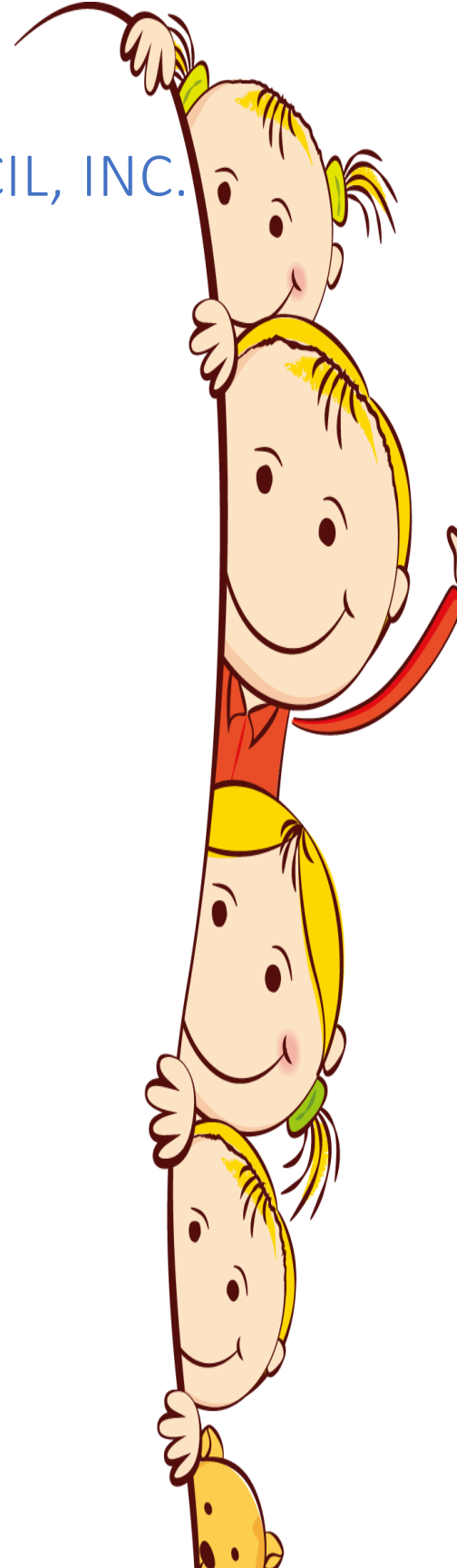


MINNESOTA VALLEY ACTION COUNCIL, INC.  
HEAD START  
FAMILY HANDBOOK  
2023-2024



Administrative Office  
706 N. Victory Dr. Mankato, MN 56001  
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Visit us on the Web at [www.mnvac.org](http://www.mnvac.org)



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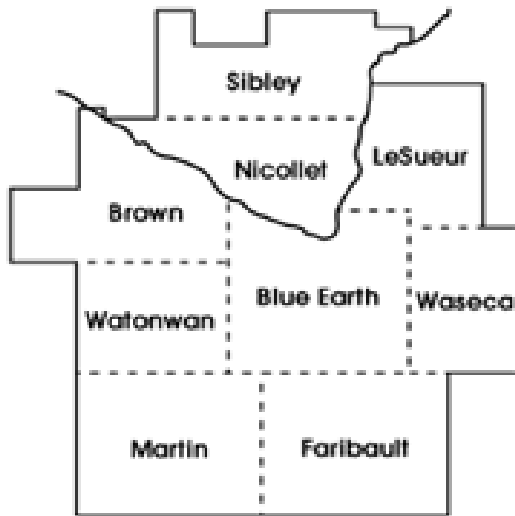
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Dear Families,

Welcome to the 2023-2024 Head Start year! We are about to start an amazing journey together with you and your children. Throughout the year, there will be many opportunities for you to become involved and share what makes your family unique. We will provide many options to volunteer in the classroom and work on projects at home with your child that will allow you to express what makes your family so wonderful.

Minnesota Valley Action Council, Inc. is a community action agency. We are for communities, not for profit. We have served the people of south-central Minnesota since 1965. We believe that hard work should be valued and rewarded, that working people are struggling and that MVAC provides solutions. We develop resources and opportunities that empower people in low-wage work to secure affordable housing, viable transportation, employment training, and educational opportunities for children.

### MVAC Head Start service area



For information on MVAC Head Start classroom in the nine-county service area. Ask your local Head Start staff or visit the MVAC website: [www.mnvac.org](http://www.mnvac.org) and go to Programs tab and choose Head Start.

If you are moving out of the MVAC service area visit [www.mnheadstart.org](http://www.mnheadstart.org) for information about Head Start programs in the state of Minnesota.

#### **Blue Earth County**

Mankato-(507)345-3565

Mapleton-(507)524-4478

#### **Brown County**

New Ulm-(507)380-8354

#### **Watonwan County**

St James-(507)380-8354

Madelia-(507)514-2749

#### **Faribault County**

Blue Earth-(507)526-5458

Wells-(507)553-5099

#### **Le Sueur County**

Le Center-(612)910-4076

#### **Martin County**

Fairmont-(507)238-1409

Sherburn-(507)764-6955

#### **Nicollet County**

St Peter-(507)934-5225

#### **Sibley County**

Gaylord-(507)237-5438

#### **Waseca County**

Waseca-(507)835-1282

MVAC's Head Start licensed centers are 4-star Rated through MN Parent Aware. The Star Ratings improve, support, and celebrate the strengths of childcare and early education programs. Based on research, Star Ratings help families identify programs using the practices that best prepare children for kindergarten

## HEAD START PHILOSOPHY

The early education environment, whether in the home or in a school, should provide a rich variety of activities that will foster the child's physical, developmental, social, and emotional growth. Families are encouraged to be equal partners in their child's learning and development. The potential for learning opportunities should be provided to children at the earliest age possible.

## ABOUT THE HEAD START PROGRAM AND MVAC'S SERVICE AREA

Established in 1965, Head Start promotes school readiness for children in low-income families by offering educational, nutritional, health, social, and other services. Since its inception, Head Start has served more than 35 million children, birth to age 5, and their families. Head Start is funded to serve nearly one million children and pregnant participants in centers, family homes, and in family childcare homes in urban, suburban, and rural communities throughout the nation.

Head Start programs prepare America's most vulnerable young children to succeed in school and in life beyond school. To achieve this, Head Start programs deliver services to children and families in core areas of early learning, health, and family well-being, while engaging parents as partners every step of the way.

Head Start encompasses preschool programs, which primarily service 3- and 4-year-old children, and Early Head Start programs for infants, toddlers, and pregnant participants. Head Start services are delivered nationwide through 1,600 agencies which tailor the federal program to the local needs of families in their service area.

Helping eligible children ages birth to 5 and families of Blue Earth, Brown, Faribault, Le Sueur, Martin, Nicollet, Sibley, Waseca, and Watonwan counties with high quality services through strong partnerships that promote success through school readiness and family strengthening. We hope you will join us in ensuring this a successful year for your child and family.

## WHOLE CHILD APPROACH

Our staff are trained to observe and learn about each child in their classroom. They review each child's developmental, social/emotional, and vision/hearing screenings. They gather information from the child's Health & Nutrition Assessment, physical and dental exams. This information helps them to understand if a child has everything they need to learn at his or her best. This is called the Whole Child Approach.

Children are prepared for school using Creative Curriculum and Growing Great Kids, which aligns with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework and the Minnesota Early Learning Standards. A copy of our Child Care Program Plan is available for review in each classroom's Family Area. It is reviewed and updated annually.

## WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH

Head Start practices the "whole family" approach when working with children, parents, and caregivers.

We believe that the child will be more prepared for school and life if the whole family feels supported and welcomed in Head Start classrooms and at Parent Connect activities.

Our staff will meet with you to listen to your family story, your needs, dreams, and ambitions. They will help you develop achievement plans for you and your family in all areas of life: housing, transportation, health, higher education, your child's education and nutrition, parenting skills, financial security, and many other areas that you determine to be important to your family.

## MVAC'S HEAD START PROGRAM OPTIONS AND INFORMATION

Head Start serves eligible families of children who are 3 or 4 years old. Head Start is available at no cost to families; at least 90% of Head Start children must be from eligible families, with 10% of the total enrollment slots available to children with disabilities. MVAC offers the following two options for free high-quality preschool.

### CENTER BASE

Centers are licensed through the MN Department of Human Services, Childcare Licensing to serve 15-20 children ages 3-5 years old.

Centers located in Fairmont, Mankato, St Peter, and Waseca are 3 1/2 hours long and run four days a week, Monday-Thursday for a total of 128 days.

Centers located in Blue Earth, Mankato, New Ulm, Le Center, and St James are 6 1/2 hours long and run for five days a week, Monday-Friday for a total of 157 days.

To contact the MN Department of Human Services, Division of Licensing, call (651) 431-6500

### HOME BASE

Each Home Visitor provides services for 10-12 families-including pregnant participants, infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Home Visits are weekly for 1 1/2 hours for a total of 32 visits.

Home Base options are located in Brown County, Fairmont, Madelia, Mankato, Mapleton, Le Sueur County, Sherburn, Sibley County, Nicollet County, Waseca County, Watonwan County and Wells.

The parents and children enrolled in each Home Base option attend a 2-hour school time day, about two times a month for a minimum of 16 school days. This ensures they can play and socialize with other children in their class and work on school-readiness activities together.

### HOME VISITS

During the home visit, you will join in child development activities with your child that you have planned with the Home Visitor. There is also time set aside on each home visit for the family to meet with the staff to discuss parenting topics, a child's progress on education goals, family updates & goals, health updates and program information.

Head Start believes the home visit should be a time for you to be with your child without distractions;

please keep cell phones on silent, turn the tv & radio off, have pets contained, and leave household chores until after the home visit. The staff will work with your family to determine a time that works for you when you and your child can be ready to work together. Please have yourself and your child dressed and ready at the scheduled home visit time. For the health and safety of our staff, we ask that you keep all pets restrained and do not smoke, including e-cigarettes, during your home visit time.

The staff will be on time and prepared for the home visit. The role of staff is to guide you and your child in the child development activities and then let you complete the activity with your child. Head Start believes you are the first and most important teacher of your child and wants you to have the joy of experiencing your child's excitement when they are doing activities and learning new skills. The staff will be taking notes on how your child completes the activity and share those notes with you. The staff may ask you to use items from your home for some activities, such as sorting socks or counting silverware. To respect their relationship with you, the staff will have their cell phones on silent and be ready to listen to your family story.

## PARENT INFORMATION

### WHAT CAN I EXPECT AS A HEAD START PARENT?

- To be welcomed in the classroom
- To participate without fear of endangering the child's right to be in the program
- To be informed regularly about your child's progress
- To always be treated with respect and dignity
- Guidance to help my child achieve their full potential
- To be informed of community resources
- To be educated in School Readiness and Family Framework
- To be provided the opportunity to meet and work with other Head Start parents

### ANIMALS VISITING THE HEAD START CLASSROOM.

Parents and guardians are always informed when someone is planning on bringing an animal to visit the classroom.

We consider:

- If there are children who have allergies or asthma
- If the animal is appropriate for a preschool setting

Animals must:

- Have current shots and care required by a veterinarian
- Be supervised at all times with the children
- Go home the same day they visit the classroom

Pets in the classroom must be approved by all parents or guardians and follow local health codes.

Animals not allowed in childcare settings include:

- Poultry (especially baby chicks and ducklings)
- Ferrets
- Reptiles (lizards, turtles, snakes, iguanas)
- Dangerous animals (lions, tigers, cougars and bears)
- Non-human primates (monkeys and apes)
- Mammals at higher risk of transmitting rabies (bats, raccoons, fox)
- Aggressive or unpredictable animals
- Stray animals with unknown health and vaccination history
- Venomous or toxin-producing (spiders, insects, reptiles and amphibians)

#### AUTHORIZED RELEASE OF A CHILD

- Children are only released to the people named as Emergency Contacts by a child's parent or legal guardian.
- The child's parent(s) or legal guardian(s) must make a written request to add or change an emergency contact before that person is allowed to pick-up the child.
- Emergency contacts will need to show a photo ID.

#### CELL PHONE USE

We ask that parents refrain from using their cell phone while at a Head Start Center for Pick up/drop off or volunteering. Allowing communication between staff and parents while they drop off or pick up their children provides a positive school experience for the children. Please also refrain from taking pictures and/or videos of children with your phone to respect the privacy of other children in the classroom.

#### PICTURES AND VIDEO AT HEAD START

Head Start staff will ask parents to sign a release so their child may be photographed or videotaped for use within the Head Start program, including posted in the classroom/site, on the MVAC Website, on the MVAC Facebook page and on the Learning Genie app. Head Start staff will ask parents to sign a release before each occasion of research, experimental procedure, or public relations activity (excluding those listed above) involving their child. The release is valid only for that use specified on the release.

Personal cell phones are not allowed for pictures or videos in the classroom. The video cameras set up in the classroom are for monitoring only, they do not record. At no time will Head Start children be involved in research or public relations activities without a signed release by the parents.

#### CHILD ABUSE/NEGLECT REPORTING



All staff, volunteers, contract employees, and consultants are trained mandated reporters and are required by Minnesota State Law to report any suspected child abuse or neglect. Child abuse reporting procedures are posted in all classrooms. If parents have a concern, they should follow the posted procedures in the classroom or use the phone numbers listed below.

Local county Child Protection agency for reporting suspected maltreatment of a child.

Blue Earth County – (507) 304-4222

Nicollet County – (507) 934-8559

Brown County – (507) 354-8246

Sibley County – (507) 237-4000

Faribault County – (507) 526-3265

Waseca County – (507) 837-6600

Le Sueur County – (507) 357-8288

Watonwan County – (507) 375-3294

Martin County – (507) 238-4757

For Allegations made in the classroom and throughout the agency, investigations will be conducted internally by the Program Director and Program Manager. Staff will report to the Program Director first, and if they are not available, they will report to the Program Manager.

#### DATA PRIVACY

Files containing private or confidential data are kept locked when not in use by staff. Parents or legal guardians can request to see their child's file at any time. Parents must give written permission before any information contained in their file may be shared with other agencies. Head Start staff, Federal and State officials, and consultants have access to files on a "need to know" basis to complete their work.

#### FOR INFORMATION, EVENTS AND COMMUNICATION WITH STAFF:

The Center Base option uses Learning Genie, a free app for Head Start staff and parents to communicate about their children and classroom activities. Staff will update parents on Parent Connect opportunities, school delays/cancellations, and resources. Teachers can send pictures and classroom updates. Your Family Advocate or Teacher will provide you with an access code and training.

#### MVAC HEAD START GRIEVANCE POLICY 2023-2024

Most problems are solved in Head Start through open communication and finding out all the facts before making judgements. Individuals directly involved should always make the first attempt to solve any problem. If there are questions regarding the jobs and responsibilities of a staff person, please contact their supervisor.

The following procedures will be used to address concerns/complaints of parents or community members regarding the MVAC Head Start program:

1. If a problem develops, the individual and staff person, together should informally attempt to resolve the problem through face to face and/or other verbal methods.

2. Before a grievance can be filed by a parent or community member, direct discussion must take place between the person(s) whom the complaint involves. The parties involved must make more than one attempt to resolve any problem or conflict. Family Advocates or Home Visitors or designated staff will case note all interactions during this process with the date and summary of the informal discussions along with who was in attendance in ChildPlus/Family Services Tab/Problem-Solving Event.
3. Failing resolution at that level, the person with the complaint must attempt to resolve problems or concerns at the center level with Supervisor/Site Manager. More than one meeting must occur prior to the issue becoming a grievance.
4. If the informal discussion process fails, the grievance or complaint must be prepared in writing using the Problem-Solving form and given to the individual about whom the complaint is made. Forms will be available at the local class site. The staff person about whom the complaint is made will have a maximum of five working days to respond after receiving the written complaint.
5. If the complaint is not resolved, or if no action occurs within five working days, the complaint may be presented in writing to the Head Start Department Director, who has 10 working days to hold at least one meeting and to make a recommendation.
6. If the individual is dissatisfied with the response from the Head Start Director, he or she may appeal in writing to the Executive Director within ten (10) working days. The Executive Director will respond to the individual's complaint within ten (10) working days.

\*If we decided that an investigation is warranted based upon the complaints, MVAC will attempt to fully maintain confidentiality. Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed since we may need to discuss your concerns with other parties to perform a successful investigation.

#### GIFTS, HOLIDAYS AND BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

Head Start staff are not allowed to accept gifts, money or favors from Head Start families. Because there is such diversity in traditions and culture, holidays and birthdays will be handled in the following manner:

- Because there are children with food allergies, please do not send treats
- All families are asked about celebrating holidays on the Head Start Consent and Signature page prior to enrollment
- All families must agree, or no holidays will be celebrated. No child will be excluded from attending class due to holiday or birthday celebrations
- When all families agree to celebrate holidays, the parents plan and carry out the holiday activity in class or on a home visit so it does not take the Teacher or Home Visitor away from their responsibilities.

#### SCHOOL CLOSING

When the local public school district cancels school or closes early due to the weather conditions, all Head

Start centers and school times are cancelled.

If the local public school district is running 1-2 hours late because of weather conditions, the morning center and school time are cancelled. Afternoon classes will run as scheduled. Full day center classes will run 1-2 hours late. Staff will notify parents individually when the class closes early by phone, text or if you are a center-based option, Learning Genie app.

Parents should listen to local radio stations or watch local television for school closings. Some schools and websites allow you to sign up to receive emails or text messages when schools close.

Anytime conditions exist where staff are unable to provide services safely and comfortably to the children, the site when close (example: power outage, water shutoff, gas leak, shortage of staff). Staff will contact parents individually by phone or text when class is cancelled due to unsafe conditions.

#### DRESS FOR THE WEATHER

Unless the weather poses a health risk, we play outside every day. Dress your child for the weather outside. Your child will need a jacket, snow pants, boots, hat and gloves/mittens to keep them safe and warm while they enjoy playing outside.

#### SMOKE-FREE ENVIRONMENT

We enforce a smoke free environment. Use of tobacco products is prohibited in and around all Head Start areas. This applies to all staff, parents, and visitors. Please refrain from smoking during home visits and on field trips.

#### FIREARM POLICY

It is MVAC's policy that no one except a licensed peace officer acting in his or her official capacity as a law enforcer may bring firearms into MVAC's buildings, classrooms, or vehicles at any time.

#### PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

Each year Head Start welcomes parents, staff, community volunteers, and the MVAC Board Members to help us evaluate our program. All families are given an opportunity to evaluate the program by completing surveys throughout the year.

#### ATTENDANCE

**Show Up and Learn!**

## ATTENDANCE AND ABSENCES

Your child's consistent attendance ensures progress towards healthy growth and development. We expect parents to bring their children daily and maintain regular attendance unless the child is ill.

- Call, text, or notify your child's teacher anytime your child will not be in school. If you do not contact the school before the start of class, this is considered a no call / no show or an unexpected absence.
- If you have not contacted the school to let them know of your child's absence, someone from the classroom will attempt to contact you within one hour of the beginning of the school day. This is to ensure your child's safety and to learn the reason for the absence.
- If your child is absent from school due to illness, hospitalization, or similar reasons for 2-5 days, contact teaching staff in advance of the child being absent. Let staff know the child's anticipated return date (you can email, text, or call to leave a message at any time - even in the middle of the night).
- Then, the attendance plan and referral process will not be needed, unless it becomes an attendance issue.
- If the initial return date changes, you will need to contact the education staff again to inform them of the new return date.
- If your child has 2 unexpected absences in a row or is absent for 4 days in a row for reasons other than illness, hospitalization, or similar reasons, the Family Advocate will contact you to create an attendance plan to improve your child's attendance. An attendance plan will be re-visited every two weeks (up to 6 weeks) until attendance improves.
- If, after beginning an attendance plan, attendance doesn't approve within 4 weeks the Family Advocate will complete an attendance referral. If attendance does not improve within 2 weeks of the attendance referral, your child will be dropped from the program.
- If at any point in the attendance plan process staff are unable to connect with you and complete these meetings within 14 days, your child will be dropped from the program. (Even if your child has still been attending school during this time.)
- If your child has 2 attendance referrals filled out within the school year, your child may be dropped from our Head Start program.
- Staff understand that each case is unique and as such, each case will be discussed and evaluated before any determination is made. Staff will make every effort to help children maintain regular attendance. Staff will keep documentation of children's absences and parent contacts in the child's file.

**\*\*NOTE\*\*** Parents/caregivers must attend the school time together with their children in the Home Base option.

## EDUCATION SERVICES

## BACKPACKS

Each child should have a backpack every day. Head Start staff send home:

- Notes and reminders about things that are happening in the classroom and in your community.
- Important updates and application reminders for other MVAC programs like fuel assistance, food shelf or weatherization.
- Your child's homework, stories, art, writing samples and other examples of your child's progress at Head Start.

#### WHAT SHOULD MY CHILD BRING TO HEAD START?

Dress your child in comfortable, washable play clothes and shoes. Each child has their own storage space. Your child should keep an extra set of clothes, underwear, and socks, in case of spills or accidents. Label the clothes with a permanent marker. Shoes should fit so they can run, jump, and climb. Flip flops, high heels and cowboy boots are not the kind of shoes for the classroom. Keep an extra pair of shoes at school when your child is wearing snow boots. Children must wear shoes in the classroom.

#### CHILDREN SHOULD NOT BRING:

Weapons, toys, knives, food, drinks, plastic bags, medication (prescribed or over the counter), or any items staff feel disrupt the classroom or puts a child's safety at risk. If staff find any of these items in the child's possession, it will be put away and returned to the parent or guardian when you come to the classroom and pick them up.

#### CONFERENCES

Required conferences are held 3 times each program year. Your child's Teacher will talk to you about your child's progress in the areas of physical, social, intellectual, and emotional development. You will be given a copy of the Family Conference form with a written assessment of your child's development. Staff will also ask you for your help in planning lessons that will support your child and provide the best possible learning experience. If the staff has any concerns about your child's development, they will contact you immediately and staff encourage parents to do the same.

##### **Center Base:**

Fall Conferences—one-on-one at the site

Winter Conferences—group conferences at the site

Spring Conferences—one-on-one in the home

##### **Home Base:**

Three one-on-one conferences are held in the home (fall, winter, and spring)

#### FIELD TRIPS

Field trips are a part of your child's classroom learning experience. You need to sign a permission slip before your child may go on any field trips. Parents are always welcome in your child's classroom, ask your Teacher or Home

Visitor how you can help.

**Head Start is all about preparing children for success in school and in life.**

**Curriculum** = planned activities and experiences for children to learn, develop, and practice skills

**Assessment** = tracking children's progress and adjusting as needed

**Outcomes** = the measurement of how children progressed - how ready children are for school

#### EARLY CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL READINESS

Head start views school readiness as a child having the skills, knowledge and attitude that is necessary for success in school and for later learning and life.

Teachers collect observations on each child's learning and record them. They use assessments to get a clear picture of each child's progress in their development. The Teacher puts this information together for each child. This information gives you and the Teacher a good idea on how ready your child is to start school.

All Head Start programs make school readiness goals that are right for the ages and development of the enrolled children. There are five developmental areas (domains) that are important to a child's readiness for school: Social/Emotional; Language and Literacy; Cognition; Perceptual, Motor and Physical; and Approaches to Learning.

#### NAPS AND REST POLICY

For children attending a full day class (6 hours or more), a rest/nap time will be offered. This applies to the Blue Earth, Mankato, New Ulm, Le Center, and St James sites. Children who have completed 30 minutes of rest/nap will be allowed to participate in quiet activities in an area away from children still resting/napping. Head Start will provide cots, sheets, and blankets. The cots are cleaned daily, sheets and blankets are cleaned weekly unless needed sooner. Cots are placed on the floor so there are clear aisles on at least one side of each cot.

Children are allowed to bring one item to rest quietly with. The item must remain on the cot, not distract other children, and remain in the locker before and after rest time. If a child does not follow the rules, the item will be removed from the child and placed in his/her locker or cubby.

#### SCHOOL READINESS

To provide a smooth transition for children entering Head Start or starting Kindergarten, the program develops different activities to make the transition from home to Head Start and from Head Start to Kindergarten a positive experience.

The following are some of the activities the program conducts:

- The family will be provided with information on the program's policies and procedures, family handbook, transition plan, and information regarding home visits and parent conferences. Parent Committee Meetings will also focus on Kindergarten Transitions.
- Transition Tips are given to the parents/guardians when children are transitioning from Head Start to other educational settings and to Kindergarten.
- Children with special needs will be provided with support to ensure needed services will continue in Head Start or Kindergarten.
- In preparation for the children transitioning to Kindergarten, Teachers will schedule visits to the elementary school, whenever possible. Support will be provided to parents to ensure their children are enrolled in kindergarten.

#### TOILET LEARNING AND DIAPERING

When a child is learning to use the toilet independently, Head Start provides diapers and wipes. The Teacher or Home Visitor and parent/guardian meet before school starts to develop a plan to encourage the child to use the bathroom independently. The wipes and diapers have contact with your child's skin, so we need your permission to use the products we purchase.

Children are never punished for toileting accidents. Please send an extra pair of pants, underwear, and socks to school in case of an accident.

#### FAMILY SERVICES

##### FAMILY SUPPORT & SERVICES

The program will work with parents to identify any family needs through the use of our Family Assessment Tool and provide information and/or resources within the community as needed. The Family Assessment will follow the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Outcomes through topics such as Family Well Being, Parent-Child Relationships, Family as Lifelong Educators, Families as Learners, Family Engagement in Transitions, Family Connection to Peers and Community, and Families as Advocates.

If you need information or have a need for your family, please contact your Head Start staff.

#### PARENT CONNECT

Family Engagement is key to your child's success in school. Head Start offers a variety of activities to help you stay engaged in your child's educational experience.

The following are ways to be engaged in your child's Head Start experience.

- **Strong Fathers-Strong Families** gives the child's father and/or other male figures the opportunity to participate in the child's Head Start experiences by coming into the classroom for Bring Your Dad to Head

Start, attending a science, math, or reading night.

- **Strong Moms** is a group for mothers and/or female figures who meet and help with classroom projects, learn new skills and get to know each other.
- **Parent Committee Meetings** all parents/guardians who have children enrolled in the program are members of their local Head Start Parent Committee. The meetings happen 3 times during the school year in the fall, winter, and spring. The Parent Committees work together with staff in planning activities for the children. Guest speakers, parenting topics, the parenting curriculum “Make Parenting a Pleasure”, Policy Council meeting minutes and information about the program are discussed. Head Start staff will inform parents of the times and dates of the meetings.

#### PARENTING CURRICULUM

“Make Parenting a Pleasure” curriculum helps reduce the stress that families experience. It provides parents the opportunity to enhance communication and develop the skills necessary to manage stress. It reduces the isolation of parents by putting them in touch with others in similar situations and promotes a positive approach to childrearing and discipline. In addition, “Make Parenting a Pleasure” helps parents create a social support system that can continue long beyond their participation in Head Start. During these meetings, staff will encourage participants to take a closer look at their lives and the ways they relate to their children, discover a broader range of positive and effective parenting, coping alternatives, and develop a social support network with other parents.

#### VOLUNTEERING - PARENTS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME IN THEIR CHILD’S CLASSROOM

When volunteering in the classrooms or on a field trip, we ask that you leave your beverages and food at home. Cell phones need to stay in your pocket, purse, or vehicle at all times. No pictures or videotaping allowed.

#### **Volunteering benefits your Head Start Child:**

Your child learns how to share with others. Your child learns to share their world with you. Your child learns that you value education and them.

#### **Volunteering benefits you as a Head Start Parent:**

Volunteering shows the value of education and sets a good example for your child. You have a chance to learn more about child development, and it feels good to volunteer to support Head Start. You can meet other parents and learn new skills. Volunteer experiences can be used on your resume/job applications.

#### **Volunteering benefits the Head Start Program:**

Parents/volunteers make a big difference in the Head Start program. Parents’ and volunteers’ participation is not only needed for a successful program, but also needed to gain funding for the program. To receive funds to run the program, we are required to provide a 20% non-federal share match of our total grant. This match is called in-kind. In-kind is volunteering time or donating needed items to the program.



Volunteers will follow MVAC's confidentiality policies concerning information about children, families, and staff members. What you see or hear in the classroom stays in the classroom.

## WAYS TO GET ENGAGED

In the classroom - Help with projects, help with lunch, read a book to a child, help on playground, help on field trips, watch, observe, and play with the children

### **Policy Council**

The Policy Council is a group of Head Start parents and community members. Representatives are elected from each class during the Parent Committee meeting at the beginning of the program year to represent their class. Policy Council members take part in the shared decision-making process in our Head Start Program.

The Policy Council meets monthly in Mankato to provide formal ways for parent involvement in the shared decision-making of the program. The Policy Council is an excellent opportunity for parents to develop leadership skills and provide meaningful contribution to our Head Start Program. The Policy Council works in partnership with the Board of Directors and management staff to develop, review, and approve or disapprove the following items: Funding applications, Program Policies & Procedures, criteria for defining recruitment, selection & enrollment priorities, annual self-assessment, decisions to hire and terminate staff, and financial Statements.

- The Policy Council Representatives help encourage parents to participate at their sites, take information to and from the Parent Committee Meetings and Policy Council Meetings. *Policy Council Representatives are reimbursed for gas and childcare expenses in accordance with approved policy.*

## HEALTH SERVICES

### COVID-19 INFORMATION & PRECAUTIONS

MVAC's Head Start program is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for children, parents, visitors, and staff at our local classrooms and offices. We will continue to follow safety and sanitation procedures to ensure this. Our COVID-19 Mitigation Policy is available upon request.

### **The Best Ways to Protect Yourself Against COVID-19**

- Get vaccinated
- Wash your hands frequently with warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds
- Use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available
- Stay home when you are sick; keep child home if they are sick
- Cover your cough or sneeze – cough or sneeze into a tissue or use your elbow or sleeve – wash your hands afterward

## INJURY PROCEDURES

### **Minor Injury at Head Start**

- First Aid is provided on site.
- An Injury Report is completed and discussed with Parent/Guardian
- Parent/Guardian is asked to read, sign and return the Injury Report form
- If your child receives treatment from a health or dental provider after being injured at Head Start, tell the staff immediately. We must report the injury within 24 hours to the Minnesota Department of Human Services Child Care Licensing Division

### Medical & Dental Emergencies

At the time of registration, emergency contacts and names of medical & dental providers will be obtained from the parent or guardian. In case of an injury, the following steps will take place.

#### Medical Emergency at Head Start

- 911 is called
- Parent/Guardian is contacted immediately. If unavailable, emergency contacts are called

### MEDICATION PROCEDURES

If your child needs any prescription or nonprescription (over the counter) medication at Head Start, we need an order from your child's doctor. The order must have all required information completed by the provider for the medication to be given at Head Start.

All medication must be brought to the school by parent/guardian. Head Start does not allow your child to carry his or her medication to school. Medications brought by children will be locked away safely until parent/guardian can come to school and get it. Medication will not be administered until the parent/guardian meets with the Teacher or Home Visitor and the documentation is on file. **New medication will not be administered for the first time at school.**

All medication must be brought to school in the original, child-proof, labeled container prepared by the pharmacy, doctor, or pharmaceutical company (no envelopes, foil, or baggies). The prescription label must include the following:

- Child's name
- Name of medication dosage
- Dosage of medication to be given
- Frequency of administration
- Route of administration
- Name of physician ordering medication
- Name and phone number of pharmacy
- Expiration date
- Storage instructions

### Unused or Expired Medications

Unused medications will be returned to the parent/guardian for disposal. If the medication cannot be returned to the parent/guardian, it will be disposed of according to the recommendations of the US Food and Drug Administration at the end of the year. Expired medications will be returned to parent/guardian for disposal and must be replaced with current medications.

## IMMUNIZATIONS

Childcare and early childhood program providers must have records on file showing that each child 2 months of age and older has been appropriately immunized against certain diseases or has a medical or non-medical exemption.

Parents who don't get their children immunized may be putting them and others at risk for several diseases. These diseases can cause serious health problems, including death. Minnesota children are still getting diseases like measles, whooping cough (pertussis), and chickenpox (varicella). These diseases are contagious. They can spread rapidly—especially among groups of children who haven't received their shots. Your Family Advocate or Home Visitor can provide you with a Minnesota Department of Health Immunization Schedule.

### **What if my child doesn't have all the required immunizations?**

- Children who have not received all required immunizations need to be on an active catch-up schedule with their health care provider or have a medical or non-medical exemption.
- Children with a medical reason for not receiving a shot or who are immune to a disease must submit a signed statement from their doctor.
- Children whose parents' or legal guardians' personal beliefs prohibit them from allowing their children to receive any or all immunizations must submit a signed, notarized statement identifying which immunizations they are opposed to their child receiving.
- Children in the following living situations (homeless, in foster care or waiting to be placed) are allowed to enroll without showing immunization records because of federal policy. In these situations, they have 30 days after enrollment to produce records of immunization.

## HIPAA (HEALTH INFORMATION PORTABILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT)

MVAC is required by law to maintain confidentiality for any medical records we receive for you or your child. We ask you to sign a release of information to obtain current medical, dental and immunization information from your child's health care provider. We use the information to:

- Make sure we have everything we need to safely provide care for your child when they are at Head Start.
- Identify and monitor any ongoing health care or nutritional needs that may affect your child's development.
- Assist families with obtaining any needed ongoing or follow-up care.
- The information we receive from your child's health care provider is never shared with outside agencies without your written request or unless required by law.

## REQUIRED HEALTH WORK AND SCREENINGS

Head Start has always recognized the important connection between a child's health and their ability to learn. It is important to identify and treat health problems early. This is why Head Start requires every child to be up to date on a schedule of regular well-child visits with their health care provider.

Before your child attends school, Head Start staff will work with you to get:

- A copy of your child's immunization history and verify your child is up to date on immunizations.
- A copy of any special health plans, medication orders or dietary restrictions from your child's health care provider.

Children enrolled into the program receive various screenings (vision, hearing, speech/language, developmental, social-emotional). These screenings may be administered by your local public schools, health care providers or trained Head Start staff.

Head Start staff will work with families to get further testing or services when the results of a screening or exam show further needs.

**Within 30 calendar days of the first day of school**, your child will need documentation of a current well-child check-up from your child's health care provider. This includes current or previous blood lead screenings results.

**Within 45 calendar days of the first day of school**, your child will need a current:

- Vision and hearing screening
- Growth Assessment
- Developmental screening
- Social-emotional screening (ASQ:SE 2)

**Within 90 calendar days of the first day of school**, your child needs documentation of a current dental exam.

## INDIVIDUALIZED HEALTH PLANS

When a child has an allergy or health condition that requires medication or specialized health care, we must be prepared at school. There are required forms that your child's health care provider must complete before he or she can attend school. These forms tell Head Start staff how to care for your child and what to do in case of an emergency. A Family Advocate or Home Visitor will provide you with the forms.

## WHEN YOUR CHILD IS SICK, PLEASE KEEP THEM AT HOME

Although we expect your child to attend school on a regular basis, there are reasons to keep a child home from school. The following is a guide based on childcare licensing guidelines to help you with your decision. Children must be healthy and well to learn.

- With multiple common COVID-19 symptoms
- With chicken pox until the child is no longer infectious or until the lesions are crusted over
- With thick mucus or pus draining from the eye

- With a bacterial infection such as streptococcal pharyngitis (strep throat) or impetigo and has not completed 24 hours of antimicrobial therapy
- Who has a significant trouble with breathing or is wheezing
- With an underarm temperature of 100-degree Fahrenheit for no known reason
- With lice, ringworm, or scabies that is untreated and contagious to others
- With an undiagnosed rash or a rash known to be a symptom of a contagious illness or condition
- Who has vomited two or more times in the last 24 hours
- Who has three or more loose stools in the last 24 hours
- Who is not able to participate in program activities comfortably
- With signs/symptoms that prevent them from participating, such as being unusually tired, not active, not alert

If your child has a contagious reportable illness or condition identified by the commissioner of health (these are posted in the classroom) and that a physician determines has not had enough treatment to reduce the health risk of others.

#### **What happens if my child gets sick at Head Start?**

- A child with any of the conditions or behaviors listed above must be excluded from a center. If a child gets sick at Head Start, he or she will be moved away from the other children. The parent/guardian is called right away. The child is always supervised while waiting to be picked up. If a parent/guardian cannot be reached, staff will contact your emergency contacts.
- Parents/guardians are required to notify Head Start within 24 hours (or immediately following the weekend or holiday) of their child being diagnosed by a health care or dental provider as having a contagious reportable disease, lice, scabies, impetigo, ringworm, or chickenpox.
- Head Start will post or give a notice to the parents of exposed children the same day a parent notifies us of a child's illness or condition listed above

#### **What if my child has head lice?**

- Staff will inform the parent/guardian at the time of pick up and will be asked to treat the child with an over-the-counter treatment before sending the child back to the classroom
- Head Start staff will give you information on the recommended ways to get rid of head lice
- Your Family Advocate or Home Visitor can supply you with over-the-counter treatment if needed

## FOOD SERVICES

### MEALS & SNACKS

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers several programs that provide healthy food to children to help fight hunger and obesity by reimbursing organizations such as schools, Head Start, childcare centers, and after-school programs for providing healthy meals to children. At Head Start, we operate the Child and Adult Food Care Program (CACFP) to provide free meals to enrolled children.

All meals and snacks are planned to meet CACFP regulations and include a variety of healthy foods with nutrients children need to grow well. Children and staff eat together in a family-style meal setting. The following meals will be provided at Head Start:

- Half day programs (morning) serve breakfast and lunch
- Half day programs (afternoon) serve lunch and afternoon snack
- Full day programs serve breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snack
- Home Base options serve either breakfast or snack based at school times.

We do not allow outside food to be sent to Head Start due to numerous food allergies in our classrooms and maintaining the safety of all children.

#### SPECIAL DIETS

Before school starts, Head Start needs to know if there is any food your child can't eat because of an allergy, disability, or a medical condition. If this is the case your child's health care provider needs to complete a required form(s) before your child can attend school on the first day. This form tells staff what foods to avoid and what foods are safe. Your Family Advocate or Home Visitor will give you the forms for your child's health provider to complete.

Substitutions are allowed for dietary restrictions based on religious or cultural beliefs. The parent/guardian must complete a "Dietary Preference Request Form."

If you are requesting a fluid milk substitution, it must meet the CACFP nutrient standards for non-dairy beverages offered as mild substitutes. Plain soy milk, lactose-free dairy milk, or Ripple pea protein milk may be substituted without medical documentation.

#### USDA NON-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the

program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USDA-OASCR%20P-Complaint-Form-0508-0002-508-11-28-17Fax2Mail.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

1. **mail:**  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. **fax:**  
(833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. **email:**  
[program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

## MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

### MENTAL HEALTH AND DISABILITY SERVICES

Children grow and develop rapidly during the preschool years. Head Start is concerned with the complete development of each child. The mental health component of the Head Start program focuses on the promotion of positive self-worth, respect for individual differences, and the ability to develop appropriate social skills.

Head Start Staff seek to help children become socially competent by implementing the following Head Start Performance Standards:

- Enhance parent and staff's understanding of child growth and development
- Support mental health activities by staff and parents, which are individualized to child specific needs and abilities
- Assist children with emotional, cognitive, and social development
- Provide services to maximize the full potential of children with disabilities or special needs
- Ensure prevention and early identification of problems which may interfere with a child's development
- Serve as a link for staff and parents in obtaining and/or providing counseling and other resources

A Mental Health and Disability Advisor is employed by Head Start and observes the children in the classroom on a regular basis and attends home visits. The Mental Health and Disabilities Advisor consults with staff, giving

suggestions and guidance to work with behaviors and trying interventions and strategies on how to best work with all children.

For more information on workshops, publications, and individual assistance for children with disabilities, go to [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org) or call 1-800-537-2237 or contact our Mental Health and Disabilities Advisor by calling (507) 345-0444.

## BEHAVIOR GUIDANCE POLICY

In accordance with Minnesota Department of Human Services Licensing Rules, staff will use positive methods of discipline which encourage self-control, self-direction, self-esteem, and cooperation. In the event of a child's inappropriate behavior, these positive methods may be used:

- Teach children how to use acceptable alternative to a problem
- Redirecting the child to another activity
- Giving the child a choice of activities
- Working with the child on a one-on-one basis
- Provide immediate, age-appropriate consequences for unacceptable behaviors
- Protect the safety of children and staff persons

Behavior that is harmful or could cause injury to self or others will not be tolerated. Such behavior will be dealt with immediately and in an appropriate manner. If the behaviors continue, the Teacher or Home Visitor will meet with the parent to set up a support plan. For more information about behavior guidance, ask staff to see a copy of our entire policy.

## SAFETY AND PREVENTION

### PREVENTION AND SAFETY

Children will learn how to exit or shelter in a building during regular safety drills at school. Home Visitors will help your family develop a plan of escape, or sheltering in your home, for different kinds of emergencies. Learning these skills prevents children from being hurt in an emergency such as a fire, tornado, or a dangerous intruder. The Emergency Response Plan for your Head Start site is available upon request.

## TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

### TRANSPORTATION POLICY

#### ***\*Transportation is not available at all MVAC Head Start locations***

Whenever possible, Head Start will provide transportation. Bus routes are determined at the beginning of the school year. When making a bus schedule, the program considers that no child can be on the bus for over 60 minutes. To pick up as many children as possible, the program may designate pick-up and drop-off locations. When transportation is provided by the program the following rules apply:



## Parent/Guardian responsibilities

- Notify Head Start by 6:00 a.m. and leave a message. Messages can be left 24 hours a day. This way staff do not stop at your pickup location and spend time trying to notify you.
- After failing to notify Head Start when my child will not be on the bus, my child could be dropped from the bus route. After 3 times, staff will contact you about this situation.
- The bus could arrive 15 minutes early or be 15 minutes late depending on previous stops, weather, road construction, etc. Be prepared for this situation. Routes and route times are subject to change.
- Walk your child to and from the bus every day. If I am unable, I agree to arrange for an approved emergency contact to do it.
- Agree to not sent food, beverages, medication, valuables, or items that would be dangerous with my child
- Notify Head Start staff if you move or my child starts at a new childcare. Understanding that your child's spot on the bus is not guaranteed if you move or change childcare.
- Understand that there may be times when a bus is not available due to bus maintenance or repairs or staff shortage.

## Head Start responsibilities.

- Staff will check messages and communicate with the parent/guardian about bus situations on a regular basis.
- Staff will assign a designated bus stop time and the bus will not leave before the designated bus stop time.
- Staff will welcome parents/guardians on to the bus to help their child buckle in.
- Ensure that children do not bring food, beverages, medication, valuable, or items that would be dangerous on the bus.
- Within 5 business days staff will notify parents/guardians if their child can be added to the route and notify other parents/guardians of the changes
- Will notify parents/guardians as soon as they are made aware of a bus situation or if the bus is unable to run the route.