STEPS Head Start & Childcare

Moving Lives Forward

www.stepsheadstart.com

FAMILY HANDBOOK

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.
We 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.

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Dear Parent/Guardian,

STEPS *Family Handbook* is intended to provide families of enrolled children with program information, policies, procedures, and expectations.

STEPS offers a variety of program types funded through various sources. To determine which program(s) your child(ren) and your family are eligible for STEPS will request an annual application update.

HOURS:

- Head Start day is 6.5 hours, typically 8:30 am - 3:30 pm (subject to change depending on the location)
- Early Head Start day is 8 hours, 8:00 am – 4:00 pm.
- Wrap around childcare for Head Start/Early Head Start 7:30 am – until program start time and/or program end time to 5:30pm. This is available at select locations and can be paid for by parents or provided through childcare subsidy.
- Mixed Delivery/Private Pay Childcare Full Day Care, 7:30 am – 5:30 pm (select locations)

The Office of Head Start, for general purposes, uses the term "Head Start" which includes Head Start, Early Head Start, and Expectant Mothers, STEPS does the same throughout this handbook.

The term "teacher" in this handbook refers to classroom teaching staff in all childcare programs.

The following terms are used interchangeably throughout this manual: Family, parent, parents, and guardians in recognition of the diversity of family situations in which children.

This is your program, and you will get out of it what you put in. We provide a whole family approach to the support we offer. I strongly encourage you to be an active parent and partner in our program. Please ask questions, volunteer, show up for meetings and events, your child(ren) and the program depend on you for success.

I am looking forward to a terrific school year and welcome you to STEPS School Family.

Sincerely,

Jessica Lehman
STEPS Vice President of Early Childhood Education
STEPS Inc.

IMPORTANT NAMES AND NUMBERS

NAME	CONTENT/SERVICE AREA	PHONE	EMAIL
Sharon Harrup	STEPS President/CEO	434-315-5909 ext. 212	sharrup@steps-inc.org
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Taneha Terry	Assistant Director of Programs	434-315-5909 ext. 24	tterry@steps-inc.org
Katie Rhodes	Assistant Director of Administration	434-315-5909 ext. 14	krhodes@steps-inc.org
Evonne Robertson	Food Service Manager	434-315-5909 ext. 15	erobertson@steps-inc.org
Mike Robinson	Family Advocate	434-315-5909 ext. 16	mrobinson@steps-inc.org
Crystal Hammock	Family Advocate	434-315-5909 ext. 22	chammock@steps-inc.org
Summer Groves	Family Advocate	434-315-5909 ext. 17	sgroves@steps-inc.org
Sierra Johnson	Family Advocate	434-315-5909 ext. 21	sjohnson@steps-inc.org

My child's center is:	My child's room number is:
My child's Teacher is:	Contact number:
The Assistant or Co-Teacher is:	Contact number:
The Center Director is:	
My child's bus driver is:	Bus contact number:
The operating hours for my child's center are o'clock a.m. to o'clock p.m.	
The main number for my school building is:	

WELCOME TO STEPS HEAD START & CHILDCARE

STEPS, INC. is a community action agency serving Southside Virginia. STEPS provides childcare services to the counties of Amelia, Lunenburg, Nottoway, Prince Edward, Buckingham, Charlotte, Cumberland, and Appomattox through blended programming that includes Head Start, Mixed Delivery, subsidized childcare, and parent private pay.

STEPS is a non-profit organization with the following mission, vision, and motto. Our childcare programs have a clear purpose that is aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (HSELOF) and the Virginia Early Learning Standards (ELDS). All our programs are state-licensed child day centers.



STEPS COMMITMENT TO QUALITY

STEPS is committed to providing quality early childhood education through Head Start, Early Head Start, and childcare programs for children and families. Programs are offered in accordance with the Head Start Program Performance Standards, federal, state, local regulations and STEPS Head Start & Childcare policies and procedures. STEPS actively participates in the Virginia Department of Education Virginia Quality Birth to Five (VQB5) System.

HEALTH, SAFETY, SUPERVISION

STEPS is committed to providing quality facilities and outdoor environments with health and safety as the highest priority. STEPS will always maintain active supervision in compliance with state and federal standards.

PROMOTING SCHOOL READINESS

STEPS commitment to quality services for children and families focuses on the Head Start approach to school readiness. By establishing school readiness goals and working with community and family partners to achieve

those goals we strive to provide the highest quality early childhood education. STEPS provides whole family support and recognizes families as children's primary nurturers, teachers, and advocates.

NONDISCRIMINATION AND INCLUSIVE SERVICES COMMITMENT

STEPS is committed to providing services that ensure equal access and opportunity for all children and families. The program recognizes that children develop and learn within the context of their family, community, and cultural background. Staff work to implement services that are responsive to the strengths, needs, and experiences of each child and family.

STEPS complies with all applicable federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate based on race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, or family status. The program makes every effort to provide responsive and individualized child development services that support the participation and engagement of all children and families.

Staff Responsibilities

Staff are expected to:

- Recognize and respect the unique strengths and contributions of each child and family
- Support children's positive development, confidence, and sense of belonging
- Encourage family engagement and participation in program activities
- Provide opportunities for children to learn about themselves, their families, and their communities
- Offer learning experiences that reflect a variety of backgrounds and perspectives in age-appropriate ways
- Promote respectful interactions among children and adults
- Support effective communication with families, including those who speak languages other than English
- Encourage positive peer relationships and cooperative play
- Address inappropriate or harmful behaviors in a manner that is consistent with program policies and promotes a safe and supportive environment
- Foster a learning environment that supports children's ability to function successfully in school and in the broader community

WHAT IS HEAD START?

The Office of Head Start (OHS) promotes school readiness through health, educational, nutritional, social, and other services to children and their families. Head Start encourages the role of parents as their child's first and most important teachers. Programs build relationships with families that support positive parent-child relationships, family well-being, and connections to peers and community. Head Start, as a quality early childhood program, is inclusive of children with disabilities. STEPS implements Head Start standards and philosophies in all of our childcare propgrams.

For more information about Head Start's history, mission, vision, values, program option descriptions, resources, and regulations go to HeadStart.gov
https://headstart.gov/about-us/article/head-start-history

ELIGIBILITY AND ENROLLMENT

Head Start is a federally funded program and is free to all participants. Participant eligibility is based on federal guidelines. In general, eligibility is based on family income at or below the poverty level. However, several other factors will play into a family's eligibility, such as homelessness, SNAP/TANF/SSI recipients, and a child's status in foster or kinship care. Head Start is a 10-month program that follows a calendar like one used

in public schools. Children have a shorter day, winter break, spring break, and summers off. Families qualify if their total household income is at or below 100% of Federal Poverty Level. If spaces are available a small portion of enrolled children can have an income between 100%-130% of poverty level.

Virginia **Mixed Delivery** is an early childhood program that helps eligible families access high-quality childcare and preschool services at low or no cost. Mixed Delivery is called a "public-private partnership" because it brings together state funding and local community-based childcare programs to expand access to quality early education options for families. This program ensures that children from birth to age 5 can attend full-day, year-round early learning programs in licensed childcare centers or family childcare homes in their community.

Children may qualify for Mixed Delivery if they are under age 5 and their family has an income at or below 200% of federal poverty guidelines, they are experiencing homelessness, and other regional criteria. Parents must generally be working, in school/training, seeking employment, or unable to provide care. Services are based on eligibility, location, and available program slots. Mixed Delivery does require the family to pay a monthly co-payment to STEPS.

Childcare Subsidy provided by the Commonwealth of Virginia can be used for full day full year childcare, and/or wrap around childcare for Head Start eligible children. This means if you qualify for Head Start but need 12-month full day childcare you can use childcare subsidy to pay for days and times not funded by Head Start. The Child Care Subsidy Program helps eligible families pay for childcare so parents can work, attend school, or participate in training.

Children may qualify for subsidy if they have income below the program limit, which is generally up to about 85% of State Median Income (SMI). Families with lower incomes are prioritized. Families must be Virginia residents and either working, job searching, attending school or job training, participating in a program like VIEW. Additionally, families receiving TANF, experiencing homelessness or involved with Child Protective Services may be eligible. Childcare Subsidy recipients may be required to pay a monthly co-payment to STEPS.

Quick Comparison Table for Families

Program	Income Level
Head Start	~100% FPL
Mixed Delivery	Up to ~200% FPL
Child Care Subsidy (VA)	Up to ~85% State Median Income

STEPS has limited funded enrollment through our grants and is unable to serve all eligible children. Families are ranked based on federal eligibility guidelines, and the most qualified applicants are selected for Head Start first. Many of our programs are publicly funded by tax dollars and subject to state, local, and federal monitoring. Families must be honest in their application information and program staff must follow stringent rules and regulations when assessing the eligibility of families. During the interview process, program staff will conduct intentional conversations with parents about family income to determine eligibility and work to place the family in the childcare slot that best meets the needs of the whole family.

If your family does not qualify for any of our state, federal, or locally funded childcare slots we do offer a limited number of private parent paid childcare slots. These are not available in all locations.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

STEPS early childhood programs focus on promoting school readiness by providing learning environments that support cognitive, social, and emotional development, as well as language, literacy, mathematics, science, creative arts, fine and gross motor learning opportunities.

Head Start & preschool classrooms serve children 3-5 years of age, with an average class size of 15 children. The class size will never exceed 17 and will be staffed with a minimum of two teaching staff. Early Head Start & infant, toddler & two's classrooms serve children 4 weeks – 36 months, the class size will never exceed 12 children but typically consist of 8 children with two teaching staff. Staff will meet the qualifications for their position as required by their funding source, outlined in the Head Start Performance Standards, the Head Start Act, and the Department of Education Standards for Licensed Childcare Programs.

Regardless of program type or funding source parents will be required to participate in an intake meeting, parent orientation workshop, a minimum of 2 parent-teacher conferences, and 2 home visits during the program year. Parents are encouraged to volunteer in their child's classroom, participate in parent committee meetings, and serve on the Policy Council.

STEPS Expectant Mothers program is an extension of Early Head Start and will serve pregnant women and their families across the eight counties we serve. Participants must meet federal eligibility requirements, participate in support group meetings, home visits, and complete the designated curriculum. This program provides pre- and postnatal support for the mother and family, including resources for breastfeeding, postpartum depression, health, safety, child development and social emotional support.

HEALTH AND SAFETY OF CHILDREN

STAFF

All staff members have the qualifications to provide services for children and families. Staff receive ongoing training in child development, positive guidance, CPR, first-aid, medication administration and a variety of other relevant topics. Should you need additional support or have questions please reach out to your child's Teacher, Center Director, or the appropriate Manager.

SUPERVISION

STEPS utilizes an Active Supervision model to ensure proper supervision of children by staff during the day. Staff-to-child ratios are always maintained, and staff will always maintain sight and sound supervision of children except for preschool age children using the restroom; children are never left unsupervised.

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

It is the responsibility of STEPS early childhood staff to promote the health and safety of the children in our program. Being a parent can bring much joy but at times it can be a tough job and sometimes it becomes overwhelming. If you feel that you or someone in your family needs help to keep your child safe, manage anger, overcome adverse experiences, tackle substance misuse, seek help for depression or other medical conditions talk to your child's Center Director and we will get you the help you need. We offer several opportunities for you to develop your parenting skills and seek the support of others.

Any staff that recognizes the signs and symptoms of reportable events related to abuse or neglect of a child enrolled in STEPS childcare programs is required by law as a mandated reporter to report. The STEPS Vice President of Early Childhood Education and the Assistant Director of Programs will be advised immediately of any incidents relating to the abuse or neglect of a child.

Reportable situations include, but are not limited to:

- Signs of malnutrition
- Poor hygiene
- Unattended physical or medical problems
- Unexplained bruises, burns, or welts or explanations that don't fit the injury
- Child appears frightened of a parent or caregiver
- Pain, bleeding, redness, or swelling in anal or genital area
- Sexual play with toys, self, or others that are not developmentally appropriate
- Knowledge of sex that is not age appropriate
- Extremes in behavior ranging from overly aggressive to overly passive
- Delayed physical, emotional, or intellectual development
- Abandonment of a child by a parent or guardian

Per Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA – 42.U.S.C 5101) the terms child abuse and neglect mean, at a minimum, any recent actor or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker, which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.

AUTHORIZATION FOR EMERGENCY MEDICAL OR DENTAL TREATMENT

In case an emergency occurs and you or one of your emergency contacts cannot be located to give permission at the time of an emergency, STEPS requires you to give consent that allows us to seek treatment until you arrive.

EMERGENCIES / EMERGENCY CONTACTS

For your child's well-being it is critical that we always have up-to-date emergency contact information for your family. In case of an emergency, we must know how to reach you or your emergency contacts as soon as possible. Please provide any changes in your personal or emergency contacts to your child's teacher or Center Director. It is critical that we always have the most current information.

STEPS has an emergency preparedness plan/procedures that will be followed in the event of an emergency or major disaster (e.g. child injury, fire, earthquake). In the event of an emergency, either you or the emergency contact person(s) will be notified immediately. In the event you or your emergency contact person cannot be reached, staff will follow program procedures until your child can be reunited with you.

STEPS holds monthly fire drills and posts evacuation plans, you should review the posted evacuation location for your center. Families should practice fire and other safety drills at home so that all family members know what to do in case of a fire.

SAFETY PRACTICES, ACCIDENTS, FIRST AID AND ACCIDENT/INJURY REPORTS, MEDICATION

Health and safety are everyone's responsibility in STEPS childcare programs. We encourage parents to assist staff in monitoring the environment for any health and safety hazards. If you see something that is a concern, please bring it to the attention of your child's Teacher, or Center Director.

STEPS requires there to always be a minimum of one staff person in each group of children with both first aid and child CPR training certification. All STEPS classrooms and buses are equipped with fully stocked first aid kits. Minor accidents requiring first aid will be treated by staff certified in first aid. If a child requires first aid

and/or sustains any type of head injury, bump, or broken skin, you or your emergency contact will be notified by staff. All incidents will be documented in the Incident/Injury Report at the time of the event. Parents will be asked to sign the form on the day of the event. All incident reports are kept confidential, and a record will be retained by STEPS. If a child requires more than basic first aid, we will call 911.

If your child is to be transported by an emergency medical vehicle, he/she will be accompanied by a staff member if you or your emergency contact is not available and if allowed by the EMS staff. We will let you or your emergency contact know immediately where your child is being taken.

SMOKE FREE ENVIRONMENT
For the health and protection of young children no one can smoke on STEPS childcare center property.

NUT FREE FACILITIES
For the health and protection of children all facilities are nut-free. This includes tree nuts, seeds, and legumes, such as peanuts that are commonly associated with nuts and nut allergies. The program reserves the right to define what classifies as a nut.

DAILY OPERATIONS

HOURS OF OPERATION
Hours of operation are determined by your local STEPS program site and may be determined by the availability of transportation services. You will be given your sites, hours of operation at enrollment or orientation. Administrative office hours are 8 am to 4 pm Monday through Friday.

CENTER CALENDAR
Your STEPS program or center will provide you with a calendar of program dates of operation and closures.

INCLEMENT WEATHER, DELAYS, EMERGENCY CLOSURES
In the event of inclement weather or emergencies our classrooms located in a public-school building, Appomattox, Buckingham, and Nottoway will follow the county school system decision regarding any closures or delays. If the county public school is closed your classroom will be closed.

Decisions for sites located outside the public school, Amelia, Charlotte, Lunenburg, and Prince Edward Counties, will be made by the STEPS Vice President of Early Childhood Education in. All closures will be announced on our Facebook page, and a text will be sent to parents through the ChildPlus communication app.

Decisions regarding closure or early release will be made by the STEPS Vice President of Early Childhood Education, based on circumstances that affect the center (mechanical failure, power outages, etc.). Our staff will call, text and post on our Facebook page if a decision is made to close or close early. If building conditions are not safe, staff will evacuate to the pre-determined evacuation location and parents will be notified.

ATTENDANCE AND ABSENCES
Regular attendance is **expected** for all participants. If your child is not present, you will receive a notification within the first hour of the program day from site staff. We request that you contact us to confirm your child's absence. If your child is going to be absent, we ask that you contact your child's Teacher, or Center Director to let them know.

For Head Start & Early Head Start participants attendance is tracked and reported to the Office of Head Start. As a condition of our funding, we must maintain an 85% attendance rate for all enrolled participants. If your child is absent 2 consecutive days without an explanation or has a pattern of absences an attendance plan will be created, and a home visit will be conducted by Head Start staff. If staff cannot reach you via phone and you do not participate in the home visit they will attempt to reach you through contacting your emergency contacts. Staff will follow up by mailing you a letter, you will have five (5) days to contact staff. If you do not respond within five (5) days, we will send a certified letter to notify you of our intent to drop your child from the program on a specific date. If you still do not respond we will drop your child from the program.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE OF CHILDREN BEING DROPPED OFF/PICKED UP

For Head Start and Early Head Start participants, your child needs to arrive and be picked up from the center at the time designated by the program and specified in the enrollment agreement. Limiting classroom disruptions and maximizing instruction time is the priority of program staff. If you are having trouble getting your child to school on time or picking them up, please notify your Center Director so we can assist you.

All parents must enter and exit the building through the main entrance. To ensure your child's safety, you must accompany your child to her/his classroom or designated drop off/pick up area, unless other arrangements have been made. Children should never be dropped off or picked up at an outside entrance or unattended. Children must be signed in and out of the center and appropriate staff need to be notified that children are arriving and/or leaving. All people, other than a child's parent, signing the child in and out of the center must be at least 18 years of age and must be pre-authorized in writing. Children will only be released to individuals listed on the authorization form. There will be no exceptions. If you need to make changes to who is authorized, please see your Center Director or Teacher to make the necessary changes. You can authorize as many people as you need to.

If we are unfamiliar with the person picking up your child, we will ask him/her to show us a picture ID. If you did not previously indicate either on the emergency contact form or by presenting us with a written authorization in person, that this person was authorized to pick up your child, we will not release your child to that person.

LATE PICKUP

Picking up a child late is upsetting to your child and difficult for staff who need to go home to their own families. In addition, there will be a fee charged for late pick up (see section on Fees/Late Fees and Tuition). If you fail to pick up your child at the designated time, staff will first attempt to locate you and, if unsuccessful, they will attempt to reach your emergency contacts. If one hour after the closing time of the center, you or a designated emergency person has not contacted the center, your child will be left in custody of the local police department or appropriate state agency (i.e., Child Protective Services). A note will be left on the door letting you know where your child has been taken and how to reach them. Under no circumstances are staff authorized to take your child home or to continue to wait at the center longer than one hour after closing.

FEES, LATE FEES AND TUITION

Parents of children enrolled in Head Start/Early Head Start do not pay a fee or tuition for participating in the regular program day. If additional fees are required, they would be for non-Head Start services such as late pick up fees, wrap around childcare services, summer program, subsidy/Mixed Delivery co-payments or private pay tuition. Late Pick up fees will be charged to Head Start parents who do not meet their child's school bus or who do not pick their child up from the center by the designated time. Early Head Start students must be picked up prior to the center's posted closing time or late pick-up fees will be assessed. Late

pick-up fees will be assessed at $1 per minute per child. Late pick-up fees must be paid within 24 hours of them being assessed. Failure to pay required fees will result in a temporary suspension of services until the balance is paid, for a period not to exceed **seven (7) business days**. If payment is still not received, the parent(s) will receive written notice informing them that **STEPS will consider the enrollment vacated on the fourteenth (14th) day of non-payment**. At that time, the child's slot may be offered to the next eligible family on the waitlist.

There may be times during field trips or family activities when an attendance fee for others is required (e.g., another non-Head Start child or relative). This will be announced in written materials pertaining to each specific field trip.

Non-Head Start:

Registration fee:	$50.00
Late Payment fee:	$25.00
Infant weekly rate:	$210.00
Toddler/Twos rate:	$200.00
Preschool Children weekly rate:	$195.00
Head Start Wrap-Around weekly rate:	$115.00 (before & after care)
Early Head Start Wrap-Around weekly rate:	$130.00 (before & after care)
Co-payments (subsidy/Mixed Delivery)	$ TBD by funding source

All Program Options:

Late pick-up Fee:	$1 per minute, per child

TRANSPORTATION FOR CENTER-BASED PROGRAMS

Not all STEPS' centers provide transportation. No transportation is provided for Early Head Start, Mixed Delivery, Subsidy, or Private Pay slots. All Early Head Start children must be transported to the center. All parents will receive school bus and pedestrian training by September 30th annually regardless of how transportation is provided.

Your signed transportation agreement indicates that you agree to STEPS bus rules and regulations. It is especially important that you know that children will only be released by the bus driver and monitor to a parent, legal guardian, or other individual that you authorize in writing in advance. All changes to bus routes or stops must be requested in writing, a minimum of 24 hours prior to the change taking effect.

If no one is at home or at the bus stop/drop-off point to receive your child, your child will remain on the bus, and the driver will continue the bus route. Staff will attempt to contact you and all emergency contacts. Your child will be returned to his/her center, you or an authorized individual must pick them up and late fees will be assessed.

STEPS staff are not to take a child to the child's home, a staff member's home, or drive children anywhere in a privately owned vehicle.

EDUCATION SERVICES

CURRICULUM AND TEACHING PRACTICES

STEPS uses the research based STREAMin3 in our programs. To individualize the curriculum to meet each child's developmental stage and areas of interests, a number of screening and assessment tools are utilized.

The teachers use observations, information shared by parents during informal conversations, home visits, conferences, and ongoing assessments throughout the year to gather information about the child and plan individualized classroom activities.

The Office of Head Start has provided the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (HSELOF) which represents the foundation of the Head Start approach to school readiness. The Framework is used in all our classrooms in addition to Virginia's Early Learning & Development Standards (ELDS) issued by the Virginia Board of Education. This framework is built from five core domains for children birth to five. STREAMin3 focuses on the core skills of relate, regulate, think, communicate, and move.

The term STEM, STEAM, or in the case of this curriculum, STREAM is becoming increasingly popular in education. Just learning facts won't set up children for future school success. We go beyond by intentionally supporting these STREAM skills with a focus on the process of exploration, investigation, problem-solving, reasoning, and discovery. The curriculum will focus on science, technology, reading, engineering, art, and math. Please ask your child's teacher for more information about the program's curriculum and goals for school readiness.

The daily schedule is developed to meet all the areas of quality early childhood education. Allow your child the opportunity to experience and learn from all that is offered each day. Getting them to school on time each day, volunteering in the classroom and doing take-home activities with your child is the best way you can support your child's learning and development.

Dress your children in comfortable play clothes, so they may participate in all activities, both indoors and outside; bring appropriate outerwear for the current weather conditions; make sure your child has on appropriate shoes for running & playing (no flip flops, crocs, sandals, heels). We play hard at school, kids are encouraged to explore and use classroom materials, please keep in mind clothes will get dirty.

EXPECTANT MOTHERS EDUCATION

Services for expectant mothers and their families are offered through an individualized path that includes support group meetings, home visits, and curriculum. STEPS provides resources and support for the whole family to promote healthy pregnancy outcome. Each participant will work with a case manager to assist them in meeting their individual and family needs.

FIELD TRIPS

Walking or strolling trips are less than one-quarter miles from the center. Parents sign permission at the time of enrollment to allow staff to take their children on walking or strolling trips from the center throughout the year. When leaving the building or playground, appropriate staff-child ratios are maintained, the STEPS Vice President of Early Childhood Education or Assistant Director of Programs will be informed of the route the group will be walking, and a note is left for parents or visitors to the class informing them of what time they left and the expected return time. All trips more than one-quarter mile distances from the center are considered "field trips" and parents' signed permission is required in advance for each trip.

Safety is our first concern during field trips, and the chosen activity should be safe for children and families. Field trips enhance children's learning and promote active exploration in a setting away from the center. All field trips are relevant and integrated into the curriculum. Parents are encouraged to participate in field trips. Children who are not enrolled in the STEPS program may not attend field trips and will not be transported on STEPS buses or vehicles. Children on field trips will be expected to adhere to STEPS rules. They must eat the STEPS provided meal, in compliance with USDA guidelines. Parents must sign their child in/out of the program

if they drive their child to the field trip or take their child home from the field trip. Parents on field trips do not count in the child-adult ratio and will not be responsible for the supervision of children they do not have custody of. Parents must adhere to STEPS behavior guidance policies while on field trips.

For children with an IEP/IFSP or Behavior Plan, a parent or guardian may be required for the children to participate in the field trip if it is necessary to keep them safe.

FOOD ACTIVITIES

Do not bring food from home. To maintain healthy nutrition practices and compliance with your participation in the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program our sites must provide all meals and snacks. STEPS encourages cooking and food preparation activities as part of regular curriculum activities.

STEPS will strive to have all food served at celebrations be healthy and nutritious. If celebrating birthdays is part of your family's traditions, you may ask your child's teacher with 2 weeks' notice, to purchase supplies to prepare a special healthy snack to celebrate your child's birthday (e.g., ants on a log) and mini cupcakes for the class. Please do not send cupcakes, cake, ice cream, candy etc. from home.

On occasion your site may hold a socialization event that involves a potluck. All food must be store bought with labels that clearly identify ingredients. All STEPS' sponsored events are NUT FREE!

HOLIDAYS AND OTHER CELEBRATIONS

STEPS provides meaningful experiences for children that are reflective and respectful of family traditions of all the children in the classroom. To respect the values and beliefs of all families, classroom staff will provide inclusive lesson plans to teach about diverse holidays and traditions. Holiday celebrations can be held but must be inclusive of all the children enrolled in the program. Parents may opt their child out of participating in any celebration.

Families are encouraged to share their traditions in centers and at socializations. We encourage you to talk with your teacher if you would like to share some of your family's celebrations or holiday traditions and work closely with the teacher to provide developmentally and culturally appropriate experiences for our children. Conversations about the many ways people celebrate are encouraged and will be included as we plan with you to create a multicultural and inclusive learning environment.

OUTDOOR PLAY

STEPS views the outdoor setting as an extension of the classroom and a natural, nature-based setting in which learning and interaction can occur. The outdoor setting is viewed as an "outdoor learning environment." Children will participate a minimum of one hour each day in the outdoor learning environment.

Children go outside every day except in extreme conditions when the weather service has issued a warning to remain indoors. Staff will monitor daily air quality and limit outdoor time if required. Even in cold weather your child still needs fresh air, sunshine, and exercise. We will go outside if the temperature is above freezing 32° and the air quality is anything less than purple.

In general, if your child is well enough to attend school he/she is well enough to go outside. Please dress your child for outdoor play and supply appropriate clothing and shoes for the season, allowing for weather extremes. As mentioned before, please dress your child in "play clothes", so he/she may enjoy the time outdoors and your child's teacher can relax knowing that you won't be upset when they get dirty. To ensure the safety of children no flip flops, sandals, hoop earrings, necklaces or drawstrings should be worn to school.

REST/NAPTIME

STEPS provides rest/naptime in all our programs and age groups. If a child does not go to sleep during rest or nap time, he/she is allowed to participate in a quiet activity that does not disturb the other children. We recognize that if a child falls asleep, his/her body requires the rest, so we do not try to keep a child awake if he/she is sleepy. Also, many children fall asleep on the bus ride home; again, we will let him/her sleep.

Infants & Toddlers will rest and nap based on their individual needs and sleep patterns. There will be a designated rest period, but children will be permitted to take additional rest periods as needed.

- Cribs and cots will be designated for a specific child's use.
- Infants will not to be laid down to sleep with a bottle or cup.
- To reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), infant cribs must not contain soft bedding materials such as comforters, pillows, blankets, "boppy pillows" or stuffed toys. No bumper pads or mobiles are to be used and nothing can be in the crib with the child. Infants are to be placed on their backs in a crib to sleep.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO BRING?

A CHANGE OF CLOTHES. You are asked to make sure your child always has at least one clean change of clothes at the center. As the seasons change make sure to change out your child's clothes, so that the children are appropriately dressed. When a child wears home the change of clothing left at the center, please provide the center with another set of clothing the following day. Please make sure to provide underwear since bathroom accidents are developmentally normal at this age. We ask that clothes be brought in a Ziplock or sealable bag with your child's name written on it.

STEPS provides rest cots with a bottom sheet for each child in care and a blanket for them to sleep with. No items from home should be sent to the center unless your child's class is having show-and-tell or a special request is made by the center staff. STEPS is not responsible for theft, loss, or damage of items brought to school. We request no backpacks be brought to school and all diaper bags must be stored in a locked cabinet or in a safe place outside of the classroom. Videos and computer games are not part of the curriculum and should not be sent to school. Toy guns or other weapons are not offered as play options and should not be brought to class. Material that is violent, sexually explicit, stereotyped, or otherwise inappropriate for children is also not allowed.

TOILET/POTTY TRAINING IN CENTER-BASED PROGRAMS

Children are enrolled in the center-based program without regard to whether they have learned to use the toilet independently or not. We will change diapers and assist children in learning to use the toilet when they are ready. Accidents are to be expected. Children who are not yet ready, forget, and have accidents will never be made to feel ashamed. We prefer that all children transitioning/enrolling in Head Start, or our preschool programs be potty trained.

Coordination between you and program staff around toilet learning is imperative. A conference between parents and teacher will be held to establish common goals and methods. If your child is currently learning to use the potty, please dress your child in clothing that is easy to get on and off. Also, provide a change of clothing just in case we need it, we expect potty accidents to happen.

For children enrolled in an Early Head Start program diapers will be provided by STEPS for the period of the day the child is participating in the program.

VIDEO, DVD, TV, AND COMPUTER USE AND VIEWING

Appropriate early education programming for young children focuses on active learning and exploration. Use of videos or DVDs are discouraged in STEPS programs because they encourage only passive listening and viewing experiences for the children. Some live action videos/DVDs may be appropriate for children to see animals or scenes of interest which they may not be able to experience first-hand and may be approved as part of lesson planning. Popular children's videos or DVDs are not to be a part of the lesson plan and will not be played. Children will not watch TV, movies or play video games. Screen time of any variety should be limited and part of the approved curriculum plan.

STEPS may utilize tablets that allow the children to play games aligned with the Curriculum and Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework for a limited amount of time weekly. Teachers may use computers/tablets to play music and facilitate music and movement activities.

VIDEORECORDING OR PHOTOGRAPHING OF CHILDREN

Teachers and other STEPS staff may occasionally want to take photographs of your child and your family for program use or promotion. You will be asked to sign a consent form at intake. Most of our facilities and buses use video surveillance to ensure the safety of staff and children participating in the program. Your consent is automatically provided to surveillance when you choose to enroll your child in STEPS programs.

Teachers may videorecord themselves providing instruction and interacting with children to be shared with program coaches or supervisors for feedback and training purposes only. No footage from surveillance videos will be posted on social media. Parents are not to take or post photos of staff or other children participating in program events without prior written consent from the staff member or child's parent.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND GUIDANCE AND DISCIPLINE

Promoting healthy social and emotional development of all children is an important focus of STEPS. For young children the term "mental health" is synonymous with social and emotional development which is an essential part of well-being. It is foundational to the ability to think, learn and grow. A definition of early childhood mental health is summed up as the developing capacity of children birth through age five; to form close and secure relationships with adults and peers; experience, regulate and express their emotions in appropriate ways; and to explore their environments, try new things and learn.

MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION

STEPS programs provide mental health consultation services for all children, families, and staff either directly, or through the development of contracts with licensed mental health professionals. Collaborations with mental health consultants aim to improve the ability of staff, families, and the program to prevent, identify, treat, and reduce the impact of behavioral problems among children from birth to age five. Mental health consultation promotes staff wellness so that they can provide support to children and families in STEPS programs. Mental Health consultation services might include:

- Classroom observations to support the teacher in their efforts to provide appropriate emotional support to all children using effective methods of guidance and discipline and developing positive teacher-child interactions.
- Parenting education at parent meetings or one-on-one at the parent's request.
- Collaborate with parents and staff to develop plans to support individual children's social/emotional

development, with written parental permission; and,
- Referral of parents and children for additional counseling support when needed and authorized by the parent.

GUIDANCE AND DISCIPLINE POLICY

STEPS staff support the social-emotional development of all children by building trust, being responsive and fostering independence. Staff provide clear, consistent limits, set realistic expectations, offer encouragement, and model self-regulation strategies, they offer children choices, and establish appropriate consequences. Staff encourage respect for other's feelings and rights and show respect for home language/culture.

The long-term goal for children enrolled in STEPS is to gradually develop self-regulation and the ability to communicate their needs and wants. STEPS staff work to achieve this goal by utilizing Conscious Discipline, The Feeling Buddies and Baby Doll Circle Time curriculums while creating a School Family. Parents are encouraged to ask questions, participate in targeted training classes, and the Conscious Discipline Parenting Education Curriculum will be woven throughout parent activities and training.

PERSISTENT BEHAVIORS

If a child displays persistent, unacceptable behavior, program staff will develop a plan, with the parent and the mental health consultant, as needed, to meet the individual needs of your child. A child could be placed on a modified program plan, if his/her behavior poses a significant risk to their own health and safety, other children, or anyone else in contact with the child.

Examples of behaviors that may require program modification are behaviors that are continuous, excessive, and dangerous:

- Repeated biting (additional guidance will be reviewed for infants and toddlers)
- Repeated kicking
- Repeatedly throwing objects
- Inflicting harm to self
- Oppositional behavior or non-compliance in times of urgency, running from the teacher or from the room or playground.

EARLY HEAD START, INFANT, TODDLERS, & TWOS – GUIDANCE

Responding to a child's needs immediately and building trusting relationships is to be the primary focus in infant, toddler & twos classrooms. The program can:

- Provide a calm and engaging environment for infants and toddlers to safely explore.
- Provide multiples of favorite toys: Offer choices and provide acceptable alternatives.
- Remain calm and provide appropriate support and guidance when *toddlers* communicate with tantrums, biting, or crying.
- Create a "Yes!" environment. Focus on "do's" instead of "don'ts."
- Model appropriate behavior.
- Respond consistently and appreciate and encourage the behavior you want to see repeatedly.
- Develop emotional connections with infants and toddlers. Express joy in being with and playing with young children.
- "Narrate" a child's feelings to teach words to express strong emotions.
- Show affection with smiles, hugs, and cuddling.

INAPPROPRIATE/PROHIBITED ACTIONS

You will not see staff engage in the following activities:

- Corporal punishment, including rough handling, shoving, hair pulling, shaking, slapping, kicking, biting, pinching, hitting or spanking.
- Emotional abuse, including name calling, ostracism, shaming, making derogatory remarks about the child or his/her family, or using language that threatens, humiliates, or frightens the child.
- Yelling or raising voice (unless a child is in some type of danger, such as running into the street and traffic is coming).
- Withdrawal of food, rest, bathroom, or play activities to include outside play.
- Inappropriate or untimely diapering procedures (e.g., leaving a child in a soiled diaper).
- Unsupervised isolation
- Use of restrictive environments such as play pens, highchairs, infant swings, walkers, or car/infant seats for the purpose of restraining a child or isolating them.
- Punishing or humiliating a child for toileting habits or lack thereof.
- Any type of punishment hazardous to the physical, emotional, or mental health of the child.

Parents participating in STEPS program activities are expected not to engage in these actions.

TOUCH AND NURTURING

Appropriate physical touching is an important part of the care and nurturing of young children. Children feel loved, accepted and supported through appropriate touch by nurturing adults and peers. Except for safety or cleansing, children will always have the right to refuse touch. Even the very youngest children will be approached with a verbal announcement and a request for permission before being picked up or moved by an adult. Children are also taught to respect adults' and other children's touch preferences.

The nature and type of routine physical contact your child might experience while enrolled in the program include the following types of nurturing touches: hugging at greeting, when a child needs comfort, high fives for praise, holding hands when walking, in response to a child initiated hug, holding on laps for comfort or story time, holding and rocking to sooth an infant, rubbing and patting backs at nap time, holding or carrying.

SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION

STEPS will not suspend or expel a participant in any of its programs without first exhausting all other behavior modification methods, implementing a behavior management plan in consultation with the parents, consulting with the agency responsible for implementing IDEA, and a determination by the mental health consultant that continued enrollment in the program presents a continued serious safety threat to the child or other enrolled children, and determines that the program is not the most appropriate placement for the child. STEPS, may under the advisement of the mental health consultant or as part of an IFSP/IEP, temporarily implement a modified schedule. Considerations must be made when the family is a dual language household to ensure the family understands what is being communicated.

FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICES

NUTRITION ASSESSMENT

During enrollment, you will complete a nutritional assessment form for infants 0-11 months or be asked questions for students 12 months – 4 years, which will be reviewed by the health and nutrition staff. Eating patterns, cultural and religious preferences, and special dietary concerns will be noted and communicated to all staff involved in the child's nutritional program. If your child has any food allergies, you will be required to complete a food allergy form and possibly an Individualized Health Care Plan (IHP).

MEALS

Breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snacks are provided for children enrolled in STEPS programs based on the hours that they attend. Meals and snacks meet all federal nutrition standards as outlined under the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Parental requests for individual variations in the menu for medical, religious, or personal reasons are honored when requested in writing by the family's health care provider. Additional documentation may be required. Any child participating in a non-Head Start program will be required to complete the Virginia CACFP Meal Benefit Income Eligibility Form for Childcare Centers and Family Day Homes.

Breakfast, lunch, and snacks are provided by the program free of charge. Because of CACFP guidelines and nutritional practices, no outside food is to be brought to the center for the children. Meals and snacks are served family style whenever possible; this may not be possible if your classroom is in a public-school building. As a part of family style meal service and good early childhood education practices, classroom staff and volunteers sit at the tables with the children, and converse with the children during mealtimes.

Staff, classroom volunteers, and children always wash their hands before meals and meal preparation. Children and staff work together in setting tables for meals. We encourage families to do this at home as well. Mealtime is designed to be a pleasant social experience shared by children and adults.

Self-help skills such as pouring, serving, and cleaning up are encouraged. Children are also encouraged (but never forced) to eat a wide variety of nutritious food. If a child does not want to eat a food item, the child is encouraged to have a taste but is never forced or coerced. Adequate food is prepared to make second servings available at a child's request.

Families are always welcome to eat with their children when their schedules allow. Parents should notify staff in advance for enough food to be prepared. Parents are required to follow the same CACFP guidelines as the children and not bring their own food (e.g., coffee, sodas, tea, snack food, fast food, chips, and candy) into the classroom.

EARLY HEAD START, INFANT, TODDLERS, & TWO'S

Since infants may not yet be eating on a schedule, food will be available on demand and will be served when the child is hungry. Staff will work with parents to help establish a schedule and mealtime routines for infants. Even very young children will be encouraged to serve and feed themselves. Infants will be held when bottle feed and will not be put in a crib with a bottle and bottles will never be propped.

Breast feeding mothers are encouraged to visit the center and feed their child. The program will provide a refrigerator for mothers to store pumped breast milk for their use. Staff is to ensure containers of breast milk or formula are dated, clearly labeled with the child's full name, and used only for the intended child. STEPS will provide parents with an Infant Formula Choice Form with details on the specific formula we provide, parents can opt to provide their own formula.

Teachers will work closely with you to introduce solid foods between the ages of four and six months. New foods will begin after the introduction of cereal. The teacher will work with you to introduce one new food at a time, allowing sufficient time before introducing the next new food, to determine if allergies occur.

USDA NON-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination against its customers, employees, and applicants for employment on the bases of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity,

religion, reprisal and, where applicable, political beliefs, marital status, familial or parental status, sexual orientation, or all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program, or protected genetic information in employment or in any program or activity conducted or funded by the Department. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

HEALTH SERVICES

The goal of health services is that each child receives ongoing, continuous healthcare. Promotion of good health and preventative healthcare involves children, parents, and all staff.

STEPS staff will partner with you to ensure that developmental, behavioral, vision and hearing screenings take place within 45 days of your child entering the program and that physical exams take place within 30 days of your child entering the program, dental exams and nutritional assessments are completed within 90 calendar days of entry into the program. These services will be updated according to the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) program of the Medicaid agency of the state in which the program is located. From your first contact with the program, you should expect a high level of support from staff around your child's physical health. We know that a healthy child and early preventative care will result in better learning outcomes for your child.

If you or any member of your immediate household has developed any reportable communicable disease, you must notify STEPS within 24 hours or the next business day, except for life threatening diseases which you must report immediately.

DAILY HEALTH CHECK

As part of STEPS procedures, a staff member conducts an informal daily health check of each child as soon as possible after the child enters the bus or center. They will check for changes in appearance or behavior, lethargy, drowsiness, skin rashes, itching, complaints of not feeling well, and other signs of illness. If anything of concern is noticed, the classroom staff will immediately notify the Center Director or their immediate supervisor. Parents will be contacted regarding any immediate concern.

SICKNESS - EXCLUSION POLICY – INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Parents are expected to be considerate of other families, children, and staff in the program by notifying staff, not sending their children to class, and cancelling home visits, or not attending socializations in the case of illness as defined below. If you have questions about when to keep your child at home, ask your child's teacher or program staff for the guidelines.

STEPS follows state childcare licensing guidelines for symptoms of illness that require short-term exclusion from services and the requirement for when a child may return. Your child's teacher or Center Director may provide you with the complete listing of signs and symptoms from state childcare licensing. Children should always see a health care provider for diagnosis. A note may be required from a physician for your child to return to school.

If your child displays symptoms of illness, parents will be called to pick them up. If your child becomes ill and you cannot be contacted immediately, we will make sure that appropriate medical attention is provided until you can be reached. Your child may be isolated from other children if they are displaying symptoms that may be contagious. If your child is sick, STEPS reserves the right to send your child home and require a note from your child's health care provider before they can return.

A child will not be allowed to attend the center for the day if:

- Temperature over 101 degrees, they must be fever free for 24 hours before returning, without medication.
- Recurrent vomiting or diarrhea; or
- A communicable disease*
  *as defined in the Department of Health current communicable disease chart.
  http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/Epidemiology/documents/pdf/Communicable_Disease_Chart.pdf

IMMUNIZATIONS

Immunizations and immunization records must be kept as current as medically possible, not only to protect your child, but also to comply with state childcare licensing regulations. Staff will support you in your efforts to keep your child current with his/her immunizations. When your child receives an immunization, you must provide an updated record to your Center Director.

ADMINISTRATION AND STORAGE OF MEDICATION

Staff must be informed of all medications your child is taking. If medication is required while your child is in our care, you must complete appropriate forms and permissions for medication administration. Medications to control a fever will not be administered by program staff if your child has a fever they should not be at school. Medication will only be administered by properly trained staff. Authorizations must be completed for over the counter and prescription medications. Written consent of the parent and the prescribing health care provider will be required. All medicine (both prescription and over the counter) must be in the original, labeled container with the child's name, expiration date and dosage/instructions on it. No medications or ointments should be left in your child's backpack or diaper bag. The administration of medicines at STEPS centers is limited to:

- Prescribed medications ordered by a health care provider for a specific child, with written permission of the parents or legal guardian; and,
- Limited nonprescription (over the counter) medications with written permission of the parents or legal guardian. Medications to control fever are not to be administered by staff.
- Written authorization is required for staff to apply sunscreen, diaper ointment and insect repellent.
- The initial or first dose of medication will not be administered by STEPS staff.

Parents are to inform staff of the time of the last dose of medications given to their child before they leave the child at the center or before putting the child on the bus. Staff will keep a record of all medications administered while a child is enrolled in the STEPS program. All medications kept at the center will be in a locked box away from children's access. All empty containers or unused medication will be returned to the parent at the end of the authorization period.

Rescue medications are not locked up however, they must be kept out of children's reach and still be accessible to staff, including when children are on the bus, playground or on a field trip.

DENTAL CARE AND ORAL HYGIENE

Dental care and oral hygiene are important focuses of health services. Preschool and toddler age children are provided with toothbrushes and taught to brush their teeth after meals at the center. In early infants' mouths and teeth are gently cleaned using age-appropriate methods. Staff will assist parents with making sure appropriate preventative dental care for their child is received, and to identify health concerns to be addressed through individualized plans for follow-up and treatment. No pacifiers will be allowed for children over the age of 18 months.

HAND WASHING

Keeping hands clean is one of the most important steps we can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. Parents are encouraged to reinforce proper hand washing at home.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND FAMILY SERVICES

Parents and families observe, guide, promote, and participate in the everyday learning of their children at home, school, and in their communities. STEPS believes that parents are a child's first and most important teachers because they are the most significant adults in the child's life. It is our goal to promote the parent/child relationship and support you in your role of child rearing.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES

Through positive and goal-oriented relationships, STEPS staff engage families in program activities, family partnership agreements, and volunteer in the program. The Office of Head Start has provided the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework which outlines seven family engagement outcomes of Head Start programs that will be used in all of STEPS early childcare programs, regardless of funding source.

1. Family Well-being
2. Positive Parent-Child Relationships
3. Families as Lifelong Educators
4. Families as Learners
5. Family Engagement in Transitions
6. Family Connections to Peers and Community
7. Families as Development specialists and Leaders

Each of these outcomes leads to the goal of children being ready for school and sustaining development and learning gains. A positive relationship and open communication between parents, their child's teacher, program administrators and family service staff are key to the program supporting the family in achieving their goals.

This is your program, and your active involvement is an expectation. You will be expected to attend meetings, conferences, events, and volunteer. Your teacher, Center Director, or other program staff can give you more information about these opportunities.

FAMILY-STAFF RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION

STEPS strives to create mutual respect between parents and staff and to develop a partnership for the benefit of the child. While these partnerships might become strong throughout the child's enrollment in the program, staff and parents must also recognize the professional nature of their relationship while their child is enrolled in STEPS programs..

We ask that you tell your child's teacher about any unusual behavior or incident that may have occurred with your child at home so that teachers can take care of your child in the best way possible. Please also share your observations of your child's development with the teachers as well as the positive impacts the program is having on your child and family.

Staff record daily notes/anecdotal observations concerning each child's developmental progress, social skills, and any other incidents that may be interesting and helpful when planning the curriculum or sharing progress reports with parents. As the parent, you are welcome to see these notes at any time and we encourage you to provide your own observations of your child's development and milestones.

In the Early Head Start, infant, toddlers, and two's classrooms, staff will record and share information daily about the child (e.g., bottle and food intake, introduction of new foods, diaper changes, developmental milestones like crawling, rolling over). Parents will also need to provide information to the teacher daily regarding when the child last ate, how they slept, and any other observations of development the parent has noticed that they want the teacher to be aware of.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

The staff and family have the flexibility to determine what family services will be provided through the individualized family partnership agreement process. The process is designed to support you and your family in identifying your own strengths, interests and goals. This includes writing down these goals and determining resources and timelines for achieving them. Your Center Director and/or Family Advocate will schedule a time and place with you to begin the family partnership agreement process. After the initial meeting, the Center Director and/or Family Advocate will continue to follow up and work with you to achieve identified goals and record accomplishments.

Family partnership agreements developed with the family may include the following:

- Developing family goals in relation to their own safety or self-sufficiency, education, or job skill training.
- Building knowledge of child development.
- Building knowledge of how to plan daily routines that individualize and stimulate learning for the child.
- Increase understanding of general childhood health and nutrition and how it relates to their child; and,
- Building knowledge about community resources and skills in problem solving to better utilize available resources.

HOME VISITS AND STAFF - PARENT CONFERENCES

Staff will participate in home visits and parent conferences to assist with coordination and integration of services, as appropriate (e.g., the health and nutrition staff may be invited if there is specific information to share, the Family Advocate may attend to follow up on family goals).

Teachers will schedule with you a minimum of two (2) home visits each year. In addition to the home visits, teachers will also conduct teacher-parent conferences with you, as needed, but no less than two (2) per program year. These conferences are held to enhance the knowledge and understanding of both staff and parents on the educational and developmental progress and activities of children. Additionally these meetings will be used to plan learning goals and activities for the child. The schedule for home visits and staff-parent conferences is provided on the school calendar.

CHILD TRANSITIONS, ORIENTATION, AND PHASE-IN

RETURNING CHILDREN

If a child is currently enrolled in STEPS and is age eligible, you may re-enroll them for the next year. The Center Director and Assistant Director of Programs will work with you on updating your information and processing your enrollment for the next year.

Children enrolled in STEPS Early Head Start are automatically eligible until they transition to Head Start or another preschool program at age three. At that time, children who transition from Early Head Start to Head Start will need to re-qualify. That means that you will have to provide current family income and fill out an application like you first did when you applied to enroll your child in Early Head Start.

ORIENTATION AND PHASE-IN

To ensure a happy and successful transition to STEPS programs, parents are required to participate in a parent workshop prior to their child attending the program. Parents are invited and encouraged to visit their child's assigned classroom to meet the teacher and become familiar with the classroom and its routines during the annual open house. A thoughtful transition into the classroom helps provide a trusting, secure relationship for you, your child, and your child's teachers. Parents should communicate with classroom staff any difficulty they or their child are experiencing with transitions to ensure a positive experience for all.

TRANSITIONS

Transitions such as entering or leaving a program or changing from one program option to another require thoughtful planning and preparation for the benefit of both you and your child. You are expected to participate in transition planning.

TRANSITION OUT OF EARLY HEAD START CENTER-BASED SERVICES

Transition planning begins for each Early Head Start and two year olds at least six months prior to the child's third birthday. A meeting is held with STEPS staff and the family to create an individualized written transition plan that takes into consideration the child's health and developmental status, progress made by the child and family while in STEPS infant toddler and twos classrooms, current and changing family circumstances, and the availability of Head Start, other preschool slots, or other child development services in the community.

TRANSITION OUT OF STEPS HEAD START/PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

STEPS program staff will transfer student records to the school system or other program with parental consent. Staff will assist parents with locating a program and all transition related activities to minimize the impact on the child.

TRANSITION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES OR DEVELOPMENTAL DELAYS

The STEPS staff person responsible for disabilities services works closely with the parents of children with an IFSP or IEP, the early intervention program, and the local education agency to provide a well-planned transition for children.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS – ACCESS TO CHILD FILES

All files of program children are confidential. Staff and authorized partners, such as specialists, speech therapists, resource teachers, mental health consultants, licensing specialists from the Department of Education, Office of Head Start monitors and staff are the only people who have access to these files.

STEPS takes the position that the parent or legal guardian has the authority to inspect and review records and sign documents relating to his or her child's services unless STEPS has been advised that the parent does not have the authority under applicable state or federal law governing such matters as guardianship, separation, custody, or divorce (e.g., court order, state statute or other legally binding document). In a situation where parents are not living together, either parent having not been legally barred is to have access to the child's file. Parents and legal guardians have the right to inspect their child's files.

- Inspection and review are to be conducted during normal working hours, and the custodian of the file is to be present.
- All records are to remain within the program. Parents wishing to make copies of any records in their child's file for themselves or for a third party must do so in writing.

AUTHORIZATION TO RELEASE CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

STEPS will always ask before we send any information about your child or your family to any other agency. We will get in writing from you that you agree that we can release specific information by asking you to sign a form called Consent for the Release of Confidential Information.

DECLINING OR REFUSING SERVICES

In the event you wish to refuse any services, after staff has explained the benefits of those services, you will be asked to sign documentation of your refusal.

SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

SEEING THE CHILD FIRST AS A CHILD

STEPS programs believe it is important to implement an integrated, developmentally appropriate, universally designed curriculum framework that is flexible, comprehensive, and linked to assessment and program evaluation. We have an inclusive early education program; we actively recruit children with disabilities. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) STEPS programs are to develop collaborative relationships and written agreements with the local education agency which provides services to children three to five years of age with disabilities (Section 619) and the early intervention program for children birth through two years of age (Part C).

If you know or think that your child may have a disability or delay in any of the following areas, be sure to tell your child's teacher.

- Hearing
- Speech
- Vision
- Emotional Development
- Physical Development
- Mental Development
- Learning
- Health
- Other

Through the local education agency (LEA) and the early intervention program preschool age children with disabilities receive a comprehensive Individual Education Plan (IEP) and infants and toddlers with disabilities have an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP). The plan is written by a team of the child's parents, teachers, and appropriate professionals, such as speech and occupational therapists. STEPS staff will participate on the team for children enrolled in our programs and will help to determine if STEPS is an appropriate placement for children not yet enrolled.

If your child has a diagnosed disability, you will be contacted by the staff person responsible for disabilities services upon enrollment and asked to provide copies of all assessments, evaluations, and Individual Education Plans (IEP) or Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP) completed for your child. This information will be kept confidential and will be used to assist staff in planning for your child's developmental needs and educational growth.

Through the process of screening, ongoing assessment, or a shared parent or staff concern, children may be identified as needing further professional evaluation. Staff will work with parents to make referrals to the LEA or early intervention program for further evaluation. If you have questions about parental rights under the IDEA, please ask staff.

PARENT AND COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS

PARENTS

All parents are encouraged to become fully engaged in the program in a variety of ways. For instance, you

may:

- *Observe* your child's classroom at any time.
- *Have input* into your child's daily experience by identifying specific goals and objectives for your child.
- *Volunteer* in the classroom or in other parts of the program as often and for as long as you wish.
- *Encourage friends and other family members* to share their time and talents and get work experience by volunteering in the program.

Parents are always welcome in STEPS classrooms. By visiting and volunteering, you can gain a deeper understanding of your child and the program, gain many new experiences, and give something back to the program. When parents volunteer, their time may be counted as part of the local "match" or "in-kind donation" required by programs that receive federal funding to run the program.

PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS AS VOLUNTEERS.

Come and join us in the classroom; read, sing, dance, play games and share cultural experiences with children. Volunteer to make classroom resources at home, assist with a field trip or set up the outdoor play space; work on your classroom or center newsletter, help in the office, fix toys or equipment, or just talk with us about what you enjoy doing and we will find a place for you as a STEPS volunteer!

A *STEPS Volunteer Handbook* with important information for all regular volunteers to read will be provided. If you plan to volunteer more than eight (8) hours per week on a regular basis, a health exam, TB-test and criminal background check are required. All volunteers go through a training session before assisting in classrooms. For more information about volunteering, contact your Center Director, your child's teacher, or the staff person responsible for the family and community partnerships service area.

BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

The benefits of volunteering in the program are many.

- Research shows that parent involvement in their child's education and school has a positive impact on children's success in school
- You will have fun and make friends
- You will gain knowledge about child development
- You will gain experience that you can include in your resume and may be useful in your current job or in getting a new or different job
- Parents who meet the minimum job qualifications are given preferential consideration for employment

WAYS PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS CAN VOLUNTEER

- Accompanying children on field trips
- Volunteer in the classroom
- Working in the office
- Providing child care for other parents during program related activities and training
- Providing transportation for parents to and from program related activities
- Carrying out tasks for the program at home, such as: creating classroom resources
- Decorate bulletin boards
- Participating in the Policy Council
- Helping with outdoor maintenance – playground, building, gardening, etc.
- Working on a program newsletter or website

CONDUCT IN THE CLASSROOM

All classroom volunteers, including parents, are expected to follow program standards and policies. Volunteers in STEPS classrooms will:

- Receive assignments and directions from STEPS staff.

- Follow through with assigned activities or projects.
- Support classroom activities.
- Interact in a positive and professional way with staff, children, and other volunteers.
- Defer to STEPS staff in all matters concerning child guidance and discipline and follow the guidance and discipline policies of STEPS.
- Maintain absolute confidentiality - Staff and volunteers strictly adhere to program confidentiality policies.
- Focus on children and facilitate their activities.
- Keep adult conversations to a minimum and be focused on supporting the children.
- Follow common sense guidelines for public behavior. Drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, swearing, threatening, shouting, fighting, and firearms are all examples of common-sense prohibitions.
- Express any concerns in private and take the opportunity to talk to classroom staff outside of class time. Make sure the staff can address your concern.

When you choose to volunteer you are making the following agreements:

- I agree to respect and promote the unique identity of each child and family and refrain from stereotyping on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, religion or disability
- I agree to follow program confidentiality policies concerning information about children, families and other staff members
- I agree to never leave a child alone or unsupervised while under my care
- I agree to use only positive methods of child guidance and will not engage in corporal punishment, emotional or physical abuse or humiliation. In addition, I will not employ methods of discipline that involve isolation, the use of food as punishment or reward or the denial of basic needs.

STEPS reserves the right to deny access to STEPS facilities to parents and volunteers who violate the above guidelines and the Parent Code of Conduct.

PARENT & FAMILY CODE OF CONDUCT

STEPS promotes and respects the identity of each child and child's family. Staff refrain from discriminating against families based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, and disability. As a parent or family member, you play a special role in contributing to the needs and development of STEPS children. Therefore, we expect parents and families to follow the Parent's Code of Conduct as listed below. Below "your child" refers to the family member who is being served by STEPS.

Support Your Child

Supporting your child by giving encouragement and showing interest in their classroom activities is very important. Help your child work toward skill improvement through backpack activities and volunteering in the classroom.

Always Be Positive

Parents and family will serve as positive role models for their children. As positive role models, parents, guardians, and family will refrain from shouting, swearing, cursing, or making physical threats to staff, other parents, or children in STEPS facilities.

Reinforce Positive Behavior

Positive reinforcement is the best way to help your child achieve their goals. Encouraging your child's efforts and pointing out the good things they accomplish are an important part of the learning process.

Communications with STEPS Staff
Communications are always expected to be positive and professional between staff and parents/guardians. Parental and staff concerns will be expressed in a private setting outside of the classroom, away from the school bus, and away from students. Transportation concerns should be communicated directly to the Assistant Director of Administration. Parents and family will not discuss concerns in the classroom during instructional time or during morning or afternoon bus stops.

Keep Contact Information Current
Parents and guardians must keep the site staff updated on any changes to, Release to Contacts and Emergency Contacts forms. Classroom or transportation staff will not release children to people not listed on the Release to Contacts form. Parents must have current personal contact information on file for school and transportation staff. All changes to contact information must be made in writing or in person by the adult authorized to make changes. Changes made by telephone will not be accepted.

Drug, Alcohol, and Firearms Policy
STEPS is a drug free, smoke free, and gun free zone. Parents and family members will be removed from the premises if there is a reasonable suspicion of the possession or use of any of the above-mentioned items while on STEPS property.

Safety Concerns
Parents and family members, when threatened, provoked, intimidated, or witnessing a threat, are responsible for notifying the STEPS administration office immediately. Depending on the severity of the incident, the parents and guardians will follow the procedures below for addressing concerns. 911 will be contacted if necessary.

Procedure for Addressing Concerns
Parents will address concerns using the following procedures.
Classroom:

1. Parents will discuss concerns with appropriate teaching staff.
2. Teaching staff will report concerns to their Center Director or Assistant Director of Programs to work on reaching a satisfactory resolution.
3. The Vice President of Early Childhood Education and Chief Executive Officer, and if needed, the Policy Council will provide recommendations for resolution if the parents, Cener Director, Assistant Director of Programs, and teaching staff are unable to reach a satisfactory resolution.

Transportation:

1. The parents will contact the Assistant Director of Administration with their concern.
2. The Assistant Director of Administration will work with relevant staff to work on a resolution.
3. The Vice President of Early Childhood Education and Chief Executive Officer, and if needed, the Policy Council will provide recommendations for resolution if the parents, Assistant Director of Administration, and transportation staff are unable to reach a satisfactory resolution.

STEPS reserves the right to deny access to STEPS facilities and property, to include buses, to parents and volunteers who violate the above guidelines for parent conduct.

PROGRAM GOVERNANCE

STEPS programs include parents and community members as active decision-makers in policies, procedures and other important issues that affect your child's education and how the program operates. This process is

called “shared governance.” Participating in the Parent Committee or Policy Council of the program is a privilege and wonderful opportunity to serve your child, program, and community.

PARENT COMMITTEES

Parent Committees are organized at the center level and involve parents from all program options. All parents are automatically members of the Parent Committee and are invited to attend meetings and activities and serve on sub-committees of the Parent Committee.

Parent Committees serve as a forum where parents can explore a wide variety of issues which impact both home and center, such as curriculum plans, identify training needs, and organize support groups. As a member of the Parent Committee you plan, conduct, and participate in informal or formal programs and activities for parents and staff (e.g., Parent Committee meetings, dances, holiday events, picnics, movie nights, field trips, etc.). Parent Committees are encouraged to discover and discuss what parents would like to do; what they would like to learn; and how ideas can be carried out with or without staff assistance.

As a part of the Parent Committee, you also have opportunities to advocate on behalf of low-income families and assist in recruiting parents and other resources to support activities that you yourselves plan. The Parent Committees also elect parents to serve on the Policy Council.

POLICY COUNCIL

The Policy Council (PC) is composed of elected parents and community representatives. It meets monthly to review and approve business such as plans for the program, personnel recommendations and policies, enrollment criteria, and the annual program budget. It functions as a link to Parent Committees, and Policy Council members operate as the voice for the parents who have children currently enrolled in the program. The Policy Council will be comprised of a majority of members that are parents of currently enrolled children; the remainder are community members.

A parent member and an alternate parent member are elected to the Policy Council from each Parent Committee annually. Policy Council members receive formal training in their other roles and responsibilities. Policy Council members cannot be STEPS employees, nor can they be related to any STEPS employee by blood, marriage, or domestic partnership. There is a lifetime limit of three (3) one-year terms to serve on the Policy Council.

STEPS BOARD OF DIRECTORS (Governing Board)

The STEPS Board of Directors has the administrative and fiscal responsibility for the STEPS early childhood programs. As the governing board for the program, the STEPS Board of Directors is a partner in the shared governance of STEPS early childhood programs.