

## EARLY LEARNING BLENDED PROGRAMS

The Department recognizes that all children need access to high-quality early learning experiences. These experiences promote key dimensions of early learning and development of young children while responding to the needs of families. High quality early learning experiences provide positive educational and social outcomes for children and their families.

To provide guidance to LEA's regarding high quality early learning programs, the Department has developed the Early Learning Program Guidance [document](#). Within this document, there are guiding principles for creating high quality early learning programs. The Guiding Principles include:

- \* Parents are recognized as their children's first teachers and are an integral part of their children's early education experiences.
- \* Comprehensive services build on the strengths of families.
- \* High-quality early learning programs evaluate the needs of individual children and families and provide access to comprehensive, research-based services.
- \* High-quality early learning programs focus on all areas of early learning and development (social and emotional, language and literacy, math, science, motor, health and physical well-being, as well as positive attitudes and behaviors toward learning).
- \* A strong, accessible system of professional development supports high quality early learning.
- \* The development of high-quality early learning programs is a comprehensive and inclusive community effort.
- \* Adequate and sustainable funding is necessary to ensure and expand high-quality experiences for all children and to provide flexibility for families.
- \* Transition services provide a seamless system from before birth to kindergarten entry.
- \* High-quality early learning programs implement culturally responsive practices and universal design for learning principles to promote the inclusion of infants, toddlers and preschoolers with learning differences, including children with disabilities and English learners.

LEA's are challenged with identifying multiple funding sources with different requirements to support early learning experiences which often creates classrooms with varied services based on funding sources. Thoughtful planning takes into account how to best meet the needs of children and families regardless of the funding source and is essential for effective early learning programs. As Local Education Agencies (LEAs) assess early learning programs for children ages three to five to determine the need within their community, exploring the opportunities of blending early learning services and funds may be advantageous. Blended programs occur when the educational costs for a group of children representing a variety of eligibility types are shared and supported by two or more funding sources.

### Purpose of the Blended Program

---

A blended program provides a consistent learning environment for all children. Blending funds allow LEAs to use available resources in a more efficient and effective manner.

## Benefits of the Blended Program

---

Children have an increased level of access to early learning programs with a greater opportunity for participation in an inclusive classroom environment.

Available space is better used to provide a well-balanced and integrated early learning program, as opposed to separating out early learning children by eligibility/disability and funding sources.

The quality of instruction through certified staffing and coordinated professional development is ensured.

Successful transition of all children into kindergarten is improved.

## Requirements of the Blended Program

---

### Program Requirements

The following requirements must be met in blended programs to provide consistent services. Blended programs utilizing awarded MPP grant funds must meet additional requirements established in the [MPP Administrative Manual](#).

### Eligible Children

Children 3-5 years of age are eligible to participate in the blended program. If MPP funds are used, all non-special education children must be 1-2 years away from kindergarten entry.

### Eligibility Types

Children served in the blended classroom must represent two or more eligibility types.

ECSE eligibility requirements, refer to the [Missouri State Plan for Special Education Part B](#).

Title I eligibility requirements, refer to the [Federal Programs Administrative Manual](#).

All Other eligibility requirements include, but not limited to [Foundation Formula for PreK](#), Tuition or Scholarship, MPP or Child Care [Subsidy](#).

### Class Size and Staffing

Maximum class size is 20 children per classroom while maintaining a ratio of one adult to ten children. Once the enrollment exceeds 10 children there must be at least two staff in the classroom.

Teachers in the classroom must have an Early Childhood Certification or Early Childhood Special Education Certification.

The Instructional Paraprofessionals/Teacher Assistants must meet either the preferred or the acceptable qualifications. The preferred qualification is required for programs working toward Accreditation or using foundation formula funds as one of the blended funding sources. LEA's are strongly encouraged to meet the preferred qualification when hiring new staff.

Preferred qualification - a child development associate's degree, associate's degree in early childhood, or sixty (60) college hours with a minimum of three (3) college credit hours in early childhood, child development, or child/family related courses and experience working in a program with young children and their families

Acceptable qualification - must have 60 college hours or pass the state assessment for paraprofessionals.

## **Curriculum**

The program must adopt and implement one of the DESE approved curriculum models. Staff must complete training through the curriculum source, and it is recommended that the director/program administrator be trained. Staff must continue to participate in on-going professional development that supports the curriculum and meets the needs of the staff. Refer to the Early Learning Curriculum [webpage](#) for specific information regarding the approved models.

- Creative Curriculum
- Emerging Literacy & Language Curriculum
- High Scope
- Montessori
- Project Construct

## **Parent and Family Involvement**

Regular, meaningful contacts with parents are an important component of any high quality early learning program and are a requirement for a blended program. In addition, it is strongly encouraged that parents be offered personal contacts with the early learning staff. Contacts should facilitate the exchange of information about the child and his/her program, including the needs identified by the family and information pertinent to the development of the child. Many options exist for achieving contact with families such as home visits, coordination with parent involvement activities pre-k through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, Parents as Teachers group connections, child care programs operated in the LEA, etc. Flexible scheduling and locations of visits should be considered in accordance with specific and individual needs of families. Communication with parents may include newsletters, parent-teacher conferences, notes home to families, phone calls, etc.

## **Parent Advisory Committee**

It is recommended that the blended program have a parent advisory committee. A parent advisory committee consists of parent representatives of children from each funding source in the blended pool. The parent advisory committee should include the roles and responsibility of the members, selection procedure, replacement procedure, number of members, and the frequency of meetings should be at least annually.

## **Licensure and Accreditation**

Programs are encouraged to consider licensure and accreditation for all early learning programs. [The Licensing Rules for Group Child Care Homes and Child Care Centers](#) is available through the Department of Health and Senior Services. If seeking accreditation, it must be obtained through either [Missouri Accreditation \(MOA\)](#) or the [National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\)](#).

## **Fiscal Requirements**

When LEAs pool funds in a blended program those funds lose their individual identity. The LEA may use the funds to support any allowable cost of the program without regard to which program contributed the specific funds. When blending funds, the following conditions must be met.

- A blended application identifying funding sources and amounts included in the pool must be submitted prior to July 1<sup>st</sup>.
  - LEAs must identify their intent to pool Title I funds on the initial Title I budget application.
  - LEAs including MPP grant funds must use 100% of the grant funds awarded.
  - LEAs including ECSE funds must submit an approvable ECSE FER by the designated due date.
- Blended program expenditures must be tracked separately from other early learning expenditures.
- LEAs cannot reduce pool contributions below the individual program amount paid to date.

### **Budgeting Funds for Blended Program Expenditures**

The Blended Plan is part of the application process in ePeGs. It is available to assist LEAs in determining the type and amount of funds to include in the blended program. Once the Blended Plan is complete, information entered on the Plan will populate the Blended Budget. The Blended Plan and Budget open April 15th and are due no later than July 1st. LEAs will not be allowed to participate in a blended program if an initial Blended Plan and Budget are not submitted by July 1st.

### **Allowable Blended Program Expenditures**

All funding sources included in a blended program may be used for the expenditures listed below. The cost for these expenditures should apply to all children in the blended program. If the cost only applies to a specific child in the program (i.e. IEP required therapy), the cost is not a blended cost but rather an individual program cost reimbursed outside of the blended pool.

Certificated and noncertificated salaries and benefits

Substitute salaries

Instructional materials and supplies

Classroom equipment

Professional development for staff

Parent and family involvement activities

Facility leases

Minor facility remodeling

Costs associated with maintaining licensure

Accreditation costs

Playground equipment

Transportation (see Transportation for Early Learning Blended Programs Appendix A)

### **Non-Allowable Blended Program Expenditures**

Therapies/Services specific to IEP goals

IEP required supplies/equipment

Facility purchases/lease-purchases

Construction or major renovation of a facility

Parents as Teachers, home visits and screenings services

Personal paraprofessional

Bus purchases or lease purchases

These costs, if allowable for a specific program, would be paid for by the individual programs and reported on the program specific budget and/or final expenditure report.

### **Salaries and Benefits**

Payment of salaries and benefits will be allowed for the teacher and instructional paraprofessional/teacher assistant who provide educational services directly to age eligible children funded in the blended classroom.

Employees fully funded through the pool are not required to complete time and effort reporting. However, staff who prorate time between a blended program and a non-blended program need to report time and effort using personal activity reports or the substitute system of reporting. The substitute system time and effort reports are for employees who work on multiple programs, but have a fixed schedule. Additional information about the time and effort reporting, including substitute system management certification forms and sample fixed schedules, is available under [General Federal Guidance](#).

### **Purchased Services**

Payments for staff to participate in professional development including travel, mileage and meals are considered a purchase service. Services rendered by persons not employed by the LEA and all other contracted services including fees for accreditation are considered a purchased service.

### **Materials and Supplies**

Materials and supplies purchased with these funds are limited to items which are either consumable in nature, cost less than \$1,000 per unit and are more feasibly replaced than repaired. Materials and supplies should be selected from the [Materials and Supplies Guide for Early Learning Classrooms](#) and must accommodate the number of children the program anticipates serving through the blended classroom(s).

### **Capital Outlay**

Blended programs can use pooled funds to purchase general classroom equipment. Equipment includes tangible personal property having a useful life of more than one year and a per-unit acquisition cost which equals or exceeds \$1,000. All purchases made for the blended program should follow the LEA's procurement procedure.

### **Administrative Costs**

Direct administrative costs are not to exceed 5% of the total budget. Expenditures may include such costs as director salaries, other administrative positions, office supplies, office equipment, utilities, postage, cleaning supplies/services, program insurances, etc.

### **Tracking Expenditures**

As the funds blended into the pool lose their individual identity, it is not necessary to track which pooled funding source paid for blended program expenditures. However, it is necessary to identify all blended program expenditures separately from other early learning non-blended expenditures in the general ledger.

The Missouri Accounting Code structure to identify expenditures in the general ledger consists of the fund, function, object, location, source, and project code. In order to track blended program expenditures separately, the project code 40002 must be used for all blended program expenditures. It is essential for program staff and finance staff to work closely together in setting up the appropriate codes before the school year begins using the direction provided in the [Missouri Financial Accounting Manual](#).

### **Requesting Payment – Distribution of Funding Sources**

Payment requests for reimbursement of blended costs may be submitted in ePeGs on a monthly basis once the Blended Plan and Budget have been submitted and approved. The payment request will open July 1st each year. Depending on the funds included in the blended pool, funding from DESE may come from MPP and/or Title I funds, and from the reimbursements the LEA is receiving through ECSE FER payments. Title I and MPP payments, if included in the pool, will be based on the prorated amount of each fund contributing to the pool.

State ECSE funds can be used for blended program costs. If ECSE funds are included in the pool, LEAs will not receive an ECSE payment through the blended payment request. ECSE state reimbursement for the amount of ECSE funds included in the blended pool will be paid a year after the expenditures are incurred and once the ECSE FER has been approved.

A final payment request will be due no later than May 15th for LEAs blending MPP funds. LEAs that do not blend MPP funds may submit payment requests until September 1st.

Refer to Appendix B for additional information regarding the ePeGS Schedule for Early Learning Blended Programs.

## Appendix A - Transportation for Early Learning Blended Programs

### Dedicated Route

A dedicated bus route is defined as the bus and drivers being utilized are strictly for the children participating in the Early Learning Blended program and no other routes.

Allowable costs the district may charge include the **full cost** of the bus driver, bus aides, contracted transportation costs, supplies and equipment. However, only a prorated cost may be charged for mechanics, dispatchers, contracted maintenance, and insurance.

### Shared Route

A shared bus route is defined as the bus and drivers being utilized are providing transportation for children participating in the Early Learning Blended program **and** other children.

Allowable costs the district may charge include a **proration of cost** for the bus driver, bus aides, contracted transportation (not including maintenance) costs, supplies and equipment. However, no costs may be charged for mechanics, contracted maintenance, dispatchers, and insurance.

Costs may be prorated using one of two methods:

Method 1: Cost of item for a route multiplied by the percentage of children on that route who participates in the Early Learning Blended program.

Method 2: Calculate average cost per mile for route item. Multiply average cost per mile by the excess miles needed to transport Early Learning Blended children. Excess miles are the additional miles needed to transport Early Learning Blended children based on the miles already needed for all other children on the route.

### Reporting Transportation Costs

Salaries and Benefits - transportation personnel.

Purchased Service - contracted transportation costs, bus leases, and vehicle insurance.

Supplies - items that cost less than \$1,000 per unit such as fuel, tires, oil, safety harnesses, etc.

Capital Outlay - items that cost \$1,000 or more per unit.

\*Bus Purchases/lease purchases **are not** a reimbursable expenditure.

Expenditures	Dedicated Route	Shared Route
Bus Driver	Charge Full Cost	Charge Prorated Cost
Bus Aide	Charge Full Cost	Charge Prorated Cost
Bus Mechanic	Charge Prorated Cost	No Charge
Bus Dispatcher	Charge Prorated Cost	No Charge
Contracted Transportation	Charge Full Cost	Charge Prorated Cost
Contracted Maintenance	Charge Prorated Cost	No Charge
Supplies	Charge Full Cost	Charge Prorated Cost
Equipment	Charge Full Cost	Charge Prorated Cost
Bus Insurance	Charge Prorated Cost	No Charge

## Appendix B - Funding ePeGs Schedule

Blended Program Year is July 1<sup>st</sup> – June 30<sup>th</sup>.

Initial	Open	Close
Initial Plan	April 15 <sup>th</sup>	July 1 <sup>st</sup> @ 12:01 am
Initial Budget	April 15 <sup>th</sup>	July 1 <sup>st</sup> @ 12:01 am

*The LEA must submit the Initial Blended Budget and “parent budget(s)”, if applicable, by July 1<sup>st</sup> to participate in the Blended program. (Parent budget refers to MPP or Title I if identified as a funding source in the Plan.)*

Revisions	Open	Close
Plan and Budget Revisions	July 1 <sup>st</sup>	May 1 <sup>st</sup> @ 12:01 am

*\*The Early Learning Supervisor must approve the Initial Budget before a revision can be made.*

Payments Including MPP Funds	Open	Close
<u>Regular Payment Requests</u> Payment is a prorated calculation of selected funding sources.	July 1 <sup>st</sup>	April 2 <sup>nd</sup> @ 12:01 am
<u>Final Payment Request</u> Payment is based on priority. MPP, ECSE, Title I, and Local funds, if applicable.	April 2 <sup>nd</sup>	May 16 <sup>th</sup> @ 12:01 am
<u>Final Expenditure Report (FER)</u> Payment is based on priority. ECSE, Title I, and Local, if applicable.	July 1 <sup>st</sup>	October 1 <sup>st</sup> @ 12:01 am

*\*Regular Payment Requests can be submitted when the Initial Budget and the appropriate “parent budget(s)” are in Approved status.*

Payments Not Including MPP Funds	Open	Close
<u>Regular Payment Requests</u> Payment is a prorated calculation of selected funding sources.	July 1 <sup>st</sup>	September 2 <sup>nd</sup> @ 12:01 am
<u>Final Expenditure Report (FER)</u> Payment is based on priority. ECSE, Title I, and Local, if applicable.	July 1 <sup>st</sup>	October 1 <sup>st</sup> @ 12:01 am

*\*Regular Payment Requests can be submitted when the Initial Budget and the appropriate “parent budget(s)” are in Approved status.*

In addition to the Budget and Payment information provided in ePeGS, all Early Learning Blended Programs are required to submit a Final Program Report. This report will summarize the services provided in the blended program and assist the Early Learning staff with continued planning for this unique funding opportunity.