



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL F. RICE, Ph.D.
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 24, 2021

TO: Local and Intermediate School District Superintendents
Public School Academy Directors

FROM: Dr. Scott M. Koenigsknecht, Deputy Superintendent
P-20 System and Student Transitions

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S.M.K.", positioned to the right of the "FROM:" line.

SUBJECT: Opportunity to Expand Quality Preschool with ESSER Federal Funding

On April 26, 2021, State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice shared a video message and a written [memorandum](#) regarding seven ideas (or "gifts that keep on giving") related to the use of non-recurring federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding. The first of those seven research-based gifts that keep on giving is the expansion of early childhood learning opportunities. Local Education Agencies (LEAs), both traditional public school districts and public school academies (PSAs), can be critical partners in achieving the goals of Michigan's Top 10 Strategic Education Plan, specifically *Goal 1: Expanding Early Childhood Opportunities*, by utilizing a portion of their allocated ESSER funding to provide a high-quality preschool experience for children in need.

As LEAs plan how to utilize ESSER II and ESSER III federal funds to support children affected by the pandemic, **one of the best research-based interventions to consider is expanding quality preschool services for four-year-old children.**

The Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) serves roughly 60% of an estimated 64,000 eligible children in Michigan, which leaves approximately 27,000 children from low-income families at home or in child care who could otherwise benefit from a quality educational experience prior to kindergarten.

Quality Matters

Research is clear: quality matters. Research shows that high quality pre-school programs positively affect children's short- and long-term outcomes while low- and moderate-quality programs do not provide the same results.

Michigan's GSRP has recently received national recognition for meeting all 10 of 10 quality standards as set by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University. Michigan achieved this ranking for the fourth

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consecutive year and is one of six states to achieve this goal for the 2019-2020 program year.

QUALITY STANDARDS CHECKLIST			
POLICY	MI PRE-K REQUIREMENT	BENCHMARK	REQUIREMENT MEETS BENCHMARK?
Early learning & development standards	Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive	Comprehensive, aligned, supported, culturally sensitive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Curriculum supports	Approval process & supports	Approval process & supports	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Teacher degree	BA	BA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Teacher specialized training	ECE, CD, ECE SpEd	Specializing in pre-K	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Assistant teacher degree	CDA or AA in ECE/CD	CDA or equivalent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Staff professional development	16 hours/year; PD plans; Coaching	For teachers & assistants: At least 15 hours/year; individual PD plans; coaching	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Maximum class size	18 (4-year-olds)	20 or lower	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Staff-child ratio	1:8 (4-year-olds)	1:10 or better	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Screening & referral	Vision, hearing, health & more	Vision, hearing & health screenings; & referral	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Continuous quality improvement system	Structured classroom observations; Data used for program improvement	Structured classroom observations; data used for program improvement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

For more information about the benchmarks, see the Executive Summary and Roadmap to State Profile Pages. 10

Source: 2019-2020 data; The State of Preschool Yearbook 2020, NIEER

Key Resources

LEAs utilizing ESSER II or ESSER III federal funds to implement preschool programs have several resources available to them to inform quality implementation.

At a minimum, any general education preschool program must meet all [Licensing Rules for Child Care Centers](#). A local school district can better position itself post-COVID to be a long-term formal provider of GSRP in partnership with its ISD by going beyond implementing key elements of quality preschool and implementing the GSRP model now. LEAs working in partnership with their intermediate school district (ISD) will benefit from its experience with administering GSRP and the information it can provide on high-quality preschool programming.

The GSRP model is based on the [State Board of Education-approved Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten](#) and is further defined through the [GSRP Implementation Manual](#).

Key provisions of the GSRP model that have proven to affect child outcomes in a positive manner include:

- **Staff qualifications:** Teachers have an elementary teaching certificate with an early childhood endorsement or a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or child development while teaching assistants have a child development associate (CDA) or an associate degree in early childhood education or child development.
- **Coaching:** Each classroom is supported by an early childhood specialist who has a master's degree in early childhood education or child development.

- Class size and ratio: Class size is capped at 18 children (with a teaching team of three adults) while typical preschool classrooms consist of 16 children and two adults.
- Number of days and hours: Programs operate for a minimum of 120 days and 30 weeks with four or five days per week; school-day programs operate the same number of hours as the district's first grade classrooms, and part-day programs operate for a minimum of three hours per day.
- Curriculum and assessment: Programs select a comprehensive, child-focused, constructivist curriculum model from a [list](#) provided by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), per the GSRP implementation manual. Children are assessed through early application of a developmental screening tool and receive feedback from ongoing, authentic formative assessment. Tools are selected from lists provided by MDE.
- Family engagement: Families are an integral part of the program and provide input on program decisions and take part in a minimum of four formal meetings with teaching staff per program year.

A newly created MDE resource, [Key Elements of High-Quality Early Childhood Learning Environments for Preschool \(Ages 3-5\)](#), outlines the elements fundamental to achieving high-quality experiences and strong outcomes for preschool children in any quality preschool program, a valuable reference for districts and administrators. This foundational document distills the essential qualities required of a preschool learning environment necessary to providing the highest quality, developmentally appropriate experiences for preschool children. The elements draw from national and state standards (including Michigan's) for early childhood programs and are based on research in child development that exemplifies proven practices in early education. Although this resource complements the GSRP model, it applies to any preschool program that strives for quality.

Districts may also develop a fully supported preschool program funded with [Title I funds](#) (Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Title I, Part A, Section 1112(c)(1)(G)) and, if so, must follow the federal [Head Start Performance Standards 641A\(a\)](#), which identify high-quality factors for Title I funded preschool programs.

Key Considerations when Using ESSER Federal Funds

To use federal ESSER funds for expanding preschool opportunities, there must be justification identifying a need for the program due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following questions may be helpful as districts consider the cause of the need and whether the effect can be diminished or eliminated, in part, by a quality preschool program when justifying the use of ESSER federal funds:

- Is there community-wide trauma to young children due to illness or deaths related to COVID-19?
- Are there widespread negative effects to young children due to job loss, reduced family incomes, food insecurity, or increased family stressors due to COVID-19?

- Has there been significant social isolation of children and families due to closed schools and programs? Has this led to social-emotional issues that may be solved by participation in a quality preschool?
- Has the closure of child care and education programs targeted to younger children caused a learning gap for the whole age cohort that will begin preschool?

If the district determines a need for the provision of a preschool and can provide a justification, ESSER funding can be used.

What does the research say?

[Research](#) on quality early learning programs in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Perry Preschool Project, Abecedarian Project, Chicago Child-Parent Centers, and New Jersey Abbott studies) revealed both academic and non-academic benefits for children will continue into adulthood. Consistently, research has shown children who attend quality preschool programs are better prepared for kindergarten and are less likely to be identified as having special needs or to be retained in elementary school than children who do not attend quality preschool programs.

Specific to Michigan GSRP (which started as a publicly funded program in 1985), there have been several approaches to evaluate GSRP effectiveness, including an external [longitudinal study](#) of GSRP conducted from 1995-2011. Results have demonstrated consistently the benefits of Michigan's high-quality preschool programs. Several key findings from 1995 through 2011 are:

- A higher percentage of 4th grade GSRP graduates scored proficient on the MEAP (currently M-STEP) compared to non-GSRP students (Xiang & Schweinhart, 2002).
- Significantly fewer GSRP participants were retained between 2nd and 12th grades compared to non-GSRP students (36.5% versus 49.2% in 12th grade) (HighScope, 2011).
- More GSRP students graduated on time from high school than non-GSRP participants (58.3% versus 43.0%) (HighScope, 2011).
- More GSRP children of color graduated on time from high school than non-GSRP participants (59.7% vs. 36.5%) (HighScope, 2011).

More recent GSRP evaluation findings demonstrate that:

- GSRP supports dual language learners in strengthening both home and English language acquisition ([HighScope, 2015](#)).
- GSRP showed significant impact on increasing at-risk preschool children's early literacy and math skills ([Xiang & Wakabayashi, 2014](#)).

For more information regarding the content of this memorandum, please contact MDE's Office of Great Start, Preschool and Out-of-School Time Learning, at 517-241-7004.

cc: Michigan Education Alliance
Confederation of Michigan Tribal Education Directors