific research on GSRP indicates that children provided with a high-quality preschool experience show significant positive developmental differences when compared with children from the same backgrounds who did not attend a high-

quality preschool program. As a result, the program has been frequently expanded and served over 32,000 children in FY19. While GSRP clearly improved outcomes for children, it is apparent that one year of preschool was not enough to enable all children to be successful in school. As a result, MDE utilized federal funds awarded as part of Race to the Top-Early Childhood Challenge to develop a conceptual model for a preschool program for three-year-old children with factors that put them at risk of school failure in the 2017-2018 school year. The model was revisited with a lens for ensuring equity and access during the 2019-2020 school year utilizing federal Preschool Development Grant funds. Funding from the same source will be available to pilot a small-scale implementation and evaluation of this program, now known as Strong Beginnings, in Fiscal years 2021 and 2022.

*Parent = legal guardian