

Head Start Parent Handbook

2026-2027 Prenatal to 5 Program

Welcome to Head Start

A Message from the Director

Welcome to the Head Start program! We are excited to have you choose UCAP Head Start for your child(ren). As a parent in the program, you make a significant contribution to the success of your child, as well as the program. You are the single most important resource for the growth and development of your child(ren). You will find a variety of opportunities to contribute to the design and delivery of Head Start services, including Parent Committees, Advisory Committees, at-home activities, parent-teacher conferences, volunteer activities, and Policy Council. You will be involved in the decisions which affect your child(ren) and have opportunities to be active in the development of your child(ren). We look forward to collaborating with you and your child(ren) during the coming school year as we help to give your child(ren) a “Head Start.”

Dr. Mary Lockhart-Findling, Head Start Director



UNITED COMMUNITY ACTION PARTNERSHIP

VISION • MISSION • CORE VALUES

VISION: WHERE WE ARE GOING AND WHAT WE ARE BECOMING

UCAP is a pioneering leader that empowers, inspires, and equips people to reach their own full potential.

MISSION: WHAT WE DO AND FOR WHOM

Eliminating poverty by empowering individuals and strengthening communities.

CORE VALUES: THE FOUNDATION OF HOW WE ACT AND MAKE DECISIONS

COMPASSION - We are aware of and sensitive to the financial and other challenges our neighbors face; we are motivated to take effective caring action.

ACCOUNTABILITY - We take pride and ownership of our work and consistently deliver the expected outcomes in a financially responsible manner.

HUMAN DIGNITY - We welcome each person and all people and recognize their inherent worth and right to be treated respectfully.

TRUST - We build trust through empathy, credible actions, authentic relationships, and reliable and honest communication.

COMMITMENT - We are dedicated to our mission as we address the needs of families, volunteers, employees and neighbors.

INTEGRITY - We always strive to do what is right, honest and ethical.



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PROGRAM OPTIONS

CENTER BASED OPTION

- Children attend class Four to Five days per week.
- Classes are full day. Some classrooms run all year and some for 9 months.
- Family receive support and engagement opportunities throughout the year.
- Healthy meals and snacks are provided every day.
- Parents must provide or arrange transportation (some locations offer transportation).
- Family Service Workers and Teachers help parents learn how to advocate their child, especially when moving from Head Start to kindergarten.
- We implement a research-based curriculum to help children get ready for school.
- Our classrooms are Parent Aware 4-star rated.

HOME BASED OPTION

- Families attend two socialization sessions each month (22 per year). Parents attend with their child.
- Families receive one 1.5-hour home visit each week (46 visits per year).
- A meal or snack is provided during socialization days.
- This option is full year services
- We implement a research-based curriculum.
- Pregnant women receive support, including a newborn visit after the baby is born.
- Home Visitors help parents learn how to advocate for their child as they move into Head Start or another preschool program.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION STATEMENT

The United Community Action Partnership Head Start program is required by law to serve families who meet or are below Federal income guidelines. At least ten% of our total enrollment is reserved for children with diagnosed special needs. In addition to income guidelines, children are enrolled based on approved selection criteria. Up to 10% of children may come from families over the income guidelines. Our program accepts eligible children regardless of race, sex, religion, color, or disability. Head Start does not support political, social, or religious beliefs.

Parents are the heart of Head Start! We encourage you to be involved!

HEAD START: PRENATAL-FIVE

HEAD START PRESCHOOL

Our teaching practices are developmentally appropriate, meaning they match how young children learn best practices. Teachers and parents work together to observe and assess so we can plan activities that fit individual needs.

Activities for children are based on the Creative Curriculum and Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, which includes:

- Approaches to Learning
- Cognition (Math and Science)
- Physical Development (Perceptual, Motor, and Health)
- Social and Emotional Development
- Language and Literacy

A LOOK AT THE DAY

A normal preschool day includes:

- Large group time (Stories, Learning Games, Shared Writing).
- Mealtimes and Brushing teeth.
- Small group learning with a teacher.
- Child-directed play (children choose activities).
- Outdoor time.
- Rest time.



EARLY HEAD START

Teachers and parents observe each child to plan activities that support their growth. The Home-Based Early Head Start use Partners for a Healthy Baby as a main curriculum. Center-Based Early Head Start implements the Creative Curriculum for Infants, Toddlers, and Twos as its core curriculum.

Activities follow the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, focusing on:

- Social and Emotional Development
- Approaches to Learning
- Perceptual, Motor and Physical Development
- Language and Communication
- Cognition

EDUCATION



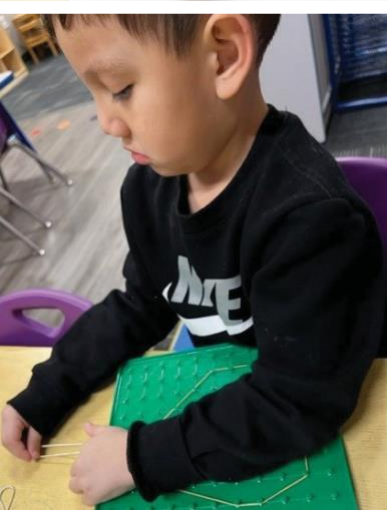
INDIVIDUALIZATION

- Every child is unique, with their own interests, experiences, language, culture.
- We use different teaching strategies to help all children learn.
- Children receive individualized instruction based on their strengths, needs, and goals.
- Families take part in at-home learning activities to support their child.



PARENTS AS TEACHERS

- Parents are a child's first and most important teachers.
- Parents can learn about child development and build parenting skills.
- Parents are always welcome to visit the classrooms.
- Parents take part in their child's learning experiences.



CURRICULUM

- Home Based Early Head Start uses Partners for a Healthy Baby
 - Center Based Early Head Start uses The Creative Curriculum for Infants, Toddlers, and Twos
 - The Head Start uses The Creative Curriculum Preschool System.
- The curricula that are used are research based.
- We also use extra materials that support literacy, math, social-emotional skills, health, and nutrition.
 - Center-based days include large group, small group, choice time, mealtimes, rest, and outdoor play.

EDUCATION

ASSESSMENTS

- Children in 9-month classrooms are assessed three times a year: November, February, and May.
- Children in full-year classrooms and home based are assessed a fourth time in August.
- Parent-Teacher conferences are held three times a year (November, February, and May).
- Full-year programs have an extra conference in August.
- During conferences, parents and teachers talk about the child's growth and set goals for the year.
- Parents will also receive a written conference report.

SCREENING

- Children's development and speech are screened within the first 45 days of school.
- A behavioral screening happens during the first home visit with the teacher or home visitor.

EARLY INTERVENTION

Children with suspected special needs are referred to the local school district or other specialist for an evaluation following parent permission and with full parent participation in the process. If needed, the team helps create an IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plans) or IEP (Individual Education Plans) to support the child and adjust goals as needed.

If you ever have any concerns about your child's development, please talk to your child's teacher or home visitor.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

DRESS CODE

- Children will take part in messy activities, so dress them in clothes that can get dirty.
- In cold weather, children will need warm coats, hats, mittens, boots, and snow pants.
- Flip flops are discouraged for outdoor play.
- Remove hood and neck drawstrings from clothing for safety.
- If you need help getting outdoor clothing, contact your Family Service Worker or Home Visitor.

PETS/ANIMALS

- Parents will be told ahead of time if animals will be in the classroom.
- Parents and Visitors may not bring animals to the classroom without approval.

TOYS FROM HOME

- Please keep toys from home at home. Toys from home are not allowed at school.

PERSONAL CARE ITEMS FROM HOME

- Items like lotion or lip balm are not allowed at school unless there are written instructions from your doctor and written permission from the parent.

SUPPLIES

Head Start will provide all the necessary supplies, such as:

- Glue
- Paper
- Pencils and crayons
- Scissors (age appropriate)
- Paint
- Rest time blanket for toddlers and preschoolers
- A backpack is recommended. If you need help getting one, talk to your teacher or family service worker.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

INSURANCE

- Head Start provides liability insurance in case a child is injured while in our care.
- Our liability insurance meets or exceeds all requirements.

PERMISSION FORMS

Parents must sign and return permission forms:

- Before children go on field trips or any activity outside the classroom.
- Parents any research, special procedure, or public relations activity involving their child.

AUTHORIZED/UNAUTHORIZED PERSON/PERSONS

- Children will ONLY be released to people listed as AUTHORIZED by the parent.
- If no authorized person arrives within 30 minutes of classroom ending time and we cannot reach anyone, we may contact social services and/or the local police department will be called.
- Staff will not release a child to anyone not on the list unless the parent gives both verbal AND written permission.
- Anyone picking up a child must show photo ID.

HEALTHY SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

HEALTHY SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Head Start helps children build strong social, emotional, and behavioral skills. Young children's mental health includes their ability to:

- Experience, manage, and express emotions.
- Build close, secure relationships.
- Explore and learn from their environment. Grow within their family, community, and culture.

We provide:

- A supportive learning environment.
- Teaching that meets each child's needs.
- Resources and training for parents and staff.
- Access to specialists and community services when needed.

BEHAVIOR GUIDANCE SUMMARY

We want children to feel confident, safe, happy, and able to make decisions. We help them to learn what to do when they feel scared, angry, or upset.

- We use the curriculum, Pyramid Model, & resources to teach children how to name their feelings, manage their emotions, and get along with others.
- We respect children's feelings and help them respond to healthy ways.
- We teach social problem-solving skills to solve problems instead of pushing, shoving, or hitting.
- We encourage positive behaviors and give less attention to negative behaviors.
- We redirect children gently and give them a limited number of choices to learn decision-making.
- We work with parents to create a behavior plan if needed.
- We never use physical punishment, isolation, or harsh language.

If you want ideas for behavior guidance at home, talk to your teacher or home visitor.

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

In an emergency, our response depends on the situation:

- We may need to dismiss early or start late.
- We may evacuate children to a safe location.
- We may have a security lockdown to keep children inside.

To keep children safe:

- We need current contact information for all families.
- Anyone picking up your child must be on the emergency contact form and show photo ID if staff do not know them.
- Each center has its own emergency procedures, and your team will share those with you.
- Please call us if you have any other questions about our Emergency Preparedness Plan

Note: Please make sure your emergency form is always updated with current addresses, names and phone numbers for those individuals authorized to pick up your child. Your child's teacher will contact you regularly to update this information

FIRST AID: CLASSROOM/SOCIALIZATIONS

- Staff are trained in First Aid and CPR.
- All classrooms and buses are equipped with first aid supplies.

IF A MEDICAL EMERGENCY, STAFF WILL:

- Give First Aid.
- Call 911 or the nearest medical center if needed.
- Notify parents.

If you would like more information on First Aid or CPR training, talk to your Family Service Worker or Home Visitor.

CHILD HEALTH INFORMATION

REQUIRED HEALTH DOCUMENTS

Part of being ready to learn includes being healthy. To ensure the health of your child, Head Start requires the following:

- Current and complete physical examination
- Up-to-date immunization record
- A complete dental exam for children over 12 months old.

MN Rule 3 requires licensed classrooms to have a current physical exam on file within 30 days of the start of the program year: 90 days for all other options. After 30 days, children will be able to attend a licensed classroom until documentation is received. Dental exams must be completed within 90 days. If your child recently had a physical, please give us a copy of the health records. If assistance is needed with accessing your “My Chart” health records, please work with your Family Service Worker or Home Visitor.

IMMUNIZATIONS

The state of Minnesota requires your child’s immunization record to be on file by the first day of class or first home visit. If we do not receive it, your child cannot receive services until it is provided.

TOOTH BRUSHING

- Your child’s oral health is important to us.
- We serve healthy foods, limit sweets, and brush teeth daily in the classroom.
- We make brushing teeth a fun part of the daily routine, so children build lifelong healthy habits.

MEALTIMES

- All meals and/or snacks are provided and are served Family Style. Children and adults sit together for meals. Children are encouraged to serve themselves.
- Meals follow USDA guidelines and Head Start Standards by offering healthy meals low in fat and sugar.
- Adults talk with children during meals.
- Mealtimes are not rushed.
- Because of strict regulations, parents cannot bring food into the classroom or take food home.

CHILD HEALTH INFORMATION

MEDICATIONS

We prefer that medication be given at home. However, medication can be given at the center **ONLY** if all requirements are met:

- Written permission from the parent
- Written instructions by doctor

Medication must be in the original container with:

- Prescription number
- Name of the medication
- Strength and amount
- Expiration date
- Directions for use
- Child's name
- Doctor's name
- Date of issued
- Name and address of pharmacy.

Please tell your teacher/home visitor of any medications your child is receiving at home. This includes long-term medications or short-term medications. Medications can affect behavior, so staff need to be aware.

ATTENDANCE

CLASSROOM ATTENDANCE

- Daily attendance helps your child learn and grow.
- Call your teacher if your child will be absent.
- Do not drop off your child any more than 10 minutes before class.
- If a child stops attending, staff will try to reconnect with the family. If the child's attendance does not improve, the spot may be given to another child.
- Make back-up plans for getting your child to school if something comes up. Call on a family member, a neighbor, or another parent
- Every missed day is a missed learning opportunity. Children lose a chance to learn! Help your child develop good attendance habits!
- If you face challenges with attendance, talk to your Family Service Workers or Home Visitor.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Keep a regular bedtime and morning routine.
- Lay out clothes and pack backpack the night before.
- Make sure immunizations are up to date before school starts.
- Only keep your child home if they are truly sick.
- Avoid scheduling appointments and long trips during school days.

HOME BASED ATTENDANCE

- The home visitor will work with parents to establish a regular home visit schedule that is convenient for the family.
- When possible, appointments should be scheduled at a time that will not interfere with home visits.
- If you need to cancel, contact your home visitor to reschedule.
- Socializations are an important part of the program- attendance is expected.

WEATHER RELATED

If your local public school cancels, starts late, or dismisses early due to weather, Head Start will do the same. Please check your local radio station, the district website, or the UCAP Facebook page for any weather-related messages. You may also contact your child's teacher or home visitor. If public schools close due to weather, the Head Start Center will also close.

For any other types of cancellations, your teacher or home visitor will notify you.

ILLNESS

If your child is sick with an infectious illness:

- Keep your child home.
- Contact your child's teacher.

Please do not send your child to school if they have the following:

- A fever of 101° orally (or surface) / 100° axillary (arm pit) or higher of unknown origin before fever reducing medication is given.
- Diarrhea within the last 24 hours.
- Vomiting (2+ times in the past 24 hours).
- Rashes with fever, spreading, or open sores.
- Impetigo (24 hours after treatment)
- Pink eye: After 24 hours of treatment and symptoms have improved.
- Any contagious illness as determined by a doctor.
- Your child must be symptom-free for 24 hours without medication before returning.

Your child may be sent home from school if displaying any of the following:

- Fever of 101° orally (or surface) / 100° axillary (arm pit) or higher
- Vomiting
- 3 or more loose stools
- Are too sick to participate in normal activities.

IF A CHILD BECOMES SICK DURING THE DAY A PARENT WILL BE CALLED IMMEDIATELY. THE CHILD MAY REST ON A COT AWAY FROM OTHERS, AND A STAFF MEMBER WILL STAY WITH THEM UNTIL PICKUP.

ILLNESS

CONTAGIOUS DISEASES

If your child has any of the following, please inform your teacher. Your child may return when conditions below are met:

- Measles (Rubella): 4 days after rash appearance.
- Pink Eye: with a note from your health care provider.
- Ringworm: With a note from your health care provider or proof of medication for 24 hours.
- Impetigo: With a note from your health care provider and 24 hours of treatment.
- Strep Throat/Scarlet Fever: After 24 hours of treatment.
- Head Lice: After effective treatment.
- Scabies: The child may return 24 hours after treatment.
- Mumps: 5 days after swelling begins.
- Chickenpox: When all blisters have scabbed over.
- COVID-19: When fever free for 24 hours and symptoms improved.

IF YOUR CHILD HAS ANY ILLNESSES NOT LISTED, PLEASE CONTACT THE HEAD START HEALTH AND SAFETY MANAGER, TEACHER, OR HOME VISITOR.

HOW CAN PARENTS BE INVOLVED?

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Parents are their children's first and most important teachers. Your involvement helps your child succeed in Head Start. Here are ways you can participate:

- Help your child attend regularly.
- Attending parent committee meetings and family events.
- Join Policy Council.
- Take part in home visits and parent-teacher conferences.
- Complete at-home learning activities.
- Set goals with your teacher, Family Service Worker, or Home Visitor.
- Read program information and newsletters.
- Talk with your child about what they are learning.
- Serve on the Head Start Health Services Advisory Committee or School Readiness Committee.



VOLUNTEERING

Volunteers help children learn and grow. Volunteering also lets you meet other families, learn new skills, and build experience for your resume. Volunteers must be at least 16 years old.

VOLUNTEERING IN THE CLASSROOM

- Read to children.
- Share a talent or an activity.
- Help with cleaning
- Assist with food preparation (training provided)
- Decorate bulletin board.
- Help with outdoor play or special events.

- Play and interact with children.

VOLUNTEERING AT HOME

- Preparing classroom materials.
- Washing blankets and/or dress-up clothes.
- Complete at-home learning activities.

HOW CAN PARENTS BE INVOLVED?

PARENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Our teachers and Family Service Workers make home visits to build strong partnerships with families. Teachers make two educational visits each year, and Family Service Workers visit as needed or requested. Partnership between parents and staff best support children with their Head Start experience.

All parents/guardians of children are automatically members of their site's Parent Committee. The Parent Committee is responsible for electing a parent representative to Policy Council, communicating with the Policy Council, and advising staff on program needs. Policy Council meetings are held monthly.

Parents are also encouraged to join the Health Service Advisory Committee which includes local health professionals and community agencies. This group helps guide health services and supports children's well-being.

AVAILABLE TRAININGS

Parents can take part in many training opportunities, such as:

- Child Development Associate (CDA)
- CPR/First Aid
- Budgeting and saving
- Job seeking & resume skills
- Parent-child activities
- Screen time guidance
- Home safety
- Nutrition for children
- Parenting classes
- Preventing stress and burnout
- What to do when your child gets sick
- Child development
- Bus monitoring or driving
- Food service

IN-KIND

WHAT IS IN-KIND?

Head Start is free for families, but the program must collect donated time or materials called “in-kind” or non-federal match. Parents and family members help meet this requirement by:

- Work on the monthly at-home activities with your child provided by teachers.
- Volunteer in the classroom, special events, or bus monitoring
- Attend Parent Committee Meetings.
- Represent your site at Policy Council.
- Prepare materials for the classroom.
- Assemble or fix toys or playground equipment.
- Help with food service (training provided).

The options are limitless!

How In-Kind Adds Up

Head Start must match 20% of the grant each year. This comes from:

- 58% - classroom space.
- 15% - Professional services.
- 1% - Professional training.
- 1% - Parent participation in Policy Council
- 10% - Home-Based program participation.
- 15% - Parents volunteering and at-home activities



Parent participation in the program is not only beneficial to your child but also to the ability to meet the in-kind requirements.

MY RIGHTS AS A HEAD START PARENT

Your Rights:

- To be treated with respect and dignity.
- To be welcomed in the classroom.
- To receive regular updates about my child's progress.
- To expect guidance that supports your child's development.
- To be able to learn how the program operates, including the budget and staff qualifications.
- To take part in major policy decisions.
- To help develop adult programs that support your family.
- To learn about community resources.
- To take part in programs that build job skills.
- To expect that your family's information will be kept confidential.

Parent/Community Concerns Policy

Head Start encourages parents to share concerns so we can improve services.

The following steps should be followed:

- First, talk to the staff member involved and share your suggestions.
- If it is not resolved, speak with the staff member's supervisor.
- If still not resolved, complete the Parent/Community Concerns form. This goes to the Head Start Director.
 - Head Start Director: Dr. Mary Lockhart Findling
 - Email: marylf@unitedcapmn.org or Phone: 320-235-0850 x1621
- If the Head Start Director cannot resolve the problem, it will be sent to the Executive Director.
- The Executive Director will make a decision within 10 working days or provide a written update if more time is needed.
- The decision can be appealed to the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors.
 - Each step must be completed within 10 working days.

MN Department of Human Services (DHS) • Phone Number: 651-431-6500

HEAD START'S CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

Head Start staff will not share information about your child or family with anyone outside the program unless you give written permission or the law requires it. All child and family information is always kept in a file and can only be accessed by authorized staff.

Each family has a right to their privacy. If you believe your privacy has been violated, contact the Head Start Director right away.

We also ask families to respect each other's privacy of all Head Start families, children, and staff.

Examples of confidential information include:

- Identity of a child who bites your child.
- Identity of a child with an infectious illness.
- Personal information about a staff member.

REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

Minnesota law requires Head Start staff to report suspected child abuse or neglect. If staff see signs that a child may be unsafe, they must call Child Protective Services. It is important that parents understand this requirement, which helps ensure that all children receive protective services when needed.

We ask parents to join us as child advocates. If you believe a child is being abused or neglected, please call Child Protective Services in your county. You may be the only person who can help that child.

Custody or Order of Protection

If your child is involved in a custody case or Order of protection:

- Head Start must have a copy in your child's records.
- Staff can only release children to those that are authorized.
- All classroom locations are in secure locked buildings.

OTHER SERVICES IN HEAD START

Your Head Start experience will include several different services that will help your child and family as a whole unit. The following list includes some of the direct services you will receive while your child is enrolled in our program:

CHILD SERVICES

While your child is enrolled, Head Start provides:

- A developmentally appropriate education program.
- Hearing and vision screenings, height, and weight checks.
- Developmental, speech, and behavioral screenings.
- Referrals to doctors, dentists, and mental health providers when needed.
- Support your child's transition into their next school experience.



ADDITIONAL HEALTH NOTES

Healthy habits are taught every day including brushing teeth, hand washing, and health education activities. Parents help by: preparing children for screenings and exams, keeping immunizations up to date, attending medical/dental appointments, and by participating in health-related trainings.

Head Start will provide vision and hearing screening. Parents and staff will work together to schedule appointments and follow-up on any concerns.

OTHER SERVICES IN HEAD START

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL SERVICES

Head Start partners with mental health organizations to support children's social and emotional development.

- Staff and parents may work together to refer children for an evaluation if needed.
- Parents may choose from several mental health providers listed below or choose one they already know.
- A follow-up plan or Individual Guidance Plan may be created to support the child.

Local Mental Health Providers:

Greater MN Family Services: 1-320-214-9692

Southwestern Mental Health Center (Windom): 1-507-831-2090

Western Mental Health Center: 1-507-532-2362

Woodland Centers (Kandiyohi): 1-320-235-4613

Southwestern Mental Health Center (Jackson): 1-507-847-2432

Nystroms (McLeod): 1-320-587-2326

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

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

To file a program complaint of discrimination:

- Complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, (AD-3027) found online at:
www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html
- Or request a form by calling: **(866) 632-9992**.
- Submit the completed form or letter with required information by:
 - **Mail:** U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410
 - **Fax:** **(202) 690-7442**
 - **Email:** program.intake@usda

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

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