



**Community Action Council**  
of Howard County

HELPING PEOPLE. CHANGING LIVES.

**2025-26 School Year**  
**PARENT 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

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## Early Childhood Education Program Overview

Community Action Council of Howard County (CAC) operates an Early Childhood Education (ECE) Program for income-eligible families and their children. The ECE Program offers full-day, full-year programming options designed to prepare children socially, emotionally, and academically for elementary school. 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:

- **School 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, BMI, dental, and educational and social-emotional 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. Depending on program enrollment type, each family will receive supports such as:
  - A designated Family Service Worker with a background in human services
  - Two or three family 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 ECE 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 (Preschool and Pre-K Only)**

The ECE Program offers Before-Care and After-Care services to all Preschool and Pre-K students enrolled in CAC's Early Childhood Education (ECE) program who are working or are in school full-time. Before-Care programming is from 7-8am and After-Care programming is from 3-6pm on days when school is in session. On early dismissal days, After-Care programming is not available. Please refer to the ECE Calendar for a complete list of scheduled school closings. Before-Care and After-Care Services are offered based on availability. Enrollment in Before-Care and After-Care Services is separate from enrollment in Head Start and Pre-K programming.

Before-Care and After-Care programming is funded by the MSDE Childcare Scholarship Program. If a slot is available, the parent will be contacted by center staff and must demonstrate current employment via pay stubs and/or enrollment in full-time school or training programming. Proof of employment such as an employer's letter will also be accepted. In addition, the parent(s) will be prompted to apply for and be approved for a scholarship through the MSDE Child Care Scholarship online portal. Specific steps for this process are provided. 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 keep their scholarship valid and current, through completing all requested tasks in the MSDE Child Care Scholarship portal. This includes validating attendance for each service period.

Students will not begin to participate in Before-Care and After-Care Programming until a valid scholarship is assigned to their program location via the MSDE Child Care Portal. A valid scholarship is for at least 20 hours to cover the time frame of care provided by the Before-Care and After-Care program. Parents and guardians will receive confirmation of a date that their child can begin to attend Before-Care and After-Care programming.

In the event the program receives notice that their scholarship has been denied, terminated, or suspended, the child will cease to be able to participate in Before-Care and After-Care Programming until the scholarship is brought current. Re-enrollment in Before-Care and After-Care programming is contingent based on availability.

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. Availability for Before and After Care services for children age 2 and under are based on staffing and availability.

### [What to Send to School with Your Child](#)

#### *Children ages 2-5:*

Closed-toe shoes

Change of clothes (at least 2):

- Weather appropriate clothing
- Socks
- Underwear
- Bedding: Roll up nap mat (preferred) or a blanket and a fitted crib sheet

#### *Children under age 2:*

Closed-toe shoes (as appropriate)

Change of clothes (at least 3):

- Weather appropriate clothing

Personal Items:

- Diapers or Pull-Ups\*
- At least 3 Bottles (as appropriate) - to be washed and returned daily.
  - Bottles must be labeled with the child's first name, last name, and date.
  - Breastmilk bottles must be labeled with the child's first name, last name, date, and date and time the milk was expressed.
- Pacifier (if needed- labeled with first and last name)

Please label your child's belongings and all clothing with first and last name (including hats, mittens, etc.)

\*Diapers and/or Pull-Ups required based on program enrollment type. Center Staff will provide specifics upon enrollment based on your child's classroom.



### What NOT to Send to School with Your Child

Please do not send:

- Toys or personal electronic devices
- Candy and snacks (or any outside food)
- Juice or beverages other than water
- Items of value either monetarily or sentimentally (ex. valuable jewelry)
- Children dressed with items that may cause risk of injury (ex. Safety pins, large loop earrings, flip-flop shoes and/or open sandals)

NOTE: Children with flip-flops or open sandals will not be accepted into the care for the day.

CAC cannot be responsible for personal items of children and families being lost or stolen while on CAC property. This includes, but is not limited to, wallets, purses, notebooks, jewelry, backpacks, clothing, etc.

## Contact Us

	Location	Phone Number
<b>Community Action Council of Howard County</b>	9820 Patuxent Woods Drive Columbia, MD 21046	410-313-6440
<b>Early Childhood Education Program Main Office</b>	9820 Patuxent Woods Drive Columbia, MD 21046	410-313-6443
Erin Adelsberger, Director of Education		410-313-6589
Ed Shields, Center Operations and Before and After Care Coordinator		410-402-0980 (work cell)
Erica Jackson, Special Education Specialist		410-313-6561
Carrie Youssi, Education Coordinator		410-313-6582
Tia West, RN BSN, Health Services Manager		410-313-6482
<b>Bauder Education Center at Long Reach</b> Michele Killette, Center Manager	8775 Cloudleap Ct, Suite 110 Columbia, MD 21045	Main: 410-313-2730 Family Service: 410-313-2732 and 2734
<b>Dasher Green Early Childhood Education Center</b> Ashleigh Peddicord, Center Manager	6680 Cradlerock Way Columbia, MD 21046	Main: 410-313-6210 Family Service: 410-313-6214 and 6213
<b>Ellicott City Early Childhood Education Center</b> Donald Major, Center Manager	8510 High Ridge Road Ellicott City, MD 21043	Main: 410-313-2750 Family Service: 410-313-2798 and 2755
<b>Old Cedar Lane Early Childhood Education Center</b> Sonya Sloan-Howard, Site Lead	5451 Beaverkill Road Columbia, MD 21044	Main: 410-313-7246 Family Service: 410-313-7257 and 7247
<b>Children's Learning Center @ HCC</b> Aaron Johnson, Center Manager	5600 Dragon Place Columbia, MD 21044	Main: 410-313-5383 Family Service: 410-313-5382

## Hours of Operation & Inclement Weather Preschool and PreK Programming (Ages 3-5)

### Planned Full Day Schedule

- **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.
- **2:30pm to 3:00pm** Student pick up. All regular day students (not participating in After-Care) must be picked up no later than 3:00pm.
- **6:00pm** After-care pick up. All After-Care students must be picked up no later than 6:00pm.

### Planned Half-Day Schedule

- **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.
- **11:30am to 12:00pm** Student pick up. All students must be picked up no later than 12:00pm. After-care canceled.

### Early Head Start Programming

#### Planned Full Day Schedule

- **8:30am – 9:00am** Student drop off.
- **3:00pm to 3:30pm** Student pick up. All students must be picked up no later than 3:30pm.

#### Planned Half-Day Schedule

- **8:30am – 9:00am** Student drop off.
- **12:00pm-12:30pm** Student pick up. All students must be picked up no later than 12:30pm.

#### 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.
- 10:30am – 11:00am: All centers will open for student drop off.

##### School Closure for HCPSS

- Before and After-Care canceled
- School day canceled

## Child Arrival and Release Policy

Each child enrolled in the CAC ECE program must have a completed and approved emergency card form that is updated at least annually by parent or legal guardian. Children will not be released to anyone not listed on the emergency form without written and verbal consent from the parent or legal guardian. Families and staff are expected to adhere to all center specific arrival and departure procedures.

CAC staff will only release children to authorized **adults** listed on the child's emergency card. Adults are defined as persons 18 years of age and over. Adults will be required to present a valid photo ID for verification prior to the child being released.

- If a parent/guardian requests that a child be picked up by an adult not on the child's emergency form, if possible, the emergency form must be updated ahead of the planned pickup.
- In circumstances of emergency or short notice, the parent/guardian must call the center and speak to the Center Manager or Family Service Worker to provide the name and telephone number of the person picking up. Additionally, the parent must follow up with a written communication (email or handwritten request) with the date, name of the person, and phone number.
- Within 24 hours, the parent/guardian must update the emergency form adding the additional pickup adult for the future (if applicable).

## Child Arrival and Release Expectations and Procedures

- Each child and family member/guardian will be greeted warmly and respectfully upon arrival to the classroom.
- Family members/guardians will escort their child(ren) fully into the classroom unless alternate arrangements have been made and agreed upon by the center staff (except at specific locations with curbside drop-off).
- Each center will communicate center specific arrival and departure procedures to families before and during the first week of school and throughout the year as part of the orientation process for new families.
- Families/guardians dropping children off for school are required to park their car, turn off the engine and walk the child into the building (except at specific locations with curbside drop-off). No children under the age of 8 can be left unattended in a vehicle at any time.
- Siblings or other children must be actively supervised by the parent during drop off and pick up while in the building and on CAC property.
- The child's emergency card must contain the name and contact information for at least one person other than the parents who may be contacted to pick up the child in an emergency in the event that a parent/guardian cannot be reached. In the event that a child's parent/guardian and emergency contacts cannot be reached, the child may be released to Child Protective Services.

### Car Safety Law

Maryland State law requires that children be secured in an appropriate child passenger restraint (safety or booster seat) until they are at least 8 years old or at least 4 feet 9 inches tall. Additionally, State law forbids leaving children unattended in a vehicle. If children are left unattended in a vehicle in the parking lot, the police will be notified immediately.

### Attendance Policy

Head Start Program Performance Standards require children to attend school daily to maintain enrollment. Your child's regular attendance of at least 85% 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 and email your family service worker each day when your child is absent to 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.

Excessive absences are defined as 15% or more days missed within a 20-school day period. Excessive Tardiness/Late Pick Up is defined as 20 or more minutes late on 3 occasions within a 20-day school period.

Excused absences include:

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

CAC of Howard County ECE program will promote regular attendance by tracking attendance for each child. The program will develop and implement procedures to ensure children are safe when they are unexpectedly absent, and the family has not contacted the school. The program will implement strategies to promote attendance, such as providing information about the benefits of regular attendance, supporting families with case management, conducting a home visit and/or making direct contact if a child has multiple unexcused absences.

### [Punctuality](#)

Consistent attendance and arriving on time (punctuality) for class is important for your child's success and the success of the classroom. Children benefit from consistent routines. Arriving late may make it more difficult for your child to transition into the classroom and is a disruption to the classroom. All late arrivals will be documented, and consistent late arrivals and/or pickups may impact your child's ability to attend the program.

If your child arrives after breakfast is served, you are asked to stay with your child while they eat breakfast at the table prior to joining the class.

## [Health and Safety](#)

### [Well Child Care Policy](#)

You must provide documentation from your medical and dental care providers that your child is current on well-child visits. Updated physical exams must be submitted each year and updated dental exams must be submitted every six months. The Health Team will contact families before these exams are due. 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 health.

### [Children with Special Healthcare Needs Policy](#)

The ECE staff works to collaborate with families and medical providers to accommodate each child's specific healthcare needs to the best of our abilities. All healthcare needs will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by the Health Services Manager. The Health

Services Manager will review each application during the enrollment process to evaluate any special healthcare needs for each child and communicate with the family and medical provider regarding any questions or next steps.

Special healthcare needs could include medical conditions such as diabetes or reflux, food allergies or other healthcare needs. All medications and/or accompanying documentation will be collected and approved by the Health Services Manager before the child is to attend. Medication, documentation and accompanying equipment will be brought to the school by the Health Services Manager. Medication may not be sent in backpacks to school with children and may not be given to center staff. Parents/Guardians are responsible for providing updated medications/documents to the Health Services Manager throughout the school year. See Medications Policy below.

#### Medications Policy

All students who take medication at school must have the correct documentation from their child's doctor for review by our Health Services Manager. **All medications must come to the ECE Team's Health Services Manager first for review.** The medication must be in the original packaging with the label from the pharmacy and not expired. The medication must be provided before the child starts the program (or continues in the program 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. Children with expired medication or forms may not attend the program until they are updated. **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.

#### Illness Policy

- 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 within 90 minutes of being called. If your child has vomiting, diarrhea or fever, he/she must remain at home the following day. When he/she is symptom free for 24 hours without medication, your child may then return 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"> <li>○ An ear or forehead temperature of 100.4° F</li> <li>○ Lice, nits, or bed bugs***</li> <li>○ Unexplained rash</li> <li>○ Difficulty breathing/wheezing</li> <li>○ Discharge from the eyes, crust around the eye or on the eyelashes</li> <li>○ Any communicable disease</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sore throat and/or severe/ongoing cough</li> <li>○ Severe congestion</li> <li>○ Cuts, open wounds, or pus-filled openings on the skin</li> <li>○ Vomiting and/or diarrhea <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ (Extenuating circumstances excluded if documented by a medical professional clearly identifying symptoms are not due to illness. Ex. Medication side effects, food intolerance issue, etc.)</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Unusual yellow coloring to the skin or eyes</li> <li>○ Complaints of a stiff neck and headache with one or more of the above symptoms</li> </ul>
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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 have been trained to follow the following emergency procedures:

- Staff will always stay with the 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.

### Accidents and Incidents

When an accident or incident occurs, regardless of the apparent severity, an accident/incident report form will be filled out and

universal precautions will be followed. The accident/incident report form will be provided to the Center Manager (or acting supervisor) and the involved child's parent/guardian. In necessary cases, the incident will be reported to the Director of Education. The child's parent/guardian will receive a phone call about any incident involving the head or face or an incident that warrants additional personnel or medical attention.

### Mental Health or Behavioral Emergencies

Staff have been trained to support mental health or behavioral emergencies as follows:

In the event a child is exhibiting a behavior escalation that becomes a crisis, the onsite team of available staff members will intervene with strategies to support safe de-escalation. That includes the use of CPI (Crisis Prevention Institute) techniques by trained staff aligned with COMAR regulations regarding restraint and seclusion (COMAR 13A.08.04.02.B and 13.08.04.05.A). CAC defines a crisis using the following descriptions:

- A student who exhibits prolonged tantrums, physical and verbal aggression, disruptive vocal and motor behavior, property destruction, self-injury, noncompliance, and withdrawal.
- A student who is unable to safely deescalate within 30 minutes of support and intervention from staff (coping skills are no longer effective, and the emotional or physiological response continues until the student may become disorientated, non-functional, or attempt to harm themselves or others).

If the child cannot safely de-escalate within the 30-minute time frame, the parent will be called and required to report immediately to the center. Immediately is defined as within 30 minutes of notification. If the parent or guardian cannot respond, emergency contacts will be called. Mobile crisis resources from Howard County will be called for support, if necessary, at the discretion of the staff.

Following the crisis response, the parent will be required to transport the child home or to emergency services as advised by the crisis response team. The parent(s) will be contacted by the Center Manager to schedule a multi-disciplinary team meeting, including the parent, to discuss a safe re-engagement plan for the student. This meeting is required prior to the student returning to the program. The result of the multi-disciplinary team meeting will include a safety re-engagement plan, focused on the health and safety of the student, the classroom, and the staff. The plan may include, but it is not limited to a requirement for evidence of mental health evaluation, consideration of the school schedule, as well as requirements in the event of additional escalations, including response time for the parent or guardian. The safety re-engagement plan will be periodically re-evaluated by the multi-disciplinary team based

on data collected during the re-engagement period.

### 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.

The Maryland Child Protective Services Act requires mandated reporters to report any suspicion of abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities. The employees of CAC's ECE program are considered mandated reporters under this law. Employees are not required to discuss their suspicions with parents prior to reporting the matter to the appropriate authorities, nor are they required to investigate the cause of any suspicious marks, behavior, or condition prior to making a report. Mandated reporters can be held criminally responsible if they fail to report suspected abuse or neglect. CAC staff takes this responsibility very seriously and will make warranted reports to the appropriate authorities. The Maryland Child Protective Services Act is designed to protect the welfare and best interest of all children. As mandated reporters, the staff of The CAC ECE program cannot be held liable for reports made to Child Protective Services which are determined to be unfounded, provided the report was made in "good faith." Causes for reporting suspected child abuse or neglect include, but are not limited to:

- Unusual bruising, marks, or cuts on the child's body
- Severe verbal threats or reprimands
- Transporting a child without appropriate child restraints (e.g. car seats, seat belts, etc.)
- Dropping off or picking up a child while under the influence of illegal drugs or alcohol
- Leaving a child unattended for any amount of time
- Children who exhibit behavior consistent with an abusive situation

Program staff are required to attend mandated reporter training annually. This training will focus on the steps for reporting suspected abuse and neglect, the role of a mandated reporter, and the recognition and prevention of child maltreatment, abuse and neglect. All new program staff will be trained in these procedures prior to their start in the classroom.

CAC supports a zero-tolerance approach for abuse and neglect and will implement immediate action should there be an allegation that a program staff member abused or neglected a child. The administration will protect the child, including immediate notification of a parent or guardian, once there is an allegation of abuse or neglect of a child in our program. Any program staff member accused

of abuse or neglect may be immediately removed from his or her position until an investigation is completed. Based on whether the allegations were substantiated or not, the program staff would either be dismissed from his/her position or allowed to return to work.

### **Emergency Response Plans**

The CAC ECE program has formulated detailed emergency response plans for a wide variety of potential emergencies such as severe weather, fire, medical, lockdown, etc. There are general emergency response plans listed below but each ECE center has additional details specific to their center and location. Please contact the center manager at your center for more information on specific emergency response plans.

#### **Medical:**

In case of a medical emergency, a qualified program staff member will attend to first aid as needed. Another program staff member will notify the family of the child. The program's medical consultants will be contacted, and attempts will be made to contact the child's physician/dentist if necessary. For extreme emergencies, 911 will be called. An ambulance will take the child and a program staff member to the nearest hospital. The child's emergency permission form will be brought with them. A program staff member will notify the family or alternate pick-up person to meet the child at the emergency room. Additional program staff will be called in if necessary to maintain required ratios.

#### **Fire/Evacuation:**

In the event of a fire, evacuation from the building will be through the closest fire exit. Program staff will be responsible for supervising the children under their care and leading them to the fire exit. Immediately, the group will walk to (the designated area) safely away from the building, and line up to take a name to face attendance. One program staff member from each classroom will be responsible for taking ownership of the sign in/out sheets, portable first aid kit, cell phone and emergency files for all children in attendance. Should it not be possible to return into the facility, staff and program staff will transport the children to the alternate shelter (center specific). Parents will be notified via phone call/text message and directed to the evacuation location to pick up their children. Ratios will be maintained at all times and two program staff will remain with the children until all children are picked up.

#### **Shelter In Place:**

In the event of severe weather, such as tornadoes, hurricanes, winter storms, or any other unsafe situation where evacuation is not possible, staff, program staff, and children will remain indoors in a safe location (center specific) away from closed windows and doors. Program staff will

have appropriate supplies available for the comfort and engagement of the children. Qualified program staff will be on hand to administer first aid, as needed, until emergency personnel can arrive. Parents will be notified after the immediate danger has passed.

#### *Lock-Down:*

Should an emergency or threat that involves potential violence in or around the facility and requires the need to lockdown, the director/person in charge will notify the staff that they should begin lock-down procedure. Emergency personnel will be called. Each program staff is responsible for the children in their care at that moment. The program staff will gather the children to the safest area of the room (center and classroom specific), away from any windows or doors. Doors and windows will be locked, lights turned off, and curtains/blinds closed to all interior windows. Program staff will calm the children and help them stay quiet. Attendance will be taken periodically. Families will be informed about the event via phone call/text message and/or email as soon as possible. Families are not permitted access to the facility until it is determined that it is safe to do so. If lockdown results in evacuation from the facility to the designated safe location (center specific), families will be informed via phone call/text message and directed to the location for immediate pick up. Program staff will remain until all children have been picked up.

#### *Accommodation for Infants, Toddlers, and Children with Disabilities or Chronic Medical Conditions:*

In consultation with the child's parent, program staff will develop a plan to ensure the special needs of the child are met during an emergency, including the provision of necessities such as medications, diapers, wipes, formula, and other comfort items. Cribs or other mechanisms will be used to evacuate infants, toddlers, and children with special health care needs or disabilities.

ECE program staff practice a variety of emergency drills with the students throughout the year so they can be prepared and know what to expect in case of an actual emergency.

#### *Supporting Healthy Habits*

Daily healthy habits are established in the classroom each day. Students one year or older participate in daily tooth brushing with fluoride toothpaste every day. There is also 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.

The Health Team conducts health screenings for all students during the year. Students have hearing, vision, and BMI screenings every school year. Students can also receive dental screenings with 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.

### *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.

### Video Surveillance and Monitoring

To further ensure the safety and security of our children, staff and facilities, centers operated by the program are equipped with video surveillance cameras. These cameras are placed in strategic locations, including classrooms, to ensure health and safety for all.

## 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 & Cognitive Development
- Language & Literacy
- Mathematics
- Physical Well-being & Motor Development
- Science
- Social Studies
- The Fine Arts

Age-appropriate developmental assessments measure children's readiness in the domains throughout children's enrollment.

#### **Supporting Students' Learning at Home**

- Children need consistent bedtime routines and an age-appropriate amount of sleep each night. Young children often need time to unwind and calm their brains before they can fall asleep. Try to build this into your bedtime routine and ensure children are getting quality sleep.

- Serve nutritious family meals. Good nutrition helps children to be at their best.
- Always dress your child for the weather and have two or more changes of clothing available at the school.
- Bring children to school on time every day. This helps children transition into the classroom easily and allows them to engage in a full day of learning with their peers.
- 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 family 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* in the infant, toddler/twos program and the preschool program. In the Pre-K program, the curriculum is Connect4Learning (C4L) which aligns with the Howard County Public School system. The objectives in *The Creative Curriculum* and Connect4Learning curriculum are fully aligned with the *Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework* as well as *Maryland Early Learning Standards*.

In the Infant, Toddler, Twos program the five components of Creative Curriculum are- Knowing Infants, Toddlers, and Twos, Creating a Responsive Environment, What Children Learn, Caring and Teaching, and Partnering with Families. Teachers will use daily routines such as drop off, diaper changes, feedings and meals, etc. as times of learning.

In the Preschool program the Creative Curriculum allows for the exploration of many different subjects such as Buildings, Trees, Simple Machines, Exercise, etc. During these studies children investigate concepts of math, science, technology, art, language and literacy. Material is presented in whole group, small group, and individual settings to meet the needs of all children. Much of children's learning takes place in the various learning centers in the classroom.



In the Pre-K program Connect4Learning also explores many different subjects such as Environments, Gardening, Structures, and more. Children develop language and literacy skills, math skills, cognitive skills throughout these studies as they work independently and collaboratively on various projects and in learning centers.

The use of evidence-based, developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculums gives the children the head start that they need to ensure school readiness. Children use exploration and discovery as a way of learning, enabling them to develop confidence, creativity, and critical thinking skills. Teachers customize curriculum instruction for children in every classroom taking into consideration individual needs and strengths, IEP/IFSP goals, home languages and culture, and background experiences.

### Assessments

Teachers assess children using developmental screeners and checklists, the Maryland Early Learning Standards, and the *GOLD*® assessment tool. Data from these tools support 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 teachers in understanding 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 are invited to complete two Ages and Stages Questionnaires: the ASQ-3 and the ASQ:SE-2. The ASQ-3 provides activities and questions related to communication, motor, personal-social and problem-solving skills. The ASQ:SE-2 focuses on self-regulation, compliance, communication, adaptive functioning, autonomy, affect, and interaction with others. These questionnaires help us to identify children who may be at risk for developmental delays and guide us towards targeted supports to address areas of need.

During orientation and onboarding teachers receive training from the Education Coordinator and Special Education Specialist regarding how to administer, interpret, and utilize these assessment tools. Periodically throughout the year teachers participate in targeted professional development to enhance their skills in observation and assessment.

These tools indicate whether children's development is on schedule based on typical developmental milestones. Teachers and parents review these results to determine if children are meeting developmental milestones 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. Families will receive reports about their child's development and learning at least twice throughout the year during family conferences. Family conferences are scheduled at regular intervals throughout the year but can also take place if there is a question or concern about your child's development.

### 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, partners and contracted providers. Tier 2 interventions are designed to be short-term, and they are not considered a special education service. Should your child require long-term support, 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 make progress in any developmental area where they are demonstrating delays. 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 are provided by CAC's partners 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 with updates and are invited to participate in this process.

### Child Guidance and Behavior Policy

If a child exhibits repeated behavior escalations with the potential for hurting themselves or others, that do not meet the description of crisis (see Mental Health or Behavior Emergency Policy) but significantly jeopardize the health and safety of the student, the class, and/or the staff available center staff will intervene immediately. For the safety of the child and staff, intervention for the child displaying dangerous behavior will not exceed gentle but firm physical guidance and direction, holding the child, when necessary, only long enough to get them to a safe place to calm down. Physical support will only be used, when necessary, by trained staff aligned with an approved behavior plan or as part of an emergency response to support de-escalation. This policy aligns with COMAR regulations (COMAR 13A.08.04.02.B and 13.08.04.05.A).

The goal of our behavior policy is to eliminate exclusionary measures such as suspension or expulsion and to equip each child with positive self-regulation skills. If necessary to ensure the safety of the student, class, and/or staff, the program will take the following steps for students who are consistently unable to engage safely in the program.

- The teachers, in collaboration with center administration, will consistently implement tier one strategies designed to promote positive interactions and self-regulation skills

- The teachers, in collaboration with center administration will collect consistent and reliable data regarding the child's behavior for at least two weeks. This data will be used to assess the function of the behavior and to adjust behavior support strategies that are currently being implemented in the classroom.
- After consultation with center administration, behavioral consultants, the child's family, and any other necessary persons, the multidisciplinary team, including the parent, will put in place a behavior and safety plan to best meet the needs of the child. This plan could include, but is not limited to, a modified school schedule, action and response plans in the event of escalations, as well as family engagement requirements.
- All measures and strategies are attempted before exclusion. If it is agreed that exclusion is in the best interest of the child, the program will offer assistance to the family for accessing services and an alternative placement.

This policy is in accordance with federal and state regulatory and civil rights laws.

Your child may be affected by the behavior of another child. The staff will advise you if there is an accident or injury. However, staff cannot discuss another child's needs or their behavior with you due to the child's and family's right to privacy.

#### Early Childhood Education 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 strategies from The Pyramid Model, responsive caregiving, the center for social and emotional framework and learning, and additional culturally responsive frameworks. These evidence-based strategies and framework support the healthy social emotional development of all children and provide adults with an understanding of how to respond to challenging behaviors.

Based on these beliefs, The Community Action Council's Early Childhood Education Program supports a positive approach to discipline and **prohibits** the use of practices that are severe, humiliating, frightening, or associated with food, rest, or toileting to discipline any child. Employees never use physical punishment such as shaking, hitting, pulling, etc. Employees never use threats, negative remarks, humiliation, coercion, or any type of emotional abuse. Additionally, employees do not withhold or threaten to withhold a child's entire outdoor play period, meals, rest, or access to the toilet.

Our program encourages the use of positive redirection and reinforcement techniques to assist children in developing self-regulation, problem-solving, and social skills. These techniques include modeling expected behavior, using visuals to support children's choices (first-then boards, choice boards, etc.), positively reinforcing appropriate behavior with verbal or physical acknowledgement, offering choices to children throughout the day, and redirecting children to acceptable activities or the calm down area. When redirection is necessary teachers provide verbal, visual, and auditory cues to children based on individual needs. Additionally, children are provided with opportunities to build their independence and decision-making skills by choosing where to play and what materials to explore, where to sit (at times this may be chosen for them), the quantity and type of food to serve themselves, what activities to engage in outside, etc. Children also have opportunities to choose songs, jobs within the classroom, partners to work with, and more.

All classrooms teach positive social-emotional learning skills throughout the day with the use of the Connect for Learning SEL curriculum component or Creative Curriculum AI's Pals. In addition, all classrooms are equipped with calm down areas to support children in developing co- and self-regulation skills. These calm down areas contain visual supports for emotional regulation and problem-solving strategies as well as safe materials for children to utilize while de-escalating.

Acceptable Practices	Prohibited Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Communicate to children using positive statements.</li> <li>✓ Communicate with children on their level.</li> <li>✓ Talk with children in a calm quiet manner.</li> <li>✓ Explain unacceptable behavior to children.</li> <li>✓ Give attention to children for positive behavior.</li> <li>✓ Praise and encourage the children.</li> <li>✓ Reason with and set limits for the children.</li> <li>✓ Apply rules consistently.</li> <li>✓ Model appropriate behavior.</li> <li>✓ Set up the classroom environment to prevent problems.</li> <li>✓ Request teacher conference to discuss behavioral concerns.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ 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.)</li> <li>✓ Use any strategy that hurts, shames, or belittles a child.</li> <li>✓ Use any strategy that threatens, intimidates, or forces a child.</li> <li>✓ Use food as a form of reward or punishment.</li> <li>✓ Use or withhold physical activity as a punishment.</li> <li>✓ Shame or punish a child if a bathroom accident occurs.</li> <li>✓ Embarrass any child in front of others.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Provide alternatives and redirect children to acceptable activities.</li> <li>✓ Give children opportunities to make choices and solve problems.</li> <li>✓ Help children talk out problems and think of solutions.</li> <li>✓ Listen to children and respect the children's needs, desires, and feelings.</li> <li>✓ Provide appropriate words to help solve conflicts.</li> <li>✓ Use storybooks and discussion to work through common conflicts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Compare children.</li> <li>✓ Place children in a locked and/or dark room.</li> <li>✓ Leave any child alone, unattended or without supervision.</li> <li>✓ Allow discipline of a child by other children.</li> <li>✓ Criticize, make fun of, or otherwise belittle a child's parents, families, or ethnic groups.</li> </ul>
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## 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 build 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 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 (see Family Standards of Conduct below).
- Participate in Family 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 family conferences.

- ***Newly enrolled infant and toddler families will also be asked to participate in an intake meeting with their child's teacher before the child's first day in the program.***
- Provide updated immunization records, physical and dental examinations, current medications (if applicable) as requested.
- Bring your child to school each day. For a listing of excused absences, please see the Attendance Policy on page 14.

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

### Family Standards of Conduct

All individuals must adhere to the following standards of conduct while on CAC property:

- Respect for the dignity of others
- Use courteous speech
- Ethical, honest, and professional behavior
- Discriminatory, derogatory, threatening, profane, abusive, or violent language or conduct
- Engaging in disruptive or unsafe behavior which disturbs the public or staff
- Verbal or physical harassment
- Sexual misconduct, including but not limited to: indecent exposure, offensive touching, unwanted physical or verbal sexual advances, or comments about sexuality
- Use of alcohol or un-prescribed drugs
- Possession of any item identified or defined as a weapon

For the safety and health of peers, ECE program staff, and guests who are unable to uphold the standards of conduct listed above will be prohibited from entering CAC property or engaging in CAC sponsored events at the discretion of the program director.

### Family Visits & Conferences

- 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 enrolling in the EHS Infant and Toddler program will also be required to attend an intake meeting with their child's teacher(s) prior to the child's first day

Families are informed about conferences in the family handbook, in classroom newsletters, and flyers posted at each classroom entrance. Teachers utilize an online sign up through Sign Up Genius or a physical sign-up form located in the classroom. The determination for which method to use is the decision of the teacher based on what works best for the families in the classroom.

Conferences are held two or three designated times per year, and in between as necessary or requested. Designated conference days will align with the local school system (Howard County Public Schools) and currently happen in November, February, and June.

### 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 or Center Manager to see if any opportunities are available at your center.



### 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 provide 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 end of the previous school year, to be in place for the first Policy Council meeting held in September. The Policy Council is held on the third Thursday of each month.
- Education Advisory Committee
  - The Education Advisory Committee is an important part of the ECE/Head Start Self-Assessment process. The committee meets quarterly to review program data and evaluate progress towards Program and School Readiness Goals.
- Family and Community Engagement Advisory Committee
  - The Family and Community Engagement Advisory Committee is an important part of the ECE/Head Start Self-Assessment process. The committee meets quarterly to review program data and evaluate progress towards Program and School Readiness Goals.
- Health Advisory Committee
  - The Health Advisory Committee is an important part of the ECE/Head Start Self-Assessment process. The committee meets quarterly to review program data and evaluate progress towards Program and School Readiness Goals.

### Family 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, tour the ECE Centers, and engage in home visits

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

### Transition Planning

Transitions are part of the family experience when entering a new program or moving between age groups.

#### *Home to Program Transitions*

As part of the enrollment process, families attend two home visits. One home visit is conducted with the family service worker and the other with the child's teacher. This process provides the opportunity for everyone to meet, discuss background information, concerns, goals, etc. Teachers utilize this time to complete a detailed home visit summary that contains information about the child's experiences in language, groups of children, and much more.

#### *Within Program Transition*

If a child transitions within the program, the family meets with the family service worker to discuss the transition and answer any questions. The family is shown the center/classroom at this time. After this meeting, the sending and receiving teachers meet and complete the child transition form prior to the child's start date in the new program. The child transition form includes information about the child's likes, strengths, and abilities. It also provides the opportunity to share vital behavior support plan information or IEP/IFSP information. The family is offered a conference with the new teacher. Once a transition has been determined, the child has the opportunity to visit the new classroom for an hour or more (determined by teachers and center manager based on classroom schedule) prior to the scheduled first day.

**\*\*If there is a child with a special need (healthcare, disability, etc.) who is transitioning into the program or across the program, the receiving teachers also have a meeting with the Special Education Specialist or Health Services Manager to review IEP/IFSP or health documentation and training if necessary.**

### Communication

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

- **Monthly Classroom Email Newsletter:** ECE program, centers, and classroom specific information direct from your child's teachers
- **Monthly CAC Bulletin Email Newsletter:** Important information and resources from CAC staff and community partners
- **Weekly Backpack Mail:** Includes flyers, reminders of family workshops, meetings, and parent-child activities.
- **TSGold Family App Updates**
- **Tadpoles App Updates (specific classrooms)**
- **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 Policy

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 Policy

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 scheduled appointment time (not during drop-off or pick-up as these are very busy time periods).
2. If the issue or concern was unable to be resolved to your satisfaction, please contact the Center Manager.
3. If the issue is still unresolved or requires additional guidance, the center manager can assist you in contacting the Center Operations Manager or 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 ten of this Handbook. You may also contact:

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