



## **Request for Proposals for Strong Beginnings Three-Year-Old Preschool Pilot Program, Phase 2**

### **1. Statement of Purpose**

The Fiscal Year 2026 School Aid budget funds the expansion of the Strong Beginnings pilot preschool program, phase 2. Clinton County Regional Educational Service Agency, Office of Innovative Projects (CCRESA-OIP), under the direction of the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP), administers the program and will implement the expansion. Strong Beginnings is a state-funded pilot program for low-income three-year-old children with factors that may place them at risk for low educational attainment, including developmental delays, language barriers, or challenging behaviors. Phase 2 of the pilot will include additional program options beyond the current pilot project to align with Michigan's PreK for All roadmap and priorities. New programming options will include 5-day extended, part-day, multiage classrooms, and blended and braided funding options.

### **2. Background**

In fiscal year 1986, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) received one million dollars to identify appropriate program models for operating preschool pilot projects for four-year-olds. Fifty-three projects were funded and served 694 four-year-olds. 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 43,000 children in fiscal year 2025. 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.

Start-up funding through the PDG Birth through Five grant supported pilot implementation and evaluation of Strong Beginnings in 2021. An additional \$2.2 million in State School Aid funding was appropriated to continue the twelve-classroom pilot for the 2022-2023 school year. In fiscal year 2024, the pilot implementation of Strong Beginnings was expanded to \$18 million for fiscal years



2024-2026, expanding the program to 30 classrooms in 10 intermediate school districts (ISDs). This year’s school aid budget expands the pilot implementation again with an additional \$25 million for fiscal years 2026-2029. This RFP seeks applicants for approximately 14 additional classrooms to operate for two years in fiscal year 2027 and fiscal year 2028.

Selections of new programs submitted by ISDs for the fall of 2026 will be made in **May 2026**. Classrooms involved in the pilot during school years 2021-2026 will continue to be funded through fiscal year 2028.

### 3. Scope of Work

Strong Beginnings is part of Michigan’s PreK for All strategy, which is committed to strengthening family access to high-quality PreK through a robust mixed-delivery model. As such, priority for funding will focus on applications that ensure the expansion of PreK access in areas of the state experiencing a shortage of quality care for three-year-olds, engage in partnerships with community-based providers and child care businesses, and supplement and enhance federal Head Start programs and services. The Strong Beginnings model is based on Michigan’s GSRP PreK program for four-year-olds. It has been modified to ensure service delivery is developmentally appropriate for three-year-olds, including the addition of a Child/Family Supports component.

### Timeline

Activity	Target Date
Release RFP	March 16, 2026
Informational webinar	March 18, 2026, 1:00 PM
Questions due from ISDs	March 20, 2026, 5:00 PM
FAQ Posted	March 24, 2026, 5:00 PM
Intent to apply due	April 14, 2026, 5:00 PM



Activity	Target Date
RFPs due	April 24, 2026, 5:00 PM
RFP review, recommendations submitted	April 27-May 22, 2026
Notify applicants, pending budget approval	May 27, 2026

### **Applicant Eligibility**

1. Applications will only be accepted from Intermediate School Districts (ISDs).
2. ISDs currently receiving Strong Beginnings funding are ineligible to apply for additional classrooms for fiscal year 2027.
3. ISDs must engage and partner with their local Resource Center, Head Start grantee, and Regional Child Care Coalition to recruit licensed centers to apply. Letters of support and endorsement are also required from all three partner entities.
4. Local Education Agencies (LEAs), Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), Head Start programs, and Public School Academies (PSAs or "Charter Schools") are **all encouraged** to apply for classrooms through their ISD.
5. ISDs are **strongly encouraged** to include classrooms operated by CBO and/or Head Start partners in their application.
6. Applicants must commit to operating classrooms through fiscal year 2028.
7. Applicants must successfully meet all grant requirements to receive ongoing funds.
8. Subcontractor awards are non-transferable without the approval of CCRESA.

### **Classroom Implementation Criteria for FY 2027**

1. Fiscal Year 2027 classrooms will be funded to provide a specific program variation/option. These include 4-day and 5-day extended options, part-day (AM or PM only or both AM and PM), Multiage (3- and 4-year-old



- classrooms), classrooms with Head Start blended-funded students, and classrooms with braided funding (tuition, GSRP, Head Start).
2. Guidance for the implementation of each of these program variations/options may be found [here](#).
  3. Pilot classrooms must implement the program variation for which they were approved. Changes may only be made with the permission of CCRESA.
  4. Only applications for in-person classroom instruction will be considered (distance learning or hybrid approaches are not allowed).
  5. All classrooms approved for fiscal year 2027 must be currently licensed.
  6. Children with IEPs are eligible for special education services under the Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education and are eligible for Strong Beginnings. ISDs must support the placement of children with IEPs in Strong Beginnings classrooms to ensure successful experiences for children with and without IEPs, and teaching staff to the same expectations as children with IEPs in GSRP classrooms must be supported.
  7. ISDs and pilot classrooms must work collaboratively with Special Education to plan for all children's success in Strong Beginnings in accordance with the Inclusion Support Assurances for Strong Beginnings found [here](#).
  8. Children must come from families at or below 250% federal poverty level and reside in the ISD's service area. Children at or below 130% federal poverty level must be referred to Head Start. The [Strong Beginnings Implementation Manual](#) provides a detailed description of eligibility and program requirements.
  9. Classrooms that serve children in a part-day, single session (AM only or PM only) will have no more than 15 children and at least two staff members. Classrooms that serve children in a school-day or part-day, double session (Both an AM and PM class) must have no more than 15 children and at least two staff members.
  10. All classrooms will have two teaching staff with the required GSRP or Head Start credentials, regardless of the number of children.
  11. Programs will use only state-approved screeners, curriculum, and assessments. They may not use Connect 4 Learning. Only those supplemental curricula and supplemental assessments approved for the ISD to use with GSRP are allowed.
  12. All classrooms will utilize the CLASS 2nd Edition and CLASS Environment for program quality assessment.
  13. 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, subrecipients, and even classrooms. Because of this, there is a range of supports that ISDs should consider when providing Child/Family Supports in collaboration with subrecipients and other partners. All children enrolled in a classroom, including children not funded by Strong Beginnings (braided funding), will receive the same child and family supports.

1. Each program must have a Family Liaison who is available to develop relationships with families, provide ongoing support, resources, and information, and assist families in improving their general well-being.
2. Family Liaisons provide support for the child attending Strong Beginnings and other children in the same classroom. They are also expected to support all families in meeting basic needs, assisting other children and family members, and dealing with other needs, 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 replace a dedicated Family Liaison.

Each ISD, in conjunction with its subrecipients, 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 to each classroom.
2. An agreed understanding for who is responsible for hiring and employing the Family Liaison, trained, coached, and supervised in fulfilling their role.
3. The responsibilities assigned to the Family Liaison, as well as the number of hours they will work, and their compensation.

More information on Child and Family Supports is available in the February 2026 revision of the [Child/Family Supports](#) section of the [Strong Beginnings Implementation Manual](#).

## **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. Family Liaison Self-Assessment Rubric
6. Director's Survey
7. Child Demographics
8. Child Attendance
9. Family Surveys
10. Bi-monthly classroom data collection

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.

MSU may compensate teachers and parents for their time completing assessments and surveys. Parents' participation in 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.

## **Prioritization for Fiscal Year 2027 Expansion**

Aligning the Strong Beginnings model with Michigan's PreK for All roadmap and GSRP PreK model for four-year-olds. Ensuring the model can be successfully implemented in different communities and regions, and utilizing the variety of delivery and funding models now available to families through GSRP, subrecipients to ensure the goal of developing a statewide scaling and implementation plan.

For fiscal year 2027, we are most interested in applications where the proposed classroom(s) are in an area that is a child care desert for three-year-olds.

## **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 2026-2027 Cohort:

1. All contracts and subcontracts are signed by **6/30/2026**.
2. ISD Early Childhood Contact and Finance Representative attends the August 2026 trainings.
3. ISD Early Childhood Specialists, Family Liaisons, teaching staff, and site directors attend the August Back-to-School Kick-Off.
4. Programs start no later than **October 1, 2026**.
5. At least one Strong Beginnings ISD-level Project Team Member attends all Training and Technical Assistance meetings in SY 2026-2027 and 2027-2028.

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 if requested
3. Completion of a Child and Family Supports Plan

## **5. Payments and Incentives**

### **Program Payments**

1. The Strong Beginnings target foundation amount for fiscal year 2027 is \$15,000 per enrolled, eligible child.
2. Funding for a four-day/week, school-day classroom will be based upon the number of Strong Beginnings children served in the program multiplied by the target foundation.
3. Funding for a five-day/week, school-day extended classroom will be based upon the number of Strong Beginnings children served in the program multiplied by the target foundation multiplied by 1.2.
4. Funding for a four-day/week, school-day Head Start/Blend classroom will be based upon the number of Strong Beginnings children served in the program multiplied by the target foundation multiplied by 0.5.
5. Funding for a five-day/week, school-day Head Start/Blend extended classroom will be based upon the number of Strong Beginnings children



- served in the program multiplied by the target foundation multiplied by 0.6.
6. Funding for a four-day/week, part-day classroom will be based upon the number of Strong Beginnings children served in the program multiplied by the target foundation multiplied by 0.5.
  7. Funding for a five-day/week, part-day extended classroom will be based upon the number of Strong Beginnings children served in the program multiplied by the target foundation multiplied by 0.6.
    - a. For children age-eligible for GSRP will receive the 4-day school day GSRP allocation from GSRP funds. In addition, for each age-eligible GSRP child, the program will receive an allocation from Strong Beginnings that is equal to the difference between Strong Beginnings and GSRP funding. For each classroom, the number of children eligible for Strong Beginnings and GSRP will be determined by the MSDS Spring Early Childhood Collection.
    - b. For children age-eligible for GSRP will receive the 5-day extended GSRP allocation from GSRP funds. In addition, for each age-eligible GSRP child, the program will receive an allocation from Strong Beginnings that is equal to the difference between Strong Beginnings and GSRP funding. For each classroom, the number of children eligible for Strong Beginnings and GSRP will be determined by the MSDS Spring Early Childhood Collection.
  8. A slight increase in per-child funding for school year 27-28 is possible but not guaranteed.
  9. 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.
  10. Funds must cover both the program's classroom program and Child Family Supports components, and allowable administrative expenses.
  11. Applicant ISDs (or a 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 at a minimum of \$500 per child for four-day programs and \$625 per child for five-day extended programs, in addition to program payments. Children in the Strong Beginnings/GSRP multiage classroom who are age-eligible for Strong Beginnings will receive transportation funding from Strong Beginnings;



children who are age-eligible for GSRP will receive transportation funding from GSRP.

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. All Strong Beginnings/GSRP Multiage classrooms will receive \$20,000 in start-up funds from Strong Beginnings and may be eligible for additional start-up funds from GSRP.

### **Period(s) of Closure**

In the event of a shutdown due to health or other related reasons, 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 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 prohibit discrimination in employment, housing, education, and public accommodations based on religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, height, weight, familial status, marital status, sexual



orientation, gender identity, and gender expression in any program or activity for which it is responsible or for which it receives financial assistance from the Michigan Department of Education, or Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential.

### **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. The ISD Early Childhood Contact, Special Education Director, and Superintendent must agree to and sign the Inclusion Support Assurances for Strong Beginnings, found [here](#).
7. Each ISD, in collaboration with its sites, shall comply with all reporting requirements and due dates.
8. Each ISD shall ensure that the Lead Teacher in each Strong Beginnings Classroom fulfills the literacy requirements that will be mandated for GSRP.
9. Each ISD acknowledges that the program is part of a data collection and evaluation effort. Acceptance of these funds requires that the project fully cooperate with CCRESA, MILEAP, and MSU, and that cooperation includes but is not limited to the following:
  - a. Making classrooms available for observation.
  - b. Allowing administrators and staff to take time to complete surveys and questionnaires (by phone, online, on paper, or in person).
  - c. Returning completed surveys and questionnaires promptly and regularly to the contractor or any of the state's other research partners.
  - d. 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, number of classrooms per site, number of children served, and staffing assignments within classrooms.
- e. Providing a Unique Identification Number (UIC) for each child enrolled in Strong Beginnings.
  - f. Entering data on children in accordance with the CEPI MSDS Early Childhood Collection dates.
  - g. Participating in project informational webinars, conference calls, and in-person meetings.
  - h. Distributing parent information letters/consent forms.
  - i. 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 health or other state and federally emerging requirements.

### **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 the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP) fiscal year appropriations for 2027, 2028, and 2029.

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, 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.



## 7. Letters of Intent, Application Materials, and Format of Response

### Timeline and Process

1. A [webinar](#) about this RFP will be held on **March 18, 2026, at 1:00 PM**.
2. Questions about this RFP should be submitted using [this link](#) and are due by **March 20, 2026, at 5:00 PM**. An FAQ will be posted by **March 24, 2026, at 5:00 PM**.
3. The ISD must submit an intent to apply by completing this [online form](#) by **April 14, 2026, at 5:00 PM**. Only ISDs who submit an intent to apply can respond to the RFP. (This form is through Submit.com. If you need assistance using the platform click [here](#).)
4. Full RFP responses must be received at CCRESA by **5:00 PM on April 24, 2026**, and include the following:
  - a. **Online Application:** Submit this information directly through the application on Submit.com. **You will receive a link to complete the application within one business day of submitting your Intent to Apply.** If you want to preview the application before beginning, click [here](#) to view a PDF version. The following attachments are required as part of the online application:
    - i. **Letters of Support:** There are two types of Letters of Support required for a complete grant application (listed below).
      1. Letters of agreement to participate in and follow all rules and guidance from CCRESA related to Strong Beginnings are required from the ISD superintendent and the CEO/superintendent of each proposed program site.
      2. Letters of support and endorsement for the ISD and its participation in the project are required from the Regional Great Start to Quality Resource Center, the Regional Head Start Agency Directors, and the Regional Child Care Coalition Leads.
5. Signed [Inclusion Support Assurances](#) for Strong Beginnings
6. **Completed Rubrics:** ISDs will conduct outreach to identify potential partners and select sites based on this [rubric](#). You will also submit these completed rubrics and backup documentation (one for **each site** that you submit for consideration).
7. **Completed Program Requests for and Experiences with Variances Form:** ISDs must submit a completed [form](#) for each program they select to partner with.



**Note:** This [rubric](#) will be used by outside evaluators to score the proposal you submit. **Please use it as a guide for your plan to respond to the proposal.**

## **Evaluation and Awards**

This phase of the Strong Beginnings Pilot Project aims to assess the scalability of a three-year-old preschool program statewide. Because implementation must be studied across different settings, the final site selection will be based on a combination of factors, such as communities within established child care deserts, as well as scores obtained on the application.

Visits to sites under consideration for an award may be made in **May 2026**.

Notification of the tentative award will be made at the end of **May 2026**.