



Michigan Department of Education Office of Great Start

Curriculum Approval Process Overview

Infant and Toddler Programs and Family and
Group Child Care Home Programs

Letter from the Michigan Department of Education



Dear families, providers, administrators, policymakers, and partners,

Michigan has a rich history of providing high-quality, early childhood opportunities to all children across the state, including our most vulnerable children. Since launching Great Start to Quality (GSQ) in 2011, we've learned a lot about how to define and assess quality and how to help child care professionals improve services for children. Great Start to Quality strives to help families make informed decisions about child care and support child care programs as they improve their quality and provide the best care possible for children. As the program has improved and evolved, early childhood partners, MDE and the Early Childhood Investment Corporation (ECIC) have worked together to maintain essential markers of quality.

Curriculum is no exception. The early childhood field is constantly learning and innovating, and the list of state-approved curricula for GSQ needs to be updated regularly to align with best practices and state standards. This document explains how the state reviews and approves curricula for use with infants and toddlers and family child care settings as part of GSQ rating process. While written primarily to support curriculum vendors as they complete the process, the MDE encourages all partners to review the materials to better understand how the state considers comprehensive curricula.

The MDE updates these materials regularly to ensure clear communications between the department and its partners. If you have questions about the process or have suggestions for improving our materials, please contact Lisa Brewer Walraven at brewer-walravenl@michigan.gov.

Thank you for all you do to improve opportunities and outcomes for young children.

Sincerely,

Lisa Brewer Walraven, Director Child Development and Care
Office of Great Start

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Background

Michigan's Office of Great Start (OGS) has been charged with ensuring that all children birth to age eight, especially those in greatest need, have access to high-quality early learning and development programs and enter kindergarten prepared for success. As part of that charge, OGS oversees the federal Preschool Development, Birth to Five grant, which includes a mixed-delivery system of child- and family-serving programs. The early childhood component of the mixed-delivery system includes a mix of federal, state, and privately funded programs targeting early learning and care, including the following:

- Head Start/Early Head Start (children 0–5)
- Great Start to Readiness Program/GSRP (preschool-age children)
- Child Development and Care (CDC) program (infants, toddlers, preschool children, and school-age children)
- Private-pay child care and preschool programs, including licensed center-based care, licensed family homes, and license-exempt subsidized care (infants, toddlers, preschool children, and school-age children)

In this role, the OGS must achieve an important balance. It must ensure that curricula implemented in programs participating in the mixed-delivery system meet high standards, specifically Michigan's Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Prekindergarten (ECSQ-PK) and Michigan's Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Infant and Toddler Programs (ECSQ-IT). At the same time, the OGS needs an approval process that responds to new and innovative curricula emerging in the field.

This document describes the curriculum approval process for programs serving **infants and toddlers in center-based settings** and programs serving **children in family and group home-based settings**. As a part of the approval process, this document also includes how curricula are submitted for consideration, reviewed, scored, and approved. This process was designed using best practices from other states and feedback from Michigan stakeholders.

Note: Vendors interested in submitting a curriculum for consideration should review this document in full.

Qualities of an Effective, Comprehensive Curriculum

This process is designed to ensure all children enrolled in infant and toddler programs or family and group child care homes have access to a high-quality curriculum. A curriculum encompasses the full range of a child's experience at school and is the key to a high-quality learning and developmental environment. A truly effective curriculum successfully blends best practices in theory and practice to support children's overall development and provide an intentional set of experiences and activities that build on a child's natural sense of inquiry.¹

Infant and toddler programs and family and group home providers should implement a comprehensive, child-focused, constructivist curriculum model for all enrolled children, which strikes an appropriate balance of child-initiated activities and adult-guided active learning. Providers interact with children to establish important relationships, build on their understanding, and enhance learning and development. Learning is play-based, allowing children opportunities to develop important skills and knowledge within the context of inquiry and interactions. Teachers in family and group home-based programs build flexible schedules and age-appropriate care routines, provide a range of learning experiences designed to address the needs of children in mixed-age groups, and maintain close communication with families. Teachers in infant and toddler programs understand that all learning is based on secure and responsive relationships with caring adults and create environments and experiences that extend knowledge across domains, focus on the importance of movement and exploration, utilize daily care routines as key opportunities for learning and development, and, importantly, create strong partnerships with families.

Curricula for infant and toddler programs must support the Essential Instructional Practices in Language and Emergent Literacy, Birth to Three, developed by the General Education Leadership Network (GELN) of the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators. Curricula for family and group home-based programs must support the GELN Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy–Pre-K.

The state does not identify one best curriculum model. Instead, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) uses its curriculum approval process and Curriculum Model Evaluation Rubrics for infant and toddler and family and group home programs to assess a curriculum's alignment with Michigan's ECSQ-PK (for family and group home programs) and Michigan's ECSQ-IT (for infant and toddler programs). The rubrics for the infant and toddler and family and group home program curricula were developed in alignment with Michigan's rubric for GSRP preschool programs, with modifications based on a review of selection criteria from the Office of Head Start's Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC), as well as a review of research and best practices for developing curricula for infant and toddler and family child care programs.¹

¹ ECLKC curriculum review criteria for infant and toddler and family child care programs accessed online at <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/curriculum/about-curriculum-consumer-report/criteria-infant-toddler-curricula> and <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/curriculum/about-curriculum-consumer-report/criteria-family-child-care-curricula>; R.

Chazan-Cohen et al., *Working toward a Definition of Infant/Toddler Curricula: Intentionally Furthering the Development of Individual Children within Responsive Relationships*, Network of Infant-Toddler Researchers, March 2017, accessed online at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED592769.pdf>; J. R. Lally, *Infants Have Their Own Curriculum: A Responsive Approach to*

Michigan's rubrics include five major areas:

- Valid research: Is the curriculum grounded in sound theory and research?
- Evaluation results: What evidence exists that the curriculum is effective?
- Professional development: How does the curriculum support educators' professional learning?
- Developmental appropriateness: Is the curriculum developmentally appropriate for infants and toddlers and/or mixed-age children in home-based care?
- Alignment with state standards: Is the curriculum aligned with Michigan's early learning standards for PreK and infant and toddler programs?

Process Overview

The MDE accepts, reviews, and approves curricula every other year. Only curriculum vendors can submit a curriculum for approval. They are called “vendors” or “curriculum vendors” throughout this document.

How to Submit a Curriculum for Review

Vendors must signal their interest in submitting a curriculum for approval by completing the intent to submit form during the curriculum review cycle, which helps the MDE determine how many requests will be submitted and ensures reviewers will be prepared for the volume of requests. This form must be submitted **via email no later than August 20, 2021.**

Based on the review timeline, vendors must submit four (4) full sets of their curricula and supporting materials for review **by August 27, 2021.** In addition, the vendor must complete the curriculum alignment rubric to explain how the curriculum meets Michigan's requirements. A checklist has been created for vendors' use and is posted on the Great Start to Quality (GSQ) website to help ensure vendors submit the correct materials.

Once materials are received, the MDE will review the application to ensure all materials and forms are included. The MDE will follow up with vendors if there are any questions about the materials.

How Curricula Are Reviewed, Scored, and Approved

The curriculum approval process is supported by the MDE; however, the curriculum review committee (CRC), made up of early childhood experts, will review curricula. This committee includes members representing diverse perspectives and is responsible for ensuring a fair and thorough review of proposals.

Curriculum Planning for Infants and Toddlers, WestEd Center for Child and Family Studies, 1999, accessed online at <https://ccrnj.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Infants-Have-Their-Own-Curriculum.pdf>.

Charge


The CRC's charge is to review, score, and approve infant and toddler curricula using the Infant and Toddler Curriculum Model Evaluation Rubric and family and group curricula using the Family and Group Child Care Home Curriculum Model Evaluation Rubric. The rubrics will be used to assess a curriculum's alignment with the five major elements of effective and quality curriculum design: valid research, evaluation results, professional development, developmental appropriateness, and alignment with state standards.

Structure

The CRC consists of nine members, each serving for three-year terms. Members represent the following perspectives:

TABLE 1.

Perspective	Number of Members	Sample Members
Infant and toddler and family and group child care providers	3	Potential members include infant and toddler (I/T) experts, Head Start and Early Head Start directors, and other I/T specialists.
Early learning and education experts	2	Potential members include professionals with expertise across a broad spectrum of early childhood education and development, such as infant and toddler development, child assessments, or developmental screening tools.
Higher education	2	Potential members include university or community college researchers or administrators with expertise in prekindergarten or early education policy, programming, or curriculum.
K–3 educators	1	Potential member is an educator or administrator with certification in early childhood and relevant experience working with GSRP graduates in K–3 classrooms.
MDE	1	Potential member could include staff with expertise in early childhood education and development and I/T expertise and experience.



The CRC has been expanded since the last GSRP curriculum review to include members with experience and expertise with children age eight and younger, including infants and toddlers.

Appointments

The MDE is committed to identifying highly qualified individuals to serve on the CRC. The MDE will receive recommendations for CRC members, and individuals can submit themselves or recommend a colleague. Individuals must:

- Demonstrate they represent one or more of the perspectives above
- Demonstrate a strong background in early learning and development
- Commit to three years of service to the CRC

We will be using previous CRC members who participated in the PreK review process. Ad hoc members will be added as needed for additional curriculum review.

Conflict of Interest

To avoid any appearance of or actual conflicts of interest, all CRC members must sign an agreement asserting their commitment to adhere to the following statements.

- I agree to review infant and toddler and family and group curricula in an objective manner based on the established rubric and process developed by the MDE.
- I agree to maintain appropriate confidentiality before, during, and after the review process.
- I agree to declare current affiliations with the curriculum vendor and recuse myself from any decision that may present a conflict of interest.
- I confirm that neither I nor any family members have a direct or indirect financial interest in any infant and toddler or family and group child care curriculum model or vendor.
- I agree to recuse myself from the evaluation of any curriculum that will give an appearance of impropriety and in this way compromise the review process, thereby eliminating and avoiding any potential conflict of interest in the review process.
- To further avoid a conflict of interest or the appearance of impropriety, for a period of 12 months after completion of my duties as a reviewer, I will not seek or accept employment from, nor will I become directly or indirectly financially interested in, any newly approved infant and toddler or family and group child care curriculum publisher.

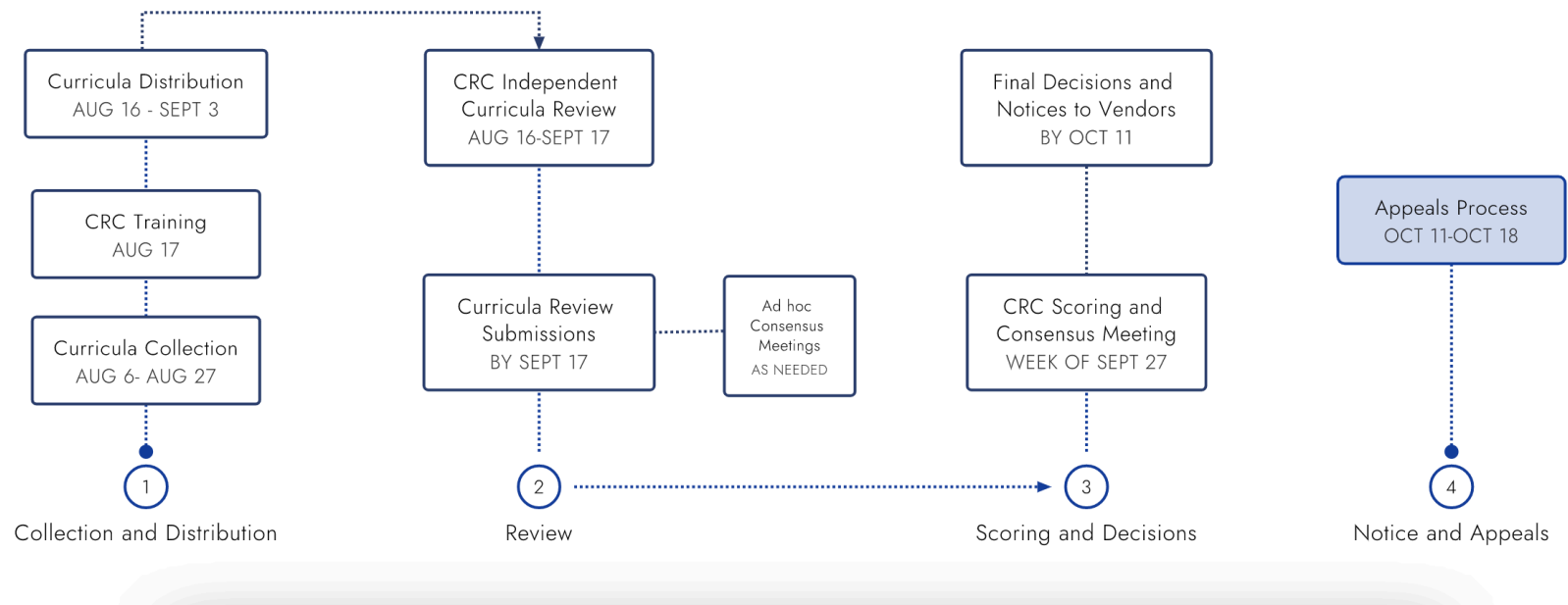
All submitted curricula are reviewed using the Infant and Toddler and Family and Group Child Care Home Curriculum Model Evaluation Rubrics. Both rubrics include evaluation criteria that are

closely aligned with the guidelines established for early childhood programs by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The rubrics use a scale of zero to seven to score a submission's alignment with criteria organized in five major areas:

- Valid research
 - Criteria assess the curriculum's grounding in theory and support from research
- Evaluation results
 - Criteria assess the curriculum's demonstration of positive effect on key learning and development outcomes in rigorous studies
- Professional development
 - Criteria assess the curriculum's inclusion of a significant and high-quality professional development approach
- Developmental appropriateness
 - Criteria assess the degree to which the curriculum content and the promotion of family/school partnerships are developmentally appropriate
- Alignment with state standards
 - Criteria assess the degree to which the curriculum content aligns with Michigan's early learning standards for infants and toddlers and children across mixed-age groups in home-based family child care settings

Each major area contains detailed criteria that will be scored and averaged to determine the area's composite score.

CURRICULA REVIEW PROCESS



Review Process

Each curriculum proposal will be assigned to two or three members of the CRC, which will depend on the number of curricula submitted. The CRC members, or reviewers, will independently evaluate and score each assigned curriculum based on its ability to meet or exceed the criteria. Reviewers assigned the same curricula may hold ad hoc meetings prior to the full CRC meeting; however, it is not mandatory. Following independent review, the CRC will convene for a full-day meeting to discuss the curricula ratings with other CRC members who have been assigned the same curricula. During this time, the reviewers will break out into smaller sessions with members who reviewed the same curricula, discuss their assigned curricula, and calculate average scores for each submitted curriculum. The calculated scores and a recommendation will be reported back to the full CRC.

During the breakout sessions, if there is any disagreement among reviewers on the calculated scores of the assigned curricula that will lead to a curriculum being approved or denied, the reviewers will discuss and attempt to reach an agreement on the scores. This process may mean that calculated scores remain the same or that one or more of the reviewers will adjust their score based on the discussions during the breakout session. However, if the disagreement on scoring between the original reviewers cannot be resolved during the breakout session, those issues will be brought to the full CRC for consideration.

Standards for Approval

For a curriculum to be fully approved for statewide use, it must receive:

- An average composite score of five or higher in *each* of the five major areas
- A five or higher in all criteria related to alignment with Michigan's Early Childhood Standards of Quality (Prekindergarten and Infant and Toddler) and General Education Leadership Network (GELN) Essential Instructional Practices (Pre-K and Birth to Three)
- A three or higher in all non-ECSQ-PK and non-ECSQ-IT criteria

If information needed to evaluate a criterion is not provided, that criterion will be given a score of zero, which is indicated by the INP designator. This score is averaged with the other criteria in that area.

Decisions

Following CRC review and scoring, a proposed curriculum will receive one of two determinations.

TABLE 2.

Determination	Explanation
Approved— Statewide	The curriculum meets all standards for approval and is approved for use statewide.
Denied	The curriculum does not meet the criteria for approval. Vendors may appeal this decision or reapply after the deficiency identified by reviewers has been addressed.

Communications

Vendors will receive their decision letter and a consensus scoring rubric electronically. The CRC’s policies and procedures for appeals process will be included.



Appeals Process

The MDE is committed to identifying high-quality, aligned curricula for use in infant and toddler and family and group child care home classrooms. If a vendor feels the CRC's decision did not accurately reflect their materials submitted originally, the vendor may appeal to the CRC.

The formal appeal process described below is in accordance with the MDE appeals policies and procedures, with clearly outlined eligibility requirements, instructions for submission, and a review process designed to reduce the burden on the vendor and reviewers.

How to Submit an Appeal

For a vendor to be granted an appeal, the CRC must receive an electronic intent to appeal letter from the vendor within five (5) calendar days of decision notification. Then, within ten (10) calendar days of that notification, the CRC must receive another electronic letter that includes the following elements in accordance with the CRC appeals process for policies and procedures:

- The criteria/sub-criteria the vendor believes were not scored correctly
- The documentation in their original proposal that substantiates their claim—no new information may be submitted for an appeal
- A description of how a change in scoring could result in the curriculum reaching the threshold for approval

The intent to appeal and formal appeal documents must be submitted to Eugenia McRae at mcrae@schoolreadinessconsulting.com with a copy (cc) to Lisa Brewer-Walraven at Brewer-WalravenL@michigan.gov, Director for Child Development and Care.

How Appeals Are Reviewed

The MDE will review each formal appeal to ensure that timelines are met and that a change in scoring would result in the curriculum reaching the threshold for approval. Following the MDE's review of appeals, the full CRC will reconvene to review the disputed section or sections and develop revised consensus scores for each appealed curriculum, if necessary. The CRC members who evaluated and scored the curriculum during the initial phase will serve in an advisory capacity, and the final decision will be made by the remaining members.

After an appeal, the CRC's decision is final. If the curriculum still does not receive full approval, the curriculum may be resubmitted for consideration in the next curriculum review cycle along with documentation that the program has been changed or updated to address the previously identified gaps.

Communications

The CRC's final decision letter and updated scoring rubric will be provided to the vendor electronically.

Approved Curriculum List

The MDE will publish the list of approved curricula.

Future Updates

This curriculum approval process document will be reviewed and updated, as needed, in advance of each curriculum review cycle. The document will be publicly available year-round on the GSQ website. Questions about these materials can be directed to Lisa Brewer-Walraven at Brewer-WalravenL@michigan.gov, Director for Child Development and Care.