

## **OVERVIEW**

This Strong Beginnings Pilot Implementation Manual is designed to serve as a guide for all Strong Beginnings pilot administrators and staff. It contains specific information related to piloting Strong Beginnings for three-year-old children as well as to the overall implementation of Strong Beginnings. The Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential (MiLEAP) and the Clinton County Regional Educational Service Agency (CCRESA) require adherence to this manual and all standards in the Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Birth to Kindergarten. Other resources critical to implementing high-quality preschool programs are an approved comprehensive curriculum, an approved ongoing and authentic child assessment tool, and an approved program evaluation tool. Additional information about these resources can be found in subsequent sections of this manual.

### **Purpose**

Michigan offers the Strong Beginnings pilot for three-year-old children, all of whom have factors which may place them at risk for low educational attainment. The program is administered by the CCRESA Strong Beginnings Implementation Team under the direction of MiLEAP. Research on two-year preschool programs indicates that children provided with a high-quality preschool experience for the two years proceeding kindergarten show significant positive developmental differences when compared to children from the same backgrounds who attended a high-quality preschool program for only one year.

To strengthen learning at home and strengthen positive child outcomes, programs must provide for active and continuous involvement of \*parents in the learning process. In Strong Beginnings, this includes funding for a variety of parent/child supports which a program can implement to provide support, resources, and information to parents who need assistance with meeting basic needs or other family issues. Parents are never charged additional fees for program elements such as transportation or meal service. Through advisory committees, parents assist to evaluate and make recommendations about the program.

### **History**

The Department of Education Appropriation Act, in fiscal year 1986, designated 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 Appropriation Act provided funds for targeted early childhood programs. Programs began operating after September 1, 1988. Specific research on the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) indicates that children provided with a high-quality preschool experience show significant positive developmental differences when compared with children from the same backgrounds who did not attend a high-quality preschool program. As a result, the

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program has been frequently expanded and served over 40,000 children in FY23. While GSRP clearly improved outcomes for children, it is apparent that one year of preschool was not enough to enable all children to be successful in school. As a result, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) utilized federal funds awarded as part of Race to the Top-Early Childhood Challenge to develop a conceptual model for a preschool program for three-year-old children with factors that put them at risk of school failure in the 2017-2018 school year. The model was revisited with a lens for ensuring equity and access during the 2019-2020 school year utilizing federal Preschool Development Grant funds. Funding from the same source was available to pilot a small-scale implementation (12 classrooms in 4 ISDs) and evaluation of this program, now known as Strong Beginnings, in Fiscal years 2021 and 2022. Because of the success of this federal pilot project, Early Childhood Contacts from the four participating ISDs, with the support of MDE and the CCRESA Implementation Team, were able to obtain funding to continue the project in Public Act 144 of 2022. Section 32t of the Act stipulated that the program must be administered by the CCRESA Strong Beginnings Implementation Team under the direction of MDE, Office of Great Start, with assessment, data and collection analysis for the program being provided by Michigan State University. Additional funding to support the project during 2023 came from remaining Preschool Development Grant funds and any other necessary sources.

Public Act 103 of 2023, also in section 32t, increased funding for Strong Beginnings to \$18 million for a three-year work project ending September 30, 2027. These funds were directed for continuing pilot classrooms for three-year-old children as well as for compiling a report detailing information on the pilot and developing a model that could be used to scale the program statewide. As a first step, the pilot was expanded to 28 classrooms in 10 ISDs based on a competitive award process.

On December 1, 2023, oversight of the project was transferred from the MDE to MiLEAP who was then authorized to oversee early childhood education.

\*Parent = legal guardian