

Clinton County RESA Office of Innovative Projects

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Request for Proposals for Strong Beginnings Three-Year-Old Preschool Pilot Program

1. Statement of Purpose

In Fiscal Year 2024, the Clinton County Regional Education Services Agency, Office of Innovative Projects (CCRESA-OIP), under the direction of the Michigan Department of Education Office of Great Start (MDE-OGS), plans to expand the Strong Beginnings pilot preschool program. Strong Beginnings is a state-funded program for three-year-old children with factors that may place them at risk for low educational attainment. The program is based on research that shows similar children, who attend a high-quality preschool for the two years before kindergarten, have significant positive developmental outcomes compared to their peers who attended a high-quality program for only one year.

2. Background

In fiscal year 1986, MDE received one million dollars to identify appropriate program models for the operation of preschool pilot projects for four-year-old children. Fifty-three projects were funded and served 694 four-year-old children. In fiscal year 1987, Section 36 of the State School Aid Act and the Department of Education Appropriations Act provided funds for targeted early childhood programs, now called the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP). Programs began operating in September 1988.

Since then, research on the efficacy of GSRP indicates that children provided with a high-quality preschool experience show significant positive developmental differences compared to children from the same backgrounds who did not attend a high-quality preschool program. As a result, the program has continuously expanded, serving over 60,000 children in fiscal year 2023. While GSRP improves outcomes for children, research shows that one year of preschool is not enough to enable all children to be successful in school. During the 2017-2018 school year, MDE-OGS used funds from the Race to the Top Early Childhood Challenge to develop a conceptual model for a state-funded three-year-old preschool. The model, Strong Beginnings, was reexamined to explore equity and access issues during the 2019-2020 school year using funds from the federal Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five grant program (PDG Birth through Five).

Start-up funding through the PDG Birth through Five grant allowed for a pilot implementation and evaluation of Strong Beginnings in 2021. As a result of the program's success, \$2.2 million in State School Aid funding was appropriated to continue the twelve-classroom pilot for the 2022-2023 school year. The Governor's proposed fiscal year 2024 budget expands this pilot implementation to \$18 million in fiscal years 2024-2026. While the funding still requires legislative approval, this RFP seeks applicants to participate in the pilot over the next three years.

Preliminary selections of new ISDs for the fall of 2023 and fall of 2024 will be made in June of 2023, and final notification for each year will be made when the funds are fully authorized. Classrooms involved in
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the pilot during school years 2021-2023 will continue to be funded yearly if funds are fully authorized. In addition, the ISDs involved in phase I of the pilot will receive additional classrooms in the fall of 2023 once funds are fully authorized.

3. Scope of Work

Strong Beginnings is based on Michigan's GSRP program. Some modifications have been made to ensure program appropriateness and suitability for three-year-old children. This includes the addition of a Child/Family Supports program.

Applicant Eligibility

1. Applications will only be accepted from Intermediate School Districts (ISDs).
2. Local Education Agencies (LEAs), Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), Head Start programs, and Public School Academies (PSAs or "Charter Schools") are eligible to apply for classrooms through their ISD.
3. New applicants receiving funds for more than 300 GSRP slots in the 2022-2023 school year must apply for two classrooms.
4. New Applicants receiving funds for less than 300 GSRP slots in School Year 2022-2023 may apply for one or two classrooms.
5. Applicants may not add additional classrooms during the funding period.
6. Applicants must commit to operating classrooms in the year they receive the award and each subsequent year through Fiscal Year 2026 that funding is appropriated.
7. Applicants must successfully meet all grant requirements to receive ongoing funds.
8. Subcontractor awards are non-transferable.
9. Subcontractors must operate an existing GSRP program that has been operating successfully for at least two consecutive years.
10. Applicants may select an implementation year of FY2024 or FY2025. Applicants can also indicate ability/interest for the other year.

Classroom Implementation Criteria

1. Only applications for classroom instruction will be considered (distance learning or hybrid approaches are not allowed).
2. All Fiscal Year 2024 classrooms must be currently licensed or be able to be added to a current license.
3. Programs will serve only three-year-old children. Multiage classrooms are not allowed.
4. Pilot classrooms will use Strong Beginnings funds only. Braided or blended classrooms are not allowed.
5. Children with IEPs, eligible for special education services under Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education, are eligible for Strong Beginnings. Inclusive classroom limits for children with IEPs are 10 percent.

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6. Eligibility criteria for Strong Beginnings children closely align with GSRP guidelines from 2019-2020. Children must be from families at or under 250% poverty and reside in the ISD area of the Strong Beginnings program. Refer to the Strong Beginnings Implementation Manual for a detailed description of eligibility requirements.
7. School-day classrooms are required.
8. Pilot classrooms will have no more than 14 children and at least two staff members.
9. All classrooms will have two teaching staff with the required credentials, regardless of the number of children.
10. Programs will use only GSRP-approved curriculum and assessments. Programs may not use Connect 4 Learning. No specials, supplemental curricula, or supplemental assessments will be allowed.
11. All classrooms will utilize either Classroom Coach, CLASS, or both for program quality assessment.
12. All classrooms will work collaboratively with a Family Liaison, as described in the Strong Beginnings Implementation Manual.

Child/Family Supports Requirements

Families and children arrive at Strong Beginnings with different needs. These needs vary across the state, ISDs, subcontractors, and even classrooms. Because of this, there is a range of supports that ISDs should consider when providing Child/Family Supports in collaboration with subcontractors and other partners.

1. Each program must have a Family Liaison, School Social Worker, or similar support person who is available to develop relationships with families and, provide ongoing support, resources, information and assist families in improving their general well-being.
2. Family Liaisons, School Social Workers, or similar support persons provide support around the child attending Strong Beginnings. They are also expected to support families in meeting basic needs, assisting other children and family members, and dealing with issues, including health, employment, housing, and job training that are important to the family.
3. Services for children and families, such as Early Childhood Mental Health, Behavioral Consultation, or the inclusion of a third member of the teaching team on a full or part-time basis, may also be provided as part of the Child/Family Supports, but cannot take the place of a dedicated Family Liaison, School Social Worker or similar support person.

Each ISD, in conjunction with its subcontractors, must develop an annual plan for providing child and family support that strengthens the foundation for children and families as they begin their journey through the school system. This plan must include the following:

1. The support they will provide each classroom.
2. A vision for how the Family Liaison(s), School Social Worker, or similar support person will be hired, coached, and supervised in fulfilling their role.

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3. The responsibilities assigned to the Family Liaison, School Social Worker, or similar support person, as well as the number of hours they will work and their compensation.

More information on Child and Family Supports is available in the March 2023 revision of the Family Engagement section of the Strong Beginnings Implementation Manual. This document is included in Attachment B.

Data Collection and Reporting

To scientifically examine the benefits of this new program for vulnerable children and families, data collection and reporting are required of each site for program monitoring, continuous quality improvement, and program evaluation. Examples of data collection and reports include:

1. Information such as COR or TSG child and summary records for children in Strong Beginnings
2. Child Screening Data
3. Program Quality Assessments
4. Family Contact Logs
5. Child Demographics
6. Child Attendance
7. Teacher/Family Liaison/family communications
8. Family Surveys
9. Child assessment data such as COR or TSG child and summary records from all children in GSRP classrooms containing children who were in Strong Beginnings.

Refer to Appendix A for a full description of data collection items and their associated reporting schedule.

Evaluation

Pilot sites must agree to participate in a multi-year evaluation conducted by researchers at Michigan State University (MSU). The evaluation may include teacher and parent surveys for the Strong Beginnings program year. The progress of children who participated in Strong Beginnings and their non-Strong Beginnings classmates will be assessed.

Teachers and parents will be compensated for their time completing assessments and surveys by MSU. Participation of the parents in the MSU activities is voluntary and will not impact children's eligibility or admission to the program.

See Appendix A for a list of assessments and schedules.

Areas of Focus in 2024-2026 Expansion

Understanding the strengths and challenges of the Strong Beginnings program when operating in all types of ISD, all geographical regions, with all types of children, and all types of subcontractors is critical to CCRESA-OIP's goal of developing a statewide scaling and implementation plan.

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In 2024-2026, we are primarily seeking applications from programs that can meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Remote rural areas such as the UP and/or Thumb
- Large counties with populations over 600,000
- Mid-sized cities such as Saginaw/Flint/Battle Creek/Lansing
- Programs serving Hispanic children
- Programs serving families affiliated with Federally recognized tribal nations
- Programs operated by Head Start (no blended or braided funding allowed)

Programs that do not meet these criteria will be awarded funds only if there are insufficient high-quality proposals that meet these criteria or if unique needs for balancing characteristics are evident.

4. Outcomes and Performance Standards

Desired Program Outcomes:

1. Implementation of Strong Beginnings classrooms
2. Implementation of Child and Family Supports
3. Implementation of a program meeting performance standards

Please refer to the Strong Beginnings Implementation Manual for a full description of performance standards.

Milestones, Deliverables, and Timeline

Program Milestones for SY 2023-2024 Cohort:

1. All contracts and subcontracts are signed by 7/31/2023. (Tentative based on School Aid Act)
2. ISD Early Childhood Contact and Finance Representative attend the August 2023 trainings.
3. ISD Early Childhood Specialists, Family Liaisons, and Teaching staff attend August Back-to-School Kick-Off.
4. Programs start by October 1, 2023.
5. At least one Strong Beginnings ISD-level Project Team Member attends all Training and Technical Assistance meetings in SY 2023-2024.

Program Deliverables:

1. Submission of all budgets, reports, and data in accordance with project timelines
2. Submission of teaching staff, Family Liaison, and ECS resumes and credentials
3. Completion of a Child and Family Supports Plan

5. Payments and Incentives

Program Payments

1. Strong Beginnings classroom will receive an allocation of \$13,000 in Fiscal Year 2024, \$13,250 in Fiscal Year 2025, and \$13,500 in Fiscal Year 2026.

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2. Programs will receive their full allocation regardless of enrollment. However, continued funding of the program may be jeopardized if the program is consistently under-enrolled.
3. Funds must cover both the program's classroom program and Child Family Supports components and allowed administrative expenses.
4. Applicant ISDs (or consortium of ISDs) may retain up to 4% of the total grant amount for administrative services the ISD provides. This amount comes out of the per-child allocation (not in addition to it).

Additional Payments

1. Transportation is encouraged and will be funded in addition to program payments at a minimum of \$500 per child.
2. One-time start-up funds of \$20,000 for each classroom are available (in addition to program funds) for purchasing non-consumable goods, equipment, materials, supplies, child restraint systems for vehicles, and making minor classroom renovations.

Periods(s) of Closure

In the event of a COVID-19-related shutdown, classrooms will continue to receive their full per-child allocation. The Child and Family Supports are expected to continue virtually throughout the period(s) of closure to receive continued funding.

Fund Balances

Due to this program's requirements and the evaluation's parameters, a fund-balance carryover is not allowed.

6. Contractual Terms and Conditions

Assurance Regarding Compliance with Program Requirements

ISDs awarded contract funds under this RFP agree to comply with all applicable requirements of all state statutes, federal laws, executive orders, regulations, policies, and award conditions governing this program. Awardees understand and agree that if they materially fail to comply with the terms and conditions of the award, CCRESA may withhold funds otherwise due to this program until the recipient 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.

Certification Regarding Nondiscrimination Under Federal and State Assisted Programs

In responding to this RFP, the applicant hereby agrees that it will comply with all federal and Michigan laws and regulations prohibiting discrimination and, in accordance therewith, no person, on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin or ancestry, age, sex, marital status, or handicap, shall be

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discriminated against, excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination in any program or activity for which it is responsible or for which it receives financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education or the Michigan Department of Education.

Specific Program Assurances

Should an award be made, the following provisions are understood to be true:

1. This award is made possible through State School Aid Act dollars and is subject to legislative appropriation and enactment.
2. The award will be made as a contract between CCRESA and the ISD applicant.
3. The award is approved for the applicant and cannot be assigned to a third party without specific approval.
4. CCRESA is not liable for any costs incurred by the awardee before the issuance of the award.
5. Payments, records, and financial statements made to sites under the provisions of this program will be made accessible and are subject to audit by CCRESA.
6. Each ISD, in collaboration with its sites, shall comply with all reporting requirements and due dates.
7. Each ISD acknowledges that the program is part of a data collection and evaluation effort. Acceptance of these funds requires that the project fully cooperates with CCRESA, MDE, and MSU and that cooperation includes but is not limited to the following:
 - Making classrooms available for observation.
 - Allowing administrators and staff to take time to complete surveys and questionnaires (by phone, online, on paper, or in person).
 - Returning completed surveys and questionnaires promptly and regularly to the contractor or any of the state's other research partners.
 - Providing program information to CCRESA and MSU. This information may include but is not limited to program type, session types, session hours, program calendar of school breaks, field trips, staff development, site locations, numbers of classrooms per site, number of children served, and staffing assignments within classrooms.
 - Providing a Unique Identification Number (UIC) for each child enrolled in Strong Beginnings.
 - Participating in project informational webinars, conference calls, and in-person meetings.
 - Distributing parent information letters/consent forms; and
 - Collecting and forwarding parent consent forms promptly and regularly.

ISDs are aware and understand that program requirements may be subject to change due to circumstances around COVID-19.

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Award Availability, Force Majeure, and Contract or Award Cancellation

Awards made under this agreement are subject to funding allocation and availability under the State School Aid Act and Michigan Department of Education fiscal year appropriations for 2024, 2025, and 2026.

The performance of an award or agreement by either party shall be subject to force majeure, including but not limited to acts of God, fire, flood, natural disaster, war or threat of war, acts or threats of terrorism, civil disorder, unauthorized strikes, governmental regulation or advisory, recognized health threats as determined by the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control, or local government authority or health agencies (including but not limited to the health threats of COVID-19, H1N1, or similar infectious diseases), curtailment of facilities, or another similar occurrence beyond the control of the parties, where any of those factors, circumstances, situations, or conditions or similar ones prevent, dissuade, or unreasonably delay the terms of the award or ensuring agreement. The award or contractual agreement may be canceled by either party, without liability, damages, fees, or penalty, for any one or more of the above reasons, by written notice to the other party.

9. Letters of Intent, Application Materials, and Format of Response

1. A [Strong Beginnings RFP Information webinar](https://eotta.ccreesa.org/Event.php?id=4520&Upcoming_Events=1) (https://eotta.ccreesa.org/Event.php?id=4520&Upcoming_Events=1) about this RFP will be held on April 12 at 10:00 AM.
2. Questions about this RFP should be submitted to the [Strong Beginnings Questions and Answers form](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SBQandA) (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SBQandA>) and are due April 14 by 4:00 PM. An FAQ will be posted by April 17 at 4PM.
3. The ISD must submit an intent to apply by completing the [Strong Beginnings Intent to Apply form](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SBIntenttoApply) (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SBIntenttoApply>) by April 21, 2023, at 12:00 PM, indicating their interest in applying for pilot classrooms, the name of the ISD, and the name and contact information of the person who will be completing the ISD response.
4. Only those ISDs submitting an intent to apply can respond to the RFP.

Full RFP responses must be received at CCRESA by 4:00 PM on Friday, April 28, 2023. Full responses must include the following:

1. A cover letter that includes a brief description of your interest in the program and the population you plan to serve, signed by Early Childhood Contact and ISD Superintendent.
2. Letters of support from:
 - a. Proposed Site(s)
 - b. Great Start to Quality Resource Center
 - c. Great Start Collaborative
 - d. The cover letter and letters of support should be emailed as a single PDF document to jfirestone@ccresa.org.
3. Completed [Strong Beginnings RFP Application](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SBAPP23) (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SBAPP23>)

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Materials submitted after 4:00 PM on April 28, 2023, will not be considered.

10. Evaluation and Awards

This phase of the Strong Beginnings Pilot Project is focused on assessing the scalability of a three-year-old preschool program statewide. Because it is necessary to study implementation across different settings, the final site selection will be based on a combination of factors such as geographical distribution and the site's contribution to a diverse, balanced sample.

Receiving the highest point total does not guarantee an award.

Visits to sites under consideration for an award may be made in May 2023.

Intent to award will be made in June in 2023.

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