

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Strong Beginnings pilot classroom evaluation requirements come from Clinton County RESA (CCRESA) and the Michigan State University Research Team (MSU), both of which are overseen and coordinated by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE). Pilot Strong Beginnings programs are involved in two types of program evaluation with some data used by both efforts. First, Strong Beginnings is involved in the same type of local and regional evaluation as GSRP programs. This ongoing evaluation is focused on assuring that all Strong Beginnings classrooms are meeting program requirements and systematically using data for program improvement. This type of evaluation is expected to continue after the pilot phase of the program ends. There are requirements for some of this summary classroom and family partnership data to be sent every other month to CCRESA in order to assure that programs are on track in meeting requirements. This data collection effort will stop when the pilot is complete. Second, all pilot Strong Beginnings classrooms will all be involved in a rigorous state-wide evaluation to determine if program elements are working as expected and Strong Beginning's impact on child and family outcomes. Requirements for the state-wide evaluation are determined by MDE and the MSU Research Team and will be in place for the duration of the pilot project. This evaluation will impact not only children and families enrolled in Strong Beginnings but also children and families on Strong Beginnings waiting lists and those enrolled in GSRP after not participating in Strong Beginnings. Research requirements are likely to be less rigorous and involve fewer participants under state than under federal Preschool Development Grant funding. Regardless of source of funds, however, all funded Strong Beginnings classrooms and the ISDs that fund them must participate in and assist with the state-wide evaluation.

LOCAL AND REGIONAL EVALUATION

Strong Beginnings utilizes information from screenings, ongoing observations, program quality evaluations, ECS records, family goals sheets and Family Liaisons' records as well as from staff and parents to determine if the systems in place are working, whether there is an efficient use of resources and how the program can best respond to the needs of enrolled children. The focus of a systematic approach to local data collection and data use is to provide continuous improvement feedback to staff and enrolled families.

Strong Beginnings is required by CCRESA to provide for active and continuous participation of parents of enrolled children. Parents partner in child development goals as active decision-makers. Parents discuss data with their children's teachers and understand what the data means for their children, both inside and outside of the classroom. Upon enrollment, parents must be informed that information about their child and family is collected, reported, and analyzed to learn about the effectiveness of Strong Beginnings. Confidentiality must be maintained. A sample

announcement to parents on program evaluation can be found in the resources for this section.

Each Intermediate School District (ISD) must have a written evaluation plan that covers the implementation of all required program components. The annual program evaluation process includes the following elements.

Systemic Collection and Utilization of Data

Programs are required to conduct developmental screening and comprehensive, authentic child assessment. The SB-Early Childhood Contact (ECC) collects data on the curricula, screening and child assessment tools approved for use in the area. The SB-ECC supports common measurements and consistent data reporting mechanisms across program providers. Typically, an ECS who is a Reliable Assessor/Certified Observer completes the observations, interviews and scoring of the program evaluation tool(s). The ECS documents evidence about classroom observations and specific classroom-level requirements.

The formal end-of-year program evaluation is most often completed by the ECS assigned to the classroom. When the annual formal evaluation is not completed by the assigned ECS, additional attention must be given to the process for communicating the results of the evaluation to the assigned ECS and teaching team.

At the start of each school year, CCRESA provides information to ISDs about annual contracts and reporting expectations for program evaluation.

The MSU Research Team, in collaboration with CCRESA, determined that one of the following tools may be used singly or in combination to evaluate program quality.

Classroom Coach by HighScope

- The Classroom Coach measures the quality and use of the indoor and outdoor learning environments, teaching and learning routines, adult-child interactions (including interactions that encourage the development of expressive/receptive language, vocabulary, math, literacy, social and emotional skills, executive function skills and conflict resolution skills), evidence-based comprehensive curricula, planning to differentiate instruction based on student interests, ongoing child assessment to monitor learning and adapt/modify learning if needed, and parent engagement activities. **Note: It is a requirement that the assigned ECS ensures that all sections of the Classroom Coach are completed by the reliable assessor responsible for the End of Year program assessment.** See the *Early Childhood Specialist* section of this manual for Strong Beginnings requirements on Reliable Assessor status.

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®) by Teachstone®

- CLASS is used to measure and improve teacher-child interactions in the areas of emotional support, classroom organization and instructional support. A Certified CLASS Observer is a person who has attended an in-person CLASS Observation Training and who has passed a CLASS Reliability Test within the past year. All data is collected within myTeachstone, a separate product. To learn more please visit the Teachstone website.
- After it was determined which instrument the ISDs participating in the pilot typically use, all pilot participants are now required to utilize Classroom Coach as it was the more frequently used instrument. Those ISDs who typically use CLASS may continue to use it in addition to the one that is required.

Both the Classroom Coach and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®) are reliable and valid for classrooms serving three-year-old children.

Training in the selected tool(s) and Reliable Assessor/Certified Observer costs are approvable expenses.

The SB-ECC is responsible to monitor compliance with the program evaluation reporting requirement. The SB-ECC will access, aggregate, and analyze information to support those serving in the Strong Beginnings ECS role across the ISD, and also inform the creation of a professional learning plan.

Data are reviewed to guide parent-teacher decisions about specific child supports, the teaching staff's lesson planning, and administrative decisions about classroom- and program-wide improvement. Effective practices include program provider-level aggregation of child assessment data three times per year. Data should be aggregated separately for Strong Beginnings and GSRP so the quality of each program may be analyzed and used for planning. Program quality information is shared with parents, the ISD, and the community. The subcontractor level data analysis team is supported and/or led by the ECS, SB or GSRP ECC, or a person with experience and skills to effectively execute this program requirement. Program quality data and child outcome data from child screening and authentic assessment are aggregated and provided to the data analysis team in advance. Data sets should be prepared for the meeting in a reader-friendly format such as bar graphs, and without identifying features such as child names. A data analysis team includes parents, the program supervisor, representation from teaching teams, and other specialists or stakeholders, as appropriate. A systematic approach brings the team together three times each program year. During the end-of-year meeting, the team:

- Identifies the current level of performance across relevant indicators, evident strengths, and extraordinary accommodations for children/families (e.g., attendance rates, program settings and/or options, language groups, child, family or community risk factors);
- Uses data to establish professional learning priorities;

- Sets measurable goals and objectives to address classroom quality, agency quality, and child outcomes;
- Agrees to eliminate what is not effective or conflicts with requirements;
- Addresses whether policies and procedures require revision; and
- Inventories available program resources such as time, money, personnel, technology, curriculum resources, and local training opportunities.

After the end-of-year meeting, the ECS supports meaningful professional learning related to the goals. Consideration should be given to the unique needs of Strong Beginnings staff. Action plans, including timeframes for progress monitoring, are developed with teaching teams. The ongoing cycle of continuous improvement moves forward with ECS support for strengthened practices. Measurement strategies are critical because they address accountability to the continuous improvement efforts that are in place. Changes to agreed-upon strategies may at times require an additional team meeting. When progress monitoring is implemented, the result is a strengthened and individualized instructional program. Resources for this section include tools for helping with the analysis of data.

When this process is complete at the local level, the ECC convenes the ECS team to aggregate and analyze the overall Strong Beginnings results for the year. The ECC uses aggregated child outcome and program quality data to share success in meeting goals and to address needs that are revealed by data disaggregated by sub-groups, e.g. Strong Beginnings, GSRP, English Language Learners, race/ethnicity, and socio-economic status. The ECC determines if data collected are being used in ways that drive continuous improvement efforts. The ECC evaluates the data are being used to differentiate supports to program providers, staff and children. Data patterns may reveal a need for ISD-wide goals for improvement and professional learning. See the *Child Assessment* section of this manual for more information on an effective assessment system. See the Early Childhood Contact description in the *ISD Administration of GSRP* section of this manual for additional description of responsibilities of the ECC.

In addition to child outcome and program quality data, Strong Beginnings is also required to collect data related to child/family supports. The type of data required will vary depending on the particular selection of supports made by the ISD in conjunction with each individual subcontractor. Child/family support personnel working with families will be asked to report monthly on the number of families they are supporting, number of contacts with these families, and type of service (i.e. resource referral, information) they are providing. Those personnel supporting with teaching staff with behavior and other such strategies will be asked to report on number of children they are supporting. These data should also be discussed at local and ISD wide data analysis meetings. Data related to child/family supports will be used to drive continuous improvement efforts and identify overall areas in need of ISD-wide goals for improvement and professional development. A summary of the data and goals derived from it should be reported to the School Readiness Advisory Committee at least once yearly.

Strong Beginnings sites must attain at least a 3-star rating in Michigan’s Great Start to Quality (GSQ) system. A program whose license is modified to first provisional status at any time may be removed from GSQ and reappears in GSQ when the license is renewed to regular status. Strong Beginnings sites that are unable to achieve or maintain at least a 3-star rating must not receive continued Strong Beginnings funding. ISDs must be aware that such sites are “out of compliance” with requirements, and sanctions, up to and including recapture of all Strong Beginnings funds for those sites, may be implemented.

Follow-up Through Second Grade

It is best practice that program providers develop a local evaluation component, such as a follow-up study through second grade. Local longitudinal data collection facilitates communication between preschool and early elementary grades. Data collected provides information regarding the progress of children enrolled in Strong Beginnings and GSRP through subsequent grades, referral to special services such as Special Education and Title I, school attendance, school performance, retention, and parent involvement. Reflection on longitudinal data provides preschool program staff with insight into the conditions of successful transition from preschool to subsequent grades and should be coupled with other program data to further program quality. The local evaluation should indicate and data should be considered on the basis of whether children participated in both Strong Beginnings and GSRP or only one of these programs. See resources for this section for sample follow-up documentation and the required Parent Notice of Program Measurement.

Passive Consent of Program Evaluation

Families of enrolled children must be notified of program evaluation activities. The information is often summarized and included in handbooks in parent-friendly language.

STATE-WIDE PILOT EVALUATION

Program evaluation results are used by MDE, the MSU Research Team and the CCRESA Implementation Team for statewide evaluation of the pilot program: to determine if programs are able to be implemented efficiently and effectively and the impact of the program on child and family outcomes. Results of the evaluation will be shared with the ISDs operating pilot sites.

Programs must cooperate with MDE, its designated evaluation contractor(s) at MSU and CCRESA, and any of MDE’s other research or implementation partners. Cooperation includes, but is not limited to:

- Making classrooms available for observation;
- Providing non-classroom space on site for individual child assessment;
- Allowing administrators and staff to take time to complete surveys and questionnaires (via telephone, internet, paper, and/or in person; as necessary);
- Returning completed surveys and questionnaires promptly and regularly;

- Providing program information to the contractor, including children’s unique identification numbers, to be reported to the MSU research team;
- Participating in project informational webinars, conference calls, and in-person meetings;
- Distributing parent information letters and assisting in collecting and submitting completed parent surveys; and
- Assisting with the recruitment and enrollment of families participating in Strong Beginnings and on the waiting list for Strong Beginnings in the MSU research study.
- Storing materials such as iPads necessary for the administration of the child assessments.
- Assisting with identifying and/or contracting with MSU to provide proctors who support children during the assessments.

Details on types of information collected and timelines for the collections from children, families, teachers, early childhood specialists and others are included in section 13 of this manual Reporting and Monitoring.