



Community Action Council of Howard County

HELPING PEOPLE. CHANGING LIVES.

2022-23 School Year PARENT HANDBOOK

Please read this entire Handbook.

Community Action Council of Howard County: Mission Statement

To diminish poverty and enable self-sufficiency for all Howard County individuals, families, and children in need.

Table of Contents

- Community Action Council of Howard County: Mission Statement..... 2
- Early Childhood Education Program Overview..... 5
 - Before-Care and After Care Program..... 6
 - What to Send to School with Your Child:..... 6
- Contact Us 7
- Hours of Operation & Inclement Weather 8
 - Attendance Policy 9
- Health and Safety 10
 - General Health & Safety 10
 - Building Security and Access..... 10
 - Illness 10
 - Physical Health..... 12
 - Nutritional Health 12
- 2022-23 COVID-19 Health and Safety Procedures 13
 - Safety of Children, Families, and Staff..... 13
 - Drop off and Pick Up Procedures..... 13
 - Face Coverings 14
 - Food Preparation and Distribution 14
 - Keeping Areas Clean 14
 - When to Keep Children at Home..... 14
 - Closure and Quarantine..... 15
- Early Learning 16
 - Early Childhood Education is a Two-Way Street..... 16
 - Curriculum 17
 - Assessments 17
 - Mental and Behavioral Health..... 19
- Early Childhood Education Employee Discipline Policy 19

Parent, Family, and Community Engagement	21
Family Services and Family Well-being.....	21
Family Expectations	21
Family Visits	22
Families as Advocates and Leaders	23
Family Engagement in Transitions.....	24
Communication	24
Non-Custodial Parents.....	25
Confidentiality	25
Complaint Procedures	25

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 includes 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.
- **Physical, Mental, and Behavioral Health:** Each child's, social emotional, motor, cognitive, and language development is supported to allow them to fully engage 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
 - Two family 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 and based on availability.

Enrollment in Before and After Care is provided by the 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 with Your Child:

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 with first and last name (including hats, mittens, and umbrellas).

Contact Us

	Location	Phone Number
Community Action Council of Howard County	9820 Patuxent Woods Drive Columbia, MD 21046	410-313-6440
Early Childhood Education Program Main Office	9820 Patuxent Woods Drive Columbia, MD 21046	410-313-6443
Director of Education		410-313-6589
Brocklin Qualls, Deputy Director of Education		410-313-3684
Nikisha Anderson, Mental Health Behavioral Specialist		410-313-3714
Julia Tomanovich, Special Education Specialist		410-313-6561
Carrie Youssi, Education Coordinator		410-313-6582
Demetria Moore, Service Integration Coordinator		410-313-6562
Tia West, RN BSN		410-313-6482
Bauder Education Center at Long Reach Michele Kilette, Center Manager	8775 Cloudleap Ct, Suite 110 Columbia, MD 21045	Main: 410-313-2730 Family Service: 410-313-2730
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
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 21044	Main: 410-313-7246 / Family Service: 410-313-7257
Before-Care and After-Care Ed Shields, Coordinator	6680 Cradlerock Way Columbia, MD 21046	410-313-6219

Hours of Operation & Inclement Weather

ECE Hours of Operation for ALL Center Locations

- **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

Attendance Policy

Head Start Program Performance Standards require children to attend school daily to maintain enrollment.

Your child's regular attendance is required to maintain full enrollment in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) program. Absence or lateness to school leads to poor performance and achievement. All children should be present and on time each day.

You must notify the 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. 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. Excessive absences, late drop offs and/or pick-ups may result in your child being withdrawn 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

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 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. During the school year, students also participate in screenings for hearing, vision, BMI (height and weight), and oral hygiene.

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. Medication is stored in a locked cabinet. Each center has at least one staff member with medication administration certification.

Building Security and Access

All Early Childhood Education Centers are locked for security. Parents or caregivers seeking access to the building will be buzzed in and directed to a staff member for assistance.

Illness

- Children must be kept home from school if they are ill. Please notify the school if your child is ill.
- 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 must stay home with, or 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 ○ New onset of severe headache ○ New loss of taste or smell ○ Complaints of a stiff neck and headache with one or more of the above symptoms
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*** 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. ***

Medical Emergencies

Staff has been trained to follow the following emergency procedures:

- Staff will always stay with injured child 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 is permissible as health conditions allow.

Family style eating with balanced, nutritious meals gives children an opportunity to learn about healthy eating habits with support from their peers *as health conditions permit*. Staff members use the classroom to teach children healthy habits about safety.

Physical Health

Children will engage in structured/unstructured physical activity daily indoors or outdoors, weather permitting. Children's gross motor development is important to overall health. Gross motor development is gained through regular play and movement 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.

All children receive two vision, hearing, and BMI screenings per year. Children also receive two dental screenings upon parental consent.

Nutritional Health

The ECE Program's child nutrition services assist families in meeting each child's nutritional needs and in creating good eating habits that nurture healthy development and life-long well-being. The Program participates in the Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). A variety of nutritionally balanced, high quality foods are served on the premises each day. These nutrition services promote child wellness by providing nutrition services that supplement and complement those of the home and community. Leisurely mealtimes provide opportunities for:

- Development of positive attitudes toward healthy foods
- Decision making, sharing, and communicating with others, and
- Development of muscle control and eye-hand coordination.

Children also learn appropriate eating patterns and mealtime behavior when they observe adult behavior at mealtime.

Weekly menus are carefully planned to follow the MSDE 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. Menus include children's favorites, culturally diverse, and seasonally appropriate options.

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.

CAC's ECE Program is an equal opportunity provider.

2022-23 COVID-19 Health and Safety Procedures

Safety of Children, Families, and Staff

Nothing is more important to us than the health and safety of children, families, and staff. The ECE Program works closely with the Maryland State Department of Education, the Office of Childcare, and the Howard County Health Department to ensure the health and safety of our staff and students. The ECE team has worked diligently, following the guidance from the Center for Disease Control, to develop policies and procedures to keep students, families, and staff safe throughout the school year.

Drop off and Pick Up Procedures

Drop-Off at All 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. Sick children will not be permitted 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.
5. All children must be picked up by an **authorized** adult (**at least 18 years of age**). Children can only be picked up by adults listed on the Emergency Form.

Face Coverings

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

Food Preparation and Distribution

Teachers 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 conduct rigorous cleaning routines, and all high-touch surfaces and objects are 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.

When to Keep Children 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:

- Fever of 100.4 or higher
- Sore Throat
- Cough
- Difficulty Breathing
- Diarrhea or vomiting
- New Onset of severe headache (especially with fever)
- New loss of taste or smell

**For persons with chronic conditions such as asthma, the symptoms should represent a change from normal health status. **

These symptoms are considered COVID-19 like symptoms. If your child is experiencing these symptoms, he or she must have a **negative PCR COVID-19 test, OR** a doctor's note stating your child's diagnosis (differential diagnosis) and that your child does not require a COVID-19 test.

- The ECE Program **cannot** accept COVID-19 rapid test results, or At-Home COVID-19 test results at this time.
- Please send all test results to the school nurse at twest@CAC-HC.org. **The nurse must review your child's test results before he/she is cleared to return to school.**

- If your child has vomiting, diarrhea, or fever, your **child must be symptom-free for at least 24 hours, without medication, before returning to school.**

Closure and Quarantine

Every case of child illness is taken seriously. Our team takes extra precautions to monitor for COVID-19 like symptoms in students and staff.

- Parents will be notified if a case of COVID-19 is reported in your child's classroom.
- The Registered Nurse may contact parents/guardians of students with a positive COVID-19 test for follow up information.
- All cases of COVID-19 must be reported to the Howard County Health Department (HCHD). Guidance and next steps will be determined by the HCHD. Any guidance affecting the classroom will be communicated with parents.
- Parent/Guardian cooperation is very important in keeping all students, families, and staff safe, and minimizing closures to the classroom.

Early Learning

Early Childhood Education is a Two-Way Street

Early Childhood Education Team's Commitment to Students

Early childhood learning domains are the areas of child development and early learning essential for school readiness and long-term success. Based on the *Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework* and the *Maryland Early Learning Standards* the domains are important and are supported and nurtured in a variety of ways in the ECE Program.

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

Kindergarten readiness assessments measure children's readiness in the domains throughout children's enrollment.

Supporting Students' Learning at Home

- Preschool children need 11 to 13 hours of sleep each night.
- Serve nutritious family meals. Good nutrition helps children to be at their best.
- Always dress your child for the weather and have a change of clothing available at the school.
- Bring children on time to school every day.
- Keep children at home if they are not feeling well.
- Complete the *Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)* soon after enrollment to help teachers' measure your child's developmental progress.
- Meet with the assigned family service worker (FSW) throughout the year for family visits.

- Meet with your classroom teachers throughout the year for a home visit and parent-teacher conferences.
- Communicate weekly with the assigned family service worker and your child's teacher.
- Actively participate in your child's early learning experience by participating in volunteer, leadership, and engagement opportunities offered throughout the year.

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 Early Learning Outcomes Framework* as well as *Maryland 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.

Within the first 45 days of school, each child receives developmental and mental health/behavioral screenings. Parents and teachers work together to complete the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3) and Devereux Early Childhood Assessment for Preschoolers (DECA-P2). The ASQ-3 provides activities and questions related to communication, motor, personal-social and problem-solving skills. The DECA-P2 measures initiative, attachment and relationships, self-regulation and behavior concerns.

These two tools indicate whether children's development is on schedule as compared to their typically developing peers. Teachers and parents review these results to determine if children are on track and how to best support them. For children who appear significantly behind in any of these areas, a referral for further assessment may be recommended.

Individualized Child Supports and Services

CAC's ECE Program provides an equitable, strengths-based early childhood experience for all children. We use a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to ensure that each student has what they need to succeed. The MTSS consists of three tiers:

- Tier 1 (high quality environment and instruction),
- Tier 2 (short-term, targeted interventions), and
- Tier 3 (referral for evaluation and individualized services).

Parents must engage with CAC staff in discussing appropriate plans for their children and ensuring that home and school are similarly supportive environments.

Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports are provided by CAC staff and contracted providers. Depending on the area of concern, Tier 3 evaluations may be conducted by an outside provider or by Howard County Public School System (HCPSS)'s Child Find Team. No evaluation can be conducted without the parent's consent.

Early Childhood Special Education is a preventative and proactive service to help children are struggling in any developmental area to catch up to their peers. Howard County Public Schools provide special education services in Howard County. CAC's Special Education Specialist works with the County's assessment team (Child Find) to help parents through the referral process and ensure that eligible children are identified and receive appropriate services.

Once children receive services through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), ECE teachers review the plan, follow its main goals and required supports, and work with the IEP/IFSP team to monitor progress.

Children with suspected delays, confirmed disabilities, IFSPs and/or IEPs are encouraged to apply. CAC does not deny placement based on a disability or its severity if the child otherwise meets the Program's age, income eligibility criteria, and appropriate placement according to the child's IEP.

Mental and Behavioral Health

CAC's ECE program provides robust, wrap-around services to enrolled children. Behavioral health intervention and mental health therapy is provided by CAC's subject area experts or contracted 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. Parents are provided updates and are invited to participate in this process.

Early Childhood Education Employee Discipline Policy

The Community Action Council's Early Childhood Educational (ECE) Program believes that all learning is best supported through play and strong, positive interactions with adults. Promoting healthy social and emotional development is one of the goals of our program. To support our students in developing these critical skills, the Program uses the Maryland Pyramid Model. The Pyramid Model is evidence-based framework to support the healthy social emotional development of all children. This Model helps adults interact with children and understand 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** the use of practices that severe, humiliating, frightening, or associated with food, rest, or toileting to discipline any child. Employees never use physical punishment such as shaking, hitting, physical or emotional abuse or threats. Childcare personnel never use threats or negative remarks and never threaten to withhold food as 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

The goal of Family Engagement is to provide support, encouragement, and training to help parents and other family members in their roles as their child's first and most important teachers. ECE program staff builds strong and effective partnerships that will help children and families thrive. These partnerships are based on mutual respect and trust.

Family Services and Family Well-being

Each family will be assigned a dedicated Family Service Worker (FSW). The Family Service Worker will:

- Work collaboratively with families to identify family goals and establish a Family Partnership Agreement.
- Assist with applying for additional Community Action Council services: energy assistance; housing assistance; and food assistance through the Howard County Food Bank. Families may be referred to other community resources that are responsive to their interests and goals as needed.
- Ensure that parents are provided opportunities to enhance their own parenting skills.

Family Expectations

- Treat peers, ECE program staff, and guests with dignity and respect.
- Participate in Parent Orientation.
- Provide accurate up-to-date contact and emergency information including e-mail address and cell phone number.
- Plan to meet with your assigned Family Service Worker and Teachers for family visits and parent-teacher conferences.
- Provide updated immunizations, physicals and dental examinations as requested.
- Bring your child to school each day. For a listing of excused absences, please see the Attendance Policy on page 9.

Note: Emergency Forms must be kept up-to-date. Notify your FSW when any information has changed.

Family Visits

- Family Visits are an important part of our program. They help us become true partners in your child's early learning experience. When you enroll your child in the ECE Program, you agree to be an active participant in visits with teachers and Family Service Workers.
- Both teachers and Family Service Workers meet with the parent/guardian at least twice a year; these Family 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

Family Visits ensure a partnership between your family and the ECE Program. Family visits will take place in both your home and at your child's ECE Center. Your family will have the opportunity to meet with your Family Service Worker and your child's Teacher.

Family Visits may include:

- Initial Home Visit conducted by a Teacher or Family Service Worker.
- Fall Parent-Conference at your child ECE Center.
- Winter Parent-Conference at your child ECE Center.
- Spring Parent-Conference at your child ECE Center.
- Other Family Visits may be added as needed.

Families as Learners

We welcome the entire family and value your participation in our program. Families are encouraged to participate by attending Parent Committee and Policy Council meetings, participating in family workshops, and volunteering in ECE centers and classrooms., or assisting with clerical tasks such as answering telephone calls.

To sign up and find out about volunteer opportunities, please contact your Family Service Worker.

Families as Advocates and Leaders

As an ECE parent, we believe that you are your child's greatest advocate. Parents make program decisions and recommend policies. The ECE Program offers parents multiple opportunities to build advocacy and leadership skills. You are encouraged to join the following groups.

- Parent Committee
 - Parent Committee meetings provides an opportunity for parents to join their peers, participate in program events, classroom activities, parent group activities and make recommendations to improve the program. Parent Committee meetings are held on the second Tuesday 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.
- Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Committee
 - The MTSS Committee consists of teachers, parents, family service workers, administrators and community stakeholders. This group gathers regularly to assess, direct and revise CAC's MTSS to make sure it is meeting the needs of all students.

Family Engagement in Transitions

The ECE Program offers transition activities and information throughout the school year for parents and students. Transition support is provided to families as children are welcomed into the ECE Program. Additional support is provided as student's transition into kindergarten.

Newly enrolled families will:

- Be assigned a Family Service Worker to help navigate the ECE Program
- Attend Parent Orientation
- Meet teaching staff and tour the ECE Centers

Families transitioning to kindergarten:

- Receive information about kindergarten registration and one-on-one support from their Family Service Worker to assist with registration
- May visit kindergarten classrooms
- Receive a transition backpack at the end of the program year

Communication

You will receive regular communication from ECE teachers and staff to include:

- **Weekly ECE Bulletins Email Newsletter:** Important program information and resources from staff and community partners
- **Weekly Ready4K Program Text Messages:** fun facts and easy tips on how to promote your child's development
- **Weekly Backpack Mail:** includes flyers, reminders of family workshops, meetings, and parent-child activities
- **Monthly Classroom Email Newsletters:** ECE centers and classroom specific information
- Weekly TSGold Family App
- **Text Messages:** Emergent or time sensitive information such as school closings

We encourage you to follow Community Action Council of Howard County on Facebook and Twitter.

Non-Custodial Parents

To the extent possible, the ECE Team will 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 CAC of Howard County 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.

Confidentiality

The ECE Team gathers family information to better understand and support the needs of your child and family. All information obtained from you is completely confidential, **EXCEPT** for information that ECE Staff, as mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect, would be required to share with Howard County Department of Social Service's Child Protective Services and/or the Howard County Police Department. 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).

Complaint Procedures

The ECE Program is a partner to each family and works to resolve concerns as quickly as possible. The ECE Program follows the *Head Start Program Performance Standards* developed by the Federal Office of Head Start as well as MSDE's Office of Childcare licensing guidelines. Please follow this process for raising your concerns:

1. Discuss with your child's teacher during a schedule appointment time.
2. Contact your child's Center Manager
3. You may also contact CAC's Director of Education who leads all Program operations.

Performance Standards and the Child Care Administration guidelines are available to you at any time at each of our centers. Contact information is available on page five of this *Handbook*. You may also contact:

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