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**Early Head Start/Head Start**

**Parent Handbook**

**2025-2026**



Dear Families,

Welcome to the Commission on Economic Opportunity’s (CEO) Early Head Start/Head Start program! CEO creates partnerships and develops opportunities for social and economic growth and empowerment in individuals, families and communities. We are a federally funded program that provides comprehensive early childhood services to children and families throughout Rensselaer County. We promote school readiness of children ages birth to five by supporting the development of the whole child. Our program support children’s growth and development in a positive learning environment through a variety of services, which include:

* **Early learning**: Children’s readiness for school is fostered through individualized learning experiences. Through relationships with adults, play, and planned and spontaneous instruction, children grow in many aspects of development. Children progress in social skills and emotional well-being, along with language and literacy learning, and concept development. These are reflected in our current school readiness goals.
* **Health**: All children receive health and development screenings, nutritious meals, oral health and mental health support. We connect families with medical, dental, special education, and mental health services to ensure that children are receiving the services they need.
* **Family well-being**: Parents and families are supported in achieving their own goals. We support and strengthen parent-child relationships and engage families around children’s learning and development.

We are very excited to have your family and child(ren) be part of our program and begin the school year with us! We are committed to providing quality educational services to your child and work with your family. We encourage family engagement and hope you are able to volunteer in you child’s classroom or get invovled in the program.

To learn more about The Commission on Economic Opportunity (CEO) please visit us at : <https://www.ceoempowers.org/>

You can also follow us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ceocap>

And on our CEO Early Childhood Services page: <https://www.facebook.com/CEOECS/>

If you have any questions please do not hesistate to contact me at 518-272-6012 ext. 283.

Here is to a great 2025-2026 school year!

Tia Nunziato Early Childhood Program/Human Resources Officer

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# **How CEO Staff Work with Your Family**

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CEO’s Early Childhood program will gather information from families about child development, health, nutrition, and social service needs throughout a family’s enrollment in the program. This information helps to provide targeted services to your family. The ultimate goal is to always meet your family's changing needs.

The program collects a great deal of information from parents that help us to better care for the children in our programs and support families. Family and child records will be kept confidential. All files will be stored in a locked file cabinet. Emergency forms will be filed separately and will be available at all times in case of an emergency. Enrollment lists, addresses, and phone numbers will not be shared with other agencies or parents without a parent’s written permission except in specific situations required by law or regulation.

|  |
| --- |
| **Classroom Teaching Staff** |
| At the start of the school year, teachers will schedule a home visit to get to know your family and complete necessary paperwork. Teachers will host two parent -teacher conferences with families throughout the year (fall and winter) as well as a final home visit (spring) to review and discuss child progress.  If at any time you have concerns about your child’s development or progress, please reach out to a CEO staff member for information about potential referrals or support. |
| **Family Advocates** |
| Family Advocates are here to support families with any questions or needs. They will be in regular contact with families from the time of their enrollment into the program and going forward.  During the first several weeks of school, Family Advocates (FAs) will work with families to complete a Strengths and Needs Assessment and Interest Survey, as well as an individual goal plan. |
| **Center Manager/Site Supervisor** |
| Each site/center has a site supervisor or Center Manager that oversees the site staff and ensures the daily operation of the location. Center Managers and site supervisors can and will assist families in any way they are able to. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out. |
| **Health and Kitchen Staff** |
| Program health staff will work with you to ensure your child’s health needs are met and up to date. Program kitchen staff work diligently to ensure that meals provided are nutritious to your child. Program menus will be available to all families throughout the school year. |

# **Family Engagement**

CEO Early Head Start/Head Start encourages all families to play an active role in their child’s education. Families and staff work together toward the goals that families choose for themselves and their children. Staff provide resources and referrals to support families in reaching their goals. We also provide families the opportunity to participate in different types of parent education, including a parenting curriculum.

Our Parent Socials and Parent Committee provide important information while giving families the opportunity to connect with each other and contribute to planning events at center.

Family Fun Days strengthen the parent-child relationship. Examples of past activities include bowling, family dine night, dances, and age-appropriate activities in the classroom.

Stay connected with your child’s classroom teachers and center staff via Learning Genie. Please reach out to your child’s teacher to sign up for Learning Genie.

Families know their children better than anyone—their temperaments, personalities, strengths, vulnerabilities, talents, and special needs. When parents share their knowledge, they improve provider practices and program quality.

Our staff create partnerships with families. The more knowledge and information families can give to CEO, the better the program will be!

**Other ways for Families to get Involved**

Family volunteers are ALWAYS welcome! Please speak to your Center Manager or Family Advocate for more information.

* Guest Readers & Librarians
* Virtual opportunities
* Meal Helpers
* Special Center Events & Celebrations
* Fatherhood Initiative activities
* Family Goal Setting
* School Readiness activities at home
* Policy Council
* Family Connections Committees
  + Provide input on agency policies
  + Plan events for the centers
  + Provide suggestions and input on classroom activities
  + Plan parent education experiences

**Join the Policy Council!**

Policy Council is made up of families and members of the community who are interested in supporting the Early Childhood program, as well as working toward making positive change in the community. **The Policy Council is responsible for providing assistance in budgetary and program decision-making as well as the development and support of CEO Early Childhood program enhancements**. Policy Council parent representatives are elected within the program by other parents. Community representatives are identified as positive partners and/or resources to the program. If you would like more information about Policy Council, please contact the Early Childhood Director at 272-6012 Ext. 283.

**Join the Health Services Advisory Committee!**

The Health Advisory Committee is an advisory group which serves to consult with the Early Childhood Program Health Services. The committee is made up of families and members of the community who are interested in supporting the health and wellbeing of our children and families. The Health Advisory Committee is responsible for providing support to the program’s health philosophy, assisting in solving health related issues as well as serving as a resource to meet the program health goals. If you are interested in more information about the Health Advisory Committee, please contact the Health and Nutrition Manager at (518)272-6012 Ext.

300.

**In-Kind**

CEO is required to raise donations to match Federal Head Start funding. All donations of time help us to meet our goal! All volunteer time and activities can be counted as “In-Kind”. Please be sure to document your time spent in the program through CEO’s In-Kind process. Please ask your Center Manager, Family Advocate, or Classroom Teacher about the In-Kind process anytime you volunteer at the center or in the classroom.

If every family could donate five hours of their time per school year, CEO can easily surpass our goal!

**Education**

The CEO Early Childhood program uses a nationally recognized curriculum for teaching young children. The ***Creative Curriculum*** helps teachers and families plan each child’s educational growth. The curriculum includes:

* Developmentally appropriate learning goals and guidance on how to use them for the individualization of learning experiences based on children's strengths and needs
* Comprehensive guidance on ongoing child assessment
* Strategies and resources to support parent and family engagement
* Specific adaptations for children with disabilities, suspected delays, or other special needs

Our Head Start program fully includes children with disabilities, provides supportive services to children who have Individualized Education Plans (IEP) and IFSP’s and individualizes the child’s learning experiences to support goals on the IEP/IFSP.

We provide a non-bias program. This means: all children are encouraged to engage in active play, and to enjoy quiet play. We help children develop a sense of freedom to explore as many of their talents, interests, and roles as they would like to. Children will be exposed to all people performing a variety of jobs, which will help them understand that people are free to choose their work, and that most jobs can be performed by anyone.

What can you expect from our classrooms?

* Daily schedule
* Open door policy and volunteering
* Developmental age-appropriate learning experiences
* Information sent home to promote school readiness and the home to school connection
* Weekly lesson plans
* Home Visits and Parent Teacher conferences throughout the school year
* Developmental and social/emotional screening results of your child
* Transition planning. CEO will work with each family to facilitate a successful transition.
* Several activities will take place throughout the year including:
  + - Parent meetings and information sessions on various transition topics
    - Transition planning for children moving into a different CEO classroom
    - Teacher and/or Family Advocate home visits
* Confidentiality of your family and child information
* All teachers are required to use positive reinforcement and redirection as the primary means of discipline. Positive Guidance is promoted by:
  + Setting clear rules and limits.
  + Building trusting relationships
  + Engaging in responsive caregiving that meets the child’s needs
  + Redirecting a child’s behavior, and offering alternatives
  + Comforting children
  + Teachers modeling appropriate behavior
  + Presenting appropriate options/activities to a child

**Home Visits**

To get to know your family and child better we complete home visits within your home twice a year. The first home visit is completed within the first 45 days of your child’s enrollment. The second home visit is completed at the end of the school year. Home visits are a great opportunity for your child to see the home to school connection firsthand. Please know that our intention for these visits is to build the home to school connection, build relationships with you and your child in a familiar environment, share important information about your child’s education and to get to know you, your child and your family.

**School Readiness**

CEO Early Childhood programs are here to prepare your children for kindergarten and beyond. Our program has School Readiness Goals, which are expectations of children's progress across learning domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development. CEO’s School Readiness Goals are developed in accordance with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, NYS Early Learning Guidelines, staff input, family input, and child assessment from Teaching Strategies GOLD. Goals are reviewed on an annual basis and because we believe parents/caregivers are our students first teachers, we will be reaching out throughout the school year to get your feedback on these goals.

School Readiness activities for home and school are designed and offered by CEO staff. These activities will be sent home on a monthly basis for you to complete together with your child. Please be on the lookout for how your family can participate.

# **Attendance and Enrollment**

Having your child attend school every day and on time is important to your child’s success and learning. The routines that your child develops in our program will continue throughout their school career. Our staff is dedicated to working with you to help your child develop and maintain strong attendance.

Families are expected to maintain **85% monthly attendance.** This means that they should miss no more than three days of school per month. If your child’s attendance falls below 85% and your child has chronic unexcused absences this will lead to meeting with program staff to complete an Attendance Success Plan. If your child’s attendance is deemed to be chronic it could have an impact on your child’s enrollment in the program.

**Absence Procedure**

If your child will be absent from school, please contact your classroom or center by 9:00am to let us know. Otherwise, CEO staff will be in touch with you within one hour of the start time of the program.

**Arrival Time**

It is important that your child arrive to school by 9:00am, unless there is an excused reason why they will be late. It is important to adhere to this drop-off time, so your child does not miss out on the most important part of the day and does not cause a disruption to the rest of the classroom. If you have several instances of unexcused late arrivals, then program staff will meet with you to discuss the impact this may have on your child’s enrollment in the program.

**Late Pick Up**

Due to staffing, it is very important that your child(ren) are picked up by program end time. If an emergency occurs, and a child will be picked up late, please contact your child’s center to notify them. If a family has an excessive number of late pick-ups, Center Managers will meet with families to discuss the impact on your child’s enrollment in the program.

**Income Re-Verification**

The income re-verification process is completed for children that are moving from Early Head Start to Head Start or Head Start children who have been in program for two years. During the income re-verification process, we will determine if your child is eligible to remain in our Early Head Start/ Head Start program.

**Safety**

Safety is the number one priority of the Early Childhood Program. In order to ensure the safety of children in our program we have to follow the below policies:

* Each childcare center conducts monthly fire drills
* Bi-annual shelter in place drills are conducted
* All CEO staff are Mandated Reporters and are required to report any suspected child abuse and maltreatment of children.

Safety at drop off and pick up is extremely important. We understand parking is limited and can be challenging. You must obey all driving laws. Do not double park or leave any child unattended in your vehicle.

Each site has secure visitor control protocol. In order to maintain a safe space at school we ask that all families adhere to the protocol and not hold the door open for unknown families and visitors. We appreciate your cooperation to help maintain a safe space at school.

**Release Policy**

All families need to ensure that the Emergency Card they fill out is current and up-to-date. **Please notify the center immediately of any changes**. In order to be able to pick children up from program individuals need to be 16 years of age and provide photo identification at time of pick up.

**CEO cannot prevent any parent from removing his or her child from the center if there is no court order on file. If there is a court order restricting a parent from visiting or picking up their child, then a copy of the court order must be provided to the agency, which will be placed into the child’s confidential file.**

**Sign In and Out**

Please make sure that children are signed in and out of their classroom each day.

**Electronic Devices**

When entering CEO locations families should refrain from using their cell phones. In order to protect the confidentiality of children, families should not take pictures of other children and staff using your own personal electronic devices.

**Pedestrian Safety**

To help prevent injuries as a pedestrian on the way to and from school, the National SAFE KIDS Campaign recommends the following tips:

* Children under age 10 should not be allowed to cross streets by themselves.
* Children should be taught proper pedestrian behavior, such as crossing at street corners, using traffic signals and crosswalks when available and making eye contact with drivers before crossing.
* Children should be encouraged to look LEFT, RIGHT and then LEFT again when crossing a street.
* Children should be aware that seeing a driver in a vehicle does not mean that the driver can see them.
* When walking along a street with no sidewalks, pedestrians should walk facing oncoming traffic, as far to the left as possible.
* At dawn and dusk, children should wear bright or reflective materials and carry flashlight.

**Emergency Closing**

In the event that CEO locations may close due to emergency situations or weather we will post information on CEO’s website: [www.ceoempowers.org](http://www.ceoempowers.org).

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**Safety & Code of Conduct**

Family participation is essential to the success of our partnership. We believe that parents/guardians and family members are their child’s first teachers and are valuable contributors to the success of their child’s educational experience with us. To maximize our time together, everyone must feel safe in order to thrive. For this reason, we have very high expectations for families as well as ourselves.

**Safety/Cody of Conduct**

* The safety of your child, you, our staff, and visitors on our grounds is our #1 priority.
* We enforce a zero-tolerance approach for staff, families, and visitors. Free from yelling, screaming, vulgar language, racism, sexual harassment, and threats of any kind including physical, threats of harm towards children, staff, and other parents while on premises, including by phone or any other platform.
* Free from intimidation, harassment, or discrimination against any person based on race, color, creed, national origin, religion, age gender, sexual orientation, culture, health status, or disability.
* Communication to you and from you must be in a respectful manner or may be shut down.
* While in the presence of the children, our #1 priority is safety and supervision. This is a time to refrain from personal conversations and cell phones and focus on the children.

**The above apply on our grounds and functions off site or virtually. Failure to comply with any of the above may result in being banned from premises, an altered schedule for the child, or being dropped from the program. Decisions of such being at the discretion of program management and handled on a case-to-case basis.**

**Adult Conduct Policy**

Adult behavior in schools and in classrooms directly impacts children and their ability to learn. All parents are invited to join staff in setting a good example for our children by:

* Refraining from the use of loud voices, foul language, negative comments, uncontrolled public anger and/or any physical contact.
* Not smoking or vaping on CEO property or within the view of children.
* Never carrying weapons.
* Adhering to a dress code that is appropriate for young children.
* Abstaining from the use of electronic devices while in CEO centers and classrooms. In the event that a call must be answered, please step out of classrooms.
* Only using social media to promote positive messages; always reaching out to program staff with questions or concerns.
* Never discussing the behaviors, words or actions of other children or adults within the program; speaking with a Manager if there are concerns.
* If any caregiver designated to pick up is found to be incapable of driving, or appears to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs, CEO staff members will:
  + Assist in making a call to another adult listed on the child’s emergency contact list to pick up both the child and caregiver.
  + Call the police for assistance if any caregiver is unable to understand or respond to questions about their ability to safely supervise a child, or becomes aggressive or threatening,

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Caring for your child(ren) is a shared responsibility. We are excited to be able to work with you and your family during the upcoming school year!

# **Health & Nutrition**

Achieving positive health outcomes for children and families is an integral part of the CEO Early Childhood experience.

Children brush their teeth with fluoride toothpaste every day in the classroom. Children get a chance to practice self-help skills, by brushing their own teeth, with guidance and modeling by their teacher. Eating a low sugar diet, brushing every day, and regular visits to the dentist, creates lifelong habits and helps keep teeth healthy.

If families need help finding a healthcare provider, please contact a Family Advocate or a Nurse. Early Childhood staff will complete a daily health log at the start of program and will share all results with families.

**Health requirements which must be completed before your child begins program are**:

* Physical examination (within the past year) on CEO Physical Exam Form
* Up-to-date immunizations

*\*Please note, infants are required to follow the well-baby visit schedule\**

* Health Form (completed at phase in)
* Allergy & Anaphylaxis Form (if applicable)
* Individual Heath Care Plans (if applicable)
* Medication Administration Forms (if applicable)

**The Program Nurse will be collecting the following information:**

* Dental exam
* Anemia Screening
* Lead Screening

Within the first 45 days of enrollment, program nurses will complete vision and hearing screenings for all children. Please make your program nurse aware of any concerns so that your children will be prioritized for screening.

Heights and weights of all Head Start children are taken twice throughout the school year, once with in the first 45 days of enrollment and secondly in the Spring.

Seal a Smile, a School Based Oral Health Program, is offered twice during the school year. A dental hygienist visits the center and will examine your child’s mouth and teeth and apply a fluoride treatment to help protect against cavities. This does not take the place of a dental visit with your dentist. It is just a second set of eyes on your children’s teeth in between dental exams. They will provide you with a report with any comments or recommendations upon completion of their evaluation. Parental written permission will be required for children to participate in this program.

**PLEASE DO NOT send your child to program with a fever, vomiting, diarrhea, or any other sign of illness.** Further details can be found within CEO’s *Exclusion Due to Illness* policy. CEO will notify parents of any communicable disease that can be transferred among the children present in the classroom (s).

**In case of illness or an accident at school, the following procedure will be observed:**

* The teacher will contact the parent immediately and inform them of the situation at hand.
* Additional steps will be taken based on the severity of the illness or accident.
* If the parent cannot be reached, the teacher will contact the person listed by the parent on the emergency card.
* Call 911 if the illness or accident requires immediate emergency attention.

**CEO cannot administer any medication** to a child without the required documentation from a physician. If a child requires medication to be administered during program, a Medication Administration Form (MAT) will need to be completed by the child’s physician before the medication can be administered. Medication cannot be transported between home and school by a child. If a child requires any emergency medication, the parents will be required to train staff caring for that child on the administration of the prescribed medication.

Each center will participate in the OCFS program that provides non-patient specific epinephrine auto injectors. They will be stored onsite and will be available to be administered by a trained staff if a child is showing signs and symptoms of an anaphylactic reaction.

If a non-patient specific epinephrine is administered, a call will be made immediately to 911 and then to the child’s parent as soon as possible.

**Nutrition**

Children are served a well-balanced breakfast and lunch each day at school meeting the nutritional requirements of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). These meals are served family style whenever possible to support children in learning to serve themselves and develop healthy relationships with food. We recognize that family style dining has many benefits, where not only creating a relaxed mealtime environment, but also having many positive effects on a child’s development.

If your child has food allergies or dietary restrictions, please let staff know. We will work with you and your health care provider to complete the required documents to accommodate any restrictions needed.

We follow strict policies and procedures to protect children from experiencing allergic reactions. All staff receive annual training on prevention, recognition, and response to allergic reactions and anaphylaxis. All our licensed facilities are “nut free”, not allowing any outside food or drink to be served in the classrooms. Each classroom has a posting with a list of individual children’s allergies that is accessible to all staff and volunteers caring for the child. All staff will take the necessary steps to prevent exposure to known allergen. Individual care plans are completed with the parent and shared with the classroom teachers as required to care for children with allergies.

Parents of infants will complete an Infant Feeding Statement, Infant Feeding Schedule and Infant food list during enrollment. Parents are required to update the food list as infants are introduced to new table foods at home. Infants will never be introduced to new foods at school.

All centers have received the Breastfeeding Friendly designation from the NYD DOH. Our centers actively support breastfeeding families and help parents continue breastfeeding when they return to work or school. Breastfeeding has many benefits including providing protection from infection, SIDS, obesity, constipation and diarrhea, among many more. We provide a friendly breastfeeding environment where mothers can come and nurse their babies or express their milk in a private, comfortable space.

**Mental Health**

Mental Health supports are available to all enrolled children and families through collaboration with St. Catherine’s.

St. Catherine’s staff provide on-site observation and follow-up within CEO buildings regularly and as needed. If you would like your child and/or family to participate, or would like more information, please contact your Family Advocate.

**Safe Sleep for Infants**

We follow current health guidelines to keep your baby safe while sleeping. Staff are trained annually on the topics of Safe Sleep and Preventing Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Infants will be placed on their backs to sleep in a crib. Babies are not allowed to sleep in swings, strollers, or car seats. The crib will only contain a fitted sheet (no blankets or toys). A sleep sack will be used as needed.

Near 18 months of age, your child will use a cot for nap time. The teachers will keep you informed of your child’s sleeping arrangements.

