



Community Action Council of Howard County

HELPING PEOPLE. CHANGING LIVES.

2021-22 School Year PARENT HANDBOOK

Please read this Handbook in its entirety.

Table of Contents

Early Childhood Education Program Overview	4
Before-Care and After Care Program.....	5
What to Send to School	5
Contact Us	6
Hours of Operation & Inclement Weather	7
2020-21 COVID-19 Health and Safety Procedures	8
How We Are Keeping You Safe	8
Drop off and Pick Up Procedures.....	8
Practicing Social Distancing	9
Face Coverings	9
Food Preparation and Distribution	9
Keeping Areas Clean	9
Limiting Shared Contact Between Students	9
When to Keep Your Child at Home	10
Closure and Quarantine.....	10
Early Learning	11
Early Childhood Education is a Two-Way Street.....	11
Curriculum	12
Assessments	13
Individualized Child Supports and Services	13
Health and Safety	14
General Health & Safety	14
Illness	15
Physical Health.....	16
Nutritional Health	17

Mental and Behavioral Health	18
Early Childhood Education Employee Discipline Policy	18
Parent, Family, and Community Engagement	20
Family Services.....	20
Family Services Commitment	20
Family Engagement Activities.....	20
Parent Orientation	21
Parent Involvement	21
Parent Leadership Opportunities	21
Family Expectations	22
Attendance and Punctuality	22
Home Visits	23
Confidentiality	23
Non-Custodial Parents	23
Community Engagement	24
Complaint Procedures	24

Early Childhood Education Program Overview

Community Action Council of Howard County (CAC) operates an Early Childhood Education (ECE) Program that encompasses both Head Start and prekindergarten classrooms. The ECE Program offers full-day, full-year programming designed to prepare children socially, emotionally, and academically for kindergarten. The 2-Generational framework implemented throughout the ECE Program also included family engagement partnerships between parents and staff to promote family stability and self-sufficiency, reduce stressors, and connect families to critical family resources.

The ECE Program supports children's growth and development in a positive learning environment through a variety of services, including:

- **Kindergarten Readiness:** Children's readiness for school and beyond is met through whole-class and individualized learning experiences. Through relationships with adults, play, planned or spontaneous instruction, children grow in many aspects of development. All children are placed in a classroom with a lead teacher and an assistant teacher.
- **Physical, Mental, and Behavioral Health:** Each child's perceptual, motor, cognitive, emotional, and physical development is supported to allow them to fully explore and function in their environment. All children receive:
 - Health and developmental screenings to include vision, hearing, dental, and cognitive development screenings
 - Nutritious meals (breakfast lunch and snack)
 - Behavior and mental health support through trauma-informed approaches
- **Family Engagement:** Parents and families are supported in achieving their own goals, such as housing stability, continued education, and financial security. The Program supports and strengthens parent-child relationships and engages families around children's learning and development. Each family will receive:
 - A designated Family Service Worker with a background in human services
 - Two parent-teacher conferences each school year
 - At least two home visits facilitated by the Family Service Worker
 - Leadership opportunities to include Parent Committees, Policy Council, Health Advisory, Education, and Family Engagement Committee participation
 - Volunteer opportunities to support your child's early learning
 - Opportunities to attend family engagement events held throughout the school year

CAC's Head Start program is accredited by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and has earned a level 5 rating from Maryland EXCELS.

Before-Care and After Care Program

The ECE Program offers Before-Care and After-Care services to all Head Start and Pre-K students enrolled in CAC's Early Childhood Education (ECE) program, opening at 7 a.m. and closing at 6 p.m. on days when school is in session. Please refer to the ECE Calendar and this *Handbook* for a complete list of scheduled school closings. Services are offered at select centers.

Enrollment in Before and After Care is based on MSDE Childcare Scholarship Program. Once a student's eligibility is determined, participation in the Before-Care and After-Care Program is at no cost to the family. However, a parent/guardian is required to sign a voucher for Before-Care and After-Care Program participation.

Parents may apply for Before-Care and After-Care services at any time throughout the school year. Enrollment is based on availability, and registration does not guarantee a place for your child in the program.

What to Send to School

Change of clothes:

- Weather appropriate clothing
- Socks
- Underwear

Bedding:

- Blanket
- Fitted crib sheet

All bedding will be sent home at the end of each week to be washed. Please return these items on the next school day.

Please label your child's belongings and all clothing (including hats, mittens, and umbrellas).

Contact Us

Community Action Council of Howard County

9820 Patuxent Woods Drive
Columbia, MD 21046
410-313-6440

Tracy Broccolino, Director of Education

9820 Patuxent Woods Drive
Columbia, MD 21046
410-313-6589

Tiffany Williams, Education Coordinator

9820 Patuxent Woods Drive
Columbia, MD 21046
410-313-6582

Tia West, RN

9820 Patuxent Woods Drive
Columbia, MD 21046
410-313-6482

Ellicott City Early Childhood Education Center

Janiecka Brown, Center Manager
8510 High Ridge Road
Ellicott City, MD 21043
Main: 410-313-2750 / Family Service: 410-313-2798 and 2755

Old Cedar Lane Early Childhood Education Center

Lauren Tardy, Center Manager
5451 Beaverkill Road
Columbia, MD 21045
Main: 410-313-7246 / Family Service: 410-313-7257

Early Childhood Education Program Main Office

9820 Patuxent Woods Drive
Columbia, MD 21046
410-313-6443

Nikisha Anderson, Mental Health Behavioral Specialist

9820 Patuxent Woods Drive
Columbia, MD 21046
410-313-3714

Julia Tomanovich, Special Education Coordinator

9820 Patuxent Woods Drive
Columbia, MD 21046
410-313-6561

Dasher Green Early Childhood Education Center

Ed Shields, Center Manager
6680 Cradlerock Way
Columbia, MD 21046
Main: 410-313-6210 / Family Service: 410-313-6214 and 6213

Bauder Education Center at Long Reach

Michele Killelte, Center Manager
8775 Cloudleap Ct, Suite 110
Columbia, MD 21045
Main: 410-313-2730 / Family Service: 410-313-2730

Ed Shields, Before-Care and After-Care Coordinator

6680 Cradlerock Way
Columbia, MD 21046
410-313-6219

Hours of Operation & Inclement Weather

ECE Hours of Operation for ALL Center Locations

Before-Care and After-Care Services are offered at Dasher Green and Ellicott City Centers Only.

- **7:00am – 8:00am** Before Care drop off. *Students arriving after 8:00am will not be allowed to enter the center until 8:30am.*
- **8:30am – 9:00am** Student drop off. *Students arriving after 9:00am will not be permitted to attend school as screening staff will have departed.*
- **2:30pm to 3:00pm** Student pick up. All regular day students must be picked up no later than 3:00pm.
- **6:00pm** After-care pick up. All After-care students must be no later than 6:00pm.

ECE Inclement Weather Policy

ECE follows the Howard County Public School System's (HCPSS) inclement weather policy.

1-Hour Delay for HCPSS

- Before-Care is canceled
- 9:30am – 10:00am All centers will open for student drop off

2-Hour Delay for HCPSS

- Before-Care is canceled
- 10:30 – 11:00am All centers will open for student drop off

School Closure for HCPSS

- Before-Care canceled
- School day canceled
- After-care canceled

Early dismissal

- After-care canceled

2020-21 COVID-19 Health and Safety Procedures

How We Are Keeping You Safe

Nothing is more important to us than the health and safety of our children, families, and staff. That's why we've been working hard to implement additional policies and procedures to help keep our Centers as clean and germ-free as possible. We have worked closely with the Maryland State Department of Education, the Office of Childcare, and local public health physicians to ensure the health and safety of our staff and students. Our internal team has worked diligently, following the guidance from the Center for Disease Control, to develop policies and procedures that will safely support a reopening of our centers at a reduced capacity.

Drop off and Pick Up Procedures

Our routines for drop-off and pick-up are designed to ensure the health and safety of students, staff and parents. Please be mindful of keeping a six-foot distance from others during drop-off and pick-up at the centers.

Drop-Off at Centers

1. Parents will enter the traffic lane and follow the directions of the traffic director to pull towards the drop-off area.
2. Parents will be instructed to their exit car and remove child from car seat.
3. Center staff will conduct a quick health screening to ensure your child does not have a fever above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or other COVID-19 or flu-like symptoms. **Children with a fever above 100.4 and/or displaying symptoms of COVID-19 will not be allowed to enter the center or to attend school.**
4. A designated staff member will take your child to the center and into the classroom.

Pick-up at Centers

1. Parents will be instructed by the traffic director to pull towards the pick-up area.
2. Staff will ask the name of your child.
3. Parent will be asked to remain in car until child arrives.
4. A staff member will bring your child to your car, where you will assist your child in getting into the car seat.

Practicing Social Distancing

We will practice social distancing in the classroom throughout the day to the extent possible. Your child will remain in the classroom or on the playground with their teachers and classmates. For added safety, cohorts have been created to minimize contact between students while at the centers. Children will not engage with students outside of their assigned cohort.

Face Coverings

Teachers and staff will wear face coverings. All students will continue to wear face coverings. Parents should send their child with a clean mask each day. Masks will also be available for students at the centers if replacements are needed.

Food Preparation and Distribution

Teachers will continue to wear gloves and masks while helping children with breakfast, lunch, and snack time. Family-style serving at all meals will be conducted as health conditions permit.

Keeping Areas Clean

Our teachers and staff will continue with a rigorous cleaning routine, and all high-touch surfaces and objects will be sanitized regularly throughout the day. These include, but are not limited to, all learning materials, playground structures, light switches and door handles, napping mats and bathrooms.

Limiting Shared Contact Between Students

To limit the sharing of student learning materials each child will receive their own “learning box” that includes pencils, crayons, glue sticks, and other frequently used items. Each child will also have a separate storage area for personal items.

When to Keep Your Child at Home

To maintain the health and safety of our students, families, and staff, please keep your child at home if they have experienced any of the following:

1. Signs of COVID-19 or other illnesses.
2. Exposure to anyone with COVID-19 or any of the symptoms of COVID-19.
3. Need for fever reducer (Tylenol, Advil, Motrin etc.) in the last 24 hours
4. A NEW onset of cough or shortness of breath OR at least two of the following:
 - Fever of 100.4 or higher
 - Chills/Shivering
 - Muscle Pain/Body Aches
 - Sore Throat
 - Headache
 - Loss of taste or smell
 - Nausea/vomiting/diarrhea

Closure and Quarantine

Every case of child illness is taken seriously. With COVID-19, we are taking extra precautions if any child or staff member has symptoms of COVID-19 or a COVID-19-like illness:

- If a COVID-19-like illness is reported, a multi-tiered process begins where senior CAC staff and health professionals are consulted.
- The Howard County Health Department is called if COVID-19 is reported. The Health Department may request the individual with COVID-19 contact information and may contact that individual or parent/guardian of that individual.
- If COVID-19 is suspected, the effected classroom could be closed until COVID-19 can be ruled out or for 14 days.

Parent/ Guardian cooperation is very important in contact tracing and follow up to get everyone back to the classroom.

Early Learning

Early Childhood Education is a Two-Way Street

Early Childhood Education Team's Commitment to Students

Schools in the ECE Program provide safe environments to enhance each child's curiosity and learning. Children are encouraged to develop his/her unique pattern of interests, talents, and skills. Children learn best through interaction with their peers and age appropriate activities including play, art, and natural environment explorations experiences.

The learning domains listed below are the overarching areas of child development and early learning that are essential for school readiness and long-term success. They are based on the *Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework* and the *Maryland Early Learning Standards*. All domains are important and need to be supported and nurtured in a variety of ways.

- Social-emotional learning
- Approaches to learning
- Language & Literacy
- Mathematics
- Physical Well-being & Motor Development
- Science
- Social Foundations
- Social Studies
- The Fine Arts

Kindergarten readiness assessments measure children's readiness in the domains listed above as they have the greatest impact on overall kindergarten readiness.

Supporting Students' Learning at Home

- Children need to be well rested; 11 to 13 hours of sleep is recommended for preschool-aged children.
- Serve nutritious family meals. Good nutrition helps children to be at their best.
- Dress your child for the weather and have a change of clothing available at the school at all times.
- Bring children on time to school every day.

- Keep children at home if they are not feeling well.
- Complete the *Ages and Stages Questionnaire* three weeks of your child's enrollment to help teachers' measure your child's developmental progress.
- Meet with the assigned family service worker twice a year for a home visit.
- Meet with your classroom teachers throughout the year for a home visits and parent-teacher conferences.
- Communicate weekly with the assigned family service worker and your child's teacher.
- Be an active participant in your child's early learning experience through participating in volunteer and leadership opportunities.
- Engage in parent and family engagement activities.

Curriculum

The CAC Early Childhood Education uses *The Creative Curriculum* for mixed aged students and *Connect4Learning* for pre-kindergarten students. The objectives in *The Creative Curriculum* are fully aligned with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework as well as Maryland state early learning standards. *Connect4Learning* has been adopted by CAC for prekindergarten children to ensure students are prepared for kindergarten. Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) also uses this curriculum. Adopting the same curriculum used in HCPSS gives the children the head start that they need to ensure school readiness. Children use exploration and discovery as a way of learning, enabling children to develop confidence, creativity, and critical thinking skills. Teachers customize curriculum instruction for children in every classroom.

Assessments

Teachers assess children using the *Teaching Strategies GOLD*[®] assessment tool. Data from this tool supports effective teaching and monitors children's development and learning. Collections of items include observations and documentation of children's work to document each child's progress on the developmental continuum. This data assists the teacher to understand where additional instruction, adjustment of curriculum, or adjustment of the learning environment may be needed.

Teachers also utilize developmental and behavioral screening assessment tools in the classrooms. Within the first 45 days of school, parents and teachers are required to complete an *Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)* to determine the developmental progression of each child in the areas of communication, gross motor, fine motor, problem solving and personal-social skills. Results determine the strengths and/or if further support is required. Parents should work closely with ECE Staff to complete their ASQ accurately as this tool will begin the ongoing conversation and partnership around supporting their child's development.

Within the same time frame, teachers also complete the *Devereux Early Childhood Assessment for Preschoolers (DECA-P2)* to determine the strengths and areas of need a child has in areas such as initiative, attachment and relationships, self-regulation and behavior. With the information gathered through these assessments, teachers can further individualize their lessons plans and classroom supports to make sure they are reaching all children and helping them succeed in their education.

Individualized Child Supports and Services

Early intervention is critical to ensuring academic readiness for all students. Your ECE team understands that each child develops differently, and is committed to identifying exceptional students early and connecting them with the supports they need to be successful:

- Each child is screened in the following areas: communication, fine motor, gross motor, problem solving, personal-social, initiative, self-regulation, attachment and relationships, and behavioral concerns via the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3) and the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA). Teachers use these results to identify appropriate classroom supports and differentiate their instruction. Parents are notified and consulted if the team identifies areas that may warrant further evaluation. All screening results are discussed at Parent Teacher Conferences.
- ECE Specialists visit classrooms and meet with teaching teams on a regular basis to make sure all student's needs are being met. These specialists conduct observations, provide feedback, consult with families, trial and model strategies, and assign specialists from outside agencies to provide additional supports as necessary and with informed parental consent. The Multi-Disciplinary Team discusses children who continue to demonstrate difficulty despite several consistently implemented

strategies. This team consists of a Registered Nurse, Education Coordinator, Behavior Specialist, Family Service Worker, Teachers, Center Manager, and Special Education Specialist. Members collaboratively plan holistic interventions, share and obtain feedback from families, progress monitor, and determine efficacy to inform revisions or Child Find referrals (see below).

- CAC and the Early Intervention Office of the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) work together with families to identify children with special needs. In order to determine eligibility for Special Education services through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), families participate in the Child Find process which includes questionnaires, registration, screening, evaluation, eligibility determination, and IEP creation. IEPs can be serviced either at a CAC center or at an HCPSS Regional Early Childhood Center (RECC). Many CAC children spend half days at CAC and half days at RECC, riding an HCPSS early childhood bus between locations. CAC also works with providers for families with Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) in order to ensure children's needs are being met across settings. If you have any questions about the Child Find or IEP process, please contact the Special Education Specialist (see Contact Us).
- Children with suspected delays, confirmed disabilities, IFSPs and/or IEPs are encouraged to apply. Community Action Council of Howard County does not deny placement on the basis of a disability or its severity as long as the child otherwise meets the Head Start age, income eligibility criteria, and appropriate placement according to the child's IEP.

Health and Safety

General Health & Safety

Well Child Care

You must provide documentation from your medical and dental care providers that your child is current on well-child care visits each year. Failure to provide this proof can impact your child's participation in the program. If you need help getting a medical or dental provider, inform your Family Service Worker so that together we can develop a plan to overcome those barriers.

Medications

All students who take medication at school must have the correct documentation from their child's doctor for review by our Registered Nurse. All medications must come to the ECE Team's Nurse first for review. The medication must be in the original packaging with the label from the pharmacy and not past its expiration date before the child starts the program or continues if this is

a new medication. It is important that medications stay up-to-date and parents/guardians provide updated medications throughout the school year. Medications may not be given to center staff or sent in backpacks.

Illness

Children must be kept home from school if they are ill. Please notify the school if your child has a communicable disease such as measles, chicken pox, the flu, etc.

If your child becomes ill while at school, parents/guardians will be called and must take the child home immediately.

If your child has vomiting, diarrhea or fever, he/she must be symptom free for at least 24 hours before returning to school.

Symptoms children will be sent home from school for include (but are not limited to):

<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ An oral temperature over 100 degrees○ Lice, nits or bed bugs○ Unexplained rash○ Difficulty breathing/wheezing○ Thick, discolored drainage from the nose○ Discharge from the eyes, crust around the eye or on the eyelashes○ Any communicable disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Sore throat and/or severe/ongoing cough○ Severe congestion○ Cuts, open wounds or pus-filled openings on the skin○ Vomiting and/or diarrhea○ Unusual yellow coloring to the skin or eyes○ Complaints of a stiff neck and headache with one or more of the above symptoms
--	--

*** Children with lice, nits or bed bugs must be free of live bugs and nits and must have a doctor's note to return to class.***

Absence Policy

You must notify your child's school if your child is going to be absent. Please call your center each day your child is absent and give the reason for the absence and the return date. Children absent for three (3) or more days for illness must have a doctor's note to return or cannot be allowed back into school.

Medical Emergencies

Staff has been trained to follow the following emergency procedures:

- Staff will stay with injured child at all times and administer first aid as necessary.
- If needed, staff will seek medical assistance from emergency medical services and contact the parent/guardian as listed on the child's emergency contact form.
- If the child is transported to a hospital, staff will accompany the child and wait with the child at the hospital until a parent/guardian arrives.
- **Please be sure that your emergency cards are always kept up to date with your most recent phone numbers.**
- For non-emergency incidents, an incident report will be sent home with the child.

Child Abuse Reporting

CAC's ECE staff is **required** by Maryland State law to report any suspected or identified child abuse to the Department of Social Services and will preserve absolute confidentiality of all records pertaining to a report in accordance with state law.

Supporting Healthy Habits

Healthy habits are established in the classroom with daily tooth brushing and an emphasis on hand-washing and other habits that help reduce the spread of illnesses. Note: Tooth brushing, at school, will be suspended during COVID-19.

Family style eating with balanced, nutritious meals gives children an opportunity to learn about healthy eating habits with support from their peers. However, students will be served individual meals and snacks during COVID-19. Staff members use the classroom to teach children healthy habits about safety; we ensure that playground rules are followed and safety devices such as seat belts are used appropriately.

Physical Health

Children will engage in structured/unstructured physical activity daily indoors or outdoors, weather permitting. A child's gross motor development is important to overall health. Gross motor development is gained through regular play and movement, both indoors and outdoors. Supervision, safety and planning for children during all outdoor activities are important. Such activities are an integral part of the curriculum and are documented on lesson plans.

- * Medical and dental referrals for families who do not have insurance or do not qualify for the Maryland Children's Health Insurance Program (MCHIP) (inquire directly with your Family Service Worker)
- * Vision, hearing, height and weight screenings
- * Dental Screenings through a partnership with Chase Brexton Nutritional Health

Nutritional Health

Head Start's child nutrition services assist families in meeting each child's nutritional needs and in establishing good eating habits that nurture healthy development and promote life-long well-being. Head Start participates in the Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). A variety of nutritionally balanced, high quality foods are served on the premises each day. The goal of nutrition services is to promote child wellness by providing nutrition services that supplement and complement those of the home and community. Leisurely mealtimes provide opportunities for the development of positive attitudes toward healthy foods; for decision making, sharing, and communicating with others; and for the development of muscle control and eye-hand coordination. Children also learn appropriate eating patterns and mealtime behavior when they observe adult behavior at family style meals. Family Style meals will be suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our weekly menus are carefully planned to follow the MD State Department of Education and the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's guidelines at every meal. Each menu is designed to provide a wide variety of nutritious foods that are different in color, shape, size and texture. All of our child care menus include foods that are new or different, the children's favorites, culturally diverse, and seasonally appropriate.

Parents may not send any food to the school for any occasion. This policy allows us to protect children who may have life-threatening allergies and provide healthy celebrations which shift the focus from food to the special child or holiday.

Mental and Behavioral Health

CAC's ECE program provides robust, wrap-around services to enrolled children which include behavioral health intervention and mental health therapy provided internally by CAC's subject area experts or contracted to be provided externally. With regular developmental and physical health screenings and ongoing services, the students receive targeted interventions from expert providers. Using data from *Teaching Strategies GOLD*®, developmental screeners, health screeners, related service providers, and coaches, a center-based multidisciplinary team (MDT) works through a multitiered system of supports (MTSS) to identify children in need of more intensive intervention in the classroom. More intensive intervention may be provided through small group or one-on-one sessions. Intervention data is collected, and children are moved through the intervention tiers.

Early Childhood Education Employee Discipline Policy

The Community Action Council's Early Childhood Educational (ECE) Program believes that all domains of learning are best supported through play and strong, positive interactions with adults. Promoting healthy social and emotional development is one of the foundational goals of our program. To support our students in developing these critical skills, the Program uses the Maryland Pyramid Model (formerly known as the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning – SEFEL). The Pyramid Model is an evidence-based framework that promotes and supports the healthy, social emotional development of all children. The Model helps adults, in different settings with various disciplines, to interact with children and understand, address, predict, and respond to challenging behaviors.

Based on these beliefs, The Community Action Council Early Childhood Education Program supports a positive approach to discipline and prohibits children from being subjected to practices, which are severe, humiliating, frightening, or associated with food, rest, or toileting. Employees never use physical punishment such as shaking or hitting and do not engage in psychological abuse or coercion. Childcare personnel never use threats or derogatory remarks and neither threaten to withhold or withhold food as a form of discipline.

Acceptable Practices	Prohibited Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Communicate to children using positive statements. ✓ Communicate with children on their level. ✓ Talk with children in a calm quiet manner. ✓ Explain unacceptable behavior to children. ✓ Give attention to children for positive behavior. ✓ Praise and encourage the children. ✓ Reason with and set limits for the children. ✓ Apply rules consistently. ✓ Model appropriate behavior. ✓ Set up the classroom environment to prevent problems. ✓ Request teacher conference to discuss behavioral concerns ✓ Provide alternatives and redirect children to acceptable activity. ✓ Give children opportunities to make choices and solve problems. ✓ Help children talk out problems and think of solutions. ✓ Listen to children and respect the children's needs, desires and feelings. ✓ Provide appropriate words to help solve conflicts. ✓ Use storybooks and discussion to work through common conflicts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Inflict corporal punishment in any manner upon a child. (Corporal punishment is defined as the use of physical force to the body as a discipline measure. Physical force to the body includes, but is not limited to, spanking, hitting, shaking, biting, pinching, pushing, pulling, or slapping.) ✓ Use any strategy that hurts, shames, or belittles a child. ✓ Use any strategy that threatens, intimidates, or forces a child. ✓ Use food as a form of reward or punishment. ✓ Use or withhold physical activity as a punishment. ✓ Shame or punish a child if a bathroom accident occurs. ✓ Embarrass any child in front of others. ✓ Compare children. ✓ Place children in a locked and/or dark room. ✓ Leave any child alone, unattended or without supervision. ✓ Allow discipline of a child by other children. ✓ Criticize, make fun of, or otherwise belittle a child's parents, families, or ethnic groups.

Parent, Family, and Community Engagement

Family engagement is an interactive process through which program staff and families, family members and their children build positive and goal-oriented relationships. Our goal is to partner with families to build strong and effective partnerships that can help children and families thrive. These partnerships are based on mutual respect and trust. The Family Service team work closely with families to help them identify and achieve their individual goals through a Family Partnership Agreement, connect families to other Community Action Council services and community resources.

Family Services

Each family will be assigned a dedicated Family Service Worker (FSW). The FSW is responsible for building positive relationships with families and their children by establishing a family partnership.

The objectives of the ECE Family Partnerships are:

- Establish mutual trust, identify strengths or needs of services for each family necessary to meet the identified goals.
- Establish a Family Partnership Agreement.
- Establish the roles that staff, and families will play in addressing and meeting each goal.

Family Services Commitment

- Work collaboratively with parents to identify and access Community Action Council services: energy assistance, housing assistance and food assistance through the Howard County Food Bank. In addition, families referred to other community services and resources that are responsive to their interests and goals.
- Ensure that parents are provided opportunities to enhance their own parenting skills, as well as gain knowledge and understanding of the educational, developmental needs and activities of their children.
- Provide opportunities to participate in medical, dental, nutritional, and mental health education programs.

Family Engagement Activities

We welcome the entire family and value your participation in our program. Families are encouraged to participate in a variety of ways including attending parent meetings and serving on committees.

Parent Orientation

At the beginning of the Head Start school year, parents are required to participate in ECE Program's Parent Orientation. Not participating in the orientation may delay your child's transition into Head Start.

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement is an integral part of a successful program for you and your child. Parents are encouraged to visit any time, volunteer, and become fully engaged in their child's learning experience. Volunteering at Head Start provides the opportunity to gain new skills, develop skills you already have, and may be used as job experience!

During Covid-19 access to classrooms may be limited.

Parents are encouraged to commit to a minimum of fifteen (15) hours of Parent Engagement each school year. These hours can be fulfilled in the following manner: Parent Committees, Policy Council, Classroom Volunteers, Teacher Support Activities, Administrative Support, Field Trips, etc.

Parent meetings, educational programs, and family gatherings take place throughout the school year. Parent workshops are based on family interests. Some of the workshops include: **Parent Cafes and Taking Care of YOU Group.**

Parent Leadership Opportunities

- Parent Committees
 - Parent Committee meetings provides an opportunity for parents to advise staff in developing and implementing local program policies, activities, and services to meet the needs of children and families. Parent Committee meetings are held on the second Tuesday or Wednesday of each month.
- Policy Council
 - Policy Council provides governance and oversight for ECE's Head Start and Pre-K programs. Officers are elected at the beginning of each school year. The Policy Council is held on the third Thursday of each month.
- Education Advisory Committee
 - The Education Advisory Committee is an important part of the ECE/Head Start Self-Assessment process. The committee meets quarterly to review program data and evaluate progress towards Program and School Readiness Goals.

- Family and Community Engagement Advisory Committee
 - The Family and Community Engagement Advisory Committee is an important part of the ECE/Head Start Self-Assessment process. The committee meets quarterly to review program data and evaluate progress towards Program and School Readiness Goals.
- Health Advisory Committee
 - The Health Advisory Committee is an important part of the ECE/Head Start Self-Assessment process. The committee meets quarterly to review program data and evaluate progress towards Program and School Readiness Goals.

Family Expectations

- Treat peers, program staff and Head Start guests with dignity and respect
- Provide accurate up-to-date contact information including e-mail address and cell number (for texting purposes)
- Plan to meet with your assigned Family Service Worker and Teachers for home visits and parent-teacher conferences
- Must provide updated immunizations, physicals and dental examinations as requested
- Must adhere to the 85% Head Start student attendance standard

Note: Emergency contact information MUST be kept current and updated so that staff can contact you or someone that you have designated as a contact person. Please contact your Family Service Worker as soon as any information changes!

Attendance and Punctuality

Your child's regular attendance is required to maintain full enrollment in the Early Childhood Education program. Being absent from school or arriving late can cause poor performance and achievement. All children should be present and punctual each day. By establishing good attendance and timely arrival, it will create good habits for your child. These habits lay a foundation that continue through school and life success.

You must notify your Family Service Worker if your child is going to be absent. Please call your center each day your child is absent and give the reason for the absence and the return date. Excessive absences late drop off and/or pick-ups may result on your child being dropped from the program.

Excused absences include:

- medical, dental and clinic appointments
- illness/injury/hospitalization
- temporary family situations
- adverse or unsafe weather conditions
- death of a family member

Home Visits

Home Visits are an important part of our program - they help us become true partners in your child's experience at Head Start. When you enroll your child in CAC's Head Start Program, you agree to be an active participant in home visits with teachers and Family Service Workers. Both teachers and Family Service Workers meet with the parent/guardian at least twice a year; these Home Visits are required for continued enrollment in our program. ECE staff will coordinate with parents/guardians to schedule visits and appointments that are convenient. Parents/guardians are expected to notify ECE staff if a visit must be rescheduled.

Confidentiality

Family information is gathered so that the ECE team can best understand and support the needs of your child and family. All information obtained from you is completely confidential, **EXCEPT** for information that we, as mandated reporters, would be required to share with Child Protective Services. Records can only be sent to other agencies, such as the Howard County Public School System, with written permission from the parents or legal guardian, or if requested for legal purposes. Only the parent or guardian signing the enrollment form will have access to the enrollment records. Parents may request their children's records at any time. CAC complies with the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Non-Custodial Parents

When possible, the ECE Team will make an effort to include the non-custodial parent, providing support for their involvement with the child and goal attainment. Non-custodial parents have the right to access all *educational records* and may participate in classroom/center activities unless Howard County Head Start has been provided with **legal, up-to date** documents that do not permit contact with the child by the non-custodial parent. *Non-Educational* records may only be accessed by the legal guardian who submitted the paperwork for enrollment in the program. Be sure to provide your FSW with any custodial documentation.

Community Engagement

Community Action Council have established partnerships with community organizations which may be faith-based agencies, local retail and non-profits in Howard Count. An FSW can assist with accessing any of these resources when necessary to help your family. Some of our community organizations are: Howard County Library System, Howard County Government, HopeWorks, Department of Social Services, Howard County Public School System, Family & Children Services, Foreign-Born Information and Referral Network (FIRN), Grassroots, Howard County Health Department, and Howard County Workforce Development.

Complaint Procedures

The ECE Program follows the *Head Start Program Performance Standards* developed by the Federal Office of Head Start. The Program must also follow all Maryland State Department of Education's Office of Childcare licensing guidelines. If you have a complaint about the program, you are encouraged to begin your discussion with your child's Center Manager. The Center Manager may be able to assist you with the situation or will direct you to CAC's Director of Education who is responsible for overseeing area programs. Center Manager contact information is listed in this *Handbook*.

Performance Standards and the Child Care Administration guidelines are available to you at any time at each of our sites.

MSDE Office of Child Care
200 West Baltimore Street, 10th Floor
Baltimore, MD 21201
410-767-7805