



PARENT/VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

2023-2024

**Community Action of Allegan County
323 Water Street
Allegan, Michigan 49010**

Visit our website: www.CommunityActionAllegan.org

And follow us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/communityactionallegan

Parent/Volunteer Handbook is dependent on decisions still being determined in Local Districts and State/Local guidance as it relates to MI Safe Schools: Michigan's 2020-2021 Return to School Roadmap.

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WELCOME STATEMENT

Welcome to Community Action of Allegan County Early Education Services - where we provide early education services encompassing our prenatal program and nearly 400 children: birth to five years old, in center-based and home-based program options. Our handbook is designed to provide an overview of the options offered in our typical program year.

Head Start and Early Head Start are model early childhood programs for children and families. The latest research reveals a child is more likely to succeed in school and in life when their parents or guardians are involved in his/her education.

Your active participation is critical to the success of your child. We hope all parents will volunteer 10 hours per month whether at home, virtually or at school. There are many exciting opportunities for you to become active in your child's early childhood experience such as:

- *Working with us on the Policy Council and/or the Health Services Advisory Committee*
- *Volunteering in the classroom*
- *Participating in special family events*
- *Attending family engagement events*
- *Completing homework with your child*
- *And many more!*

Within the next few weeks, you will become more familiar with our early childhood curriculum. It is a developmentally appropriate approach to learning that is child-initiated and builds your child's self-esteem, early reading, writing, math, and problem-solving skills. We look forward to becoming active partners in your child's early learning experience.

Please read this handbook carefully. It contains some of our program's policies and other important information you may need as it relates to the typical program year.

We look forward to working with you and your children.

Sincerely,



*Sarah See
Director of Early Education Services*

GIVE YOUR CHILD A HEAD START

What is Head Start?

Head Start is a federal program operated by the United States Department of Health and Human Services that provides comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parent engagement services to children and families. Our services and resources, through partnership with parents, enhance children's physical and emotional well-being and establish an environment to develop strong cognitive skills. We believe parents are the child's first and most influential Teacher.

Great minds begin in Head Start and we wish you and your child a successful and rewarding Head Start experience.

CAAC Head Start's Philosophy:

To create respectful and caring partnerships with families and the community, to supply high-quality child development programming, and to provide family support services that encourage self-reliance.

What is Community Action of Allegan County (CAAC)?

Community Action of Allegan County is a local nonprofit agency designed to carry out the Community Action Program, founded by the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act, to fight poverty. Community Action Agencies help people to help themselves in achieving self-reliance.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

The State of Michigan Child Care Licensing requires all childcare programs have written procedures for crisis management including but not limited to intruders and bomb threats. CAAC Early Education Programs have a written emergency plan that is reviewed with staff, two times each year. Early Education students participate in practice drills to ensure they know what to do in case of emergencies.

- Head Start Centers in public schools follow the local district's emergency plans.
- Early Head Start Centers follow individualized guidance written in building procedures.
- During a lock down situation, Early Education students cannot be released until staff have been given the "all clear" from the school district and/or emergency response team.
- In the case of a crisis, each family will be contacted by a staff member.

Severe Weather

Head Start Centers will close if the public-school district where the Center is located is closed. Scheduled Family Engagement meetings will also be cancelled when the Centers close. Local school closings are announced online, radio and television. There is not a specific announcement for Head Start closings unless there are unique circumstances.

Home-Based Families - If your school district is closed, your Home-Based Educator will be in contact to discuss weather conditions near your home to determine if the visit will take place or be rescheduled. If Community Action of Allegan County is closed, all home visits will be cancelled.

Severe Weather Warning and Bussing

In the case of a severe weather warning, Head Start buses will not transport your child until the warning has expired and the “all clear” has been given. Please note: Bus routes may cover different districts. If the district where you live is closed, the center may still be open. Example: Sycamore Elementary may have a bus route in the Wayland District. If Wayland is closed, Sycamore may still be open. In these cases, you may transport your child to school as the bus may not be operating.

Public School Closing Notifications

PUBLIC SCHOOL	HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START
Allegan Public School	Allegan (North Ward) and Tech Center
Fennville Public School	Fennville
Hopkins Public School	Sycamore
Martin Public School	Martin
Otsego Public School	Otsego EHS Center, Dix Street
Plainwell Public School	Plainwell EHS Center, Starr Elementary
Bloomington Public School	Pullman
Wayland Public School	Steeby

School Delays

- If your public-school system is delayed for 1 hour for any reason, our Head Start Centers in the delayed area will be delayed 1 hour.
- If your public-school system is delayed for 2 hours for any reason, our Head Start Center in the delayed area will not have morning classes. Afternoon classes will run as normal.
- If the public-school system in the full day program is delayed for 2 hours for any reason, the Head Start Full Day programs will be delayed 2 hours.

ADMISSION, FEES, ENROLLMENT, AND WITHDRAWAL

Fees

No fees are charged for Early Head Start or Head Start programs.

Admission and Enrollment

CAAC Early Education includes a prenatal program and children 0-5 years old. Families must meet program age and income criteria and live in our service area (Allegan County or an Allegan Area Educational Service Agency district), or request service in our county.

Income determination is based on 100% of poverty level, per federal income guidelines or current receipt of public assistance (TANF/Cash Assistance or SNAP/Food Stamps), SSI, foster care status or the experience of homelessness.

Federal guidelines allow for enrollment of 10% of available slots to over-income families (up to 130% of poverty), depending on their priority due to risk factors/selection criteria.

Withdrawal

Families may choose to withdraw their child or leave the program at any time with no penalty.

If a child unenrolls, or drops from the program, and remains unenrolled from the program for more than 30 days and they want to re-enroll in the program they will need to re-apply.

If a family moves within our service area or wishes to be transferred to another center/program option, they may do so if an opening is available. If there is not an opening, they will be placed on the DROP/WAIT list for the center they are requesting and will maintain the priority points from the start of the school year.

ATTENDANCE

Classroom Attendance

Your child's regular classroom attendance is a priority in our program. Attending every day will maximize your child's opportunity to feel like they are a part of the school family. Start building this habit in preschool so kids learn that going to school on time, every day is important.

Contacting Staff Regarding Absence

Call the Family Engagement Specialist or classroom Teacher when your child is going to be absent. Head Start staff **needs** to be notified within the first hour of school.

Day 1: If your child is unexpectedly absent and Early Education staff have not heard from you within the first hour of school, a staff member **must** contact you to ensure everyone is healthy and/or safe and find out why your child is absent.

Day 2: If you have not contacted us, we will reach out again. We will let you know that we will be stopping by the next day if we still have not heard from you.

Day 3: If your child does not return on the third day and we have not heard from you, a staff member is required to complete a home visit.

Note: If you tell staff your child is “sick” as a reason for absence, staff will follow-up and ask for more information so we can make the required report to the Health Department about illness/communicable disease.

The program cannot allow a child to attend if health requirements or Medical Action Plans are not received.

Home-Based Expectations and Attendance

Upon enrollment in the Home-Based Program, families will be asked to choose both a set day and time for weekly visits. Families are making a commitment to attend weekly, 90-minute visits.

Families will be expected to participate in visits at their scheduled time and to notify their Home-Based Educator in advance if they need to cancel or reschedule. If possible, the Home-Based Educator will attempt to reschedule the visit that same week.

After enrollment, you may make changes to your home visit schedule on a permanent basis, but not week to week. Talk to your Home-Based Educator if you would like to change your visit schedule.

It is required that parents and children consistently attend and actively participate in family visits and play group events. Visits must be scheduled when both the child(ren) and at least one parent and/or guardian can attend. The Home-Based Educator cannot be left alone with the child.

If attendance becomes a concern, an attendance plan may be completed to help reestablish regular attendance. Continued or chronic attendance issues may prompt an attendance plan or a discussion about whether the program is a good fit for your current situation.

EDUCATION

The Early Education program wants to involve you in every aspect of our educational process. The program is designed to meet each child’s individual needs. Our goal is to develop the whole child by providing a variety of learning experiences to foster intellectual, social, and emotional growth.

Head Start classrooms are under the supervision of a Teacher and an Assistant Teacher who are involved in on-going training in the field of child development and early childhood education. Infant and Toddler classrooms are under the supervision of two Lead Teachers who undergo intense training on the latest and best practices for infant and toddler development. Parents are welcome to visit the classroom at any time with a completed and approved volunteer form.

All Early Education centers are licensed by the State of Michigan Bureau of Children and Adult Licensing.

Center Based Model

Below are options available during a regular program year:

The CAAC Head Start Center Based model provides classroom experiences for children ages 3-5. The following are some of the unique qualities the center setting offers.

- Class capacity of 16 children
- Operates 4 days a week for 3.5 or 7.5 hours per day
- At least 2 classroom staff per classroom
- Two Teacher Home Visits
- Two Parent/Teacher Conferences
- All Head Start Sites are ranked at a 4 Star through the Michigan Quality of Care System

Home Based Model

The CAAC Home Base model provides in-home learning experiences for children ages 0-5. The following are some of the unique qualities of the home base setting:

- Individualized visits for 90 minutes each week focusing on the child's school readiness and positive parent/child interactions.
- Socialization opportunities monthly for caregivers and children
- Three child assessment reports per year
- Additional family support through referrals and resources.

All program models include individualization for each child, school readiness goals set by the parent and teacher/home base educator, health and educational screenings, and mental health and support services as needed.

Your child's progress will be assessed throughout the school year using Teaching Strategies GOLD. Teachers work with your child and record observations. Results from these observations and assessments are shared with you throughout the year and are used to plan educational experiences based on your child's strengths, needs, and interests.

Referral Services and Disability Supports

Our program staff work closely with parents to identify and evaluate concerns related to each child's development. When a developmental concern has been identified, we coordinate with parents to request further evaluation and recommendations from the local school district, Early On or our Support Services team. Accommodations are provided to support the involvement of all children in program activities. Children with diagnosed disabilities may be dually enrolled in both Early Education Services and special education programs as indicated by their IEP. Program staff are available to help families understand their child's disability diagnosis and rights to free appropriate public education. We can also support parents in accessing community-based resources in cooperation with a child's health care provider.

Home Visits and Conferences

Parents of children enrolled in the center-based programs will receive a minimum of two home visits and two conferences by teaching staff during the year. Conferences are generally held at your child's center. Home Visits and Conferences are an in-depth opportunity for Parents and Teachers to:

- Develop/share individualized learning goals for your child
- Share observations about your child's strengths, needs, and interests
- Hear about the classroom schedule and activities
- Provide Teachers with suggestions for possible curriculum ideas

Additional home visits or conferences may be requested at the staff or parent's discretion.

Home-Based Families will also have visit time set aside throughout the year to discuss the enrolled child's progress, observations and development, health, visit attendance, and other family needs.

Transportation

Bus routes are required to be no more than one hour. Therefore, there may be some outlying areas or communities where transportation cannot be provided, or designated pick-up points may be determined.

In response to safety practices related to COVID-19, timeframes and number of children on a bus may fluctuate from typical policy as stated below

Bus Pick-up and Drop-off

The pick-up and drop-off schedule are under the authorization of the Transportation Supervisor and is cooperatively designed with the drivers.

The parent/guardian is responsible for walking their child to and from the bus, and for keeping the child safe while waiting for the bus. Both you and your child must be ready 5 minutes before and 5 minutes after the designated times. If the bus is running late, keep watching for the bus for 5 minutes after your scheduled time. We will try to call/or message if we are running very late. Approved bus stops are located within a reasonable distance of the child's home. The bus stop location provides a safe place for children to get on and off the bus.

The Head Start policy is a one (1) minute wait for the bus at each house. Drivers cannot wait longer than one (1) minute as the entire bus route must be completed within one (1) hour due to state and federal regulations.

We want to stress how important it is to be on time for your child's bus arrival at Drop-off. It can be very disturbing for a child to find that there is no one at the bus stop to accept him/her.

Bus Drop Off

- For the safety of your child, an authorized person aged 12 or older must greet the bus or pick up your child at the classroom. This person must show identification. (For youth, a school ID is acceptable.)
- In case of an emergency where you are unable to pick up or get your child off the bus, the following steps will be taken:
 - Arrange for your Emergency contact to pick up your child at the classroom or be at your home to meet the bus.
 - Call Transportation, at 269-941-3697, immediately to inform them of your emergency and who will be picking up your child or meeting the bus.
 - If no one is home to meet the bus or you do not pick up your child at the end of class and no one has contacted the Head Start staff, we will assume that you/your family is in a crisis, and we will notify law enforcement to help find you and assure your child's safety.

Parents should notify the Transportation Office and their classroom when their child will not attend class.

If a change in the child's pick-up or drop-off point becomes necessary, the parent/guardian must contact the Transportation Office by phone to request a change. The approval time for this request is 48 hours. Requests for changes should be limited due to emergency, work-related or other special circumstances.

Only the Transportation Office can make changes to the child's pick up or drop off location.

For safety reasons, the following items are not allowed: Rolling backpacks, food, drink, toys, stuffed animals, or other personal items. Personal items are allowed if requested by the Teacher for a special day. All personal items must fit in the child's backpack.

All children are required to be seated in a child restraint system appropriate to the height and weight of the child while on the bus.

With approval from the Transportation Office, parents/guardians may ride the bus to and from school with their child if there is room on the bus and have completed a volunteer paperwork which has been approved by the Director of Early Education Services.

Adults must always wear a seat belt while on the bus.

Only Head Start children and approved adults will be able to ride on the Head Start buses.

In the instance that transportation is unavailable for a planned route we will contact families as soon as possible. In the case of bus failure while children are being transported on the bus, a parent and/or adult listed on the Child Information Card will be contacted immediately to pick up their children.

KEEP YOUR EMERGENCY CARD UP TO DATE! Be sure to contact Head Start in advance if you are moving, changing jobs, or making different pick up or drop off arrangements. If Head Start discovers that a family does not have a working telephone number on file, staff will continue to contact each emergency contact listed. If no contact can be made in the case of an emergency, staff will contact Child Protective Services.

Bus/Pedestrian Safety

Community Action of Allegan County Head Start program is concerned about safety both in our program and in day-to-day life.

Why young children are more at risk:

- They have narrower side vision than an adult.
- They are less able to determine the direction of sound.
- They have trouble judging speeds and distances of moving cars.
- They have a limited capacity for anticipation or focusing.
- They can overestimate their knowledge and physical strength.
- They are too small to be seen by drivers.

Adults sometimes unknowingly place them at risk by expecting too much in traffic situations.

Teach by explaining

Explain to your child the safe way to cross a street. Say, “When I cross a street, I always stop at the curb. I look and listen for cars. I look left for any traffic coming, and then I look right for traffic coming that way. Then I look left again for any traffic coming. When it is clear, I cross the street, and keep looking left and right and listening for cars coming.”

You can also explain how you look and listen for vehicles where they may be backing up (out of a driveway, parking lot, etc.) Say: “Sometimes I can hear trucks backing up because they make a loud beeping sound to warn me. I also can look for a car or truck moving backward, and I can look and see white lights in the back of the car that tell me the driver is getting ready or is going backwards.”

Use life as a teaching opportunity quietly point out to your child when you notice others using safe pedestrian behavior. This reinforces your message and is also helpful for visual learners.

Pedestrian Safety Tips for Parents

- Follow the rules you are teaching your child.
- Always accompany your child when crossing the street.
- Teach children to cross the street only at the light.
- Teach children to look both ways before crossing the street.
- Teach children to walk on the sidewalks or against the traffic when sidewalks are not available.

- Teach children who wait at the bus stop to stay close to the bus stop and out of the street.
- Teach your child to be alert to cars backing out of driveways and parking spaces.
- Teach your child to never walk behind a bus.
- Teach your child to never reach under a bus for dropped item, (Toys, papers, etc.)

Self-Transport

Classroom Arrival/Departure

When parents are providing their own transportation to and from the Early Education classroom, we assume responsibility for children when the parent has signed the child in and has presented that child to staff. Your child must be signed in with a classroom staff member - not dropped off at the door to the building or classroom. At the end of the day, all children must be signed out, with a classroom staff member, by a responsible person identified on the Child Information Card.

CAAC Early Head Start/Head Start centers operate on different time schedules. Your child's Teacher will give you the arrival and dismissal times of the center. Please make sure your appointments are made in accordance with the time schedule.

Children may not arrive more than 5 minutes before class time unless authorized by the Teacher. Parents must accompany their child into the classroom or the designated drop-off location and sign them in and out daily.

Parents who arrive after the scheduled start of school may be asked to wait to drop their child off until after morning circle time. This may be due to district requirements of having staff escort parents through the school, or to prevent the disruption of the morning meeting.

Parents who pick up their children from the center must be there by dismissal time.

If an emergency arises, and the parent is unable to pick their child up from school on time, it is the parent's responsibility to contact someone from the child's release list. The parent should call the center and inform the Teacher.

Families should refrain from leaving children unattended and unsupervised in vehicles while picking up other children.

Release of Child

To ensure your child's safety, a child will only be released to individuals listed on the Child Information Card. WE CANNOT MAKE CHANGES or ADD NEW PEOPLE to the Child Information Card OVER THE PHONE.

Persons unknown to the staff will be required to provide photo identification.

A parent/guardian, or individual listed on the Child Information Card, is required to sign the child in and out of the center. Everyone must abide by these policies.

Late Pick Up

If a child is repeatedly picked up late, parents will need to meet with the Teacher or Family Engagement Specialist to develop a plan to pick the child up on time; and may require discussions about whether the program is a good fit for the family.

HEALTH IN EARLY EDUCATION

School Readiness Begins with Health.

Health Requirements

Health is the foundation of learning. We partner with families to ensure children have access to health care and are receiving preventive health care, like well-child exams and dental exams. We work with the parent/guardian and their health care provider to obtain all required screenings and follow-up care. Please let your Family Engagement Specialist or Home-Based Educator know if you need help obtaining any medical services.

Please note the following are required while enrolled in the Early Education Program:

- **Immunizations** - All children need to be up to date on immunizations or working with their physician to become up to date. We do accept a current, signed immunization waiver from the Allegan County Health Department. A center-based child who is behind on immunizations after 4 months, may be put on-hold per the State of Michigan Licensing Rules.
- **Well-child exam (physical)** – All children need a current physical exam on file with our Early Education program within 30 days of enrollment. Preschoolers need an exam every 12 months. Children birth through age two need exams more frequently. A child may go on-hold per the State of Michigan guidelines, if a current physical is not on file with our program within 30 days of starting in a center- based classroom.
- **Dental Exam** – Dental health is important and can impact children’s learning. In Michigan, any child 12 months of age or older is eligible for a dental exam. The Early Education program requires that your child be seen for a dental exam annually or more often if there are dental concerns.
- **Hearing and Vision Screenings** – All children receive this screening in collaboration with the Health Department and/or Early Education Staff. You will be informed of the results and provided with a referral for further assessment if your child does not pass a screening.
- **Lead Screen** – The State of Michigan requires all children on Medicaid be tested at 12 months and 24 months of age, or age 24-72 months if they have no record of ever being tested. Lead poisoning is caused by swallowing or breathing lead. Symptoms of lead poisoning can be silent, and children under 6 years old are most at risk. If you have questions about Lead poisoning, please contact your Family Engagement Specialist or Home-Based Educator.

- **Other required screenings** – If not done previously, include growth assessment, blood pressure, height/weight, and hemoglobin. The health team is available to perform these screenings if not completed during your child’s physical.

Medications at School

To ensure children are safe while at school, the Early Education program requires all center-based children that have been prescribed emergency medication like asthma inhalers, epi-pens, etc., to have the medication and medication supplies at school prior to starting. Other non-emergency medications should be given at home unless it is medically necessary to be given during school hours. The health team is available to answer any questions about needed medications and permission forms. **For safety reasons, do not put medication in your child’s backpack and do not allow your child to bring any medications in his/her pockets.**

Accidents, Injuries, Incidents

Our number one priority is keeping your child safe. Early Education staff actively seek to prevent accidents and injuries. However, even with preventative practices in place, accidents sometimes happen in the classroom or on the playground. If your child is injured while at school, staff will comfort your child while also taking care of their injury. After your child is feeling better, staff will record the incident on an accident report. A copy of the report will be sent home to you. If an injury requires emergency medical services, a staff member will call 911 and you. If staff are unable to reach you by phone, they will call the people you have listed as your emergency contact. Please keep your child’s emergency contact phone numbers up to date. If you need to change an emergency contact or phone number, please contact your child’s teacher.

Illness

Illness – Center-Based

To keep the classroom healthy, please keep your child home if he or she is sick. If your child becomes sick while at school, we will contact you to pick him or her up.

Illness – Home-Based

If anyone in your home is sick, please contact your Home-Based Educator to reschedule your home visit.

A child should be kept home, or the home visit should be canceled when:

- A child is not feeling well enough to participate.
- A child has a fever, sore throat or has had two or more episodes of vomiting or diarrhea in the past 24 hours.
- Child has an unexplained rash.
- Child is suspected of having any contagious illness. If a child has a communicable disease, please contact your family engagement specialist or your child’s teacher. If there is an exposure in the classroom, parents may be notified.

Your child may return to class when he or she feels well enough to participate and is symptom/fever free without any fever reducing medications.

Lice Policy

To help prevent a lice outbreak in the classroom, classroom staff complete weekly head checks. If a child is found to have live bugs, parents will be contacted to pick up their child from school. The child can return to school after they have received a lice treatment, live bugs are no longer present, and most nits have been removed. Please note, transportation may be suspended if we have not confirmed that treatment has been completed.

Hygiene Plans

The Early Education program establishes and maintains written hygiene health plans that include classroom staff and students washing hands often, universal precautions for handling of bodily fluids, and cleaning and sanitizing of equipment, toys, and other surfaces.

Community Outbreak

In the event of a communicable disease outbreak, Early Education staff follow guidelines and preventative practices put in place by the Allegan County Health Department, State of Michigan Child Care Licensing and the Office of Head Start.

NUTRITION IN EARLY EDUCATION

*Good nutrition is essential for children's brain development and growth.
Providing healthy meals and snacks help children's bodies grow and give them what they
need to talk, play, and learn together.*

Children in center-based programming are offered meals at no cost in accordance with CACFP (Child and Adult Care Food Program). Children are served the following meals while at school:

- Full Day – Children are served breakfast, lunch, and snack.
- Half Day – Children in the AM session are served breakfast and lunch. Children in the PM session are served lunch and snack.

Classroom Meals and Menus

- Meals are planned to meet the CACFP and Head Start Guidelines.
- The menus are designed to provide a variety of nutritious foods while limiting sugar, fat and salt.
- Look for a copy of the menu to be sent home each month.

Special Dietary Needs

Please contact your family engagement specialist if your child has dietary restrictions. Children who have special dietary needs due to a diagnosed disability, allergy, or intolerance, will need to have a signed medical statement completed by the child's physician before a food

substitution can be made. To ensure the safety of the child, it may be necessary for your child to be temporarily put on hold until a written order is received. The health team will work with you and your physician to get the necessary physician's order as quickly as possible.

No Outside Food or Drink

Due to food allergies and intolerances, only food prepared and served by the school or center will be offered in the classroom. No outside food is allowed in the classroom except for breast milk and infant formula.

Family Style Meal Service

- Mealtime is used as an opportunity for learning and developing good health habits, socialization skills, and communication skills.
- Meals and snacks are served in a family style setting where children are encouraged to set the table, serve themselves, and clean up afterwards.
- Classroom staff sit with children to model and encourage children to try new foods.
- Food is not used as a reward or punishment.

Early Education Dietitian

A dietitian or health team member is available to discuss your concerns regarding special dietary needs, weight concerns, picky eaters, basic shopping, and menu planning at home.

USDA Non-Discrimination Statement

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at 800-877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the [USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form](#), (AD-3027) found online at: http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call 866-632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

- (1) Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410
- (2) Fax: 202-690-7442; or
- (3) Email: program.intake@usda.gov.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

VOLUNTEERING

Volunteer Screening and Plan of Supervision

To keep children safe from harm, all parents and volunteers will always be supervised by a CAAC Early Education staff member in the classroom, on the playgrounds, on the buses and on field trips. A written plan for volunteers/parents will be posted in the classroom/center along with general suggestions for participation.

Classroom Volunteers

Any person, including parents/guardians of enrolled children, who wants to volunteer in with the program or participate in any classroom activity is required to complete a volunteer packet and receive approval from the central office, prior to volunteering. The Volunteer Packet includes:

- Volunteer Application
- Volunteer Code of Conduct/Confidentiality
- Mandated Reporter Certification

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

You made a wise choice to apply for the Head Start program and now that your child is enrolled, there is a whole new world open to you, too! Research suggests that children do better in school when their parents/guardians are involved. Family Engagement in Head Start/Early Head Start is about building relationships with families that support family well-being, strong relationships between parents/guardians and their children, and ongoing learning and development for both parents/guardians and children.

Get involved by:

- Reading monthly newsletters
- Volunteering in your child's classroom
- Attending Family Engagement Night
- Attending Celebration of Learning Days
- Join Parent Committees and Policy Council to share ideas
- Attending Parent/Teacher conferences and home visits
- Attending Early Head Start socialization

- Attending Parent Education Opportunities
- Join the Health Services Advisory Council

Information regarding these various events and meetings will be provided in greater detail as our school year goes on.

PROGRAM POLICIES

Discipline Approach:

Our program staff are trained to use Conscious Discipline to support the development of safe, appropriate self-regulation and problem-solving skills. Staff use individualized positive guidance and active supervision built into daily routines that support children in learning and using these strategies over time. Behavior management issues are handled only by trained staff. Volunteers are not permitted to address any behavior management issues with children.

Positive Guidance strategies may include:

- Positive verbal intervention
- Logical consequences
- Redirection

Our program does not use discipline techniques that require the use of corporal punishment, physical or environmental restraint. The following are not allowed:

- Physical or emotional abuse
- Exclusion from outside time or daily learning experiences
- Denial of food, water, rest, or bathroom facilities
- Placing anything in a child's mouth (soap, hot sauce, etc.)
- Punishment for soiling, wetting or not using the toilet
- Confining a child to a swing, highchair, crib, playpen, enclosed room, or other piece of equipment for an extended period in lieu of supervision.
- Time out

The safety of children and staff is a priority in our program. If a child is demonstrating behaviors that place them or others at risk of imminent harm, staff will use the least restrictive means necessary to ensure safety. When a behavior creates a serious threat to safety, staff may need to supportively hold a child. In such circumstances, staff may hold the child long enough to remove them from the dangerous situation and return the child to safety as quickly as possible.

If a child routinely engages in unsafe behaviors, a support planning meeting will be scheduled with the child's family. Support plans may also include the development of individualized support strategies, referrals for additional screening, and recommendations for community-based resources that may further support a child's development. Temporary alternative attendance plans may also be considered.

Interruption of Services:

When a child's behavior poses a continued, serious threat to health and safety, center-based services may be interrupted until a support planning meeting is held. The meeting will be offered as soon as possible. Family Engagement and Support Services will continue to be offered to families during this planning period.

Confidentiality:

Our Early Education program respects your right to privacy. Parent/guardians must sign an authorization for Release of Information Form before any information will be released. All staff and volunteers are informed of the confidentiality policy and reminded to keep all information regarding family's confidentiality.

All staff shall be informed prior to beginning work and reminded regularly thereafter that any information concerning an Early Education family is private and shall not be discussed with anyone.

All documents, forms, and files regarding families in the program will be kept in a locked space when not in use.

Court Orders and Custody:

Our Early Education program recognizes the importance of having both parents in a child's life. Additionally, state law maintains that both parents have access to their child unless there are legal documents which define restrictions. In situations involving child custody disputes or restraining orders, a copy of the court order MUST be in the child's file. We cannot prohibit contact with either parent without current court papers. If at any time there is a custody change, make sure you contact your Family Engagement Specialist/Home-Based Educator and provide a copy of the changes. For the safety of children, we require 24-48 hours for documents to be reviewed at the main office. Parents will be contacted when changes to white cards involving custody go into effect.

Child's Legal Name:

A child's last name, as it appears on their birth certificate, will be used on Head Start documents/files until/unless the parent/guardian provides legal documentation of a change of name.

Change of Information:

Whenever there is a change in address, phone, emergency contacts, health provider, health conditions, transportation, childcare provider, family situation or other relevant information, please notify Head Start.

Accessing Your Child's Records:

Parents can examine only their own child's file at the administrative office. Please allow 24 hours' notice. A student's records may be sent to another agency upon request or and with written permission of the parent/guardian.

Mandated Reporting:

All Early Education program staff and volunteers are mandated reporters under the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act. Any school/day care personnel who suspect child abuse or neglect must make a report to the State of Michigan DHS.

Early Education staff receive training to recognize the signs of abuse and neglect. Staff are trained in providing intervention, support, and assistance to families that need help.

Registered Sex Offenders:

CAAC Early Education service program follows the State of Michigan Sex Offender Laws as well as local school district policies. No person who is registered as a sex offender is allowed to enter or loiter within 500 feet of any Head Start, Early Head Start or School setting. This policy **DOES NOT** differ for registered sex offenders who are parents/guardians of a child enrolled in the program. Furthermore, a registered sex offender who is a parent/guardian of a child enrolled in the program will NOT be permitted to attend Early Education activities or programs held onsite.

Alcohol, Illegal Substances, Firearms, Smoke Free Environment:

Our Early Education program is a healthy environment that is free from alcohol, illicit drugs, weapons, and firearms (loaded and unloaded) and well as vaping or smoking. This applies to all program options, both onsite at schools and on the bus as well as in the homes of the families with which we work. All families are expected to follow this rule.

Professional Boundaries (Babysitting, Parties, etc.):

Early Education staff are prohibited from babysitting, attending social functions and social networking via technology with families enrolled in the program. Please do not ask staff to babysit, attend a social event or request to social network with them. We request that you respect our professional boundaries.

Gift Giving:

CAAC prohibits staff from accepting gifts from families. Donations may be made for the center or classrooms.

Holidays/ Birthdays:

The CAAC Early Education staff and families are richly diverse in racial backgrounds, ethnic and cultural practices, and religious affiliations. Our program recognizes and respects the holidays and celebrations normally relevant to children in our program. These celebrations and holidays may be included in the lesson plans that encompass a variety of developmentally appropriate

activities. Holiday activities will reflect the customs of children enrolled in the program as well as the introduction of new holidays and celebrations. Cultural diversity is respected every day in many ways in our classrooms. Our posters, books, and dolls are both diverse and reflective of the racial and ethnic backgrounds of the children who attend our program.

Staff and parents are encouraged to share their customs and ethnic backgrounds in the classroom. Parents' contributions of songs, stories, traditions, or recipes are a welcome addition to our curriculum.

The staff will ask families about their traditions/celebrations each year. If your child or family does not celebrate holidays, please meet with your Teacher or Family Engagement Specialist so that we may support the beliefs of all families enrolled.

Food from Home:

Food or drinks may not be brought in at any time, including to celebrate birthdays or holidays. Head Start has children in the classrooms with many different allergies so NO food can be brought from home. Note: If a parent/guardian brings or sends food to school to be used for birthdays or celebrations they will be sent back home. Parents are welcome to attend school with their child anytime, especially on their birthday.

Pest Policy:

Each facility provides a center-based environment free of toxins. Parents receive notice, through a standardized letter, and/or phone call/REMIND message, and a posted notice in the classroom, of pesticide applications when school districts provide notice to us of these applications.

No child is present during the spraying of pesticides or herbicides. Children do not return to the affected area until it is safe to do so, for not less than 4 hours or longer if required by the pesticide label use directions.

If a CAAC Head Start Classroom is located inside of a school building, that classroom will also follow that school's pest management program.

If pests are observed, the staff will inform the Director of Operations or Education Supervisor to contact the school or pest control.

Home-Based Families are asked to contact your Home-Based Educator to report if pests have been found in your home. Together, a determination will be made as to whether the Home Visit can occur, and families will be connected to resources that may assist in the elimination of such pests. Alternate visit locations may be arranged, if requested, until such resources have been obtained.

Client Code of Conduct:

Each family will review and sign the Agency Client Code of Conduct. Any family found to be violating the policy may be asked to not participate in the program and/or its events.

A TYPICAL DAY IN A HEAD START CLASSROOM

CAAC Early Education program uses various materials to teach core skills throughout four main areas of development: social-emotional, physical, cognitive, and language including content such as literacy, math, arts, science, and social studies. Teachers create weekly lesson plans for the children, which focus on the curricula and the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, as well as individualized plans, which focus on individual skills. Teachers will use the GOLD assessment system to observe and document a child's development and learning over time. This will support and guide planning for individual children and help to identify children who might benefit from additional support or challenge in the classroom. Each classroom Teacher plans to meet the needs of the children in their classroom. This means different classrooms will not always do the same activities or take the same field trips. Therefore, the projects going home may not look the same from room to room - but each Teacher does encourage the same skills in all children.

A Day in Head Start:

Arrival/Greeting- Children put away their belongings and are greeted by staff. Once they are settled, daily activities will be discussed.

Prepare, Eat Meal and Brush Teeth- Children and adults wash hands and eat in a family-style environment. Children will then brush their teeth. Teachers engage in and encourage conversations with children.

Free Choice- Children engage in free choice learning with materials in the classroom. Teachers observe and interact with individual children to extend play and learning.

Small Group- Teachers introduce new concepts and reinforce skills children are developing.

Outdoor or Large Motor- Weather permitting, children go out to play each day. Days inside will be filled with fun physical activities. Children will engage in activities that encourage large muscle development each day.

Whole Group- Children meet in a large group that may include, listening to a story, a movement activity, a discussion about the study topic, and/or a social-emotional exercise.

Prepare and Eat Meal – Children and adults wash their hands and prepare an eating area for lunch or snack. Teachers engage in and encourage conversations with children.

Dismissal- Children collect their belongings and prepare for departure.

*Full-day classes will include a rest period, additional preparation and eating of a meal, and outdoor or large motor time.

A Day in Early Head Start (Center-Based):

Arrival/Greeting – Children and adults meet in a large group and discuss the day.

Group Time – Children meet in a large group and are involved in listening and learning activities.

Clean Up – Children assist in cleaning. Everyone washes their hands and prepares to eat.

Free Choice – Children and adults engage in learning with free-choice learning materials throughout the classroom.

Meal – Children and adults eat in a family style environment.

Tooth Brushing – Children brush their teeth.

Music and movement – Children will dance and sing with fun activities.

Outdoors – Motor skills and cooperative play skills are encouraged.

Free Choice – Children and adults engage in free choice learning.

Meal – Wash Hands and preparing for meal. Children and adults eat in a family style setting.

Quiet Activities – Children and adults read stories or make puzzles

Nap time – Children lay down for a short nap.

Meal - Wash Hands and preparing for meal. Children and adults eat in a family style setting.

Dismissal – Children and parents are dismissed.

A Day in Early Head Start (Home-Based):

Home-based Head Start services take place in the home for 1.5 hours weekly. Each component of the home visit lasts around 15 minutes. Home-Based Educators utilize the Parents as Teachers Curriculum and Conscious Discipline. Home visits follow a similar structure as the center/classroom programs.

Home visiting components:

Arrival/Enroll and Build our school - Adults and children create a space to learn/sit on the floor together, distractions are removed (telephones, pets, TV, food), adults and children are ready to participate!

Open School - Greetings/Songs, review our Home Visit routine, discuss adult business (family goals and needs, paperwork, schedule next visit).

Teaching Practice - Home-Based Educator explains the value of the lesson, brings out parent/child activity and models for the parent how to teach the activity to their child. Lessons are from the Parents as Teachers and Conscious Discipline.

Learning Practice – Parent/Guardian teaches and interacts with child. Home-Based Educator supports, encourages, and narrates observations.

Closing the school - Activities are put away and school space is cleaned up together (Home-Based Educator, adult and child all participate). Adult reads a story (brought by Home-Based Educator) to the child. Activities are reviewed, and class ends with a goodbye song. We will also discuss what activities the parent would like to work on during the next scheduled visit.

ADDENDUMS

Client Complaint and Grievance Policy “Services”

It is the policy of the Community Action of Allegan County to maintain effective communication and understanding regarding the concerns of our clients. Problem resolution can occur if the problem is brought to the attention of CAAC staff, which will make every effort to address problems and or concerns in a timely manner. If a problem or situation puts any client, staff member, or volunteer at risk, clients have the responsibility to bring the situation to the immediate attention of CAAC staff.

The following procedures for addressing client complaints/concerns will apply:

- Client should first verbally discuss the situation with the Program Supervisor. Concerns and/or complaints should be talked about honestly and sincerely. There is a good possibility that problems can be resolved at this stage.
- If a grievance is with another staff member or volunteer, the client should be directed to the Program Supervisor and Program Director to discuss the complaint. If the Program Supervisor is unable to address the complaint, the complaint will be given to the Program Director.
- If you feel the Program Supervisor has not assisted you in resolution of the problem, please notify the Program Director of the situation in writing. This must be done within 5 calendar days of the occurrence of the problem. The Program Director will investigate the complaint and respond to you in writing within five calendar days of receiving your written request.
- If you are not satisfied with the written response from the Program Supervisor/Program Director, you may present a written request for problem resolution to the Executive Director. This should be done within 10 calendar days of the response from the Program Director. The Executive Director will review and investigate the issues and respond to you in writing within 30 calendar days of receiving your written request.
- If you are not satisfied with the response from the Executive Director, you may notify the Board President of CAAC in writing within 10 days of the written response from the Executive Director. The Board President will review and investigate the issues presented and will respond to you in writing within 10 calendar days of receiving your written response. The decision of the Board President is final.

Please understand that not every problem can be resolved to everyone's satisfaction. Every attempt will be made to respond to concerns in a courteous and prompt manner as described in this document. Only through understanding and open, honest discussion of problems can issues be dealt with appropriately.

Client Complaint and Grievance Policy (when staff are involved)

It is the policy of the Community Action of Allegan County to maintain effective communication and understanding regarding the concerns of our client families. Problem resolution can only occur if the problem is brought to the attention of the CAAC staff, who will make every effort to address problems and/or concerns in a timely manner. If a problem or situation puts any client, staff member, or volunteer at risk, you have the responsibility to bring the situation to the immediate attention of the CAAC Executive Director.

The following procedures for addressing client complaints/concerns involving staff will apply:

- The Executive Director of CAAC holds an open-door policy. Clients may address concerns regarding staff in person with the Executive Director any time his/her door is open. The Executive Director will document the conversation and request the client's signature verifying the grievance that occurred. It is CAAC's preference that clients attempt to address all issues involving staff with the Executive Director in person.
- If the Executive Director is unavailable, clients should document the incident/complaint in writing. The Program Director should provide the client with pen, grievance form, and envelope. After the documentation is complete, the client should place the documentation in a sealed envelope and return it to the Executive Director.
- If immediate action is needed, and the Executive Director is unavailable, client should report concerns to their Program Supervisor.
- The Executive Director and/or designated person will then investigate the incident and take any necessary action directly with the staff member and client family involved. The Executive Director will communicate in writing with the client family thanking them for sharing their concerns and letting them know he/she is looking into the situation.
- If the client family does not feel the complaint has been appropriately addressed by the Executive Director, they may notify the President of CAAC in writing within 10 days of the written response from the Executive Director. The Board President will review and investigate the issue presented and will respond to the client family in writing with 10 calendar days of receiving your written response. The decision of the Board President is final.
- All complaints/grievances requiring staff disciplinary action will follow the procedures outlined in the employee handbook.

Please understand that not every problem can be resolved to everyone's satisfaction. Every attempt will be made to respond to concerns in a courteous and prompt manner as described

in this document. Only through understanding and open, honest discussion of problems can issues be dealt with appropriately.

Volunteer Complaint and Grievance Policy

It is the policy of the Community Action of Allegan County to maintain effective communication and understanding regarding the concerns of our volunteers. Problem resolution can only occur if the problem is brought to the attention of the CAAC staff, which will make every effort to address problems and/or concerns in a timely manner. If a problem or situation puts any client, staff member, or volunteer at risk, you have the responsibility to bring the situation to the immediate attention of the CAAC staff.

The following procedures for addressing volunteer complaints/concerns will apply:

- Volunteers should first verbally discuss the situation with the Program Director. Concerns and/or complaints should be talked about honestly and sincerely. There is a good possibility that problems can be resolved at this stage with the Program Director. Program Director should document volunteer complaint and forward to the Executive Director.
- If the volunteer feels the Program Director has not assisted you in resolution of the problem, please notify the Executive Director of the situation in writing. This must be done within 5 calendar days of discussing with the Program Director. The Executive Director will investigate the complaint and respond to the volunteer in writing within 10 calendar days of receiving the written request.
- If the volunteer is not satisfied with the response from the Executive Director, you may notify the CAAC Board in writing within 10 days of the receiving a response from the Executive Director. The Board President will review and investigate the issues presented and will respond in writing within 10 calendar days of receiving the complaint. The decision of the Board President is final.

Please understand that not every problem can be resolved to everyone's satisfaction. Every attempt will be made to respond to concerns in a courteous and prompt manner as described in this document. Only through understanding and open, honest discussion of problems can issues be dealt with appropriately.

Conflict of Interest

It is the policy of Community Action of Allegan County that all employees and board members have an obligation to conduct business within guidelines that prohibit actual or potential conflicts of interest. This policy establishes only the framework within which the Community Action of Allegan County wishes its business to operate. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide general direction so that employees can seek further clarification on issues related to the subject of acceptable standards of operation.

An actual or potential conflict of interest occurs when an employee can influence a decision that may result in a personal gain for the employee or for a relative because of Community Action of Allegan County dealings. For this policy, a relative is any person who is related by blood or marriage, or whose relationship with the employee is similar to that of persons who are related by blood or marriage.

No presumption of guilt is created by the mere existence of a relationship with outside firms. However, if an employee has any influence on transactions involving purchases, contracts, or leases, it is imperative that he or she discloses to an officer of the organization as soon as possible the existence of any actual or potential conflict of interest so that safeguards can be established to protect all parties.

Personal gain may result not only in cases where an employee, board member, or relative has a significant ownership in a firm with which Community Action of Allegan County does business, but also when an employee, board member, or relative receives any kickback, bribe, substantial gift, or special consideration because of any transaction of business dealings involving Community Action of Allegan County.

The materials, products, designs, plans, ideas, and data of the Community Action of Allegan County are the property of CAAC and should never be given to an outside firm or individual except through normal channels and with appropriate authorization. Any improper transfer of material or disclosure of information, even though it is not apparent that an employee has personally gained by such action, constitutes unacceptable conduct. Any employee who participates in such a practice shall be subjected to disciplinary action, up to and including discharge.