

RECRUITMENT AND ENROLLMENT

Intermediate School District as Fiscal Agent

Intermediate School Districts (ISDs) and consortia of ISDs are the awardees of Strong Beginnings funding. ISDs may be approved to directly administer Strong Beginnings classrooms or develop agreements with eligible program providers. Eligible program providers are: school districts, public school academies and public or private, non-profit, or for-profit agencies.

Children who reside within the geographic boundaries of the ISD can be enrolled by any program provider. However, it is suggested that each ISD and its program providers within the ISD form an agreement regulating the enrollment of 3-year-old children across program provider boundaries. This may prevent competition program providers. If the family moves after the child has enrolled, the program may continue to serve the child for the remainder of the program year, with the family providing transportation.

Three-year-old children may not be enrolled across ISD boundaries for enrollment in Strong Beginnings.

Interagency Collaboration

Strong Beginnings and Head Start programs in Michigan are required to collaborate in preschool recruitment and enrollment activities. Best practice is to utilize one preschool application for all state and federally-funded programs and share one waiting list. The local Great Start Collaborative could be asked to facilitate this work to ensure that as many of the community's children as possible take part in a program. If a program enrolls a child who is eligible for or dually-enrolled in an additional funded preschool program, it prohibits another child from participating in Strong Beginnings who may only be eligible for Strong Beginnings. Refer to resources for this section on collaboration.

Guidelines for Developing a Recruitment, Referral, and Enrollment Protocol

Although Strong Beginnings and Head Start are designed to serve two different populations of children/families, both programs share a common goal: to ensure as many at-risk children as possible benefit from high-quality preschool programs. Therefore, each school readiness advisory committee must approve a collaborative recruitment and enrollment process to assist parents in selecting the program best suited to their needs. A signed collaborative agreement includes the process and procedures, including timelines, for recruitment and enrollment. The ISD monitors to see that the procedures are followed by program provider staff.

While each region will create a protocol that is unique to area needs and resources, a strong recruitment, referral, and enrollment protocol will include specific items:

- Contact information for each program including name of person(s) having responsibility for recruitment, title(s), telephone number(s), e-mail address(s), and preferred mode of communication;
- Eligibility guidelines for each program including age(s) of children served;
- Recruitment and enrollment policies that allow families to learn about each program for which their children are eligible;
- Processes and timelines for mutual referrals among all available programs; and
- Appropriate signatures.

A protocol exhibiting best practice will include a common application. The common application should collect the required information from parents/guardians of each child for later verification of eligibility. In cases of single, separated, or divorced families, access to personal data provided to determine eligibility (e.g. tax forms, pay stubs, etc.) should be restricted to only the parent that provided that data. See the *ISD Administration* section of this manual for additional information on maintaining and protecting child files and eligibility information. Programs may want to consider including a question on the application regarding permissions for discussing the application with others. Enrollment applications should collect:

- Age of child;
- School district/county of residence;
- Annual income;
- Potential program eligibility factors placing the child at risk of educational failure;
- Health information and proof of immunizations; and
- Parent permission to share information among programs to determine proper placement.

Recruitment

A well-developed plan for recruiting the children most at risk of school failure is essential. The local Strong Beginnings/GSRP parent advisory committees and the regional school readiness advisory committee should be involved in drafting the plan. Efforts to connect with families might include:

- Information given to home visit specialists through the ISD and community mental health agencies;
- Posters displayed at local health departments, doctors' offices, libraries, post offices, hospitals, and businesses that draw young families such as laundromats, and grocery stores;
- Flyers sent home with children enrolled in elementary school;
- Informational articles in the local newspaper;
- Door to door census;
- Recruitment tables at local area fairs and festivals;
- Electronic community bulletin boards;
- Information on local cable stations;

- Displays at kindergarten orientation; and
- Connecting with local *Early On*[®] and home visiting programs.

Referral of Head Start-Eligible Children

Strong Beginnings requires specific collaboration when a child is eligible for Head Start. **An eligible child must be referred to Head Start** before beginning Strong Beginnings. If a child who is eligible for Head Start attended Strong Beginnings and the family wishes the child to be enrolled in GSRP, they do not need to be referred to Head Start for a second time. The referral process within the protocol must identify which program is responsible for contacting families to inform them of the eligibility for Head Start. Once parents are aware of the eligibility, Head Start should contact the family to describe the services available. Families should be guided to make the program choice best suited to their needs. See the Office of Great Start memorandum on family choice in the resources for this section.

The Head Start program should follow-up with the referring Strong Beginnings program regarding the parents' decisions. It is not recommended that families be responsible for the completion of a referral form and/or returning a referral form to Strong Beginnings.

A referral form from Strong Beginnings to Head Start should include:

- Date of referral, date forwarded to Head Start, and date received by Head Start;
- Family contact information: parent and child names, mailing address, phone number, e-mail address;
- Signatures of sending and receiving program representatives;
- Program placement decision;
- Explanation of family program preference (preferably written by parent);
- Parent signature acknowledging parental choice and repercussions of the decision i.e., if choosing Strong Beginnings, their child will be included on a Strong Beginnings waiting list until the referral process with Head Start is completed;
- Date returned to Strong Beginnings; and
- Signature of Head Start representative.

Strong Beginnings enrollment is deferred while the referral to Head Start is completed. The completed referral form is documentation that agreed-upon procedures have been followed and also reports the placement outcome for each family that has been referred. The completed referral may document acknowledgement from program representatives and parents that the family is income-eligible for one program and will be enrolled in another. If Head Start does not return the referral form, the Strong Beginnings program providers need only retain on file the original dated referral form to meet program requirements.

The protocol should detail the referral turn-around time frame before a family is removed from the Strong Beginnings waiting list. Then, as openings occur, all the

children on the list are considered so that the family with the greatest need according to the Participant Eligibility and Prioritization Guidelines is contacted first. This critical portion of written protocol helps to ensure common understanding among programs and service to the highest number of eligible children/families.

Head Start Referrals to Strong Beginnings

In addition, a protocol that formalizes a strong collaborative relationship among partners will document the Head Start program's steps for referring both applicants that do not qualify for Head Start and qualifying families on Head Start's waiting list to Strong Beginnings. Section 642(e) of the Head Start Act of 2007 details Head Start's requirements for collaborating with state-funded preschool programs. Refer *Authorization for Requirement to Collaborate* in the resources for this section for select sections of the Head Start Act of 2007.

Enrollment

The recruitment process for cohort 1 will begin in November 2020 and cohort 2 in the spring of 2021. Prospective program providers are cautioned to delay enrollment until the ISD has received a letter from Clinton County RESA (CCRESA) stating their award or continuance. Parents may be told they are on a waiting list and if expected funding is maintained, will be formally considered for enrollment using the Strong Beginnings prioritization process once the funding of the program has been finalized. Please see the Eligibility section of this manual for information on child eligibility.

Basic Needs Evaluation

All families completing enrollment forms for Strong Beginnings must be evaluated for basic needs such as food and housing. If families have immediate needs in any of these areas, the Family Liaison must support the family in finding assistance to meet these needs even though the child has not yet been and may not be admitted to the program.

Prioritization

Ninety percent of all children enrolled throughout an ISD or consortium of ISDs must qualify with family income under 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Legislation further requires that each applicant be ranked by family's FPL and that programs enroll children with families with the lowest income first following these procedures:

1. As Strong Beginnings preschool applications, including income level and other program eligibility factors, are collected, each family's Federal Poverty Level (FPL) is calculated. Follow current guidelines in the *Eligibility* section of the Strong Beginnings Pilot Implementation Manual to calculate the family's income. Poverty level calculators are available online and may be helpful, such as this *Federal Poverty Level Calculator*. The family income, family size, and exact FPL must be recorded in each child's file, preferably on the

enrollment form. The FPL for each child will be reported within the Michigan Student Data System (MSDS).

2. Each child is then placed on a list of applicants from lowest to highest family poverty level. Children whose families are at the same poverty level should be ranked according to other collected program eligibility factors. Any children who are homeless or in the foster care system or who have an individualized education program (IEP) recommending placement in an inclusive preschool setting must be considered to be in the zero to 50% of FPL quintile. This, along with additional program eligibility factors must be considered when prioritizing children for enrollment. The actual FPL for a family with a child with an IEP will be reported in MSDS while children qualifying because of a foster care placement or homelessness will be reported within the 0 – 50% FPL quintile. All other program eligibility factors will also be collected and reported in MSDS for every child.
3. Any child who attended Strong Beginnings is automatically eligible for placement in GSRP. The family does not need to requalify financially and the child will be admitted to GSRP even if there are other eligible applicants with a lower FPL.
4. Any child eligible for Head Start by income or other factors is referred to Head Start by Strong Beginnings following local written protocols, in compliance with the Implementation Manual. The process must be complete before enrolling any Head Start eligible child in Strong Beginnings.
5. Once the award letter is received, the ISD notifies each program provider regarding the award and when enrollment may begin, according to local policy. Enrollment must begin with children from families between zero and 50% of FPL (who have completed the Head Start referral process) and continue with children from families between 51 and 100% of FPL (who have completed the Head Start referral process), between 101 and 150%, between 151 to 200%, and between 201 and 250%.
6. Finally, if the ISD determines that all eligible children are being served and that there are no children on the waiting list who live with families at or below 250% of FPL, the ISD may then enroll up to 10% of children who live with families with a household income above 250% of FPL with extreme risk for low educational achievement as determined by number or severity of existing Strong Beginnings program eligibility factors. Careful documentation of the program eligibility factors for these children must be kept in each child's file. These families must also be charged tuition based on the ISD's adopted sliding fee scale. See the ISD Administration of Strong Beginnings section of this manual "15. Sliding Scale of Tuition" subsection, for details.

Refer to the [Participant Eligibility and Prioritization Guidelines](#) in the resources for this section for detail about the specific prioritization process required during the recruitment and enrollment process.

Each ISD must utilize a written prioritization process that provides clear direction for all Strong Beginnings staff. Based on the required income quintiles explained above, it may also include weighted priority for local considerations such as lead exposure, and the enrollment of children with IEPs. It should include impartial guidance for staff on situations where children present with similar income and program eligibility factors. Many programs “hold open” a few spaces, anticipating that some of the most eligible families may apply as the school year is beginning.

Wait List

When all Strong Beginnings funded classroom openings are filled, each ISD must establish and maintain a waiting list of eligible children seeking placement when a space becomes available in a classroom. Eligibility of children on the waiting list must be verified and prioritization for possible enrollment determined as indicated in the Prioritization subsection above. Verification and prioritization of new applications remains a critical aspect of ensuring children with the greatest need are served first. Children on the waiting list are enrolled as space becomes available. In addition to children who are enrolled in Strong Beginnings, each ISD will obtain unique identification codes (UICs) UICs and other information for children in Strong Beginnings or on the waiting list for Strong Beginnings will not be entered into MSDS but will be submitted to the Strong Beginnings team as requested. The Michigan State University Research Team of Strong Beginnings will invite interested children and families who are on the waiting list to be included in the control group for this project.

Unique Enrollment Situations

Occasionally families with unique situations apply for enrollment in Strong Beginnings. When a child’s parents are separated, special considerations must be made when calculating the FPL; the *Eligibility* section of this manual addresses methods to use based on the specifics of the situation. Enrollment decisions may also be affected when the child spends time with each parent. If parents disagree about the enrollment or if one is unable to transport the child to a mutually agreeable program, program staff are encouraged to work with both parents to support a decision in the best interest of the child. In no case may a child be enrolled in two Strong Beginnings classrooms at one time.

Additionally, each year some families will move. When a move is made to a nearby location, even if outside district boundaries, a child may remain in the current program as long as transportation can be arranged. When a family moves farther, every effort should be made to assist the family to enroll in another program based on the availability of space and funding and on the appropriate prioritization of families on the waiting list, if any. This includes the transfer of the Strong Beginnings application, enrollment file, and screening and assessment data. A family moving to a new program should not be required to complete duplicate enrollment paperwork for eligibility determination. A child found eligible at any

point during the program year remains eligible for the remainder of the year as well as for the following year.

Combining Eligible and Non-Eligible Children in Preschool Classrooms

Only children fully funded by Strong Beginnings for classroom participation may be enrolled in Strong Beginnings classrooms. No braided or blended programs are allowed.

Special Education Eligible Children

Local districts may determine, through the IEP team, that Strong Beginnings is the least restrictive environment for children who qualify for special education services. A child may be placed in a Strong Beginnings classroom by qualifying for Strong Beginnings as the result of receiving an IEP that requires additional ECSE services or specifies the need for an inclusive program for the entire time they are in school.

The IEP team should have representation of parents and the Strong Beginnings teacher as it considers the following questions:

- Do all parties feel that the IEP fully meets the child's needs?
- Does the IEP declare that the child is eligible for special education services rather than a special education classroom program?
- Was the Strong Beginnings teacher a part of the IEP team?
- Are consultation meetings between special education staff and the Strong Beginnings teaching team written into the IEP?
- Can the child's needs for special services be met in the context of Strong Beginnings?
- What additional support or accommodations will be necessary so the child can participate fully in the activities and environment of Strong Beginnings?
- What percent of children in the classroom have IEPs? Individual classroom needs and resources are taken into consideration, such as the variety and degree of disability as well as adult/child ratio in a classroom. Best practice for inclusive classrooms limits the percentage of children with IEPs for special education services to no more than 10 percent.

No child may be enrolled in part-day Strong Beginnings and part-day ECSE.