

CLASSROOM REQUIREMENTS

Introduction

Great Start Readiness Programs (GSRP) must comply with Public Act 116 of the Public Acts of 1973, as amended and the *Licensing Rules for Child Care Centers*. Michigan State Board of Education criteria for the GSRP require adherence to the *Great Start Readiness Program Implementation Manual* and the State School Aid Act requires program adherence to all standards in the *Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten* (ECSQ-PK). The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) requires grantees to address program quality in a systematic way utilizing both the applicable program evaluation tool and child outcome data.

Agencies which operate GSRP must comply with state licensing regulations governing child care. GSRPs must receive a license from the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA), Bureau of Community and Health Systems Child Care Licensing Division. All regular child use areas must be approved for use. Relocations must be completed with the knowledge of the Intermediate School District (ISD). The ISD and a GSRP Consultant must be notified within 24 hours of an incident being reported to licensing, of a special investigation being initiated, a change from a regular to a provisional license, or continued provisional status. For more information contact the [Child Care Licensing Division](#) at 866-685-0006.

This section provides detail and requirements for a high-quality, center-based preschool program that will enhance the development of young children. When even one child in a classroom is funded through GSRP, all GSRP guidelines must be followed: staff credentialing, curriculum, assessment, parent involvement, etc. Children in any classroom may be funded from a variety of sources, but all must attend for the full session. Classroom models below include required components.

When planning the program year, scheduled breaks, half-days, holidays, and possible inclement weather days should be taken into account and sufficient days and weeks scheduled to ensure that the minimum number of full program days and weeks is met. When excessive unexpected closures occur (e.g. inclement weather days) and reduce the number of days/weeks children will attend to less than the minimum required, make-up days must be planned. Classrooms in place for more than one academic year, including relocated classrooms, must have a minimum of 120 days spread over at least 30 weeks. New subrecipients and newly licensed classrooms must operate for a minimum of 80 days spread over at least 20 weeks of classroom sessions, but more are strongly recommended to better support enrolled children to be prepared for a successful kindergarten experience.

School-Day GSRP

School-Day preschool programs must operate for at least the same length of day as the local school district's/public school academy (PSA)'s first grade program. A classroom that offers a School-Day program must enroll all children for the length of the school day to be considered a School-Day program. If the program operates

five days per week, staff must have paid time for planning, professional development and parent involvement.

Part-Day GSRP

Part-Day preschool programs must provide for a minimum of three hours of teacher/child contact time per day, for at least four days per week. If the program operates five days per week, staff must have paid time for planning, professional development and parent involvement.

GSRP/Head Start Blend Classrooms

An ISD or its subrecipients may partner with Head Start to create a GSRP/Head Start “Blend” within a classroom. This is accomplished by blending GSRP and part-day Head Start funding resulting in a school day of preschool programming. The funding for the GSRP portion of the day is the same as Part-Day GSRP. See the [ISD Administration of GSRP](#) section of this manual and [resources](#) for that section for more information.

GSRP/Head Start Blend preschool programs must operate for at least the same length of day as the local school district’s/PSA’s first grade program. A School-Day, versus a Part-Day daily routine must be implemented.

All Head Start and GSRP policies and regulations must be applied to the blended classrooms, with the highest standard from either program adhered to. All children funded by the GSRP/Head Start Blend must qualify for and be concurrently enrolled in both programs. Children in the class may be funded from a variety of sources, but all must attend for the full day. Classrooms that include GSRP/Head Start Blend enrollment meet Head Start requirements on days-in-session.

A child may not participate in GSRP for a part-day session in one classroom and then transition to a Head Start part-day session in another classroom. If the program operates five days per week, staff must have paid time for planning, professional development and parent involvement.

For classrooms that include GSRP/Head Start Blends and where Head Start has the preponderance of responsibility, Head Start is contracted as the GSRP subrecipient. When the subrecipient delivering GSRP/Head Start Blend classrooms is other than Head Start, considerations include collaboration on features such as enrollment, attendance, classroom tools and forms, cost allocation for the teaching team and classroom services, comprehensive services and monitoring of requirements for both programs. The responsibility for each of these program requirements must be addressed in the formal agreement between Head Start and GSRP.

Educational guidance for the teaching team warrants special consideration. As with all GSRP classrooms, the GSRP Early Childhood Specialist (ECS) is the educational leader, administering the program evaluation tool and monitoring child assessment data. The ECS must also collaborate with the Head Start Education Manager as detailed within the written agreement. If both the ECS and the Head Start Education Manager are to support the classroom, they also collaborate on feedback

sessions and goal-setting so that there is a systematic approach with consistent messaging and manageable expectations for teaching teams.

Program Components

Philosophy

Administrative and program policies are undergirded with an underlying statement of beliefs about teaching and learning. A philosophy statement is a means of thinking deeply about preschool teaching and the beliefs upon which decisions are made. This is separate from a mission statement, which answers the question, "Why do we exist?" and articulates the preschool purpose both for those in the organization and for the public.

The written philosophy statement is developed and reviewed by administrators, staff, and GSRP advisory groups. It is included in the program's Parent Handbook. It establishes a framework for program decisions, goal-setting; and is aligned with the ECSQ-PK and grant expectations. The philosophy statement also addresses local, social, economic, cultural, and family needs; and is promoted widely via websites, recruitment materials, classroom newsletters, parent-boards, etc.

Consider the following as the philosophy statement is crafted or reviewed:

- Why preschool is important: What is the purpose of preschool? What is the preschool grantee's role?
- Those we serve: How do we support diversity among enrolled children? How do we define our community of learners? What is our relationship with the community, parents, teaching colleagues, and administration?
- Approach and content: What are our beliefs about how children learn? How do our beliefs affect our work?
- Program administration: Curriculum selection; instructional strategies AND teacher-child relationships; child assessment; program evaluation; and program improvement efforts for individuals, the classroom, and program.

Comprehensive Programming

The ECSQ-PK and legislation require comprehensive programming. In partnership with parents, the GSRP provider supports:

- Children's health (mental, oral, and physical), nutrition, and development across domains in responsive environments that celebrate diversity;
- Professional development for staff to make referrals for needed services and to document all follow-up efforts; and
- A team approach toward child-specific plans for goals related to overall health and development.

Parent Handbook

Parents are provided with policies and procedures that are easy to read, sensitively written, and brief. Refer to [resources](#) in the *Reporting and Monitoring* section for

additional guidance on developing or reviewing parent handbooks. Features specific to GSRP must be included in handbooks: use of grant name, logo and 'funded by' language. GSRP providers must have written policies and procedures that include the following:

- Program overview including a philosophy statement and curriculum, developmental screening, and ongoing child assessment information;
- Parent involvement information, including formal parent contacts, e.g. home visits and parent-teacher conferences;
- An emphasis on the importance of partnership between parents and teaching staff for child development (in school and at home); and
- Opportunities for decision-making activities within the local advisory structure;
- Child recruitment plan that includes procedures for selection and placement;
- Referral policy to meet child and family needs, including follow-up procedures;
- Confidentiality policy;
- School calendar;
- Daily classroom routine that includes what adults and children do during the day. (See [resources](#) for this section for sample daily classroom routines);
- Attendance policy;
- Exclusion policy must be written to describe short term injury or contagious illness that endangers the health and/or safety of children or others.
Children must not be excluded or expelled from classroom programming or transportation services;
- Weather policy;
- Rest time policy (applies to GSRP/Head Start Blend and School-Day programs);
- Medication policy;
- Health policies and practices on physical activity and nutrition for children;
- Accident and emergency policies, including how parents are notified of emergency events;
- Child discipline/conflict resolution policy, aligned with "Challenging Behavior," below;
- Policy for reporting child abuse/neglect;
- Sliding fee scale of tuition;
- Grievance policy that clearly describes the steps to be taken when a parent has concerns or a grievance; and
- Passive consent notice of program evaluation. See the [Program Evaluation](#) section of this manual for sample language.

Class Size and Ratio

A 1:8 adult/child ratio must be maintained at all times. A consistent third adult must be present in any classroom where 17 or 18 children are enrolled. Class size must be capped at 18 children with three consistent adults.

Additional staff members must be available to allow all staff time for breaks. Staff assigned to teach double sessions must not be responsible for more than 36 children.

Staffing

The GSRP staff must have appropriate credentialing and sophisticated knowledge of early childhood education and practice a team approach. Staffing requirements include the necessity of the teaching team, which may include one lead teacher, an associate teacher, and a third adult remaining the same for the entire session, every day the class is scheduled. The classroom teaching team is supported with the active involvement of an ECS.

Refer to the [Early Childhood Specialist](#) section for specific credentials and responsibilities of this position. **One person may not be employed to fill both a lead teacher position and an Early Childhood Specialist position.**

Credentialing - Lead Teachers:

Lead Teachers must meet the GSRP qualifications upon hire. A Lead Teacher will be considered credentialed for the position with minimally any of the following:

- A valid Michigan teaching certificate and an Early Childhood Education (ZA) or Early Childhood-General and Special Education (ZS) endorsement or
- A bachelor's degree in early childhood education or child development with a specialization in preschool teaching. The transcript will document a major, rather than a minor, in child development or early childhood education.

The option to hire a Lead Teacher who holds a valid Michigan teaching certificate along with a valid CDA is discontinued. The ISD must ensure that written personnel position descriptions and hiring procedures are accurate. Lead Teachers hired between June 25, 2012 and June 24, 2014 and with MDE-approved compliance plans to acquire a CDA may complete the CDA within the approved timeframe and continue to work as a GSRP Lead Teacher. Personnel hired into a GSRP Lead Teacher position with a valid Michigan teaching certificate along with a valid CDA before June 24, 2014 are also 'grandfathered in.' In both instances, MDE requires no further action as long as the person continues to work as a GSRP Lead Teacher in the same or another GSRP. If there is a break in service to GSRP, a 'grandfathered' Lead Teacher must meet new credentialing requirements before working again in the position of GSRP Lead Teacher. MDE will also honor a valid Michigan teaching certificate with PPI/Early Childhood Special Education Approval.

Credentialing - Associate Teachers:

An associate teacher must be added with the 9th child in a classroom. Public Act 62 of 2011 altered credentialing requirements for the position of associate teacher with the GSRP. The provision for 120 Clock Hours as a Child Development Associate credential (CDA) equivalency has been discontinued; personnel who currently have a 120 Clock Hour approval letter from the MDE are grandfathered.

Any GSRP associate teacher hired after June 21, 2011 must minimally have one of the following:

- An associate's degree (AA) in early childhood education or child development or the equivalent; or

- A valid Center-Based Preschool CDA credential; or
- An existing 120 Hour approval.

The AA and the CDA are formal training options that uniformly and systematically prepare staff to be effective team teachers in preschool classrooms.

Other Classroom Staff:

Third Staff Person:

- Is added when the classroom enrolls 17 or 18 children;
- Is a consistent member of the teaching team; and
- Meets the LARA, Child Care Licensing Division requirements as a “caregiver.”

Relief Staff:

- Are appropriately oriented and trained in program procedures relevant to their roles (e.g., responsive adult-child interaction strategies, child development, special needs of enrolled children, family-style meals), and receive ongoing supervision.

Substitute Staff:

- A substitute teacher should have a minimum of a valid Center-Based Preschool CDA. Any long-term substitute (more than one month), must meet qualifications for the position being filled.

Staffing Noncompliance

Gains in a young child’s development are increased when the child has meaningful relationships with responsive adults who have a sophisticated understanding of early childhood education. For this reason, it is critical that GSRPs hire qualified teachers. Programs that employ staff who do not meet credentialing requirements are in noncompliance status.

Staff recruitment efforts must be documented in local administrative files. Recruitment efforts can include the following: identification of the search and screen committee, including individuals outside the hiring unit to serve as committee members; and should minimally include hiring procedures, position descriptions that include GSRP credentialing requirements, evidence of advertisement(s), form letters and notices; evidence of journals, publications, electronic bulletin boards, institutions, departments, professional organizations, meetings, and personal and professional networks to which advertisements and notices are sent (or offices/individuals with whom contacts are made). Compliance plans for staff that are not appropriately credentialed are submitted annually to the ISD who then reports it annually to MDE in the Michigan Electronic Grants System Plus (MEGS+). The written plan must outline educational training and include an

anticipated compliance date. It must be signed by the program's ECS, the ISD Early Childhood Contact (ECC) and the staff member. It is the responsibility of the ECS to monitor the plan throughout the two years to assure compliance will be met within two years of the date of hire with GSRP. When a subrecipient hires staff that is not fully credentialed, the subrecipient and the ISD are in noncompliance status until credentialing is completed.

Staffing Noncompliance – Lead Teachers:

If a program demonstrates to the ISD that it is unable to hire qualified lead teachers, only persons who have **significant but incomplete training in early childhood education**, or child development may be employed. "Significant" early childhood education is defined as within one or two courses of the Early Childhood-General and Special Education (ZS) endorsement on a valid Michigan teaching certificate or within one or two courses of the bachelor degree in early childhood education/child development with a specialization in preschool teaching. Educational training is defined as credit-bearing coursework and/or the field experience/student teaching necessary, according to the work plan established for the endorsement candidate by the college or university.

When GSRP Lead Teachers are employed without proper credentialing, a written compliance plan that includes administrative monitoring should be a condition of hire. ISDs will provide assurance in the GSRP Implementation Plan (formerly "Application") that the compliance plan is on file locally.

The written plan must outline educational training and include an anticipated compliance date that is within two years of the date of hire into the GSRP Lead Teacher position. Progress toward completion of the compliance plan must minimally consist of two credit-bearing courses per calendar year. Minimum GPA requirements may be included in the compliance plan as well as considerations for financial support and release time. It must be signed by whoever signs the GSRP contract for the subrecipient, the classroom's Early Childhood Specialist (ECS), the ISD Early Childhood Contact (ECC) and the Lead Teacher. It is the responsibility of the ECS to monitor the plan throughout the two years and support successful completion. The ECS provides support by helping to connect the Lead Teacher with an institution of higher education academic advisor who can arrange a schedule of coursework to meet the two-year timeframe, encourage the Lead Teacher through coursework by discussing the new learning and supporting practice of new strategies. The ECS can help the Lead Teacher to advocate with the subrecipient if release time or financial assistance is needed for courses, fees or textbooks. As with all teaching staff, the ECS ensures that the new Lead Teacher has formal training in the curriculum, the developmental screener, ongoing child assessment tool and has orientation to GSRP and the position of Lead Teacher.

The ISD must ensure that the ECS classroom ratio/contracts reflect the intensive support and additional classroom visits, coaching and consultation that staffs with incomplete credentialing require.

MDE's Office of Educator Excellence provides a [list of approved early childhood education endorsement programs in Michigan](#).

Staffing Noncompliance – Associate Teachers:

If a program can demonstrate to the ISD that it is unable to employ properly-credentialed staff, the program may employ associate teachers who have minimally completed one course that earns college credit in child development or early childhood education.

Compliance plans for associate teachers must minimally include two courses or 60 clock hours of training per calendar year from an approved training institution or agency, must be completed within two years of the date of employment, and must result in the attainment of the Center-Based Preschool CDA or an associate's degree in child development or early childhood education. Any kind of training that would be considered "individual study" as opposed to "formal training" will not be accepted. An example of this would be video training, where a person simply watches a video followed by a question sheet. Trainings should provide opportunities for the trainee to apply, analyze, and evaluate content related to the early childhood years. Video trainings and other forms of individual study do not foster this kind of experience.

Team Teaching

The ISD and program administrators must ensure that staff implement a team teaching model. In team teaching, each staff person is fully engaged in planning curriculum, implementing curriculum both indoors and outdoors, child assessment, and supporting parent engagement through home visits, conferences, and parent meetings. The work is collaboratively shared and a high-quality GSRP dedicates time for staff to plan on a daily basis:

- All teaching staff participate equally in planning activities; ensuring associate teachers do not play minor non-teaching roles (e.g., wipe tables, prepare meals, etc.); and
- All teaching staff conduct and participate in children's activities.

The ISD and program administrators must ensure sufficient time for all staff to participate in planning, professional development, and parent involvement activities. Programs typically operate four days of classroom programming per week, with the fifth weekday set aside for above activities.

Teaching Practices

Teaching practices encompass everything the teaching team does to facilitate children's development, including organization of the indoor and outdoor learning environments, the nature of adult-child interactions, and strategies for transitions and grouping. Refer to curriculum guidance, ECSQ-PK and the program evaluation tool for further detail on high-quality indicators of teaching practices.

The curriculum promotes active, participatory learning through all portions of the daily routine. GSRP offers learning experiences personalized for the strengths, interests and needs of each child, in consideration of their family, community, and culture. The following are adhered to:

- Worksheets/workbooks/coloring sheets are prohibited for GSRP classroom use and may not be promoted for use at home.
- Whole-class activities such as 'calendar-time' do not permit children to initiate ideas/actions and are not part of a well-regarded preschool daily routine. However, a valid place for a real calendar is the house area, where children may use a calendar to jot play-themed appointments or in the variety of ways that families use real calendars. Teaching teams subsequently support children at their developmental level, partnering in their play to support emergent understandings in time-sense, literacy and mathematics, etc. For further information and suggestions for alternate practices see [Calendar Time for Young Children: Good Intentions Gone Awry](#)
- A 'letter of the week' practice is not individually meaningful for children, has been shown to be an ineffective method to teach alphabet knowledge and is not acceptable within GSRP classrooms. For research-based strategies to support early literacy see [Essential Instructional Practices for Early Literacy in Prekindergarten](#).
- As with all classroom materials, technology is used with intentionality, which *may thoughtfully include* being used as a tool during play. Teaching staff consider the distinction between active and passive use, recognizing that within active use 'the child's mind is active and deeply engaged with the content' (rather than the machinery). In other words, a child using a device in a physically engaging way does not necessarily reflect active learning. A child must intentionally learn from the experience for it to be active use. For more information, see the 2016 [Early Learning and Educational Technology Policy Brief](#).

Daily Routine

Required parts of the GSRP classroom schedule are bolded below. Refer to sample daily routines as [resources](#) to this section of the manual. Classrooms may have alternate terms for parts of the routine, as long as names are used daily and are easily understood by children. A consistent daily routine must include appropriate amounts of time each day for children to:

- Participate in a three-part sequence of child planning, choice and child recall. In child **planning**, children indicate their choice time plans to adults, in a variety of ways, and in ways that are consistent with individual developmental levels. During one continuous hour of **choice time**, children carry out their plans, making many choices about where and how to use materials (adults support children's efforts by listening, encouraging children's language, imitating children's ideas and words, and commenting on specific attributes of children's work). Children complete the sequence after **clean-up time**, by **recalling** and discussing their choice time activities in small groups;
- Engage in discrete **small-group** activities which may be adult-initiated, but not adult-dominated. School-Day and GSRP/Head Start Blend program options offer small group activities every morning;
- Engage in **large-group** activities which may be adult-initiated, but not adult-dominated;

- Have **snack- or meal-time(s)** where staff and children eat together family style and share the same menu to the extent possible. (See *Meals/Snacks* in this section);
- Have transition times that actively engage them;
- Have **outside-time** where adults intentionally support and extend children's plans. Programs provide equipment and materials for active play. Children are minimally provided thirty minutes of physical activity per day, a combination of both teacher-led and free play, notwithstanding the time needed for adults to support children dressing themselves or transitioning to outdoors, unless prevented by inclement weather conditions such as heat, rain or wind-chill. School-Day and GSRP/Head Start Blend program options offer outside, gross motor activities at least every morning;
- Have an opportunity for **rest** in a full-day program;
- Hear parts of the day regularly referred to by staff; and
- See a daily routine posted at child eye level, that is easily understandable and includes visuals for planning, choice, recall, small-group, large-group, snacks/meals, outside, and rest.

Challenging Behavior

The structure of the physical environment, daily routine and activities presented, and the adult(s) approach all have a direct influence on child behavior. Research shows young children who struggle with behavioral and emotional problems have a fifty percent chance of continuing to struggle into adulthood.

GSRP providers must not deny enrollment or exclude a child from classroom programming or program provided transportation based on challenging behavior or any disability because of staff attitudes and/or apprehensions, unfamiliarity with the behaviors or disability, the need to access additional resources to serve a specific child or the need for individualized planning and intentional teaching.

There is evidence high-quality early childhood education minimizes challenging child behaviors when it focuses on child-initiated learning activities. In addition, positive behavior support is most effective when offered to children through a system based on positive relationships with children, families, and colleagues; creating supportive learning environments, intentional social-emotional teaching strategies, and mental health consultation involving intensive individualized interventions.

The effective early childhood mental health consultant has appropriate credentials and is familiar with program-centered consultation, where the goal is to build the capacity of staff, families, and program systems to prevent, identify, and reduce the impact of mental health problems in children and families. An ongoing relationship between a mental health professional and early childhood program staff ensures familiarity with the needs of children and teachers, timely consultation, and services.

The discipline or conflict resolution policy must address procedures for adults to support children as they solve problems with materials, do things for themselves, and assist them in resolving conflicts with peers. In the GSRP classroom, adults:

- Encourage children to do things for themselves throughout the day;
- Treat conflict situations with children matter-of-factly;
- Approach children calmly and stop any hurtful actions;
- Acknowledge children’s feelings;
- Involve children in identifying the problem by gathering information from children and restating the problem;
- Ask children for solutions and encourage them to choose one together; and
- Give follow-up support when children act on their decisions.

In December 2016, the State of Michigan adopted new laws restricting the use of seclusion and restraint in schools. As required by the new laws, the Michigan State Board of Education (SBE) developed and adopted a [state policy](#) in March 2017 regarding the use of seclusion and restraint in the public schools. Not later than the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year, local education agencies, including intermediate school districts (ISD), must adopt and implement a local policy that is consistent with the state policy. Specific distinctions for preschool-age children should be included in the policy consistent with the SBE policy. As GSRP is a state-funded program and as ISDs are the sole grantees for GSRP funding, the local policy adopted by the ISD must be applied to all GSRP classrooms regardless of the entity responsible for implementing the program: LEA/PSA, CBO (public or private), college/university. The ISD must monitor both ISD-run and subrecipient-run classrooms for adherence to the policy.

“Specials”

GSRP classrooms housed within an elementary school are sometimes offered additional programming referred to as “specials,” such as library, computers, physical education, music, and/or art classes. It is questionable whether a classroom in which the GSRP teacher is implementing a comprehensive program (as required) has need of additional programming. In addition, the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) requires all regular child use areas be licensed, and MDE requires GSRPs maintain staffing guidelines with staff who have significant credentialing in early childhood education. However, teaching staff may make use of other available space, approved for use by licensing, to support children’s learning. The following should also be considered:

- Children who are at risk of academic failure benefit most from developing strong and positive relationships with the GSRP classroom teachers. How would multiple teachers throughout the week affect a child's sense of safety, security, and emotional development?
- When staggered “specials” are in place, what are the effects on the consistent daily routine for children?
- How would “specials” impact the provision of an appropriate amount of time each day for other parts of the daily routine?
- What effects on children will emerge with the additional transitions that will be required of them?
- In following the ECSQ-PK, GSRP classrooms integrate attention to ALL learning domains throughout the day; if this is already in place in the classroom, is there really any need to implement “specials?”

- How can the grantee bring the expertise of the “specials” staff to the classroom as a normal part of the classroom experience? Consider team planning to ensure developmentally-appropriate activities which adhere to the ECSQ-PK. The “specials” teacher could be incorporated into the classroom as the lead for large-group or small-group time(s), assisting out-of-doors, etc. Even in this case, the “specials” teacher should have activities that reflect what is currently going on in the classroom, as opposed to isolated art, music, or physical education lessons.
- How can “specials” staff contribute anecdotes for use in child assessment?

Meals/Snacks

Grantees must adhere to the [Child and Adult Care Food Program \(CACFP\)/National School Nutrition Programs nutritional guidelines](#). In addition, all programs must follow guidelines of the LARA Child Care Licensing Division. Foods served should reflect the home and community cultures and be high in nutrients and low in saturated and trans-fat, added sugar, and salt. GSRP requires Part-Day programs minimally provide a snack. School-Day operating less than seven hours per day must minimally provide one snack and lunch. All children should eat the same foods unless there is a documented allergy or special need for individualization. Depending on income level, parents may be required to pay tuition, but parents incur no cost for program elements such as any aspect of meal service, including sending in snacks or meals from home. The program incurs the cost for individualization at meals unless changes are part of a special education Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

School cafeterias are problematic areas for GSRP to utilize as snack/meal sites due to time for transitioning, size of tables/chairs/serving materials, auditory and visual over-stimulation, and the loss of quality time for adult-child interactions. All meals/snacks must occur in space approved for use by licensing, and must occur in the GSRP classroom unless there is documented approval from the ISD due to extenuating circumstances. Adults in the classroom sit at the table, eat the same foods children do, and participate in child-initiated conversation. All GSRP meals/snacks must be delivered family-style, supporting children to do things for themselves.

Subrecipients are evaluated each year on family-style meal service with nutritious food. When the menu includes breakfast pizzas, corndogs, French-toast sticks, etc., and subrecipients question whether foods are creditable or nutritious, a formal request can be made to **not** receive specific items. Subrecipients participating in SNP can address concerns with the school district’s local wellness committee or reference the local wellness policy that each district is required to implement. Subrecipients can work with school districts and school boards to ensure that the local nutrition plan is written with quality features, e.g., foods that are high in nutrients low in saturated and trans-fat, added sugar, and salt. The Great Start Collaborative, School Readiness Advisory Committee may help subrecipients to advocate that local nutrition plans include quality menus that reflect the home and community cultures.

If food items from home are permitted for classroom celebrations, consider providing a 'nutritious food list' within the GSRP Parent Handbook. Include special notation on allergies, a companion list of foods with low nutritional value, potential choking hazards and a contact person for questions.

Family Style Meals

Snacks and meals in GSRP are part of the curriculum. Decisions regarding meal service should not be made based on ease and efficiency for adults. Snack and mealtimes provide daily opportunities to demonstrate the program philosophy in a visible way through the practices of participatory learning and authentic conversations that build relationships between children and adults. Below are quality features of family style meals, where adults and children eat together in the classroom.

Flexibility in Meal Service

Multiple conversations with program staff and parents have made it clear that more and more families are adopting specialized diets or desire food that reflects the home and community cultures, is high in nutrients and low in saturated and trans-fat, added sugar, and salt. Some of these features are not easily met by programs.

ISDs and local programs may adopt new meal service policies allowing families to provide meals and/or snacks for their children. There are several conditions that must be met.

- Families must not be expected or encouraged to provide food for their child or the program.
- Meal and snack service meeting Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)/National School Nutrition Program (NSNP) requirements must continue to be provided.
- All licensing requirements for food service must be met.
- In GSRP/Head Start Blend classrooms, the highest standard from either program must be adhered to.
- Family style meal service must continue. Children of families who provide food intermingle with the rest of the class at snack/meals, sitting and eating with the rest of the class and participating in all other aspects of the family style meal.
- Meals and snacks provided by families must also meet CACFP/NSNP requirements except when documented food allergies or intolerance or family beliefs prohibit. If inappropriate foods are provided, teaching staff with the support of food service providers, program administrators, and ECS must work with families to meet the requirements or utilize the provided meals.
- Families providing their own meals and snacks must sign an agreement stating their intent and their understanding of the requirements. For a sample form, see [resources](#) of this section.

Programs will also want to consider several situations that may occur if flexibility is offered. These and more should be incorporated into program policies, staff training, and written guidance provided to families.

- Will refrigeration be provided for meals brought from home? Will families be limited to foods that do not requiring heating/warming?
- How will staff manage possible child reactions to their own or other’s meals?
- If parents choosing this option do not send in food for their child, how will the program ensure there is sufficient food to provide meals and snacks for that child?
- If a child brings food that does not meet the requirements, will they be allowed to eat it, or will it be replaced? Who will communicate with and advise the family?

This added flexibility for parents does not remove the requirement that parents must incur no cost for program elements, unless in this case only, they choose to supply their child’s food. This guidance also does not remove the requirement to evaluate subrecipients each year on family-style meal service with nutritious food.

Planning for Meals

- Plan enough time for meals and snacks. When children assist with set-up, passing and clean-up, expect meals to take 40 - 45 minutes. Snacks will take 15 – 20 minutes.
- Center-based programs must follow [guidelines of the LARA Child Care Licensing Division](#).
- Assure there is enough food for each meal and snack. See the [CACFP meal pattern](#). A sufficient amount of food must be available to provide the full, minimum servings of each of the required food components for all children along with adult(s) eating family-style with the children. Note that while the CACFP/NSLP/SBP Preschool meal pattern charts list the minimum required serving sizes for reimbursable meals and snacks, best nutritional practice would be to plan for a bit more of vegetables, fruits and milk.
- Foods served should reflect the home and community cultures and be high in nutrients and low in saturated and trans-fat, added sugar, and salt.
- Children’s eating behaviors, food preferences, and willingness to try new foods are influenced by the people around them. Up to 12 experiences can be necessary for a child to try and then accept a new food! GSRP teachers help by encouraging children to explore and taste new foods.
- Children may have never experienced a meal served family style. Preschoolers love to serve themselves and will easily succeed with some guidance and encouragement. Be prepared to offer intentional support at the start of each school year, with newly-enrolled children and after breaks from school, such as long weekends and holidays. Use real food service materials to set up “meal” provisions in the house area, water table and sand table so that children can practice.

The Meal Service Environment

- Meals take place in the classroom, away from high traffic areas. Noises and distractions are minimized or eliminated.
- A non-carpeted surface provides for easier clean-up.
- Children have enough space at the table for serving, passing and eating comfortably.

- Serving utensils are child-size with comfortable handles. Small scoops, tongs, and spoons may work best. One-quarter and one-half cup measuring cups with handles can be ideal for supporting both fine motor and concept development. Use small pitchers with handles and pouring spouts for serving beverages. Bowls with wide lips are most easily handled by young children. Plastic serving bowls are light-weight and don't conduct heat.
- Plates, bowls, glasses, cups and eating utensils are child-sized. Consider using plates with limited patterns and designs so that the focus remains on the food. Consider using smaller lunch or salad plates because dinner plates can be difficult for children to handle.
- A gallon ice-cream container or sand-pail, along with cleaning cloths, make fine clean-up materials for child use.

Characteristics of Family Style Meals

- Children assist to prepare for snack or mealtime by assisting with washing and setting tables.
- At the beginning of the meal, children bring food to the table in serving bowls, plates, or baskets that children can use comfortably. There are serving utensils for all food.
- Children choose where they will sit. At least one adult sits at each table where children eat and eats the same foods children do. Adults typically position themselves in a mid-position, to more easily provide support and have rich conversation with all children.
- Food is passed from one person to another.
- Typically, an adult begins passing each food item, modeling with action and words as they serve themselves. For example, "Today we have yellow string beans. I am taking one spoonful of beans and then I'll pass them to my friend Tamilla. Tamilla, here you go! You might want one or two spoonfuls of beans." Adults provide verbal description as they model how to pass bowls and show children how to use two hands while holding a bowl on the outside so that their fingers do not touch the food. Adults model how to pour and scoop using appropriate utensils. Adults model conventional table manners, such as waiting for turns, passing foods and saying "please" and "thank you".
- Children are offered each meal component and make their own food choices based on individual appetites and preferences.
- Rather than acting as servers, adults sit at the tables with children throughout the snack or meal, unless more food is needed from larger or high-temperature containers.
- Everyone serves themselves. Children are encouraged to take a portion of each food component. Family style meal service affords some latitude in the size of initial servings because replenishment is immediately available.
- Adults offer minimal assistance as needed. In the rare instance where one child needs more help than others, the adult can encourage peer support, and/or the child can be encouraged to sit near an adult at the start of the meal.
- Children choose whether to eat, what to eat, and how much to eat. Have enough food available to meet meal pattern requirements and to allow for seconds.

- Some food will spill as children serve themselves. Be prepared for this with a nearby pail of soapy water and paper toweling. The adult remains seated as the child (and sometimes peers) is calmly supported to clean up spills, wash hands and return to the meal.
- Adults participate in child-initiated conversation.
- Children help clean-up by clearing their places at the table, disposing of their leftovers, washing the table, and pushing in their own chairs. Preparation suggestions include having a nearby pail of soapy water and small cloths. If a cleaning bucket is used, it is cleaned after each meal service and cloths are either disposable or laundered after each meal service. Adults do final cleaning/sanitizing after the meal has ended and children have left the table.

Rest/Quiet Time

Centers that operate five or more hours must have a written rest or quiet time policy. The policy must comply with rest requirements of the LARA, Child Care Licensing Division. The policy should include:

- A time period no longer than one hour, while accommodating for the individual needs of children.
- Provision of alternate activities for children who do not sleep.
- Provision for parents and staff to support the developmentally-appropriate rest/nap needs of each child.
- Details on transition into rest time [e.g., children assist with putting cots out, getting their own blanket(s) and transition item(s); and turning off lights and turning on soft music]. Adults can assist in transition by moving among children in an unhurried fashion, having quiet conversation and providing soothing touch such as backrubs.
- Details on transition out of rest time (e.g., staff turn on soft music, open blinds, turn on lights, and gently awaken children with a touch and conversation). Children can assist in transition by putting away cots, blankets and transition items.

Parent Involvement

Parent engagement is critical to positive child outcomes. The GSRP provides a variety of opportunities for parents to become involved in the program and regularly seeks input from parents. Refer to the [Parent Involvement](#) section for more information. **Parents must not be required to volunteer in the classroom or participate in group meetings as a condition of enrollment.**

Transportation

Providing child transportation to and from the center contributes significantly to family access to GSRP, but this service is not required. Where transportation is offered, parents must not be charged transportation fees. GSRP funds may be used to pay for transportation but must meet the guidelines set in the [Budget](#) section of this manual.

LARA Licensing Rules for Child Care Centers include requirements for the transportation of preschoolers. Licensing rules assure the safety and welfare of children, that children are properly supervised while being transported, and are not confined in a vehicle for long periods of time. Licensing rules apply to both routine and field trip transportation. There are specific rules for center-owned vehicles, vehicles of staff or volunteers, or other private transportation and also specific guidelines for public school bus transportation of preschoolers. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recommends preschool-age children transported in school buses always be transported in properly secured child safety restraint systems. Grantees must ensure:

- Parents give permission for their children to be transported;
- Children are escorted by adults to and from vehicles;
- Children are offered adult assistance when entering and exiting vehicles;
- There is one caregiver, in addition to the driver, when there are over 10 three-year-old children, or over 12 four-year-old children on the bus; and
- Children are not to be in a vehicle for more than one continuous hour.