ISD Administration of Strong Beginnings Pilots

The Early Childhood Contact (ECC)

As part of administering Strong Beginnings, the Intermediate School District (ISD) will designate a Strong Beginnings Early Childhood Contact (SB-ECC). The SB-ECC is an early childhood leader at the ISD, facilitating or assisting in facilitating an ISD-wide plan with a vision to improve child outcomes, to minimize achievement gaps and help all stakeholders to see the "big picture" of how Strong Beginnings strategically fits into the local Great Start Collaborative (GSC) early childhood efforts. The SB-ECC uses the written Strong Beginnings philosophy statement as a foundation to partner with the Strong Beginnings Early Childhood Specialists (ECS) on data-based decisions for continuous quality improvement. For ISDs with larger populations, the SB-ECC may work with a team to fulfill the responsibilities of the position. For ISDs with smaller populations, the SB-ECC may also serve as the ECS. In this instance, care must be taken to ensure that responsibilities of the ECS, as outlined in the [Early Childhood Specialist](#) section of this manual, are not compromised.

The SB-ECC ensures that effective systems are in place to support Strong Beginnings. ISD administrative policies and procedures document approaches to overarching aspects of the grant, such as, choosing and supporting subcontractors, notification of funding, community partnerships, recruitment, parent engagement, communication, record-keeping, staff credentialing, and program and fiscal monitoring. Administrative policies and procedures must also address systematic oversight of subcontractor practices.

Early Childhood Specialist (ECS)

The SB-ECC ensures that there is an ECS assigned to each Strong Beginnings classroom. An ECS may support only Strong Beginnings classrooms or a combination of Strong Beginnings and GSRP classrooms. Thoughtful consideration should be given to the match between ECS experience and age of children in the classroom when assignments are determined.

At times, ISDs are unable to identify a well-qualified candidate to fill an ECS position after an extensive search. In that case, the ECC should contact the Strong Beginnings implementation consultant.

In all cases, only an ECS who is a Reliable Assessor/Certified Observer completes the observations, interviews staff and scores the program evaluation tools(s). The Reliable Assessor/Certified Observer participates in the recertification process to maintain status as a Reliable Assessor/Certified Observer. See the Program Evaluation section of this manual for related information.

The ECS contract accommodates the intensive support and additional classroom visits, coaching and consultation that staff members with incomplete credentialing or poor performance require.

In determining ECS classroom assignments and other duties, the ISD is responsible first and foremost for assuring the ECS's role in coaching and supporting the teaching team. As the SB-ECC designs the system of ECS supports for the ISD and assigns classrooms to individual ECS, the following elements are considered:

- Required ECS functions and the hours needed to complete them.
- Additional functions the ISD assigns to ECS and the hours needed to complete them.
- Expertise and experience of the ECS.
- Experience of the program providers and teaching team(s) with operating a preschool program, maintaining a childcare license, and meeting Strong Beginnings requirements. For example, the SB-ECC may plan additional classroom visits and/or more intensive support for beginning teachers, teachers new to Strong Beginnings or teachers that have less-than-expected program quality.
- Number of assigned program providers, sites, and classrooms.
- Geographic location of the assigned classrooms and amount of travel time between sites.
- Relationships between the ECS and teaching teams, especially if ECS are monitoring teaching staff as well as coaching them.

The ISD provides:

- A master calendar for all ECS activities, which aligns with reporting requirements on program evaluation, scheduled professional learning calendars and meetings such as ECS peer group, the local family participation groups, school readiness advisory committee (SRAC), or superintendent/school board meetings.
- A coaching documentation system and form(s) used for each session. The form must include at a minimum the date, the intention of the session, method of feedback with the lead and associate teachers, observational notes reflecting the session, any expected follow-up on either the part of the ECS or the teaching team, and confirmation that all members of the teaching team and the ECS participated in the session and agree to the content of the form. The ECS must keep a copy of the form and provide one to the teaching team. The SB-ECC should review documentation periodically to see that teaching teams are getting the support needed and that the ECS team members are fulfilling the requirements of the position.
- A position description for every ECS, whether employed or contracted by the ISD or subcontractor, that includes the amount of time to be dedicated to Strong Beginnings work for the year. All position descriptions must be clear in the expectations to meet Strong Beginnings requirements: classroom observation/program evaluation, feedback, ongoing support, meetings, professional learning, etc. All must include a requirement to attend ISD and/or CCRESA ECS meetings and professional learning required for the ECS as well as being available to the ISD, CCRESA or the MSU research team as

needed as part of the monitoring process. References to meeting the requirements included in the position description must be included in all subcontracts where the subcontractor provides the ECS.

Collaborating with and supporting the partnership between the Strong Beginnings teaching team and the Early Childhood Mental Health/Behavioral Consultant and Family Liaison assigned to the classroom, alignment of Strong Beginnings with GSRP and protecting hallmarks of early childhood education such as learner-centered, active, participatory learning and authentic partnership with families in their child's development are other important roles of the ECS. (See the Transition section of the Implementation Manual for more information.)

Branding

The program name and logo Strong Beginnings must be used to identify all funded pilot programs. Branding must be evident at the ISD, program provider, and classroom level, and may be formally addressed within written agreements.

The name and logo of Strong Beginnings identify each program as a strong partner in the systems-building efforts of Great Start, where services to children and families emerge from our Michigan Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Birth to Kindergarten. Name-branding will also assist with advocacy efforts, now and in the future.

Strong Beginnings funding should be mentioned in speaking engagements and discussions with the media. In written materials, the name is spelled out. The name is never modified. The program name, Strong Beginnings, and its logo is included on public- and parent-facing publications or project materials developed with funds awarded under this program, including print materials and electronic information (e.g., program websites and social media) for projects and materials developed. Written materials and publications should also indicate that they were developed with funds from the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential and also include the Department logo. This includes print materials that are publicly distributed, intended for program recruitment, or are 'parent-facing' (e.g., application, newsletters, handbook, meeting minutes, etc.), reports/presentations, films, brochures, flyers, signs, etc. Where more than one entity's logo will be used, they should be of a similar size and when possible appear on a single line. The following statement for acknowledgement of funding will be used:

- These materials are funded through a grant provided by the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential.

When discussing the Strong Beginnings program, the following statement should be used.

- This program is funded through a grant provided by the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential.

Child Eligibility Files

Eligibility for Strong Beginnings requires verification of a child's age and family income, as well as documentation of Program Eligibility Factors. Documentation of eligibility must be on file for every child enrolled in Strong Beginnings. This documentation must be maintained for seven (7) years.

The Michigan Department of Lifelong Learning, Advancement and Potential (MiLEAP) and CCRESA require that ISD monitoring of program providers and subcontractors includes an annual review of child files to verify child eligibility was accurately and properly determined. Child files are also subject to periodic CCRESA review.

Security of Sensitive Information

Maintaining copies of child birth certificates or other child and family personal information, as well as financial documents viewed to verify income in child files must be considered with great care. Maintenance procedures for sensitive documents must include security measures to ensure the files and the data contained therein is protected. This includes redacting personally identifiable data on forms including social security numbers, date of birth (for all but the child enrolled), maiden names, etc. Files should be kept in a secure location under lock and key, only accessible to authorized program staff.

Applications and accompanying documents should only be discussed with those that have permission to access the information. This would include sharing among programs to determine placement as well as with any others the parent authorizes to have access.

Electronic Files

Files may be electronic with scanned or photo images of eligibility documentation but must include proper security protocols to ensure safety of the data and limit file access only to authorized program staff.

Educational Records vs. Eligibility Records

The educational record for each child - including home visit and parent teacher conference forms, observation data, developmental screener data, other child growth/progress documentation, and samples of child's work, etc. as well as information from the Family Liaison - *is distinctly different than eligibility documentation and should be maintained in a separate file.*

In cases of single, separated, or divorced families, both parents must be granted access to the child's educational information (unless court documents specify otherwise), however, 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.

ISD Advisory Structure

The Strong Beginnings/GSRP Advisory Structure may vary according to the size and unique systems across ISDs and may be composed of multiple committees/subcommittees/workgroups or may largely be accomplished by one central committee charged with the work. The School Readiness Advisory Committee may fulfill this role.

The **overarching purpose** of the Strong Beginnings/GSRP Advisory Structure is to:

- Ensure active participation as appropriate for all Strong Beginnings and GSRP subrecipients/subcontractors with the ISD as grantee in an ongoing dialogue by which the quality of the system and its services to families, children and the community are examined.
- Ensure and facilitate active parent participation as appropriate, for children enrolled in the program.
- Ensure participation has been established in the School Readiness Advisory Committee and continues to meet requirements as outlined on an ongoing basis.
- Ensure that data is analyzed and utilized in decision making processes.

While each ISD has the autonomy to create its own policies, procedures, protocols and timeframes to achieve the overarching purpose, the ISD must minimally convene one ISD wide group as follows:

- Purpose: To ensure that the following advisory structure functions are completed annually:
  - A formal conduit for bi-directional communication of information is provided;
  - All subcontractors have a local family participation group with a focus on local considerations (See *Family Participation Group* later in this section);
  - Strong Beginnings family representation on the regional GSC Parent Coalition is promoted;
  - An ISD Strong Beginnings representative to the SRAC is designated and participates actively;
  - ISD level Strong Beginnings data analysis is conducted per requirements (see *Data Analysis* later in this section);
  - Subcontractors provide for transition opportunities into and out of Strong Beginnings.
- Leadership: Shall be led by the ISD Early Childhood Contact (ECC) or their designee(s).
- Who / Members: Representation shall include, but is not limited to the following individuals:

- ISD representative(s)
- Subrecipient/subcontractor representative(s)
  - All subrecipients/subcontractors shall be invited to participate.
  - Each ISD establishes its own participation guidelines.
- May include, but is not limited to a proportional representation of GSRP and Strong Beginnings administrators, staff and / or parents.
- Local Head Start & community stakeholder representation is desired.
- Frequency: Shall convene a minimum of 3 times per program year, for the purpose of disseminating information to and receiving information from all subrecipients/subcontractors.
- Records
  - Attendance
  - Agendas
  - Meeting minutes
    Surveys/survey Results or other evidence of member participation in decision-making activities.
  - Evidence of ongoing communication with subrecipient/subcontractor must be carried out on a regular basis throughout the program year.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the force that drives decision making for continuous improvement of quality early childhood educational experiences. Data is used to monitor and support change elements, and share program quality information with parents, the local education community, and the community as a whole. While data analysis must be ongoing at the classroom level, periodic formal data analysis at the system level is required, and is best done by a group convened specifically for this purpose. As stated above, the unique characteristics of each ISD may see this group function independently or as part of another advisory structure group or committee. Minimally, the structure must ensure that periodic formal data analysis is occurring at the classroom level, subrecipient/subcontractor level (for subrecipients with multiple classrooms and for ISD operated classrooms), and ISD-wide as follows:

- Purpose: To ensure that the following periodic formal data analysis functions are completed:
  - Classroom level analysis of data is completed examining individual child level data and whole group outcomes/trends;
  - Site and/or subrecipient level analysis of data is completed examining the data of multiple classrooms as appropriate/determined by the ISD and its subrecipients/subcontractors;
  - ISD level analysis of data is completed which examines data from all funded classrooms;
  - Continuous improvement goals are set and monitored at all levels.
- Leadership: Is supported by the Early Childhood Specialist (ECS), Early Childhood Contact (ECC) and/or Administrator.
- Who/Members:

- Classroom and local level Data Analysis meetings will ideally include but are not limited to teaching teams (required), ECS (required), administrators, and parents.
  - Representation at the ISD level will ideally include, but is not limited to representation from the ISD, subrecipient/subcontractor, Site and Classroom.
- Frequency:
  - At each level, data analysis shall occur a minimum of 3 times per year.
- Records:
  - Attendance
  - Agendas
  - Meeting minutes

Strong Beginnings Policies and Procedures

Written policies and procedures support consistent operational activities. Policies and procedures provide clarity when dealing with accountability issues or activities that are of critical importance and may have serious consequences, e.g., grievance, flow of funding, and submitting reports. Well-written procedures that are implemented and followed help to minimize misunderstandings by identifying responsibilities and establishing boundaries. All parts of the system are dependent upon one another to function properly and provide the highest level of service to children and families.

Strong Beginnings Policies and Procedures must include program and fiscal policies. ISDs have policies and procedures for GSRP and other grants, which can be used to aid in writing Strong Beginnings fiscal and program policies. For the purpose of the Strong Beginnings pilot, ISDs may adopt applicable GSRP policies and indicate that they will also be used for Strong Beginnings. Program providers must be provided with a copy of newly developed Strong Beginnings Policies and Procedures as well as those adopted from GSRP. Some examples of policies and procedures that need to be written or adopted are: travel expenses allowable with amounts, steps for the bidding process, and seclusion and restraint. All new Strong Beginnings policies and procedures will be reviewed during a program and/or fiscal review by CCRESA.

Written processes must be in the Strong Beginnings administrative files.

1. Assurances
2. Child Recruitment
3. Closure Procedures
4. Communication
5. Community Needs Assessment
6. Community Partnerships
7. Fiscal Policy and Review
8. Monitoring Program Providers
9. Family Participation Group
10. Philosophy

11.Professional Learning
12.Program Evaluation
13.Record Keeping
14.School Readiness Advisory Committee
15.Sliding Scale of Tuition
16.Distribution of Funds
17.Written Agreement

1. Assurances

ISDs agree to comply with all applicable requirements of State statutes, Federal laws, executive orders, regulations, policies, and award conditions governing Strong Beginnings. ISDs understand and agree that if they materially fail to comply with the terms and conditions of the award, CCRESA may withhold funds otherwise due until the ISD as fiscal agent/contractor comes into compliance, or the matter has been adjudicated, and the amount disallowed has been recaptured (forfeited). CCRESA may withhold up to 100 percent of any payment based on a monitoring finding, audit finding, or pending final report. All current assurances can be viewed in the Strong Beginnings Request for Proposals.

2. Child Recruitment

Refer to the Recruitment and Enrollment section of this manual for guidance on generating written procedures that align with Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential (MiLEAP) and CCRESA requirements about recruitment. Recruitment for Strong Beginnings may be either ISD wide or limited to the areas served by Strong Beginnings sites.

The ISD should work with program providers to create outreach and recruitment campaigns that can be funded by the 2% maximum that can be set aside and used for this work. Funds from both the Strong Beginnings and GSRP budgets may be used in a coordinated recruitment and enrollment campaign. Sharing ideas with other ISDs and adapting or adopting each other's work may make the most efficient use of the funds.

3. Closure Procedures

Closure procedures guide the ISD when a program provider declines to participate in Strong Beginnings or in the event a program provider contract is terminated. A previous program provider that no longer chooses to implement the program must provide written notification to the ISD. Notification must include an inventory of the equipment and supplies purchased with Strong Beginnings funds that are remaining, this includes any food service equipment and supplies. The program provider must arrange to return all remaining equipment and materials to the ISD. The returned materials should be distributed for use within other Strong Beginnings or GSRP classrooms as needed. Excess materials can be sold to non-Strong Beginnings or GSRP providers and the funds utilized by the ISD to support Strong Beginnings or GSRP, after a determination has documented that use is not needed

within the ISD. Materials that are well worn or aged may also be donated as appropriate.

There are infrequent instances where a program may close during the school year. Details on terminated contracts must be written in a policy and procedure by the ISD. The ISD will lead transitioning activities with the goal to prevent a break in service to children and to minimize distress to the children and families.

Considerations include:

- Agreement between parties of what is a reasonable amount of time needed to finalize the closure;
- Confirmed personnel contacts before agency closure, regarding who the ISD will work with for final invoice and payment structure pieces;
- Possible proration of the funding;
- Transfer of child files;
- Transfer of subcontractor administrative files;
- Final expenditure report;
- Transfer of inventory and supplies purchased with Strong Beginnings funds; and
- All remaining reports covering the period of time for which the subcontractor participated.

At the conclusion of the Strong Beginnings pilot, all remaining equipment, materials and supplies, including consumables, that have been purchased with program funds will be returned to the ISD for equitable distribution to other state funded early childhood programs.

4. Communication

The ISD must establish and monitor systems to ensure that timely and accurate information is provided among the ISD, program providers, subcontractors, parents, policy groups and staff. Consider the following strategies:

Communication with families must be carried out on a regular basis throughout the program year, and carried out in the parent's primary or preferred language, for example:

- Newsletters
- Focus groups or surveys
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Open house events
- Local Parent Advisory Committee and School Readiness Advisory Committee meetings and minutes
- Web site
- Children's progress notes
- Family Advocacy activities

Communication with local family participation groups and the ISD-wide GSRP/Strong Beginnings advisory structure includes the following information provided on a regular basis:

- Procedures and timetables for program planning
- Policies, guidelines, and other communications from CCRESA
- Program and financial reports
- Program plans, policies, procedures, application

Communication among staff must include mechanisms for regular communication among all program staff:

- Staff meetings
- Distribution of program quality reports and family contact summaries
- Intranet or listserv for internal staff correspondence
- Development of program provider plans that includes center operations
- Updates to annual written plans
- Professional learning communities (PLCs)

5. Funding Application

An annual comprehensive needs assessment using aggregated data from the ISD service area and a community collaboration plan is required by CCRESA. The ECC must seek endorsement of the plan by the local GSC and ensure that Strong Beginnings is part of the community's Great Start strategic plan. The signed GSC Endorsement Form is retained at the ISD. The needs assessment must document:

- Annual data collection on poverty, number of three-and four-year-old children at risk for low educational attainment and existing preschool programming;
- Discussion of data with representatives from each local education agency (LEA), child care organizations and the GSC;
- Collaborative decisions on enrollment request, program options and process to determine preschool sites for the upcoming academic year (not necessary for the Strong Beginnings Pilot) and;
- The estimated number of eligible children who will remain unserved after the ISD, LEAs and community early childhood programs have met their funded enrollments.

This may be completed in conjunction with the GSRP requirement after the pilot has completed. It is not required during the pilot phase.

See the resources for this section: *GSC Endorsement Guidelines*

6. Community Partnerships

Strong Beginnings administrative policies will reflect the role of the ECC as a trusted, credible leader in the GSC, where a collective impact approach prioritizes early childhood efforts. The ECC identifies and creates connections with administrators of the licensed childcare centers in the region. The ECC increases the

number of and strengthens partnerships between LEAs, Head Start grantees, childcare organizations, municipalities with early learning initiatives, extended-learning programs, and other community-based programs. The ECC is assisted in this work by the SB-ECC if a different individual serves in that position.

It is important to have a shared language and understanding of the early learning years, as well as the variety of settings that children are in before transitioning into Strong Beginnings and those they will experience after transitioning out of GSRP. Use of shared language, goals, and evaluation should be included in the strategic plan for Strong Beginnings and public statements. The ECC will support clear and consistent communication about vertical alignment as a priority in both internal (e.g., district strategic plans, teacher newsletters) and external (e.g., websites, family newsletters) platforms.

7. Fiscal Policy and Review

Each ISD must have written fiscal policies outlining procedures including but not limited to:

How and when the program providers receive their allocations, including transportation and initial supplies and equipment allocations;

How and when the program provider budgets (original only as no carryover is allowed) and Final Expenditure Reports (FERs) are submitted to the ISD, including supporting documentation;

- Budgeting and budget amendments;
- Completing FERs;
- Allowability of costs;
- Inventory requirements;
- Cash management;
- Procurement;
- Closeout procedures for program providers (FERs, audits, and equipment). See also "3. Closure Procedures" earlier in this section;
- Professional learning/training of program providers on fiscal components of Strong Beginnings;
- Travel;
- Fiscal monitoring process of program providers;
- Food service and required spreadsheet and/or other documentation.

For the Strong Beginnings pilot, ISDs may use policies developed for GSRP as long as there is an indication that the policy is also applicable to Strong Beginnings.

Program provider documentation must be reviewed by the ISD, depending on the agreed upon payment schedule. For example, if 100% reimbursement is used, then the ISD must require supporting documentation before a payment is made. The ISD may also choose to review program providers on an annual basis. The ISD must provide professional learning to both the program provider fiscal and program staff responsible for Strong Beginnings. Fiscal policies will be reviewed by CCRESA during

a fiscal review. For further information on fiscal reviews, see the Fiscal Review Process document in the resources for the Reporting and Monitoring section of this manual.

8. Monitoring Program Providers

Administrative policies must also reflect how the ISD will provide oversight and monitoring of program provider practices, such as local policies/procedures related to:

- Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential (MiLEAP), Child Care Licensing Division, including report of violations;
- Participation in Michigan's Great Start to Quality system;
- Parent engagement and Child/Family Supports, including formal contacts;
- Use of a parent handbook that includes all required elements outlined in the Classroom Requirements section of this manual;
- The advisory structure including the advisory committee(s), and data analysis team(s);
- Human resources (staff hiring, compliance plans, supervision);
- Adult/child ratio, class size, hours and weeks of operation;
- Professional learning for teaching teams, including formal training in the curriculum and child assessment tools in use;
- Professional learning for Family Liaisons including training in family or cognitive coaching and related approaches as well as opportunities for reflective supervision.
- Coordination of service(s) providing family advocacy
- Supervision of Family Liaisons
- Participation in the National School Nutrition Program and/or the Child and Adult Care Food Program, as applicable;
- Child enrollment;
- Child files;
- Transition plans into and out of Strong Beginnings;
- Timely collecting and reporting of data required by CCRESA Implementation Team and/or Michigan State University Research Team
- Tuition; and
- All program policies identified in the Classroom Requirements section of this manual.

For the Strong Beginnings pilot, ISDs may use policies developed for GSRP as long as there is an indication that the policy is also applicable to Strong Beginnings.

9 Family Participation Group

Active and continuous parent/family engagement in the educational experiences of their children is crucial to facilitating the best possible child outcomes. Achieving such engagement with parents/families often begins with opportunities for parents/families to participate in ways that build connections between the school and home. Stronger, more frequent connections strengthen relationships, create partnerships, and lead to increased participation and ultimately active engagement.

Strong Beginnings requires opportunities be provided for parents to participate and engage with the programs serving their children in multiple ways. As not all parents/families have the same readiness for engaging with their child's school, the ECC will champion parents/families as active decision makers in Strong Beginnings.

Subrecipients/subcontractors and programs must provide opportunities for continuous participation of families of enrolled children through the implementation of a family participation group. ISDs piloting Strong Beginnings should have a joint Strong Beginnings/GSRP family participation group.

Refer to the *Parent Involvement* section for more information on parent engagement.

- Family Participation Group
  - Purpose:
    - Engage families on a high-level.
    - Opportunities will allow for engagement of families, open communication, family advocacy and integration of family input/voice.
    - Family voice/input needs to be taken back to the ISD level advisory and shared out.
    - Each meeting should focus on local considerations, such as;
      - Transition into and out of Strong Beginnings/GSRP
      - Recruitment/enrollment
      - Program quality assessment results
      - Child outcome data
      - Family learning opportunities
      - Child and Family Supports
  - Leadership: Is supported by the Early Childhood Specialist (ECS), Early Childhood Contact (ECC) and/or Administrator.
    - Facilitated by a person with experience and skills to effectively execute this program requirement. (ECS, Director, teacher, Family Liaison)
  - Who / Members: May be made up of, but not limited to the following:
    - ECS/ECC
    - School or Program-Level Administrators
    - Family Liaisons/School Social Worker
    - Classroom Strong Beginnings and GSRP Family members
  - Frequency: Shall convene or seek family input about the child/family experience in the classroom and with the family liaison through meetings, events, surveys, etc. a minimum of 2 times per program year.
    - For meetings, a minimum of one family member per classroom is ideal.
    - All family members should have the opportunity to participate, give and/or receive the information in the manner that best fits their needs.

- Records:
- Evidence of family participation in decision-making activities may include.
  - Attendance
  - Agendas
  - Meeting minutes
  - Surveys/Results

Ongoing communication with families must be carried out on a regular basis throughout the program year, and carried out in the family's primary or preferred language.

10. Philosophy

The ISD will ensure that each program provider has a written philosophy statement including their philosophy regarding family partnerships and must have a process to approve each philosophy statement, determine whether the statements are promoted widely and whether the beliefs documented are used in decision-making. Discrete philosophy statements will have common features that are aligned with the *Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Birth to Kindergarten* yet will provide for local language to address social, economic, cultural, and family needs. See the *Classroom Requirements* section of this manual for additional information on preschool philosophy statements.

11. Professional Learning

Administrative policies acknowledge that effective professional learning (PL) can improve the instructional coherence among program providers and improve the quality of learning opportunities for young children. The planning of PL opportunities is data-driven, ongoing, and part of a long-term continuous improvement plan.

The ECC strengthens local administrative quality by arranging PL for elementary principals, directors of childcare organizations, municipalities with early learning initiatives, extended-learning programs, and other community-based organizations. This group is poised for relationship-building and to learn best practices for prekindergarten and early preschool.

The ECC and the ECS support meaningful PL for teaching teams. The ECS is critical to preschool quality and supports Strong Beginnings teaching teams throughout the academic year with expertise in the *Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Birth to Kindergarten*, and status as a reliable assessor/certified observer in the applicable program evaluation tool. Refer to the Early Childhood Specialist section of this manual for more information on the ECS position. The ECC will demonstrate innovative efforts to create and standardize time for school- and community-based Strong Beginnings teaching teams to work together across different daily, weekly, quarterly, and school year calendars. The ECC will ensure that sufficient PL that assists teaching teams understand the developmental level and appropriate curriculum and expectations for three-year-old children.

ECS need time to reflect on what makes their own professional learning work strong, and what hinders it. The ECC engages and supports ECS teamwork by gathering the ECS as a community of learners more than once per year to reflect on the ECS role and responsibilities. The ECC also ensures that the ECS is able to attend professional learning events, such as curriculum/child assessment training, state sponsored professional learning events and/or the HighScope International Conference, as well as opportunities to meet virtually with other Strong Beginnings ECSs.

The ECC, ensures that other staff employed by Strong Beginnings, such as Family Liaisons, are able to attend professional development events.

12. Program Evaluation

The program evaluation plan reflects a discriminating use of data. Data markers include child-based data, classroom-based data, family contact data, staff surveys and markers of family well-being.

13. Record-keeping

ISD administrative procedures must identify where critical program records are housed and staff position(s) responsible to maintain files. Refer to the *Reporting and Monitoring* section of this manual.

Refer to the *Program Evaluation* section of this manual for guidance on generating written procedures that align with requirements for the evaluation.

14. School Readiness Advisory Committee (SRAC)

The SRAC is established as a workgroup of the local Great Start Collaborative (GSC). The SRAC is designed to improve all children's school readiness within a community, so that no matter their preschool experience children come to kindergarten ready and aligned with their peers. This is accomplished through the involvement of classroom teachers, parents or guardians of program participants, and community, volunteer, and social service agencies and organizations, as appropriate, who make recommendations to the Great Start Collaborative regarding Strong Beginnings, GSRP and other community services. The ECC or their designee must be an active participant in the SRAC.

- Purpose: Specific to Strong Beginnings and GSRP, the SRAC is charged with the task of annually reviewing and making recommendations regarding the program components listed below, as specified in Sections 32d, 32p and 32t of the State School Aid Act and by the department as follows:
    - Participation of all GSRP and Strong Beginnings subrecipients in a collaborative recruitment and enrollment process to assure that each child is enrolled in the program most appropriate to his or her needs and to maximize the use of federal, state, and local funds;
        - Review should include local enrollment policies, procedures, and timelines for recruitment and enrollment.

- This will apply to Strong Beginnings after the pilot phase has been concluded.
    - Use of an age-appropriate educational curriculum in all Strong Beginnings and GSRP classrooms that is in compliance with the *Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Birth to Kindergarten* adopted by the State Board of Education;
    - Nutritional services for all program participants supported by federal, state, and local resources as applicable;
    - Physical and dental health screening and developmental screening services for all program participants;
    - Referral services for families of program participants to community social service agencies, including mental health services, as appropriate;
    - Active and continuous involvement of the parents or guardians of the program participants;
    - A plan to conduct and report annual Strong Beginnings and GSRP evaluations and continuous improvement plans using criteria approved by the department.
    - The ISD sliding fee scale and guidance (for GSRP only), annually;
    - The GSC review or endorsement of the GSRP Funding Application, including the community needs assessment, annually.
    - Other community services designed to improve all children's school readiness.
- Leadership: Great Start Collaborative Director and Early Childhood Contact or their designee(s).
- Who: Shall be made up of, but not limited to the following:
    - Proportional Strong Beginnings and GSRP Representation
    - At least one representative from the ISD is expected to participate fully in this committee and act as a liaison/conduit of information between the Great Start Collaborative and the ISD.
        - The ISD's representative is responsible for sharing information with all subrecipients, as appropriate.
    - Classroom teachers, Family Liaisons, parents or guardians of program participants, and community, volunteer, and social service agencies and organizations, as appropriate.
- Frequency:
    - As established by the local GSC, but no less than once per year.
- Records:
    - In collaboration with the GSC.

15. Sliding Scale of Tuition

Up to 10% of children enrolled throughout the Intermediate School District (ISD) or consortium of ISDs may be from families above 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) with extreme risk for low educational achievement as determined by number or severity of Strong Beginnings program eligibility factors. **This may only be**

done with the permission of the Implementation Consultants at CCRESA. For the pilot of Strong Beginnings only, these children will not be charged any tuition for participating in the program. Refer to both the [Recruitment and Enrollment](#) and the [Eligibility](#) sections and the accompanying resources for each section for additional information on prioritization for enrollment, determining family income and documenting program eligibility factors.

If a pilot site is unable to fill a classroom even after accepting 10% over-income children, the Implementation Consultants at CCRESA should be consulted for next steps.

16. Distribution of Funds

Involving the local school readiness advisory committee and the GSC in the creation of the distribution plan is advised; the GSC works with community partners and is called on annually to endorse the ISD's Funding Application once Strong Beginnings is no longer a pilot program. In addition, program providers that are awarded Strong Beginnings funding must also currently receive funding for GSRP in order to promote program continuity for families.

For the Strong Beginnings pilot, Community Based Organizations (CBOs), including those providing Head Start in separate classrooms, as well as LEAs/PSAs may serve as program providers. In addition, ISDs may directly operate Strong Beginnings classrooms.

FBOs can make good Strong Beginnings partners as they are often well-connected to community agencies that support families. Faith-based program providers keep prayers and religious instruction from being a part of a Strong Beginnings classroom. In space used for dual purposes, there is no need to remove or cover faith-based displays. These program providers do not restrict Strong Beginnings enrollment or staff hiring due to faith-based considerations.

Existing program providers that have met the variety of quality and administrative benchmarks required of the grant should be able to expect consistency of funding awarded. That is, the ISD may 'hold harmless' or increase classrooms in existing, Strong Beginnings partners. Only existing partners providing GSRP for at least two years will be considered when starting and expanding Strong Beginnings.

The ISD must develop a written process to distribute future, sustained Strong Beginnings funding that will be fair to all current and potential early childhood partners. The document will reflect policy and procedures to follow each year, with specific consideration of allocating funds to community partners, who must receive allocations before LEAs in their catchment area are awarded funds.

17. Written Agreements

A written agreement is required between the ISD and its program providers These agreements must contain the components that form a binding agreement between two or more parties, including an offer, acceptance of that offer and consideration

of what each party gives of value that each would not normally be legally obligated to provide.

Agreement for Services for Classroom Program Providers

1. Each document must clearly state that it is a contract/agreement between the ISD and each program provider to meet the need for Strong Beginnings services.
2. Agreements must address impasse or default for parties that do not complete any portion of the agreement and identify the entity providing the dispute arbiter.
3. The contract will reflect Strong Beginnings requirements including:
    a. a plan for how the ISD and program providers will partner to ensure high-quality implementation of Strong Beginnings (e.g., monitoring, auditing, orientation, mentoring, and hiring and professional learning of staff);
    b. A list of the developmental screening tool, curriculum, child assessment tool used, and how staff will receive training on the full implementation of each of the tools;
    c. The child/family supports used and how the Strong Beginnings program providers will partner with the child/family support personnel or, if allowed to hire their own child/family support personnel, how the Strong Beginnings program provider will provide support and professional learning to that personnel along with others employed by the program provider in similar positions.
    d. A plan showing partnership in conducting annual program evaluation using the applicable program evaluation tool, with expectations that each program develops annual plans toward earning a high-quality score (as defined for the applicable tool);
    e. An explanation of how the program provider will be involved in ISD advisory groups and local parent participation and data groups, how often the local group will meet each year and how the program provider will ensure parent participation
    f. Requirements of pilot participation including timely data and information collection and submission required by the CCRESA Implementation Team and MSU Research Team.
4. The contract will include a general timeline for required Strong Beginnings reports and who will be responsible for completion of each report.
5. The contract will describe the ISD's system to seek information from the program provider about, provide oversight on, and evaluate the effectiveness of each of the itemized features in the local contracts.
6. The contract will ensure that administrative funds are not exceeded. It must include a statement regarding the administrative cap for the ISD.
7. It must also specify whether the ISD will keep the 2 percent for a shared outreach and recruitment campaign or allow the funds to be split with

program providers. If split, the ISD must provide guidance on how the funds may be used.

8. The contract must report the process for flow of funding; e.g., state the process for the ISD to make monthly payments or reimbursements to the program providers and how the ISD will track both revenue and expenses.

9. The contract must state which financial records the program provider is required to submit to the ISD and which it must retain for monitoring purposes. The ISD will also affirm its responsibility to maintain financial records necessary for CCRESA audit.

10. The program option(s) to be implemented must be included: Part-Day, or School-Day. All Strong Beginnings pilot programs will be School-Day.

11. The number of Strong Beginnings spaces to be filled must be included. Any modification to this number must be noted in an addendum.

12. If the ISD is retaining additional funds to support program quality, a strong contract will identify services.

13. The contract must be signed and dated by both parties. Complete titles, including agency name, must accompany each signature.

14. Contracts between the ISD and program provider that are continuing from previous years must be in place by October 1.

15. Contracts with new program providers, or current GSRP partners now providing Strong Beginnings, must meet this deadline if the program starts at the beginning of the school year.

Portions of this section were adapted from:

HHS/ACF/ACYF/HSB (2006). *Tips for Establishing an Effective Communication System.*

Kauerz, K. & Coffman, J. (2013). *Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating PreK-3rd Grade Approaches*. Seattle, WA: College of Education, University of Washington.

Language Diversity and Literacy Development Research Group. *Lead for Literacy Initiative Memos.*