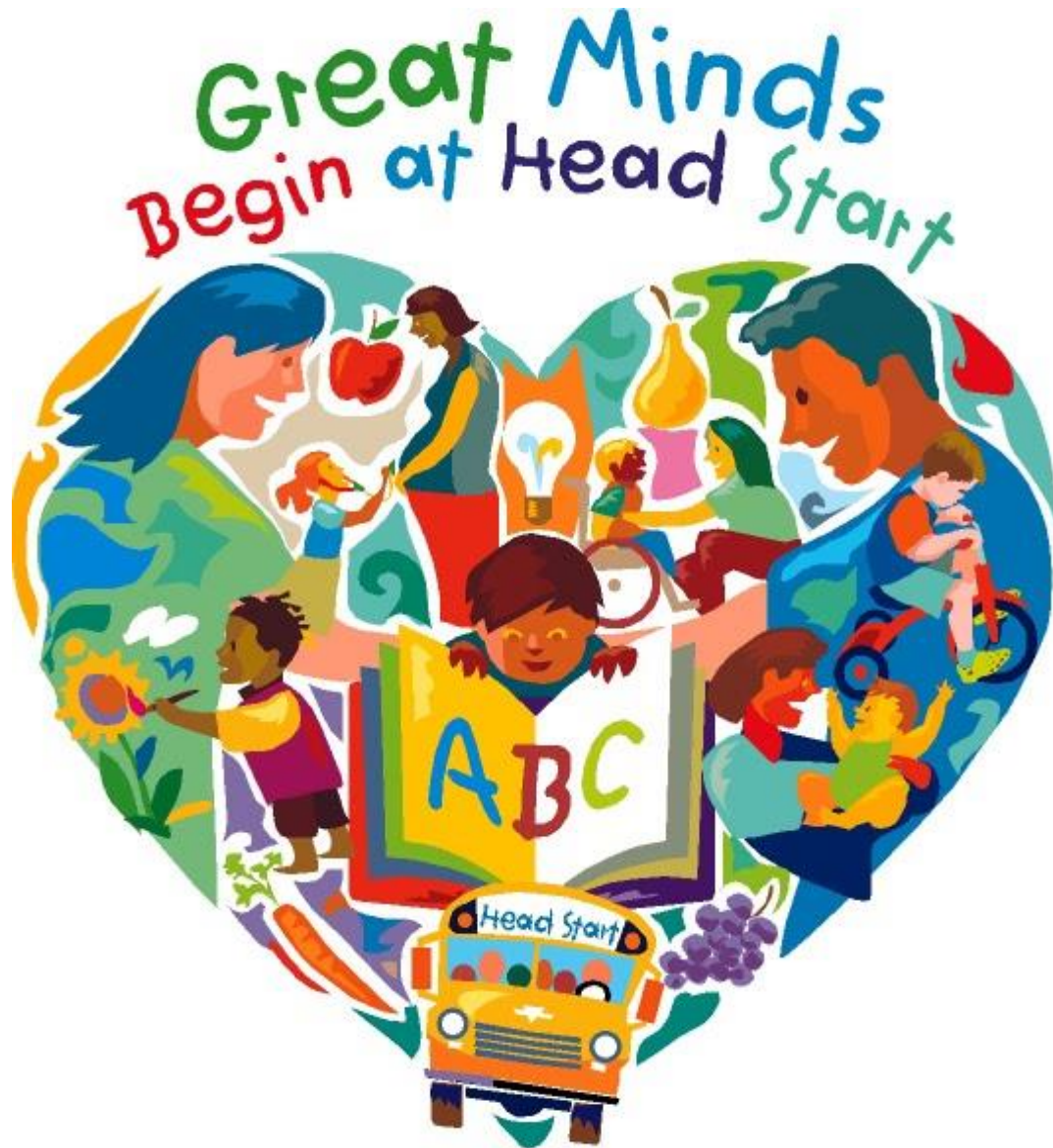


# Organized Community Action Program, Inc.



## HEAD START / EARLY HEAD START

### Parent Handbook

2024 – 2025



Dear Parent/Guardian:

Welcome to the Organized Community Action Program, Inc. (OCAP) Head Start/Early Head Start program! We are excited that you have chosen to begin your child's educational journey with us and look forward to partnering with you! Head Start/Early Head Start are comprehensive, child development programs that serve children ages zero to five with the goal of increasing school readiness of young children. We embrace the "whole child, whole family" philosophy and invite your family to engage in all aspects of our program. We believe that parents are the first and most important educators of their children. Therefore, parent involvement is one of the most important core values of the Head Start/Early Head Start program and we encourage you to become an integral part of your child's education. We encourage you to volunteer in the classroom, attend parent meetings, and serve on advisory parent committees. Your Family Service Specialist and child's teachers will also share other ways you can be involved.

Our Parent Handbook should prove to be a great resource that you may refer to throughout the year. Again, thank you for choosing Head Start! We look forward to serving your child in family this year!

Sincerely,

*Celeste R. Jones*

Celeste R. Jones  
Head Start/Early Head Start Director

# **Organized Community Action Program, Inc. Head Start / Early Head Start**

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## **Mission Statement**

The Organized Community Action Program Head Start Early Head Start is a comprehensive family services program; operating in Bullock, Butler, Coffee, Crenshaw, Dale and Pike counties, to improve the quality of life and embrace the self-esteem of the population served.

## **Vision Statement**

The philosophy of OCAP Head Start/Early Head Start is to have a fertile working environment. We recognize each person as an individual of worth, who is willing to learn and who is receptive to change. We will maintain cooperation and cohesiveness that leads to dedication, therefore, creating a program of excellence.

## **What is Head Start and Early Head Start?**

Head Start and Early Head Start are federally funded, child and family development programs that promote school readiness and provides comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parental engagement services to economically challenged children and their families. Head Start serves children ages 3 and 4. Early Head Start serves pregnant women, infants and toddlers starting at age 6 weeks.

## **What services you can expect from Head Start/Early Head Start:**

- Quality early childhood education
- Ongoing child development screening
- Family Support for all families
- Parent education, including parent-child activities
- Comprehensive health services, including services to women during and after pregnancy, assistance with well-baby and well-child check-ups; immunization tracking; dental screenings
- Nutrition education
- Mental health/wellness services and referrals
- Ongoing support for parents through partnership development focusing on family and individual goals, referral to agencies in the community to meet specific needs and peer support groups

## **Confidentiality Policy**

Please know that all information received from you by the OCAP Head Start/Early Head Start program is held in the strictest confidence. No information about Head Start/Early Head Start families or children will be given to other agencies or individuals without the written consent of the legal entity representing the family. Our program requires that records completed on your child be maintained and locked file by the agency. Those persons who have access to those records are: Official representative(s) of Health and Human Services, United States Department of Agriculture, Auditor(s), and/or persons that are required in the normal course of business with the program. No volunteer workers will have access to these files.



## **Volunteering and In-kind Contributions**

The Head Start/Early Head Start grant is federally funded that requires the receiving agency to provide a non-federal match. This match can be made by receiving in-kind contributions. In-kind is defined as property or services that benefit a grant-supported project or program and are contributed by non-federal third parties without charge to the grantee. In-kind contributions may consist of the value of real property and equipment and the value of goods and services directly benefiting the grant program and specifically indefinable to it. In-kind match is counted for the period when the services are provided or when the donated goods are received and used. An in-kind match is defined as a cash donation or other contributions from a third party that can be used to meet the requirements.

This is one reason it is important that you take the time to volunteer at the centers as often as you can. The agency's portion of the required match is over 1 million dollars. So, every hour that you can volunteer is figured in a formula by a fiscal staff and is counted towards meeting that million-dollar match. It is important that you do the take home weekly bulletin activities sent home with your children and accurately document how long you worked on the activity. By doing so that time is counted toward the OCAP Head Start/Early Head Start in-kind match.

Now, without meeting the 1 meeting dollars is in-kind match, the agency Board of Directors is fined by the federal government and the governing Board of Directors has to re-pay Head Start/Early Head Start grant funding to Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start; plus, all penalties of what we may know as additional fees.

## Parent Information

- There will be no bus transportation to and from home; however, Head Start will provide transportation to and from dental/health care facilities when requested.
- Parents are required to bring their child(ren) inside the center, sign them in on the Department of Human Resources (DHR) Sign-in form, as well as, sign their child(ren) out in the afternoons.
- Head Start children service hours are from 8:00 a.m. until 2:30 p.m.
- Early Head Start children service hours are from 8:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.
- Parents must designate, in writing, persons who will be allowed to drop off and pick up their child(ren) on the DHR Pre-admission form each month. If any family's contact information changes, we ask that you submit a revised DHR Pre-admission form as often as necessary. If the individual who is designated for drop off and pick up is not on the list, that individual cannot drop the child off, nor will we release the child to that individual, unless the legal guardian can provide us the change to the DHR pre-admission form. All unknown persons must show an ID at the time of pick up and drop off of children.
- In the event you cannot reach the Head Start center before the designated closing time, you should contact a person who is allowed to pick up your child. Children not picked up after attempts have been made to reach the parent(s), will be released to the proper authorities.
- Parent conferences are held at a minimum of twice per year with your child(ren)'s teacher to discuss your child's education and developmental progress and activities within the program. All conferences will be scheduled during program hours and at a time that is convenient for the parent.
- Newsletters will be sent home periodically to keep parents informed of different activities that are going on at the center.
- There will be two (2) home visits made to each child's home to engage parents in the child's learning and development. One visit will occur in the fall with the second in the spring. At the request of the parent, the home visit can take place at the center or another safe location that affords privacy.

- The Head Start staff will participate in professional development trainings during the program year and classes will be canceled. Notification reminders will be sent in advance for the closures. Parents are invited to attend if at all possible.

### **How you can help prepare your child for Head Start/Early Head Start:**

1. Make sure your child gets enough sleep and rest.
2. Be sure that your child gets to school on time.
3. Send extra clothing in case they soil their clothing; and please label your child's extra clothing. Clothing should be changed for each season's weather conditions.
4. If you child expresses fear about going to school, discuss their fear with them and be reassuring they will be alright.
5. Report to the teacher any upsetting experience that you think will help the teacher understand your child.
6. Help your child look forward to happy days at Head Start.
7. Visit the Head Start center often and attend monthly Parent Committee meetings.
8. Parents should come fully dressed when bringing your child to school. (Do not wear pajamas, robes, etc.)
- 9. Parents should place their cell phones on vibrate or turn them off while in the center.**
10. Above all, always have the family's current emergency numbers, emergency release to and pick-up names at the center where your child will attend. You must use the Alabama Department of Human Resources Pre-admission Record each month to update this information.

### **Graduation**

Graduation ceremonies are functions that are not funded or supported by the Head Start program. However, we allow parents to conduct these functions at a separate offsite venue. Head Start staff is not associated with planning or presenting at this type of event.

## **Picture, Video and Social Media**

Please be advised that parents are not allowed to take pictures or make videos on our premises that include children other than their own. This is a violation of one's privacy. Also, parents may not post pictures of activities that take place at our centers on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or any other social media platform unless it is of their own child.

Please note that any posts to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or any other social media platform that is perceived as harassing, coercing, or threatening to our students or staff may exclude you from participating with our program. The agency also has the right to pursue criminal charges.

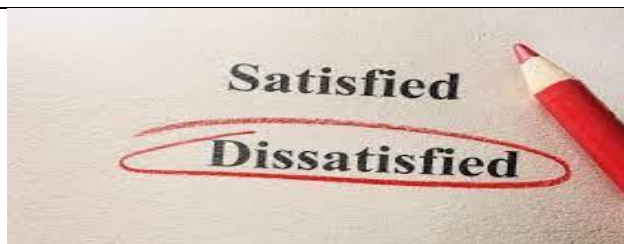


## **Notice of Surveillance Cameras**

To further our measures of safety for the children and staff in our centers, we have installed video cameras. The cameras may be located in the classrooms, hallways, cafeterias, and playgrounds at all of our sites. The purpose of the camera surveillance equipment is to help agency's staff monitor the going and coming of the children, staff, volunteers, and visitors while in our centers. The agency will work corporately with all legal authorities when video footage is requested by an outside source.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about the video surveillance, please do not hesitate to notify the Family Service Specialist I or our Central Office staff.





## **PARENT & COMMUNITY COMPLAINTS GRIEVANCE POLICY & PROCEDURE**

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### **Policy**

It is the policy of the OCAP Head Start/Early Head Start program to provide its parents with the best possible service. Employees are expected to treat all parents, suppliers, and general public in a courteous, respectful manner at all times. Employees should always remember that the program's parents come first and that each one is entitled to the same thoughtful treatment that the employee would like to receive. Parents should not be treated in a condescending or impolite manner.

When a parent approaches an employee with a question or complaint, the employee should give that matter immediate attention. If a parent or supplier becomes abusive or argumentative and the employee cannot properly handle the situation, the parent should be referred to the employee's supervisor.

### **Grievance Definition**

A grievance is a claim or complaint based upon an event or condition, which affects the operation of the Head Start/Early Head Start program.

A grievance might involve alleged safety or health hazards, unsatisfactory physical facilities, surroundings, materials or equipment, unjust treatment or any other event or circumstance related to the operation of the Head Start/Early Head Start program.

### **Grievance Procedure**

**Step One:** A parent, volunteer or community member shall present the matter in writing to the center's Family Service Specialist I (FSS I), provided the Family Service Specialist I did not instigate the grievance. The FSS I can assist in transcribing an oral complaint for the parent; if needed.

If the grievance is against the FSS I or the Family Community Engagement Coordinator, the grievance should be presented to the Head Start/Early Head Start Director.

If the complaint is not against the Family Community Engagement Coordinator, he/she will fully investigate the complaint involving other appropriate persons as necessary. After a full investigation of all the facts relating to the incident, the Family Community Engagement Coordinator shall give an answer within seven (7) working days.

**Step Two:** If the response provided in the complaint in step one is not satisfactory to the parent or community complaint; then shall the complaint be presented to the Head Start/Early Head Start Director within three (3) working days. The Head Start/Early Head Start Director will review the grievance, along with the Human Resource manager, and do further investigation involving all parties if necessary, either separately or together.

**Step Three:** If the decision rendered by the Head Start/Early Head Start Director is not satisfactory or if the response was not given, the parent shall file a complaint to the Policy Council Chairperson, within three (3) working days.

The Chairperson of the Policy Council shall within ten (10) working days to convene a hearing with a Grievance Committee, and witness may attend this meeting.

Recesses or continuances may be granted by a majority vote of the Grievance Committee. The Policy Council Grievance Committee shall make a written recommendation within three (3) working days following the completion of the hearing.

The recommendation of the Policy Council Grievance Committee, along with the Head Start/Early Head Start Director, shall be presented to the full body of the Policy Council at its next regularly scheduled meeting. The decision of the Policy Council and the Head Start/Early Head Start Director will then be presented to the Board of Directors for approval.

### **Parent Standard of Conduct**

Please know that in accordance with the agency's Policies and Procedures, staff members have the right to complain if they feel threatened, coerced, or they are physically attacked by parents. Just as the staff has a standard of conduct with disciplinary infractions, parents are expected to treat staff with a reasonable level of respect. Any use of profanity, threats to staff, social media conversations that can be interpreted as coercion or threatening, or any other manner of undesirable activities may result in the parent being banned from the agency's property and could result in report to appropriate local authorities.



# Attendance Matters



## **Absenteeism**

Head Start children are expected to attend class each day. This sets good habits for the future and helps the child receive the full benefits of the program. If your child must be absent due to illness, family issues, or other problems, please call the center to inform your Family Service Specialist.

Head Start/Early Head Start is a federally funded program. Funds are paid for your child to be in attendance each day the center is open. When your child does not attend on a consistent basis, it not only upsets their continuity of education, but it also allows federal funds to be wasted. If federal funds are not used properly, then, OCAP can be asked to return the funding. Returning funds means reduced access to developmentally appropriate education for some children in our program.

We want to express the significance of daily attendance and the negative consequences of Chronic Absenteeism (missing 10% or more school days, equivalent to less than 2 days per month) for your child.

### **Research findings include:**

- Students who are chronically absent make two months less progress in math and three months less progress in literacy.
- Students who are chronically absent in preschool are five times more likely to be chronically absent in second grade.
- Children from low-income households are four times more likely to be chronically absent.
- Absenteeism in the early grades is a strong predictor of later absenteeism and school failure.
- Parents are unaware of the negative effects of absenteeism and how quickly it leads to trouble in the early grades.
- Parents who believe that regular preschool attendance is important have children with better attendance.

**For the reasons cited above, daily attendance, All Day, Every Day is a requirement for enrollment in the program. With this in mind:**

- Each student is expected to attend at least 90 percent of the time (that means an average of less than 2 absences per month)
- When a student must be absent, parent(s)/guardian(s) are required to call the school office to report the absence no later than one hour after the school start time.
- The program must contact a family anytime a student has two or more consecutive unexplained/unexcused absences.
- If a student is absent 3 or more days, we request that you bring a doctor's statement.

**Chronic absenteeism/Attendance follow-up**

Chronic absenteeism is defined as overall absences of 10 percent or more school days (in other words, when a student attends less than 90 percent of the time). The agency will issue written notices for chronic absenteeism and may require participation in establishing an *Attendance Success Plan* and/or Case Management in its effort to assist families for improved student attendance. As part of its outreach efforts, the program will also conduct home visits in association with written notices and other forms of direct contact.

**Failure to improve student attendance despite the agency's best efforts to assist the family may result in jeopardization of your child's enrollment in the Head Start/Early Head Start program.**

<b>Absences that are considered Excused (verification may be requested)</b>	
Student or parent illness	Family emergency
Death in immediate family	Court hearing or court ordered visitation
Medical/dental appointments for child	DHR, WIC, Social Security, Medical
Extended absences due to medical emergencies for child or parent/guardian/sibling (must be requested in writing, in advance with proper documentation and approved by program administration)	
<b>All other absences are considered Unexcused</b>	

## Program Component Areas of Head Start/Early Head Start

Head Start takes a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of young children. There are four major components to Head Start:

- **Education:** Providing a variety of learning experiences to help children grow intellectually, socially, and emotionally.
- **Health:** Providing health services such as immunizations, dental, medical, and mental health, and nutritional services, and early identification of health problems.
- **Parent Involvement:** Involving parents in the planning and implementation of activities. Parents serve on policy councils and committees that make administrative decisions; participate in classes and workshops on child development; and volunteer in the program.
- **Social Services:** Provide outreach to families to determine what services they need.

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## Education



*“When you asked me what I did in school today and I say, “I just played”, please don’t misunderstand me. I am learning as I play. I am learning to enjoy and be successful in my work. Today, I am a child and work is play.”*

Anita Wadley, 1974

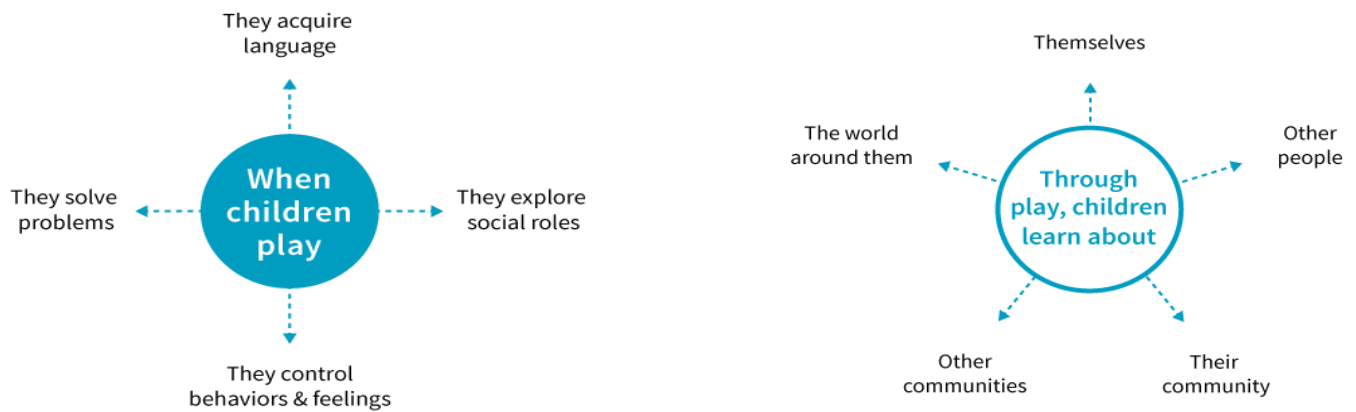
Play is how children naturally learn about the world and how they fit in it. Take a moment, if you can, and think back to a happy childhood memory. What was something that you loved to do as a little kid? Was it riding a bike down the street, the wind in your face, going as fast as your little legs could pump those pedals? Was it building with erector sets, blocks, plastic building bricks, and Lincoln Logs®, creating whatever your imagination allowed? Was it pretending to be a teacher, or a rock star, or a veterinarian, or a dragon, or a superhero? Was it painting at an easel, mixing colors and bringing pictures to life? Was it digging in the dirt and climbing trees and building forts and uncovering hidden insects under rocks? Was it dressing up your Barbie for a princess ball or having water gun fights with your brother?

For most of us, when we think about our childhood and what we loved to do as kids, we remember play. We remember joyful, unencumbered, playful experiences—using our imaginations, being free to explore a toy or the world around us without constant adult

direction. And what we got out of those play experiences was critically important to who we are today. Through play you learned...

- how to think creatively and problem solve (what size pieces do you need to make windows on the second story of your building?),
- about your own limitations and how to challenge yourself (how hard can you pedal that bike?),
- how to persist through challenges (what colors do you need to mix together to get this purple the perfect shade for your painting?),
- how to make and follow rules and get along with others (you're only allowed to squirt people who are holding a water gun),
- how to think symbolically (using objects in unconventional ways—using sea kelp as a fishing pole, for example—helped you make connections to more abstract symbols later, like using letters and numbers), and
- that you are awesome and capable and strong and brave!

Within our classrooms we provide materials and activities that promote exploration, discovery and hands-on learning. Purposeful play encourages discovery and exploration, supporting children's academic growth. When children are learning through intentional play experiences, when they are exploring, investigating, and discovering new interests and new ideas, they are continuing to find joy in learning, and laying the foundation for a lifetime of learning.



## **Parents as Partners**

Research suggests parents and family members are more likely to become engaged in their young child's development and learning when they have positive and trusting relationships with those who support them. Families play a critical role in helping their children to prepare for school and a lifetime of academic success. At OCAP Head Start/Early Head Start we provide opportunities for parents to participate fully in their child's education experience.

Understanding that you are your child's first teacher, we want to partner with you to ensure your child's school readiness success! Our Head Start/Early Head Start School Readiness Goals are below and divided among the five domains in children's development.

### **1. Approaches to Learning**

- A. Children will show initiative, be able to stay focused, interested and engaged as well as cooperate with others during activities.
- B. Children will participate in a range of activities and learning experiences that allow for creative and imaginative expression, such as music, movement, dance, art, and drama.

### **2. Social and Emotional Development**

Children will develop healthy relationships with adults and peers; in order to recognize and regulate their emotions.

### **3. Language and Literacy**

- A. Children will develop early literacy knowledge and skills as book appreciation, phonological awareness, alphabet awareness, print concepts and early writing.
- B. Children will develop skills for reading comprehension, recalling, and reciting information from familiar books.

### **4. Cognition**

- A. Children will engage in exploratory play and learning experience to further their understanding of their environment, and the natural and physical world through observation, manipulation, problem-solving, and asking questions.
- B. Children will use math in every day routines to count, compare, rank, describe relationships, solve problems, name shapes and attributes, pattern, sort, classify, and measure.

### **5. Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development**

Children will maintain health and age appropriate well-being, develop health and safety knowledge and practices, while they develop control of large muscles and small muscles.

Our classrooms are designed to promote all areas of development guided by our curriculum. Currently, our agency utilizes the Creative Curriculum in both Early and Head Start classrooms. Early Head Start classrooms implement the Creative Curriculum for Infants, Toddlers, and Twos while Head Start classrooms implement the Preschool Creative Curriculum. Both curriculums offer thematic units referred to as studies that align with our School Readiness Goals, Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF) and the State of Alabama Early Learning Guidelines.

Throughout the course of the year, your child will be assessed on the school readiness skills listed above. The assessment tool used to track your children's progress while enrolled in our program is the Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment. Their results will be shared with you after each assessment period (fall, winter and spring), and as a team we will create a plan to continue their growth.

## **Disability Services**

Children identified with a disability are actively recruited for enrollment in Head Start. They are entitled to related services; as required to meet their unique needs, developmental potential regardless of family circumstances. A child's family who makes an application for Head Start or is accepted to participate in the program should present their child's Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to the Family Service Specialist (FSS). Every Head Start grantee makes available ten percent (10%) of its funded enrollment slots to be filled with children with disabilities before the end of the program year.

Referrals are often made to our program from other agencies such as Early Intervention, United Cerebral Palsy and Easter Seals. Parents, teachers, physicians, and other professionals can also make disability referrals to the local education agency. Head Start will obtain a signed written consent from the parent to take a referral to the LEA. Children who are referred for an evaluation from an LEA or other entity must complete all of the receiving Agency's forms and paperwork.

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# Health



As the primary caregiver it is important that you advocate for your child and are involved in decisions regarding their health care. Head Start mandates that all children receive screenings and ongoing health care. Our staff are committed to assisting parents establish a medical and dental home, determine if health requirements are up-to-date, making necessary arrangements to bring your child up-to-date with their health and well-being, and providing parent education on health issues.

## **Head Start's Required Screenings**

### **What is a "screening"?**

Screening is the process through which we can identify children who may have a special need in the areas of health, development, or learning.



## Why does Head Start screen children?

To identify the needs of children early and ensure each child receives needed services.

## What types of screenings will all children receive? When and where will they be done?

- **Annual Physical Exam:** Performed by your child's Primary Care Physician. The exam includes height and weight, blood pressure, blood lead, and a hemoglobin and/or hematocrit.
- **Annual Dental Exam:** Performed by a dental professional. Follow-up treatment is to be complete in a timely manner.
- **Hearing and Vision Screening:** Performed by your child's Primary Care Physician, Head Start Staff or through the County Health Department
- **Classroom Health Screening:** Performed by Head Start staff; includes measurements of height and weight at least twice per year and oral health check during oral hygiene instruction
- **Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3):** Completed by the child's parent/guardian. The ASQ-3 questionnaire includes questions about your child's communication, gross motor, fine motor, problem solving, and personal social skills. This is a developmental screener.
- **Deveraux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA):** Completed by both parent/guardian and classroom staff. This is a social-emotional screener that provides information on your child's social-emotional needs and strengths.

## Head Start Performance Standards Health Requirements

Within 30 Calendar Days of Enrollment	Establish if your child has an established medical or dental home
Within 30 Calendar Days of Enrollment	Determine if your child has health insurance coverage
Within 45 Calendar Days of Enrollment	Obtain or Perform vision and hearing screenings Obtain or complete your child's developmental screening
Within 90 Calendar Days of Enrollment	Obtain a physical and dental from your child's medical and dental provider to determine if your child is up-to-date on his/her age appropriate preventive and primary medical and oral health care

## Immunization Records

All children must have a current immunization certificate from the State of Alabama to attend class. Head Start Staff will inform parents/guardians prior to their child's immunization expiration date to ensure the child is up-to-date and prevent a child's absence.

## **Safety and Incident Reports**

We encourage all parents to report any health and safety hazards to their FSS Specialist. It is very important to note unusual or strange circumstances that may cause an accident or become a safety issue.

A Daily Health Check will be completed by your child's teacher. This report documents any unusual signs, marks, or bruises that a child may have when he/she arrives. It also documents things such as a sore that is not healing properly, or if your child is unusually irritable without any apparent reason. We also keep incident reports on your child, if necessary. If your child gets a minor scratch, bump, or bruise while in our care, we will note it on the Incident Report and have it available for your review when you arrive. All Incident Reports are kept confidential and signed by the FSS and then forwarded to the Health Coordinator.

## **Accidents**

Minor accidents requiring first aid will be treated at the Head Start center. Serious accidents might occur inside or on the playground. The first step is for the staff member to assess the extent of the injury. If the child sustains any type of head injury, bump or broken skin, the child's parent must be notified by the FSS. The Teacher/FSS must prepare an Incident Report immediately after the child is treated and it must be signed by the FSS. The form will be available for the parent's review and signature upon arrival. First aid will consist of a cold compress when appropriate. Open wounds may be cleaned using soap and water only. A non-medicated band aide or sterile cloth may be used to cover the exposed area. Under no circumstances are topical medications or sprays to be applied.

## **Authorization for Emergency Medical/Dental Treatment**


Parents must sign consent forms allowing their child to receive emergency medical/dental treatment, if necessary. In the event the parent or emergency contact cannot be located, the consent form can be used to seek treatment until the parent or guardian arrives.



## Sick Child Procedures

Please do not send your child to school if he/she displays any of the following symptoms:

# WHEN IS SICK TOO SICK FOR SCHOOL?




**Send me to school if...**

I have a runny nose or just a little cough, but no other symptoms.

I haven't taken any fever reducing medicine for 24 hours, and I haven't had a fever during that time.

I haven't thrown up or had any diarrhea for 24 hours.




**Keep me at home if...**

I have a temperature higher than 100 degrees even after taking medicine.

I'm throwing up or have diarrhea.

My eyes are pink and crusty.




**Call the doctor if...**

I have a temperature higher than 100 degrees for more than two days.

I've been throwing up or have diarrhea for more than two days.

I've had the sniffles for more than a week, and they aren't getting better.

I still have asthma symptoms after using my asthma medicine (and call 911 if I'm having trouble breathing after using an inhaler).



When a child is sent to school sick, it is dangerous to his/her health and the health of other children. Please notify the center if your child is being kept home because of sickness. If a child becomes ill while at the center, he/she must be isolated from the other children. The parent must be contacted and informed to make necessary arrangements for their child to be taken home.

The FSS will contact the parent if the child has a fever of 100 degrees Fahrenheit, has diarrhea, is vomiting or has other medical conditions that cause concern. Parents are asked to be considerate of other children enrolled in the center and to keep a sick child at home if signs of illness are evident.

# Administering Medication



No medication (prescription or over the counter) or medical procedures shall be administered without a written, signed Authorization form from the child's guardian/parent and prescription from a physician or health care professional. *Please see required form in the back of this handbook.*

The legal guardian must have the child's medical provider complete an Authorization for Administering Medication form. The medication must be brought in its original container, with a legible label and current.

If an over the counter medicine is given to a child before he/she enters the center, the teacher must be notified by the parent. The parent should provide the name of the medication given, the time it was given, and any known reactions from the medication given.

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## **Ways you can be involved and ensure that our Head Start/Early Head Start Program complies with Head Start Performance Standards:**

- Keeping up-to-date well child visits
- Keeping up-to-date immunizations
- Attend health information meetings
- Utilizing a consistent health care provider
- Taking your child for regular dental check-ups
- Communicating with Head Start Staff regarding your child's health
- Maintaining a "health file" at home with information about medical appointments/ER visits, original immunization record and other important health information
- Keeping your child home when ill
- Setting a good example of healthy living

## **Mental Health**

OCAP Head Start/Early Head Start staff works with you to meet the mental wellness needs of your child. We create an environment that encourages healthy social and emotional development. We work to form secure, polite, caring relationships with, and between, you and your child.

As a parent, you do your best to give your child happy, loving memories. All children and families, at some point, face tough times. These tough times can create stresses within the family. When you seek out someone to help, you have an easier time coping.

OCAP Head Start/Early Head Start contracts with specialists in the mental health field that can be a resource to you in your family. If you would like to arrange a meeting with our specialists at your child's classroom or in your home, please contact your Family Service Specialist (FSS) or our Health Coordinator at the Central Office.

## **Guidance and Discipline**

The long-term goal for children enrolled in our Head Start/Early Head Start program is to provide a setting where children can slowly develop a sense of inner self-control; that they can begin to understand the reasons for limits that are set and to develop a sense of both being respected and respecting other's rights and feelings.

When behavior problems arise, staff are encouraged to look at classroom routines, the environment, and individual needs of the child in order to help the child overcome the behavior. Parents are also expected and may be required to assist with their child's behavior by volunteering in the classroom to provide extra assistance to the teaching staff if deemed necessary.

It is important for all adults to be aware of the language, the tone of voice and the manner of speech used when working with young children. Providing each child with choices, foreseeing problems, and responding to their needs immediately enables us to help the child positively without having to use direct discipline.

The program will limit the use of suspension due to a child's behavior. Temporary suspension will be the last resort in extraordinary circumstances where there is a serious threat that cannot be reduced or eliminated by the provisions of reasonable modifications.

Before the program determines whether a temporary suspension is necessary, the program will engage with our mental health consultant, collaborate with parents, and utilize appropriate community resources. If a temporary suspension is deemed necessary, the program will help the child return to full participation in all program activities as quickly as possible, while ensuring child safety.

## **Challenging Behavior Policy**

OCAP Head Start/Early Head Start has an approved policy in regards to challenging behaviors. The policy is as follows:

When a child's aggressive behavior becomes so combative that he/she becomes a health and safety risk for the other children and staff (examples: throwing furniture, kicks, bites, hits staff and other children), staff will contact the child's parent to come and pick the child up from the Head Start center.

If the staff cannot reach the parent or any of the listed contacts on the DHR Pre-Admission Record to come and pick up the child, then the proper authorities (police, sheriff, DHR) will be contacted to assist in locating the parent to notify them that they need to come to the Head Start center. If the staff does reach the parent, and the parent does not show up to pick up the child within thirty (30) minutes, staff should continue to contact or attempt to contact the parent.

Some of our children are identified as a child that takes medication for behavioral or disruptive behavioral disorders. If it appears prior to the parent signing the child in that the behavior of the child is exhibiting that they have not had their medication, the teacher is discreetly to pull the parent to the side and inform them that the child cannot be signed in. The teacher must explain that after briefly observing the child there appears no medication has been given for their behavior; therefore, the parent is asked to take the child home and give the child the medication. This will help ensure that the child has a less challenging day and help make the environment as calm as possible to promote learning activities. The child may return when their medication has been administered and the child will transition into the learning environment without being a health and safety risk. For the health and safety of children and staff, we ask that each parent fully cooperation with this policy.

## **Nutrition**

OCAP Head Start/Early Head Start nutrition program promotes child wellness by providing nutritional services that supplement and complement those of the home and community. A well-nourished child has a better chance to learn. We strive to help each child establish good eating habits which will lay a good foundation for a healthy body. Good nutrition affects many parts of a child's life; their bodies grow stronger, which enables them to work and play, and they learn through the process of eating, such as socialization. In Head Start/Early Head Start, a child learns about the looks, tastes, and smells of different multicultural foods. Children learn that eating is a pleasant experience in a family style setting. All of our Head Start centers participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), where nutritious meals are prepared according to the USDA standards. All children are offered breakfast, lunch, and a snack each day. The meals are prepared with all allergies taken into consideration. Water and milk are required unless there are special dietary restrictions. Our meals are contracted through a catering service. For breastfeeding mothers, we support nursing practices at the center.

# Parent Involvement



## Parent Involvement Matters

You are an important part of the Head Start family and your full participation in all center-based experiences are very important to assure the OCAP Head Start/Early Head Start program will remain in operation. Please come and visit the center where your child attends, attend regularly parent committee meetings, and become a volunteer. Our federal in-kind match can be accomplished if parents take an active role as volunteers, attend meetings, and become participating members of the Policy Council.

The agency is mandated to form Parent Committees that meet regularly. Your attendance at these center-based parent Committee meetings allow for the agency to fulfill this federal requirement. All meetings are held once a month. Topics of the meetings will be distributed to parents by way of flyers, phone calls, emails and text messages. FSS will post flyers at the centers as reminders of the meeting date or event.

### Parent and Community Engagement

Parent engagement is a process of community action that enriches the total Head Start program. It provides parents, staff, and communities with opportunities to work as a team to ensure their child's growth and development. Parent engagement enables parents to participate (1) in making policy decisions that affect their child's growth and development; and (2) in developing and sustaining programs that assist parents in carrying out their parental responsibilities and personal goals.

The Family and Community Engagement (FCE) component is responsible for fostering meaningful relationships with their families. Being a part of the OCAP Head Start/Early Head Start program means individualized services for the parents as well as the children. When enrolled, you will be asked to develop a family partnership agreement (FPA) with our agency.

The purpose of the Family Partnership Agreement (FPA) is to support parent/guardian(s) in identifying their own strengths, interests, and goals. This includes writing down goals and

interests, as well as, setting timetables for achieving them. Your Family Service Specialist will schedule meeting times to complete the Family Partnership Agreement. After the initial meeting, your FSS will continue to follow up and work with you to achieve your family goals and document accomplishments.

The major focus is working with the family to engage and stimulate parent participation in the center's program and related activities. This includes the encouragement, motivation and assistance provided to the family in efforts to improve the conditions and quality of life.

## **Father Engagement**

OCAP Head Start/Early Head Start partners with fathers to promote positive outcomes for children, families, and fathers themselves. Staff work with fathers to help them develop their skills and interests and achieve goals for themselves and their families. Programs support fathers as advocates, lifelong educators, and first teachers of their children. The term "father" refers to fathers and other men who play a significant role in raising a child. This person may be a biological father, adoptive father, or stepfather. He may be a grandfather, another adult male family member, a foster father, a guardian, or a mother's significant other. He may be the expectant partner of a pregnant woman. Father engagement is not a stand-alone program initiative, but a vital and integrated aspect of parent, family, and community work.

## **Training and Education for Families**

Staff and parent training/education will be an ongoing endeavor. At each center, resources will be provided to assist staff and parents with decisions about furthering their careers while giving monetary assistance (if funds are available) to attend institutions and classes. GED classes will be offered to parents at local entities within a county; and/or coordinated with local secondary education institutions. Literacy improvement will be a priority in each center.

## **Social Services**

Parents are made aware of community services and resources as well as how often to use them. To ensure parent, family engagement of these services, Head Start provides parents with a community resources list and initiates contact with these resources and trainings or services needed from them upon the parents' request.

Family Service Specialists serve as the link between the parent, staff, family and community. We are here to offer you quality service and provide you with an unforgettable Head Start experience!

Your Family Service Specialist can assist in:

- Making referrals for utility assistance,



- Writing resumes
- Completing applications (employment, SNAP, Medicaid, etc.),
- Enrolling in a GED program, and
- Looking for housing and much more!



## As a Head Start/Early Head Start Parent I Can:

- Set goals for myself and/or my family
- Seek a regular doctor or dentist for my child(ren) and/or family
- Take my child to the doctor for regular appointments and follow-ups
- Attend Parent Committee meetings during the program year
- Assist with special activities and plans to help my child thrive
- Observe and volunteer at your local Head Start/Early Head Start at least once per month
- Communicate with teachers about my child's curriculum, assessments, developmental skills and nutrition patterns
- Talk with my child's teacher and/or Family Service Specialist about any behavioral concerns I might have about my child
- Participate in parent/child take home activities, sign *Home Activity Bulletins* weekly
- Seek assistance from Family Service Specialists when and if resources are needed
- Give your child positive reinforcement about attending Head Start/Early Head Start
- Encourage your child to talk about his/her experiences in the program



Your child's health and safety are priority at OCAP Head Start/Early Head Start. Below are examples of how we ensure health and safety for our staff, children and families.

- All centers are monitored and inspected to ensure Head Start and DHR Performance Standards are met.
- Staff are certified in CPR and First Aid and receive various trainings throughout the year to ensure families and children are safe including signs of Child Abuse and Neglect, OSHA Standards, Medication Authorization, Universal Precautions, SIDS, etc.
- Fire, tornado and intruder drills are conducted to ensure staff, children and families are prepared in the event of an emergency.
- Healthy habits are part of the daily routine and encouraged in the home as well. Healthy habits include proper hand washing techniques, tooth brushing, and awareness of germs through coughing and sneezing.
- Physical activity is encouraged through outdoor play each day, weather permitting.

## Clothing and shoes

A full day at our center includes fun activities like singing, painting, playing both indoors and out, dancing, and eating, so we recommend easy fitting, washable clothes.

Being comfortable lets kids focus on learning and having fun!

Shoes that Velcro or tie help avoid trips and tumbles!

Be sure shoes are rubber-soled and closed-toe with a closed heel **or heel strap**. **To keep everyone safe, flip-flops, sandals, and shoes with wheels are not allowed.** Shoes are required for all walking children. **If crocs are worn, the heel strap MUST be secured around the back of the ankle.**

**NO!**



**YES!**



# Head Start Centers

## **BULLOCK COUNTY**

Union Springs Head Start  
501 Locke Terrace Court  
Union Springs, AL 36089  
334-738-4669 Fax: 334-738-4651

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## **BUTLER COUNTY**

**Greenville Head Start**  
211 School Highland Road  
Greenville, AL 36037  
334-382-8034 Fax: 334-382-1521

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## **COFFEE COUNTY**

**Enterprise Head Start**  
1617 Park Avenue Enterprise, AL 36330  
334-347-4434 Fax: 334-393-5784

## **Elba Head Start**

145 Tiger Drive Elba, AL 36323  
(334) 897-5413, ext. 310  
Fax: 334-897-2839

## **CRENSHAW COUNTY**

Luverne Head Start  
207 Votech Drive Luverne, AL 36049  
334-335-3909 Fax: 334-335-2389

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## **DALE COUNTY**

**Ozark Head Start**  
405 Marvin Parker Road Ozark, AL 36360  
334-774-3667 Fax: 334-774-0347

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## **PIKE COUNTY**

**Troy Head Start**  
201 Lake Avenue Troy, AL 36081  
334-566-6959 Fax: 334-670-6918

## **Brundidge Head Start**

522 Veterans Blvd. Brundidge, AL 36010  
334-735-5496 Fax: 334-735-9766

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**OCAP Central Office**

507 N Three Notch Street, Troy, Alabama 36081

334-566-1712 Fax: 334-566-7417

