| GREAT START READINESS PROGRAM (GSRP)<br>Risk Factor Definition | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Child Risk Factor** | **Definition/Documentation** | **Discussion** |
| 1. Extremely-low family income | **Definition:** Below 200% of federal poverty level (FPL).<br><br>**Documentation:**<br>• Document gross income.<br>• Copy of income verification on file: previous year's tax forms, paycheck stub, DHS child care verification form, subsidized meal form **including** income calculation, **or** staff signature verifying family produced the document and income was verified.<br>• Include income of family members legally responsible for support of child.<br>• See Implementation Manual, Sections 2 and 3, for additional information. | Children living in families who are income-eligible for Head Start are referred to Head Start. This risk factor category is reserved for children eligible for Head Start who cannot be served in Head Start, and those just over the Head Start income guideline. Extremely-low family income is associated with inability to access many services and necessities that impact children's health, development, and learning. This risk factor counts as two risk factors when prioritizing children for enrollment. |
| 2. Low-family income | **Definition:** Between 200% and 300% of FPL.<br><br>**Documentation:**<br>• See above. | Families at this economic level cannot afford high-quality preschool experiences for their children. In conjunction with at least one other risk factor, this impacts the child's chances for school success. |
| 3. Diagnosed disability or identified developmental delay | **Definition:** Child is eligible for special education services or child's developmental progress is less than that expected for his/her chronological age, or chronic health issues cause development or learning problems.<br><br>**Documentation:**<br>• Referral or diagnosis from physical or mental health system or provider, or other early childhood program<br>• *Early On®* transition referral at age three<br>• Special education referral; developmental concerns noted, but not eligible for services<br>• Individualized Education Plan (IEP)<br>• Screening assessment results combined with professional or parental referral<br>• Specific diagnosis on health form | A child may be eligible because of a specific diagnosis or significant delay resulting in an Individualized Education Program (IEP).<br><br>Developmental progress may be less than expected in one or more developmental domains (cognitive, social, emotional, physical), **or** child was eligible for Part C of IDEA (*Early On®*) services, but not Part B, 619 (i.e., not eligible for early childhood special education services, but at risk of becoming special education eligible).<br>Child has health issues, including high lead level, that have a high probability of resulting in a developmental delay or learning difficulty, although not yet detectable. Physician referral, special education referral, developmental screening, or parent report may indicate delay.<br><br>Parental report of developmental concern or chronic health concern should be referred to the local intermediate school district for observation and/or evaluation and recommendation. |
| 4. Severe or challenging behavior | **Definition:** Child has been expelled from preschool or child care center.<br><br>**Documentation:**<br>• Exclusion from other preschool/child care programs.<br>• Social services or medical referrals.<br>• Parent interview questions/report.<br>• Legal report or restraining order.<br>• Staff documentation on home visits or other contacts. | Child's behavior has prevented participation in another group setting or mental health professional has referred.<br><br>Interview question: "Does anyone in the household hit or throw things when he/she is angry?" |

| Child Risk Factor | Definition/Documentation | Discussion |
|---|---|---|
| 5. Primary home language other than English | **Definition:** English is not spoken in the child's home; English is not the child's first language.<br><br>**Documentation:**<br>• Interview question: "What language is spoken in your home?"<br>• Parent or advocate report. | Children entering school not speaking English must learn the language as well as the academic content. For most children in the United States who do not speak English at home, academic learning will be slowed unless they have opportunities to read, write, hear, and speak correct English in their preschool years. |
| 6. Parent/guardian with low educational attainment | **Definition:** Parent has not graduated from high school or is illiterate.<br><br>**Documentation:**<br>• Parent report.<br>• School report, record, or referral. | To enter school ready to learn, children need many experiences with books and language. Parents who cannot read or who have low educational attainment are less able to help their own children by offering them the consistent, frequent, and positive experiences with books and language they need for school success. |
| 7. Abuse/neglect of child or parent | **Definition:** Domestic, sexual, or physical abuse of child or parent; child neglect issues.<br>Child Protective Services report.<br><br>**Documentation:**<br>• Parent report.<br>• Court or police report.<br>• Restraining order in domestic violence situation.<br>• Family received services in a 0-3 Secondary Prevention Program.<br>• Medical report.<br>• Community knowledge of family.<br>• May be discovered on home visits. | Includes abuse/neglect of child as well as domestic/spousal abuse of parent or sibling.<br><br>Abuse of alcohol, prescription or non-prescription (inhalants, cough syrup, methamphetamine, etc.) drugs by family members or in the home. |
| 8. Environmental risk | **Definition:** Parental loss due to death, divorce, incarceration, military service, or absence;<br><br>**Documentation:**<br>• Parent report.<br>• Divorce and custody papers.<br>• Death certificate.<br>• Other legal forms.<br>• Deployment orders.<br>• Letter from facility.<br><br>**Definition:** sibling issues;<br><br>**Documentation:**<br>• Legal or medical report.<br>• Parent report.<br>• Agency referral. | Could include armed services deployment, incarceration, chronic illness (physical, mental, emotional), or frequent changes in custody, grandparents raising grandchildren, single parent, foster family or marital problems.<br><br>Child's situation is negatively effected by issues related to a sibling (e.g., chronic illness, behavior issues, disability, death). |

| Child Risk Factor | Definition/Documentation | Discussion |
|---|---|---|
| 8. Environmental risk (continued) | **Definition:** teen parent (not age 20 when first child born);<br><br>**Documentation:**<br>• Birth certificate.<br>• Ages of siblings. | If child is a much later birth, rather than the first child of a teenager or one of several in close proximity, the factor may or may not cause risk and should be examined carefully. |
| | **Definition:** family is homeless or without stable housing;<br><br>**Documentation:**<br>• Address records.<br>• Custody orders.<br>• Parent report.<br>• Social services or medical referral.<br>• | Family is homeless, living in a shelter or with other families, is in home foreclosure, or has frequent changes of residence. |
| | **Definition:** residence in a high-risk neighborhood (area of high poverty, high crime, with limited access to critical community services); or<br><br>**Documentation:**<br>• Parent report.<br>• Staff report (may be identified by staff at home visit). | Child experiences daily exposure to environmental pollutants (lead exposure, rodents, insect infestations), high crime, violence, injury, drug abuse, or death rates; unsafe or crowded housing, lack of utilities, or no space for children's play. |
| | **Definition:** prenatal or postnatal exposure to toxic substances known to cause learning or developmental delays.<br><br>**Documentation:**<br>• Medical or hospital records.<br>• Parent report.<br>• Social services referral. | Prenatal or postnatal toxic exposure including Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, children born addicted, or environmentally-induced respiratory problems. |

# *SAMPLE*: INCOME VERIFICATION

Program Name Here

Child Name: _____

This child is income-eligible to participate in:

☐ Head Start ☐ Great Start Readiness Program ☐ Other: _____

| Income Source | Amount Received |
|---|---|
| ☐ Income Tax Form 1040 | _____ |
| ☐ W-2 | _____ |
| ☐ TANF documentation | _____ |
| ☐ Pay Stub or Pay Envelopes | _____ |
| ☐ Unemployment | _____ |
| ☐ Written statement from employers | _____ |
| ☐ Foster Care Reimbursement | _____ |
| ☐ SSI documentation | _____ |
| ☐ Child Support | _____ |
| ☐ Alimony | _____ |
| ☐ Pension(s) | _____ |
| ☐ Other | _____ |

Documentation of no income: _____

I verify that I viewed documentation of the information provided above.

_____ _____

Staff Signature Date of verification

_____

Staff Title

# ELIGIBILITY

## Age

GSRP was designed to provide high-quality preschool to children at risk for low educational attainment in the school year before they are eligible for kindergarten; children enrolled in GSRP must be at least four, but not five, on or before December 1, of the year in which they enroll in GSRP. However, June 2012 legislation describes a three-year process to move the eligibility date for *kindergarten* from December 1 to September 1. For children who are younger than the age guidelines, there is also a provision for parent choice. These date changes impact GSRP eligibility. Each year children will need to be 4 by the gradually changing date.

| | 2012-2013 | 2013-2014 | 2014-2015 | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kindergarten | Age 5 on or before 12/01/12<br><br>Date of Birth: 12/02/2006 – 12/01/2007 | Age 5 on or before 11/01/13<br><br>Date of Birth: 12/02/2007 – 11/01/2008 | Age 5 on or before 10/01/14<br><br>Date of Birth: 11/02/2008 – 10/01/2009 | Age 5 on or before 09/01/15<br><br>Date of Birth: 10/02/2009 – 09/01/2010 | Age 5 on or before 09/01/16<br><br>Date of Birth: 09/02/2010 – 09/01/2011 |
| GSRP | Age 4 on or before 12/01/12<br><br>Date of Birth: 12/02/2007 - 12/01/2008 | Age 4 on or before 11/01/13<br><br>Date of Birth: 11/02/2008 - 11/01/2009 | Age 4 on or before 10/01/14<br><br>Date of Birth: 10/02/2009 - 10/01/2010 | Age 4 on or before 09/01/15<br><br>Date of Birth: 09/02/2010 - 09/01/2011 | Age 4 on or before 09/01/16<br><br>Date of Birth: 09/02/2011 - 09/01/2012 |

To avoid a break in educational programming, an additional year of GSRP is allowed for the age-cohort of children with birthdates in the one month that prevents entry to kindergarten. In this instance, the child and family do not need to re-qualify for the program.

- Children who turn 4 during November 2012 can attend in both 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 year;
- Children who turn 4 during October 2013 can attend in both 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 year; and
- Children who turn 4 during September 2014 can attend in both 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 year.

While children and families will benefit from two years with the same teaching team, this may result in the ethical conversations to re-enroll a child which can result in another, eligible child, receiving no GSRP. Programs must reflect these changes in the written processes for *eligibility and prioritization*.

## Sensitive Interviewing

Many programs use a brief phone interview to initially screen children to determine whether they might be eligible. A family that seems to have an eligible child should be invited for a more in-depth interview. Giving parents a list of questions or factors to fill out on their own is not recommended; many topics are confidential and can be uncomfortable to address. Parents should be assured that confidentiality is strictly maintained and that the program carefully protects personal information. Sensitive interviewing techniques help to build the strong relational foundation for helpful and appropriate services for children and families.

## Prioritization

Refer to the *Eligibility Flow Chart* in the resources for this section for detail about the specific prioritization process of risk factors that grantees are required to implement during the recruitment and enrollment process. A written prioritization process provides clear direction that may include weighted priority for local considerations such as lead exposure and impartial guidance for staff on situations where children present with similar risk factors. Many programs "hold open" a few slots, anticipating that some of the most eligible families may apply as the school year is beginning. When deciding whether a situation or condition should be considered, the most important question to ask is whether and how the situation puts the child at risk of school failure and how the risk factor will have a negative impact on the child's development. If the situation or condition is not something that puts the child's educational future at risk, then it is not a risk factor for that child.

Collaborative recruitment and enrollment processes between GSRP and Head Start are legislatively mandated. Written procedures should include processes for monthly monitoring of funded enrollment and apparent reasons for unfilled slots should be addressed by the administrative team. Refer to the *Recruitment and Enrollment* section for further clarification.

## Documenting Risk Factors

There are eight risk factors. Based on the prevalence data, family income is the most utilized factor in determining eligibility for GSRP. Tiered income eligibility ensures that GSRP finds and provides services to its target population and focuses on those most at risk. Extremely low family income is defined as below 200 percent of the federal poverty level and low family income is defined as between 200 to 300 percent of the federal poverty level. In addition, as part of the prioritization process, at least 75 percent of the children enrolling into the program must have parent(s) that are identified with one of these two factors.

The eight risk factors used to determine GSRP eligibility are:

1. Extremely low family income
2. Low family income

3. Diagnosed disability or identified developmental delay
4. Severe or challenging behavior
5. Primary home language other than English
6. Parent(s) with low educational attainment
7. Abuse/neglect of child or parent
8. Environmental risk

The same condition or concern should not be counted twice; e.g., a child with severe or challenging behavior should not also be considered as having a developmental delay in the social/emotional domain. Additionally, more than one situation under environmental risk may apply to a child and should be documented; however, environmental risk may be counted as only one risk factor.

It is recommended that programs record all risk factors for each child at the time of enrollment; additional risk factors that staff become aware of beyond the enrollment period are also recorded. The documentation is helpful in designing program services for children, making referrals for family members and helping to create summaries of risk factor prevalence locally and state-wide. When "parent report" can be used as documentation, the interviewer and the parent can sign and date a form indicating which risk factors pertain. Alternately, a note can be included in the file with the staff member's signature and date indicating WHAT the parent reported; e.g., to document parent report of low educational attainment, the following could be noted:

> *8/12/10 - At the intake interview, Ms. Brown reported that she has a GED and the child's father has not graduated from high school.*
> *Julie Smith, Lead Teacher*

The chart, *Risk Factor Definitions*, found in the resources for this section, will help to further define each of the risk factors and suggest possible ways to document them. MDE collects risk factor information on each enrolled child in the *Child Information and Staff Report* (CISR), and documentation is reviewed during On-Site Monitoring Visits.

## Income

Income for each family must be verified before determining that a child is eligible to participate in the program. MDE strongly encourages use of the *Income Verification* form, found in the resources for this section, and encourages programs to maintain copies of all eligibility documents along with the eligibility verification form in the child's official record.

Grantees should provide annual training to employees responsible for determining and verifying income eligibility. All staff must have clear understanding of effective practices to protect personally identifying information.

Income means total cash receipts before taxes from all sources, with the exceptions noted below. Income includes money wages or salary before deductions; net income from self-employment; regular payments from Social Security or railroad retirement; payments from unemployment compensation, strike benefits from union funds, workers' compensation, veterans benefits (with the exception noted below), public assistance (including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Supplemental Security Income, Emergency Assistance money payments, and non-Federally funded General Assistance or General Relief money payments); training stipends; alimony, child support, and military family allotments or other regular support from an absent family member or someone not living in the household; private pensions, government employee pensions (including military retirement pay), and regular insurance or annuity payments; college or university scholarships, grants, fellowships, and assistantships; and dividends, interest, net rental income, net royalties, and periodic receipts from estates or trusts; and net gambling or lottery winnings. The *Income Eligibility Guidelines* can be accessed on the GSRP website.

Grantees may consider the income:

- of the last 12 months,
- of the preceding calendar year, or
- at the time of enrollment.

For example, if neither the last 12 months or the preceding calendar year accurately represents the family's situation at the time of enrollment (e.g., because the parent is recently unemployed) then the GSRP grantee should use its judgment in deciding if it seems likely that the current situation more accurately reflects a family's likely economic status during the period of the child's enrollment.

A family includes all persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption, living within a household who are supported by the income of the parent or guardian of the child enrolling or participating in the program. A parent who is not living in the prospective child's home and is not likely to return to that home anytime in the near future (i.e., during the child's participation in GSRP) should not, however, be included when determining family size (with the exception of a deployed parent). Programs must make individual judgments about whether the absent parent is truly part of the child's family or not and to document, in the child's file, the decision and the reasons for that decision.

For parents who have joint custody, the total number of family members for both families are summed and then divided in half, rounding up when necessary. For example, if both custodial parents have remarried and each has a child from this marriage, the family size is 2 custodial parents + 2 spouses + 2 children + GSRP child = 7; divided by 2 = 3.5, or rounding up, 4. If one parent is paying any child support to the other parent, the income of the parent receiving the child support should be used for determining income eligibility. If neither parent is providing any child support to the other, the grantee should count half of each parent's income and the sum of these two should be used by the program in determining income.

A child from a family that is receiving public assistance or a child in foster care is eligible for Head Start. If a family claims it has no income, the family is also

eligible for Head Start and must be referred to the local Head Start agency. If the family is unable to provide income documentation, the program must determine the accuracy of the verbal report of income. Grantees can gather information (i.e., living arrangements, assets, etc.) to make an informed judgment about the family's income status.

Student loans are excluded as income. This is true whether student loans are federally insured or commercially issued. Student grants for tuition/books are exempt from income calculations. However, grants for room/board/living expenses should be used to calculate income. Scholarships, fellowships and grant funds received in cash and not used for qualified educational expenses are also considered income.

If a parent is an active member of the U.S. Armed Forces, certain pay can be excluded from family gross cash income http://www.irs.gov/publications/p3/ar02.html#d0e1259. Please be aware that an adjusted family income may make the family income-eligible for Head Start, and in that case, must be referred to Head Start. The following are NOT included as gross cash income for active duty U.S. Armed Forces personnel:

- Living Allowances – Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) even if BAH is used to pay mortgage interest and taxes, Basic Allowance for Subsistence (BAS), housing and cost of living allowances abroad, Overseas Housing Allowance (OHA).
- Moving Allowances – moving household and personal items, storage, moving trailers or mobile homes, temporary lodging, dislocation, military base realignment, and closure benefit.
- Travel Allowances – annual roundtrip for dependent students, leave between consecutive overseas tours, reassignment in a dependent restricted status, transportation during ship overhaul and inactivation, per diem.
- Family Allowances – specified educational expenses for dependents, emergencies, evacuation to a place of safety, separation.
- Death Allowances - burial services, death gratuity payments to eligible survivors, travel of dependents to burial site.
- In-kind Benefits – dependent-care assistance, legal assistance, medical/dental care, commissary/exchange discounts, space-available travel on government carriers.
- Other payments – disability, group-term life insurance, professional education, ROTC educational and subsistence allowances, uniform allowances, survivor and retirement protection plan premiums.

The best documentation of income is a copy of the most recent tax return. Alternate forms of documentation are paycheck stubs (indicate pay period: bi-weekly, weekly, etc.), W-2 forms, written statements from employers, or documentation showing current status as recipients of public assistance. The program's documentation verifying the income calculation must be signed by the staff member and retained in the child's file.