

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION AND STAFFING

(Replaces *Classroom Requirements* section; see also *Classroom Quality* section.)

Introduction

Strong Beginnings programs must comply with Public Act 116 of the Public Acts of 1973, as amended and the [Licensing Rules for Child Care Centers](#). Clinton County Regional Educational Service Agency (CCRESA) requires adherence to the [Strong Beginnings Pilot Implementation Manual](#) and to all standards in the [Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Birth to Kindergarten](#) as appropriate. CCRESA requires grantees to address program quality. All programs must participate in [Great Start to Quality](#) and maintain at least an Enhancing Quality rating. 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 Strong Beginnings must comply with state licensing regulations governing child care. Strong Beginnings programs must receive a certificate of approval/license from the Michigan Department of Lifelong Learning, Advancement and Potential (MiLEAP), Child Care Licensing Division. All regular child use areas must be approved for use. Relocations must be completed with the knowledge of the Intermediate School District (ISD). The ISD and a CCRESA Strong Beginnings consultant must be notified within 24 hours 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

Program providers must have a minimum of 120 days of classroom instruction spread over at least 30 weeks in all Strong Beginnings classrooms. More sessions are strongly recommended to better support enrolled children to be prepared for a successful GSRP and kindergarten experience.

When planning the program year, scheduled breaks, half-days, holidays, and possible inclement weather days should be taken into account 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. In the event that schools are closed due to COVID-19, no virtual instruction is expected but family support activities will continue.

Any changes from the prescribed schedule and classroom practices for child and staff health and safety due to COVID-19 or other health related issues must be communicated to and approved by CCRESA.

School-Day Strong Beginnings Programs

School-Day Strong Beginnings programs must operate for at least the same length of day as the local school district's/public school academy (PSA)'s first grade program. CBOs must operate their program for at least the same length of day as that of a first-grade classroom in the school district in which they are located. A classroom that offers a School-Day program must enroll all children for the length of the school day to be considered a School-Day program.

Part-Day Strong Beginnings Programs

Part-Day Strong Beginnings programs must provide for a minimum of three hours of teacher/child contact time per day, for at least four days per week. Part-Day Strong Beginnings programs are not allowed during the pilot phase of the program.

Class Size and Ratio

A 1:7 adult/child ratio must be maintained at all times in Strong Beginnings classrooms. Each Strong Beginnings classroom must have at least two consistent adults present to allow staff to provide necessary assistance for diapering/toileting and other self-care and social needs. Class size must be capped at 14 children with two consistent adults in pilot Strong Beginnings classrooms.

Consideration should be given to providing an extra staff person to the Strong Beginnings classroom at the beginning of the school year, especially if more than a few children have not learned to use the toilet, there are several severe separation issues or other issues that take a great deal of staff time for individual children exist.

Additional staff members must be available to allow all staff time for breaks. All staff should receive a half hour scheduled break as well as necessary five-minute breaks daily. Staff assigned to teach double sessions must not be responsible for more than 28 three-year-old children.

Comprehensive Programming

The ECSQ for Birth to Kindergarten and Strong Beginnings require comprehensive programming. In partnership with parents and families, the Strong Beginnings 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 an underlying 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 Strong Beginnings advisory groups. It is included in the program's Parent Handbook. It establishes a framework for program decisions, goal-setting; and is aligned with the ECSQ for Birth to Kindergarten and program expectations. The philosophy statement also addresses local, social, economic, cultural, and family needs; and is promoted widely via websites, recruitment materials, classroom newsletters, parent-boards, 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'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, parents, teaching colleagues, and administration? How do we work with the Family Liaison to support family goals?
- 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 Strong Beginnings staff must have appropriate credentialing and 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 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.**

Team Teaching Model

The ISD and program administrators must ensure sufficient time for all staff to participate in planning, professional learning, and parent/family involvement activities. Programs typically operate four days of classroom programming per Section 8: Program Administration and Staffing

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week, with the fifth weekday set aside for the above activities. If the program operates five days per week, staff must have paid time for planning, professional learning, and parent/family involvement. Any time there is a permanent change in staffing in the classroom, the CCRESA Implementation Consultant must be notified within two weeks of the change.

Credentialing - Lead Teachers:

Lead Teachers must meet the Strong Beginnings 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, or Birth-K 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.

When placing teachers in Strong Beginnings classrooms, consideration should be given as to whether their best fit is with three-year-old children. When possible, teachers assigned to Strong Beginnings classrooms should have prior experience working with three-year-old children as well as knowledge of and/or experience with toddlers. Teachers assigned to Strong Beginnings classrooms should also possess the patience and nurturing skills necessary to support young children who are often just beginning to master self-help and social skills.

If after an exhaustive and well documented search process it is not possible to find a fully credentialed Lead Teacher for the Strong Beginnings classrooms, please contact the CCRESA Implementation Consultant.

Waivers of educational requirements will not be given for both Lead and Associate Teachers in the same Strong Beginnings classroom.

The option to hire a Lead Teacher who holds a valid Michigan teaching certificate along with a valid CDA has been discontinued. CCRESA will also honor a valid Michigan teaching certificate with PPI/Early Childhood Special Education Approval.

Credentialing - Associate Teachers:

All Strong Beginnings classrooms, regardless of number of children enrolled, must have an associate teacher.

Any Strong Beginnings associate teacher must minimally have one of the following:

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

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

If an associate teacher has an Infant/Toddler CDA credential, that will be approved until the CDA expires. At that point, the associate teacher will be required to obtain a Preschool CDA credential.

If after an exhaustive and well documented search process it is not possible to find a fully credentialed Associate Teacher for the Strong Beginnings classrooms, please contact the CCRESA Implementation Consultant.

Waivers of educational requirements will not be given for both Lead and Associate Teachers in the same Strong Beginnings classroom.

Other Classroom Staff:

Third Staff Person:

- Is a consistent member of the teaching team. No more than two separate individuals may fill the role of a third staff person in any one classroom.
- Meets the MiLEAP, Child Care Licensing Division requirements as a “caregiver”.
- Must be oriented and trained in program procedures relevant to their roles. (e.g., responsive adult-child interaction strategies, child development, special needs of enrolled children, adopted curriculum)

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 Center-Based Preschool CDA. Any long-term substitute (more than one month), must meet qualifications for the position being filled.

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 Strong Beginnings programs hire qualified teachers. Any program provider that is considering employing a staff member for Lead or Associate Teacher that is not appropriately credentialed must contact the ISD for authorization before making an offer of hire. The ISD must contact the CCRESA Implementation Team for approval for hiring the staff member who is not in compliance with requirements. Written approval must be granted by the CCRESA Implementation Team before the applicant with incomplete credentialing is hired.

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 program provider hires staff who are not fully credentialed, the program provider 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 Strong Beginnings 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 who then reports staff information to the CCRESA Implementation Team. 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 Strong Beginnings.

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 or Birth to Kindergarten 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 Strong Beginnings or GSRP associate teacher may be employed.

When Strong Beginnings 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 Strong Beginnings 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 Strong Beginnings contract for the subcontractor, 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 subcontractor 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 Strong Beginnings and the position of Lead Teacher.

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.

When Strong Beginnings 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 Strong Beginnings Associate Teacher position as explained above. Progress toward completion of the compliance plan must minimally include two credit-bearing courses or 60 clock hours 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 Strong Beginnings contract for the subcontractor, the classroom's Early Childhood Specialist (ECS), the ISD Early Childhood Contact (ECC), and the Associate Teacher.

Parent Handbook

Parents are provided with policies and procedures that are easy to read, sensitively written, and brief. Refer to resources in the Reporting and Monitoring section for additional guidance on developing or reviewing parent handbooks. Features specific to Strong Beginnings must be included in handbooks: use of program name, logo and 'funded by' language. Strong Beginnings 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;
- Parent/family engagement information, including formal parent contacts, e.g. home visits and parent-teacher conferences;
- An emphasis on the importance of partnership between parents and teaching staff for child development (in school and at home); and
- Opportunities for decision-making activities within the local advisory structure and opportunities to serve on other bodies;
- Child recruitment plan that includes procedures for selection and placement. Children must not be denied enrollment or excluded from Strong Beginnings programming based on challenging behavior, developmental delays or identified disabilities (e.g., toileting needs, speech, motor function, aggressive behaviors, and cognitive delays);
- An overview of the supports available for families needing assistance with meeting basic needs or other family issues and information on how to access them;
- Referral policy to meet child and family needs, including follow-up procedures;
- Confidentiality policy;
- School calendar;
- Daily classroom routine for Strong Beginnings that includes what adults and children do during the day. (See resources for this section for sample daily classroom routines);
- Explanation of and procedures for use of family accompanied public transportation for centers that request funding for this option.
- Attendance policy;
- Exclusion policy must be written to describe short-term injury or contagious illness that endangers the health and/or safety of children, staff or others. Children must not be excluded or expelled from classroom programming or transportation services for behavioral, toileting or other non-health related needs;
- Weather policy;
- Meals and snacks policy;
- Rest time policy (applies to Strong Beginnings School-Day programs);
- Medication policy;
- Health policies and practices, including those for Covid 19 prevention and on physical activity and nutrition for children;
- Accident and emergency policies, including how parents are notified of emergency events;
- Child discipline/conflict resolution policy;
- Policy for reporting child abuse/neglect;
- Grievance policy that clearly describes the steps to be taken when a parent has concerns or a grievance; and

- Passive consent notice of program evaluation. See the [Program Evaluation](#) section of this manual for sample language.

Challenging Behavior

The structure of the physical environment, daily routine and activities presented, and the adult(s) approach all have a direct influence on child behavior. Research shows young children who struggle with behavioral and emotional problems have a fifty percent chance of continuing to struggle into adulthood.

Strong Beginnings providers must not deny enrollment or exclude a child from classroom programming or program provided transportation based on challenging behavior or any disability because of staff attitudes and/or apprehensions, unfamiliarity with the behaviors or disability, the need to access additional resources to serve a specific child or the need for individualized planning and intentional teaching.

There is evidence high-quality early childhood education minimizes challenging child behaviors when it focuses on child-initiated learning activities. In addition, positive behavior support is most effective when offered to children through a system based on positive relationships with children, families, and colleagues; creating supportive learning environments, intentional social-emotional teaching strategies, and mental health consultation involving intensive individualized interventions.

The effective early childhood mental health consultant has appropriate credentials and is familiar with program-centered consultation, where the goal is to build the capacity of staff, families, and program systems to prevent, identify, and reduce the impact of mental health problems in children and families. An ongoing relationship between a mental health professional and early childhood program staff, including the Family Liaison, ensures familiarity with the needs of children and teachers, timely consultation, and services. If an Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant is not available to the Strong Beginnings teaching staff, they should partner with the Family Liaison, School Social Worker or other knowledgeable individual to gain additional perspective and suggestions on supporting the impacted child and family.

The discipline or conflict resolution policy must address procedures for adults to support children as they solve problems with materials, do things for themselves, and assist them in resolving conflicts with peers. In the Strong Beginnings classroom, adults:

- Encourage children to do things for themselves throughout the day;
- Treat conflict situations with children matter-of-factly;
- Approach children calmly and stop any hurtful actions;
- Acknowledge children's feelings;
- Involve children in identifying the problem by gathering information from children and restating the problem;
- Ask children for solutions and encourage them to choose one together; and

- Give follow-up support when children act on their decisions.

Seclusion and Restraint

In December 2016, the State of Michigan adopted new laws restricting the use of seclusion and restraint in schools. As required by the new 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), must 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 ISDs are the sole awardees of Strong Beginnings funding, the local policy adopted by the ISD must be applied to all Strong Beginnings classrooms regardless of the entity responsible for implementing the program: LEA/PSA, CBO (public or private), college/university. The ISD must monitor both ISD-run and program provider-run classrooms for adherence to the policy.

Transportation

Providing child transportation to and from the center contributes significantly to family access to Strong Beginnings, but this service is not required. Where transportation is offered, parents must not be charged transportation fees. Strong Beginnings funds may be used to pay for transportation but must meet the guidelines set in the *Budget* section of this manual.

MiLeap Licensing Rules for Child Care Centers include requirements for the transportation of three- and four-year old 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. In addition, legal requirements for use of properly secured child restraint systems while transporting children who have not yet turned four years of age, whether they are enrolled in Strong Beginnings or GSRP, can differ from those for children who have reached their fourth birthday. It is the responsibility of the program to understand and implement all legal requirements regarding restraint systems. In addition, programs must also ensure:

- Parents 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

Programs must adhere to the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)/National School Nutrition Programs (SNP) nutritional guidelines. In addition, all programs must follow guidelines of the MiLEAP 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. Strong Beginnings requires School-Day programs operating less than seven hours per day to minimally provide one snack and lunch. School-Day programs operating seven or more hours per day must minimally provide two snacks and lunch. All children should eat the same foods unless there is a documented allergy or special need for individualization or a signed Flexibility in Meal Service agreement is in place (see Flexibility in Meal Service subsection below). Parents 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 individualization at meals unless changes are part of a special education Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

School cafeterias are problematic areas for Strong Beginnings to utilize as snack/meal sites due to time for transitioning, size of tables/chairs/serving materials, auditory and visual over-stimulation, 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 Strong Beginnings classroom unless there is documented approval from the ISD due to extenuating circumstances. Adults in the classroom sit at the table, eat the same foods children do, and participate in child-initiated conversation. All Strong Beginnings 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.

Program providers are evaluated each year on family-style meal service with nutritious food. When the menu includes breakfast pizzas, corndogs, French-toast sticks, etc., and program providers question whether foods are creditable or nutritious, a formal request can be made to **not** receive specific items. Program providers participating in 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. Program providers 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 program providers 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 Strong Beginnings Parent 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;
- 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 parents 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 parents does not remove the requirement that parents 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 Strong Beginnings 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. Meals and snacks may take longer in Strong Beginnings classrooms where staff are assisting children in becoming independent.
- Center-based programs must follow guidelines of the MiLEAP Child Care Licensing Division.
- 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) eating family-style with the children. Note that while the CACFP/NSLP/SBP 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 of vegetables, fruits and milk.
- Additional food, beyond that which is reimbursable, may be purchased for Strong Beginnings classrooms where children are still hungry after consuming the minimum required servings at meals and snacks.
- 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! Strong Beginnings teachers help by encouraging children to explore and taste new foods.
- 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. One-quarter and one-half cup 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. 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.
- 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 the same foods children do. Adults typically position themselves in a mid-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 spoonful of beans.” Adults provide verbal description 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.

- 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.
- Children choose whether to eat, what to eat, and how much to eat. Have enough food available to meet meal pattern requirements and to allow for seconds.
- 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.
- 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.
- Children in Strong Beginnings will usually need more support in participating in serving, eating and cleaning up family style meals, particularly at the beginning of the year. The goal of such support is always to move the children to greater independence.
- “Specials”
 - Strong Beginnings 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 Strong Beginnings teacher is implementing a comprehensive program (as required) has need of additional programming. In addition, MiLEAP requires all regular child use areas be licensed, and CCRESA requires Strong Beginnings to maintain staffing guidelines with staff who have significant credentialing in early childhood education. Children who are at risk of academic failure also benefit most from developing strong and positive relationships with regular classroom teachers and consistent classroom routines. **As a result, “specials” are not allowed in Strong Beginnings pilot classrooms.**