



EARLY LEARNING CONNECTIONS

**SERVING ARMSTRONG, BEAVER, BUTLER,
INDIANA & LAWRENCE COUNTIES**



Armstrong County Head Start/Early Head Start Parent Manual 2021-2022

***Please note some areas have been subject to change and modification due to the impact of COVID-19 guidelines and restrictions for the 21-22 program year.**

The mission of Early Learning Connections is to provide a variety of high quality early learning programs that foster a safe and positive culture through kindness and respect to meet the comprehensive needs of families.

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Welcome to Early Learning Connections, Inc. We are delighted to have you as one of our families and hope that your time with us is a positive experience for you and your child.

Early Learning Connections, a private non-profit United Way Agency and academic school, has been providing a variety of children's programs since 1973. The Center is governed by a voluntary Board of Directors composed of community members. The agency provides child care and is the grantee agency for Head Start and Early Head Start programs, The Pre-K Counts program and the Early Learning Resource Center in Butler County.

HISTORY, VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Early Learning Connections is to provide a variety of high quality early learning programs that foster a safe and positive culture through kindness and respect to meet the comprehensive needs of families.

The Vision of Early Learning Connections is to be the leading provider of children's programs and quality services for families. The Agency's founders recognized that a child care setting which did not meet children's physical, academic, emotional and social needs would adversely affect their development. Therefore, all of the Agency's services offer an approach, which promotes healthy growth while preparing children for future success in school, in the work place, and in the community.

Early Learning Connections has always acknowledged the importance of retaining qualified teaching staff, providing ongoing teacher training, maintaining a high ratio of adults to children, and developing and implementing written curricula.

Each year Early Learning Connections assesses the child care needs of the community. Direct child care programs, such as a summer program for schoolage children, an infant/toddler program, parent-child play groups, Head Start, Early Head Start and before/after school programs have been added to meet the changing needs of families.

The agency also provides workshops and training for parents on many topics including child development, adult learning, nutrition, budgeting, and fire safety in the home.

CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

We offer child care at our Bon Aire Site for children birth through sixth grade. Hours of operation are 6:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Our child care program strictly adheres to all licensing regulations required by the state of Pennsylvania's Department of Human Services.

The Center has a strong commitment to providing quality care to Butler County's children and families.

- We are a Keystone STARS - Star Four (4) Child Care Provider
- We serve over 100 children daily in child care

HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START

Provides comprehensive family services to low-income families living 130% below the Federal poverty income guideline (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services).

- **Head Start** - services families with children 3-5 years of age in nine locations in Butler County and 6 in Armstrong County.
- **Home-Based Head Start** – services families with children 3-5 of age in a home visiting model in Butler County
- **Early Head Start Center Based** – services families with children 6 weeks to 3 years at Bon Aire in Butler County and Ford City in Armstrong County
- **Home Based Early Head Start** - services pregnant women and families with children birth to 3 years in Butler County.
- **Head Start Supplemental** – services additional children in Head Start with State funds.

PENNSYLVANIA PRE-K COUNTS

Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts is a state funded program established by the Pennsylvania Department of Education to provide a preschool education to children who are between ages 3 and entry age for kindergarten, and families that are earning up to 300 percent of the federal income poverty level. We have Pre-K Counts Classrooms in collaboration with Karns City, Butler Area, Seneca Valley and Moniteau School Districts. Current locations are Bon Aire, Sugarcreek Elementary School, Dassa McKinney and Connoquenessing Valley Elementary.

ELRC (Early Learning Resource Center)

ELRC provides child care funding and information to Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Indiana and Lawrence County families. ELRCs provide a single point-of-contact for families, early learning service providers, and communities to gain information and access services that support high-quality child care and early learning programs. Through the ELRCs, child care professionals can obtain support in building quality outcomes for children by working with quality coaches to achieve Keystone STARS 3 and 4 status.

CACFP (Child and Adult Care Food Program)

Early Learning Connections, Inc. participates in the Child and Adult Food Care Program. This program, which is part of the Department of Education, provides reimbursement for meals served to children in all of our programs. In order to receive reimbursement, we must adhere to regulations, provide annual training for staff, monitor meals at our sites, and submit a monthly claim. Our agency also serves as a sponsor for registered family and group child care home providers. As a sponsor, we ensure providers follow regulations, monitor their mealtimes, provide annual training, process their monthly claims, and disperse reimbursement.

LOCATIONS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Administration Office

139 Rieger Road
Butler, PA 16001
724-287-2761 or 1-866-348-6674

Apollo Head Start/EHS Home Based

401 North 6th Street
Apollo, PA 15613
724-287-2761, ext. 473

Dayton Head Start

Dayton Elementary School
413 East Grant Avenue
Dayton, PA 16222
814-496-0252

Shannock Head Start

Shannock Elementary School
210 Cowanshannock Ave.
Rural Valley, PA 16249

Ford City Early Head Start/Head Start

1012 6th Avenue
Ford City, PA 16226
724-287-2761

Freeport Head Start

South Buffalo Elementary School
562 Freeport Road
Freeport, PA 16229

Kittanning Head Start

201 North Jefferson St.
Kittanning, PA 16201
724-287-2761 ext. 463

NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

All admissions and services to the families and children of the Early Learning Connections, Inc. Programs shall be made without regard to race, color, religious creed, disability, ancestry, national origin, age or sex.

Program services shall be made accessible to eligible disabled persons through the most practical and economically feasible methods available. These methods include, but are not limited to, equipment redesign, the provision of aids, and use of alternative service delivery locations. Structural modifications shall be considered only as a last resort among available methods.

Accommodations will be made for families and children whose first language is not English. Examples of support are materials in written form, as well as interpreters/translators and referrals to outside agencies to help with family needs.

Any employee, family or individual who believes they have been discriminated against may file a complaint of discrimination internally with Early Learning Connections, Inc. or any of the following:

BUREAU OF CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLIANCE FIELD OFFICE
701 State Office Building
300 Liberty Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

BUREAU OF CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLIANCE HEADQUARTERS
Room 412, Health and Welfare Building
P.O. Box 2675
Harrisburg, PA 17105

PENNSYLVANIA HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION
101 South Second Street, Suite 300
Harrisburg, PA 17105

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Offices for Civil Rights, Region III
P.O. Box 13716
Philadelphia, PA 19101



IMPORTANT PROGRAM POLICES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE SAFETY AND WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

It is the primary responsibility of the staff of Early Learning Connections, Inc. to insure the safety of the children in care. In addition to safety procedures, polices regarding the well-being of your family are also in place. Please review these policies and procedures.

Confidentiality is an important part of our program. Staff will not share any information about you or your child with anyone outside the program without your written consent. This also means that we request that parents/guardians cannot share anything discussed within our program, and information about other children and families with anyone outside the program. These principles help to create an atmosphere of safety, trust and openness.

Photographs: Your child's teacher will be providing you with photos from time to time. You are welcome to take photos of your **own child at family events**. We kindly ask that if other children are nearby, that you inform the parents that you will be taking a photo. That way, the parent can decide to have their child be in the photo or not.

- Privacy is important and we do ask that you use your best judgment if placing your photos on the internet.
- Staff of Early Learning Connections, Inc. will get written permission to post photos on social media and our website.
- Please do not place any photos of non-family children or staff members on the internet.

Protecting Children is important to us. At Early Learning Connections Inc. we strongly believe that children should grow up in a community where adults care about them and keep them safe. According to Pennsylvania State law, all staff have a legal responsibility to report suspected child abuse and neglect. All employees are required to comply with the provision of Megan's Law and its regulations [42 Pa. C.S.A. Sec. 9791 et seq]. Early Learning Connections requires parents/guardians identified under Megan's Law to sign our Megan's Law policy verifying that they understand the Megan Law Policy and will abide by the rules and regulations.

Raising children can be both fun and frustrating at times. If you find that you may need some parenting help, consider calling your Family Service Worker, Parent Educator or Teacher. These agencies, can offer ideas, too:

- Children and Youth Agency: 724-548-3466 – Provides assistance to children and families in an abusive situation
- HAVIN: 1-800-841-8881– Provides domestic violence assistance
- Warmline: 1-855-586-3306 – A helpline for parents
- Armstrong Community Action Program: 724-548-5754– Provides services in the community

Need HELP? Call 211

DRUG, ALCOHOL, TOBACCO AND WEAPONS POLICY

All tobacco, vaping products, drugs and alcohol are not permitted at any of the Head Start locations, on or near agency vehicles or at any Head Start function. Weapons, firearms and ammunition are prohibited at all Head Start buildings and functions.

POLICY FOR RELEASING CHILDREN TO ADULTS OF DIMINISHED CAPACITY

If an employee determines that the adult responsible for picking up a child from any Early Learning Connections, Inc. program is showing behavior which indicates diminished capacity, (i.e. slurred speech, unsteady walk, confused thinking, impaired reflexes, erratic behavior, altered moods, or drowsiness) the staff member will contact another authorized adult on the release list. The impaired adult should be calmly encouraged to wait for the alternate release person and not drive.

If problems arise, the teaching staff may contact the office staff for support or request police assistance through 911. Under no circumstances will the staff endanger the other children in care.

CHILD RELEASE POLICY

Prior to the time of entry into Head Start or Early Head Start, parents will fill out a ***Child Release and Emergency Treatment Form*** which authorizes other adults to receive or pick up their child(ren). This form will note which of these adults* would be contacted in case of illness or emergency and what adults children may be released to. In situation where an adult on the release form attempts to pick up a child and the staff does not recognize them, the staff must ID the individual and log the pickup on the ***Alternate Adult Pick-Up of Children***.

1. Parents may change the names or status on the release form by sending a note to the teaching staff, verbally telling the teaching staff of changes or calling and updating the list with the family service worker or intake specialist. The child will be released to any adult on the release form as long as they have the appropriate identification. (Photo I.D. or two forms if no photo identification is available.)
2. A child will be released to an adult not on the release list if in an emergency the parent calls in a new release person and the parent can be identified over the phone.



CANCELLATION POLICY

Early Learning Connections follows the snow and inclement weather closing schedule of the school district in which the center is located. For Early Head Start center days and playgroups they follow Armstrong Area School District delays and cancellations.

Policy For When School Is Delayed Or Cancelled

1. When the school district the site is in cancels class, Early Head Start and Head Start will be cancelled.
2. When the school district the site is in delays, Early Head Start, Head Start sites will be delayed by 2 hours from their classrooms start time.

Head Start Site	School District
Apollo	Apollo
Dayton	Armstrong
Ford City	Armstrong
South Buffalo - Freeport	Freeport
Kittanning	Armstrong
Shannock	Armstrong

Policy For Early Head Start Play Group When School Is Delayed Or Cancelled

1. When Armstrong Area School District cancels class there will be no playgroup held.
2. When Armstrong Area School District dismisses school early there will be no evening play group.
3. When Armstrong Area School District delays school there will be no morning playgroup; however, there will be evening playgroup.

All families that opt in to text message/email communication will be notified by text and email when their site will be delayed or cancelled. Please make sure to notify your Family Service Worker, Teacher, or Parent Educator any time your phone number or email has changed.

ATTENDANCE POLICIES

Head Start and Early Head Start Center Based

Your decision to enroll your child in Head Start comes with a big commitment on your part. This commitment means that you agree to send your child to school every day that class is in session and, that you keep your child home from school only when your child is ill or unable to attend due to unusual family circumstances.

What happens if your child does need to miss school?

- Call the classroom at least one hour before school starts to tell us your child will be absent. You may leave a message.
- If we do not know why your child is absent, you will receive a text message or phone call by 10:30 a.m. that morning stating your child is absent.
- Your child's teacher will call you at the end of the Head Start day.
- Sometimes you may need some help in getting your child to attend Head Start on a daily basis. Your Family Service Worker will contact you and set up a home visit to help develop a "Success Plan".
- If after 4 days we are unable to contact you to find out why your child is absent, you will receive a letter in the mail asking you to contact us.
- If we do not hear from you after an extended period of absence, your child may temporarily be placed on a waiting list so that another family can be enrolled.
- We will help to make attendance successful and withdraw your child from the program only when you are unable to participate.

Establishing regular attendance is important!

- Attending school regularly helps children feel better about school and themselves
- Good attendance will help children do well in high school, college and at work
- We will award a book and certificate to your child for excellent attendance!
- **"You Count Every Day"** is our motto

Early Head Start Home Based

There are to be 46 home visits per year. If you or your child is unable to participate in a home visit:

- Call your Parent Educator at 724-287-2761
- Tell them why you or your child will be unable to participate
- Ask about scheduling a make-up visit later in the week

Participation in the program becomes a concern when.....

- There are frequently canceled home visits
- There is a pattern of missed visits
- Families continually do not cancel in advance for visits they will not be able to attend.

After the second consecutive cancellation or parent absence the Parent Educator will contact you to discuss the missed visits.

If the Parent Educator cannot reach you by phone, the Parent Educator will send a letter requesting you to contact the PE.

If after five working days there is no response by the family, the Parent Educator will send a second letter informing the family that if they do not respond within five working days the Early Head Start services will be stopped.

If there is still no response by the family, a final termination of service letter will be issued making the family aware that services have stopped.

Your Parent Educator wants to continue your enrollment in the EHS Program; please keep your Parent Educator informed about any changes in your family's health, location, vacation.

CURRICULUM

Head Start/Pre-K Counts

Program Standards require each program to implement an Early Childhood Education Curriculum that guides the teaching and practices of its preschool classrooms. The Creative Curriculum for Preschool is the Early Childhood Curriculum our program uses to insure we are offering research based, high quality early learning experiences to each and every child.

The Creative Curriculum has 38 learning objectives that provide the road map our teachers use to plan our educational program. The objectives are organized into nine areas of development and learning. The first four major areas include:

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------|
| 1. Social-Emotional | 3. Language |
| 2. Physical | 4. Cognitive |

The remaining five areas are content areas that are often described as outcomes for early learning standards. The content areas include:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| 5. Literacy | 8. Social Studies |
| 6. Mathematics | 9. The Arts |
| 7. Science and Technology | |

The tenth area, English Language Acquisition, provides objectives specific to children who are learning to understand and use the English Language.

PATHS Curriculum

The PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) curriculum teaches 4 essential skills which are, emotional therapy, behavioral self-control, problem solving, and social academic climate. It increases self-control in students as well as the ability of getting along with others by improving friendship skills. It enhances the children's self-esteem and self-confidence and the ability to give and receive compliments. The PATHS curriculum helps children increase their understanding and communication of the vocabulary describing one's emotions. The curriculum helps children to recognize and understand how their behavior affects others. The children learn to develop their logical reasoning and problem solving vocabulary in order to assist them in solving problems effectively.

Heggerty

Heggerty Phonemic Awareness Pre-Kindergarten lessons are meant to supplement existing literacy curriculum and are easily integrated into half-day or full-day preschool programs. When lessons are taught consistently each day with explicit teacher modeling and scaffolded support, teachers see improvement in students' reading, spelling, and writing, as the students learn to hear the sounds in words.

Early Head Start/Home-Based

The chosen and approved curriculum of the preschool Home-Based curriculum is called **Parents as Teachers**. This nationally known curriculum promotes the following concepts:

- children are born learners
- children learn most from people they love: their parents
- parents are the experts on their own child
- all parents deserve support in their parenting role
- diversity and cultural difference are valued
- all families have strengths
- all parents want to be good parents



Program Goals:

1. Increase parent knowledge of early childhood development and improve parenting practices
2. Promote a strong parent- child relationship
3. Provide early detection of developmental delays and health issues
4. Develop a true partnership between parents and school
5. Increase children's school readiness and school success

Parents as Teachers has four basic components of the program. These are:

1. Personal home visits
2. Group Socializations
3. Developmental Screenings
4. Resource Networking. Certified Parent Educators who have been trained in child development will help you understand what to expect in your child's development. You will have input as to what you want your child to be learning. At Center Days parents and children have an opportunity to share their experiences in a preschool classroom setting, gain new insights, and have fun together. Developmental screenings help to detect and prevent difficulties later in school. Resources are available for families seeking aid through community services.



SCHOOL READINESS GOALS

Central Domains					
Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework	Approaches to Learning	Social and Emotional Development	Language and Literacy	Cognition	Perceptual, Motor and Physical Development
School Readiness Goals	<p>Children will increasingly demonstrate self-regulation including impulses, maintaining attention, persisting with activities, and using flexible thinking to solve problems.</p> <p>Children will demonstrate initiative independence, interest and curiosity in interactions with others, and exploration of objects and people in their environment.</p>	<p>Children will engage in and maintain positive peer relationships, interactions including cooperating, and resolving conflicts.</p> <p>Children will appropriately express and respond to a broad range of emotions including concerns for others.</p>	<p>Children will express themselves in increasingly long, detailed and sophisticated ways that are clear and understandable.</p> <p>Children will identify and segment the sounds within words as separate from the word itself including rhyming and matching beginning sounds.</p> <p>Children will write for a variety of purposes using increasingly sophisticated marks.</p>	<p>Children will demonstrate understanding of the relationship between numbers, names, and quantities.</p> <p>Children will associate a quantity with written numbers up to 5 and will begin to write numbers.</p> <p>Children will demonstrate understand of mathematical operations including addition and subtraction.</p> <p>Children will analyze and interpret data, draw conclusions and communicate results</p>	<p>Children will demonstrate use of small muscles for the purpose such as self-care, writing, manipulation of tools, and cutting with scissors.</p>
Preschool	<p>Teaching Strategies GOLD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solves problems 3b Attends and engages 11a Persists 11b Takes care of own needs appropriately (4 year old) 1c Shows curiosity and motivation 11d <p>Head Start Early Learning Outcome Framework</p> <p>P-ATL 5 P-ATL 10</p>	<p>Teaching Strategies GOLD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interacts with peers 2c Makes friends 2d Balances needs and rights of self and others 3a Solves social problems 3b Responds to emotional cues 2b <p>Head Start Early Learning Outcome Framework</p> <p>P-SE 5 P-SE 6</p>	<p>Teaching Strategies GOLD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speaks clearly 9b Uses conventional grammar 9c Writes name 19a Writes to convey meaning 19b <p>Head Start Early Learning Outcome Framework</p> <p>P-LC 5 P-LIT 1 P-LIT 6</p>	<p>Teaching Strategies GOLD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Counts 20a Connects numerals with their quantities 20c Quantifies 20b Uses classification skills 13 Compares and measures 22 <p>Head Start Early Learning Outcome Framework</p> <p>P-MATH 3 P-MATH 5 P-MATH 6 P-SCI 6</p>	<p>Teaching Strategies GOLD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates traveling skills 4 Demonstrates balancing skills 5 Uses fingers and hands 7a Uses writing and drawing tools 7b <p>Head Start Early Learning Outcome Framework</p> <p>P-PMP 1 P-PMP 3</p>

Central Domains					
Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework	Approaches to Learning	Social and Emotional Development	Language and Literacy	Cognition	Perceptual, Motor and Physical Development
School Readiness Goals	<p>Children will manage feelings, emotions, actions and behaviors with support of familiar adults.</p> <p>Infants and Toddlers will increase their ability to be persistent and attentive.</p>	<p>Children will engage in positive interactions through secure relationships with consistent, responsive adults.</p> <p>Children will recognize and interpret emotions of others, including expressing care and concern for others, with support of familiar adults.</p>	<p>Children will attend to, understand, respond and learn communication and language from others.</p> <p>Children will understand and use an increasing number of words for communication, including expressing wants and needs, and engage in conversations with others.</p> <p>Children will attend to, repeat and use rhymes and refrains from stories and songs.</p>	<p>Children will actively explore their environment to discover what objects and people do, how things work, and how to make things happen.</p> <p>Children will use a variety of strategies to solve problems, including reasoning and planning ahead.</p>	<p>Children will develop and demonstrate use of large muscles for movement, exploration of the environment and self-help.</p> <p>Children will develop and demonstrate control of small muscles for exploration, play and daily routines.</p>
Infant/Toddler	<p>Teaching Strategies GOLD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manages feelings 1a Follows limits and expectations 1b Attends and engages 11a Persists 11b Shows curiosity and motivation 11c <p>Head Start Early Learning Outcome Framework</p> <p>IT-ATL 1 IT-ATL 2 IT-ATL 3 IT-ATL 4</p>	<p>Teaching Strategies GOLD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forms relationships with adults 2a Responds to emotional cues 2b Interacts with peers 2c <p>Head Start Early Learning Outcome Framework</p> <p>IT-SE 1 IT-SE 2 IT-SE 7 IT-SE 8</p>	<p>Teaching Strategies GOLD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehends language 8a Follows directions 8b Follows directions 8b Uses an expanding expressive vocabulary 9a Speaks clearly 9b Uses conventional grammar Engages in conversations 10a Recognizes and recalls 12a Make connections 12b <p>Head Start Early Learning Outcome Framework</p> <p>IT-LC 1 IT-LC 7 IT-LC 8 IT-SE 3 IT-LC 9</p>	<p>Teaching Strategies GOLD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attends and engages 11a Persists 11b Solves problems 11c Shows curiosity and motivation 11d Shows flexibility and inventiveness in thinking 11e <p>Head Start Early Learning Outcome Framework</p> <p>IT-C 1 IT-C 6</p>	<p>Teaching Strategies GOLD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates traveling skills 4 Demonstrates balancing skills 5 Demonstrates gross-motor manipulative skills 6 Uses fingers and hands 7a Uses writing and drawing tools 7b <p>Head Start Early Learning Outcome Framework</p> <p>IT-PMP 3 IT-PMP 4 IT-PMP 7</p>

DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

All of our programs are equipped to support children and families who are dual language learners. From enrollment to home visits to daily classroom attendance it is our goal to help you and your child feel comfortable using your home language along side English. Play materials, stories, games and everyday items can be customized to include your home language along side English. All staff in the classroom and outside the classroom are trained to work with children who may speak another language. It is very important to help your child to feel comfortable and to learn both languages while in our classrooms.

POSITIVE BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT AND GUIDANCE PROCEDURE POLICY

Early Learning Connections Inc.'s Positive Behavior Management and Guidance Procedure policy is designed to keep all children and staff safe in the classroom and provide as much support for children as possible. Students, parents, and staff are provided the atmosphere to feel welcome, develop a sense of belonging, and to form respectful friendships and relationships.

Early Learning Connections, Inc.'s early learning programs aim to promote children's social-emotional skills to become competent learners. This includes developing empathy, anger management, problem solving, and impulse control skills. A consistent and predictable routine in a safe environment in the classroom helps children to behave in a positive way.

Early Learning Connections, Inc. staff can help prevent children from behaving in a way that is harmful to themselves, others, or the environment by consistently reviewing the behavioral expectations with parents and children daily. Targeted aggression and unsafe behaviors have a negative impact on the learning environment and teachers will intervene so children feel supported and safe.

The policy is designed to support the child, family and staff throughout the multi-tiered process. Prevention, Intervention and Transition procedures are clearly stated for everyone involved. The Positive Behavior Management and Guidance Procedure Policy (ED-03-101) can be found in your Welcome Packet.



SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT

Program Standards require screening for each child to determine the need for further, in-depth evaluation. Screening will be done within 45 days of a child's entry into the program and will include developmental, behavioral, and sensory (vision and hearing) screenings. Screenings are administered to determine if there is a need for a formal, in-depth evaluation that would be completed by a specialist.

Each child's level of development, and progress over time, are observed and documented so that strengths and needs are identified. The Teacher/Parent Educator develops individualized goals and objectives. Teachers/Parent Educators will discuss this with parents at least three times each year to gain input and jointly plan the child's educational program.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Early Learning Connections, Inc. embraces a vision of mental wellness for children and families

The Agency has a Mental Health Consultant that is available to support the development of children's social emotional skills and behavior in the classroom. The consultant will observe classrooms and work together with the teachers to promote positive classroom environments. The Mental Health Consultant is also available to meet with families about any concerns they may have about their child's behavior and development of social emotional skills.

DISABILITIES SERVICES

As an inclusive program, all children, including children with disabilities or special health care needs, are welcomed into all programs. Reasonable accommodations are made to ensure that each child has the opportunity to participate in the full range of the program.

Together, staff and parents use the Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) to determine each child's current developmental levels in gross and fine motor, speech and language, cognition, and social skills. When screening results identify evidence of developmental concerns, or when children enroll with identified disabilities, our program works closely with parents and the ARIN Intermediate Unit Early Intervention Program to ensure that children are evaluated and/or receive all necessary services.

Children with an Individual Education Program (IEP) or Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) are eligible for additional services to support their development. Early Learning Connections, Inc. collaborates with the IU Preschool Early Intervention Program to provide services for children who are eligible for special education programs.

The staff and parents work together to provide a learning environment that meets the individual needs of all children. Please feel free to talk to your Teacher/Parent Educator about any concerns you may have with your child's development.

TRANSITIONS

Transition to Kindergarten

Kindergarten readiness and social competency are the primary goals of the Agency. When a child is of kindergarten age, the Teacher/Parent Educator/Family Service Worker will provide parents with registration dates and times from the various school districts, along with other necessary information a parent will need when enrolling their child for school.

Additional information and materials will be sent home to parents regarding the transition to kindergarten experience. Training will also be available for parents of kindergarten bound children to address any questions and discuss ways parents can advocate for their child upon entering the school system.

Lastly, children's educational records will be forwarded to the school district of residence, with parental consent in an effort to help schools plan for future programming.

Transition from Early Head Start to Head Start

Six months before your child turns 3 years old, you and your Parent Educator will begin to discuss and plan for the next step/transition of your child.

This includes:

- A review of your family's income eligibility
- Your interest in where your child attends programming- child care, Head Start, Home Based Head Start
- Coordinating Special Services as needed (IFSP/IEP)
- A visit to the classroom

If your child turns 3 after your School District's Kindergarten cut off date, your child may remain in Early Head Start for additional months until he or she can transition into Head Start.

CELEBRATION POLICY

The goal is to offer pleasant and meaningful classroom celebrations. The practices we follow are:

1. Seasonal Celebrations are part of the Head Start experience for children.
2. Teachers will schedule these events and plan the activities and food for the celebration. Ideas from parents are welcome!
3. Classrooms will have a sign-up sheet for families who would like to contribute to a celebration. There will be enough celebrations so that each parent need only sign up once a year.
4. Due to the potential for allergies that children/staff might have, we are not able to have families and friends bring food from home for the classroom. We require families to bring nutritional store bought food items in the original packaging for these activities that are low in sugar, salt and fat. All food served in the classroom must be commercially prepared. It is suggested that teachers develop and offer to parents a nutritious snack list.
5. We always want children to feel safe. For this reason, we do not allow costumes or masks, as these can be scary to young children. Neither adults nor children are permitted to enter the classrooms in costumes.
6. We are fortunate to have families in our program from many different places, cultures, and belief systems. Support the heritage and culture of each child and family as well as responding to the majority culture of the classroom. Invite parents and grandparents to tell stories, show off clothes and artifacts, and teach simple crafts, show children how to prepare some of their foods, and tell how they celebrate their heritage at home.
7. When a classroom is located in the School District buildings, we will follow the district's guidelines in regards to celebrations.



HEALTH REQUIREMENTS

Healthy children are better able to learn. The program requires parents to follow the PA-EPSDT and CDC schedule for well child checkups and immunizations. Dental exams two times per year are strongly encouraged.

If a child is unable to eat any of the food that is provided for medical or religious reasons, parents should notify the staff. Parents must present a written statement from their family doctor or clergyman in order for a child to be given a meal different than the planned menu.

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL HEALTH CARE NEEDS

If your child has special health care needs, such as allergies, asthma, medication, etc. we require a written health care plan developed by a medical professional prior to starting the program. We will maintain the plan in the classroom and on the bus. If there is a food allergy, we will need your doctor to verify and provide recommended substitutions in writing.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL TREATMENT

Injuries or Illness Requiring Medical or Dental Care

- 1) The caregiver who is with the child and who has had pediatric first aid training will provide first aid.
- 2) When immediate medical help is required staff will call 9-1-1. Staff will contact a parent or legal guardian or, if the parent or legal guardian cannot be reached, the alternate emergency contact person. The emergency facility used by the program is the closest medical facility.
- 3) A staff member will accompany the child and remain with the child until the parent or legal guardian assumes responsibility for the child.
- 4) Staff will complete a **Child Injury Report** as soon after the incident as possible. The form will be signed by the parent or legal guardian.
- 5) Dental emergencies: Dental injuries will be given first aid as in #1 above. If emergency dental care is required, a staff member will accompany the child and remain with the child until the parent or legal guardian assumes responsibility for the child.

REPORTING CHILD INJURY

A ***Child Injury Report Form*** will be completed for:

- An incident that results in an injury or a visible mark on a child (bites, cuts, bruises, swollen body parts, etc.).
- A medical emergency due to a child's ongoing health condition (asthma attack, convulsions, seizure, etc.).
- Any incident that involves the child's head even if there are no visible marks or signs of a concussion. The parent must be contacted as soon as possible after the incident.

GUIDELINES FOR ILL CHILDREN

If your child becomes ill with the symptoms listed below we will notify you to pick up your child. This is to ensure the child's comfort and to prevent the spread of infection. You may need to call your pediatrician for advice and care.

1. **FEVER:** 100.4 degrees F. for all children
2. **UNUSUAL LETHARGY**, irritability, persistent crying, and difficult breathing.
3. **UNCONTROLLED DIARRHEA:** Three episodes with increased stool water that is not contained by the diaper or toilet use.
4. **VOMITING:** two or more times
5. **MOUTH SORES:** with drooling
6. **UNIDENTIFIABLE RASH** accompanied with a fever or change in behavior.

CHILDREN WILL ALSO BE EXCLUDED IF THEY CANNOT PARTICIPATE IN ALL DAILY ACTIVITIES AND EXHIBIT SIGNS OF ILLNESS.

If your child is excluded with; high fever, excessive vomiting, or uncontrollable diarrhea he/she must be symptom free in order to return. If you bring your child and symptoms re-occur your child will be excluded again and you will be contacted to pick up your child.

WHEN SIGNS OF A CONTAGIOUS DISEASE AND/OR ILLNESS ARE EVIDENT, THE FOLLOWING WILL TAKE PLACE:

1. **For the child's comfort and to prevent spread of infection, the teacher/site staff will call and ask the parent or the emergency contact person to take the child home.**
2. **If signs of a contagious disease are evident, staff may request doctor's written clearance for child to return. If parent does not get clearance, the child can not return until all signs of suspected contagious illness are no longer present.**
3. **If a child is diagnosed with a contagious disease a note will be sent to all other parents informing them that their child has been exposed to a specific disease and a listing of the symptoms that they should look for. (No children's names will be disclosed.)**
4. **When parents see these symptoms, they must keep their children out of school until symptoms are no longer present. If diagnosed with a communicable disease, refer to following communicable list as to when children may return.**
5. **Teachers can refuse a child's admittance if a child displays symptoms of the communicable disease or appears to be too sick to attend class.**

CHILDREN MUST BE KEPT OUT OF THE PROGRAM WHEN DIAGNOSED WITH A COMMUNICABLE DISEASE FOR THE INDICATED PERIOD OF TIME:

Communicable Disease	When The Child Can Return
Chicken Pox**	When all blisters have scabbed (usually 6 – 10 days)
Diphtheria**	48 hours from the time the child has taking antibiotics, or until there are two negative culture tests. Documentation must be given to staff member
Fifth Disease	Must be fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication and have no respiratory systems; child could still have a rash they are not likely to be contagious when rash appears.
Flu (Influenza)	Must be fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medications.
Giardiasis	24 hours after diarrhea and vomiting stops (symptoms can last up to 6 weeks or longer).
Haemophilus Influenza Type B (HIB)**	Child must have written clearance from a health professional or local health department. Documentation must be given to staff member.
Hand, Foot, and Mouth	When child is fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication, can contain drool, and all draining sores are covered.
Hepatitis A**	One week after onset of illness and after immune globulin has been given to all contacts. Documentation of immune globulin must be given to the staff.
Infectious Diarrhea	Child's diarrhea has stopped for 24 hours and has clearance letter from health care professional and or a negative lab test result. Documentation must be given to staff member.
Impetigo	24 hours after doctor prescribed treatment has begun and all sores are scabbed over without drainage
Lice	To re-enter into the classroom, the child must be free of live lice – Appendix HS-C and Appendix HS – D are given to parents.
Measles**	4 days after the rash began.
Meningitis	Child must have written clearance from a health professional. Documentation must be given to staff member.
Mononucleosis	Child will must a doctor's written permission to be re-admitted. Documentation must be given to staff member.
MRSA	Child must have a doctor's written clearance to return and sores must not have drainage or pus. Sores must be covered. Documentation must be given to staff member.
Mumps**	5 days after the onset of swelling.
Pertussis (Whooping Cough)**	5 days from the time the child begins taking antibiotics.
Pink Eye (acute bacterial contagious conjunctivitis)	24 hours after doctor prescribed treatment is begun.
Pinworms	24 hours after doctor prescribed treatment has begun.

Ringworm	24 hours after beginning medication.
Respiratory Streptococcal Infections	(Scarlet Fever, Bronchitis, Strep Throat, etc.) Child may return after 24 hours of antibiotic treatment.
Roseola	Child may return after fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication.
Rotavirus**	Child may return after 24 hours of symptoms free.
Rubella **	7 days from the time the rash begins.
Salmonella	24 hours clear of diarrhea and must have written clearance from health professional. Documentation must be given to staff member.
Scabies	24 hours after treatment and must have written clearance from health professional. Documentation must be given to staff member.
Shigella	After treatment complete and two stool cultures taken 24 hours apart are negative. Documentation must be given to staff member.
Tonsillitis	24 hours from the time the child begins taking antibiotics and is fever free without the use of fever reducing medication.
Tuberculosis (TB)	As soon as effective therapy has been started and adherence to medication is documented - will require updates or changes to treatment plan via documentation from health professional. Documentation of treatment plan must be given to staff member.

****Child should have vaccination against – if parent determines they do not want their child to be vaccinated than they must complete Appendix HS-LL****

RE-ADMISSION AFTER MEDICAL TREATMENT

If any child has been to a hospital, urgent care, emergency room, or has had any surgeries/treatments, the parent must provide written documentation allowing the child to attend the program, with or without restrictions. Documentation must be provided from a health professional.



ADMINISTERING MEDICATION POLICY

Medication administration is limited to prescription or non-prescription (over the counter) medications ordered by a health care professional for a specific child and accompanied by written consent of the parent/legal guardian.

Early Learning Connections will provide parents with an ***Authorization for Medication Form***. The parent must take this form to the child's physician who completes the top section of the form. (If the parent does not have this form when they go to the physician, a written order from the physician that contains the information listed below will be accepted and stapled to the form.) The written order of the health professional must specify:

- The medical reason for the medication
- Name of the medication
- Dose
- Route
- When (time of the day)
- For how long (number of days)
- Any reactions or side effects that may occur

The documentation is brought to the facility with the required medication. The parent completes the middle section and the staff person completes the bottom section of the form.

Medication must be in the original container (pharmacy or manufacturer supplied) with a label that includes the child's name, date the prescription was issued and when it expires.

The label must also include the prescriber's name, dose instructions, pharmacy name and phone number, and relevant warnings.

Once a medication is discontinued if there is any remaining it will be given to the parent or legal guardian when they come to pick up their child. They will be required to sign the bottom of Medication. Three attempts will be made to return unused medication before medication will be disposed of appropriately by teaching staff.

NUTRITION PROGRAM

Early Learning Connections, Inc. participates in the Department of Education Federal Food Program. Breakfast and lunch prepared by the school districts food services, are provided. Parents may request a copy of the monthly menus.

1. Non-Discrimination Statement: "all meals are served to children under the Child Care Food Program are served at no separate charge regardless of race, color, sex, age, handicap, or national origin. There is no discrimination in admissions policy, meal service or the use of facilities".
2. Complaint Procedures: "Any complaints of discrimination should be submitted in writing within 180 days of the incident to the Secretary of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20050". Civil Rights Complaint Forms are available in the office.

PROBLEM RESOLUTION PROCEDURE

The Purpose of this Procedure: Sometimes parents have a concern or problem and this process will help make sure parents can be heard and concerns be resolved.

1. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM CONCERNS

- a) If parents have a concern or question about a classroom activity or the education program, they are encouraged to speak directly to the Classroom Teacher.
- b) If the parent feels that the problem has not been solved, or if a parent is unable to discuss the problem with the teacher, he/she should contact the Program Manager. Program Manager's phone numbers can be obtained by calling the Administration Office at 724-287-2761.
- c) If the problem cannot be solved at this level within a one (1) week period, he/she should contact the Program Director.
- d) If the problem has not been resolved at this point, a written statement should be given to the Problem Resolution Committee. Please address to: Problem Resolution Committee, Early Learning Connections, Inc., 139 Rieger Road, Butler, PA 16001.

2. NON-EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM CONCERNS

- a) The parent should first discuss the matter with the Family Service Worker. The parent and Family Service Worker should try to solve the problem.
- b) If the parent feels that the problem has not been solved, he/she may present the problem to the Program Manager.
- c) If the problem cannot be solved at this level within a one (1) week period, it should be presented to the Family Engagement Director.
- d) If the problem has not been resolved at this point, a written statement should be given to the Problem Resolution Committee, addressed to Problem Resolution Committee, Early Learning Connections, Inc., 139 Rieger Road, Butler, PA 16001.

If a parent feels that he/she cannot discuss the matter with certain individuals, because of their personal involvement, he/she may go directly to the person on the next higher step in the Resolution Procedure.

The Problem Resolution Committee will investigate the issues and attempt to resolve the problem. If specific action seems necessary, the Problem Resolution Committee will make recommendations to Policy Council.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Child Abuse:	State Childline Children & Youth Agency (Weekends and after 4:30 p.m. – Call 911)	1-800-932-0313 724-548-3466
Domestic Violence:	HAVIN VOICe 24 Hour Hotline	724-543-1180 1-800-841-8881
Housing or Food Related:	Salvation Army: Catholic Charities:	724-543-6622 724-548-1009
Medical:	Armstrong County Memorial Hospital: Ambulance: Poison Control Center (Pittsburgh):	724-543-8500 9-1-1 1-800-222-1222
Armstrong Community Action Program:		724-548-5754
Early Learning Resource Center – Region 3		724-285-9431
Resource and Referrals for Child Care:		724-287-1004
Mental Health Crisis:		1-877-333-2470
Language Line:		https://www.languageline.com

PARENT TRAININGS

Parents whose children are enrolled in all programs are invited to participate in Early Learning Connections, Inc. Parent Trainings. The trainings which are offered locally on regular basis, address a wide variety of topics that are of interest to parents of preschool age children. Your child's teacher will send informational flyers home to you in your child's back pack. The flyers will include dates, times, locations and registration information.

Dual Language Families: We will support and provide you with materials and/or interpreters in your home language for the parent trainings as well as any other family events, meetings and home visits as requested.



VOLUNTEERING IN HEAD START

There are 4 ways you can provide In-Kind hours to the Head Start program

1. Attend Parent Meetings and Policy Council Meetings

Policy Council is held monthly. It is an opportunity to give input to budgets, hiring of employee, Program Plans and report on your local Parent Meetings and Family Events. Babysitting and snack are provided

The Parent Meetings' are held 3 times a year with the Family Events.

2. Volunteer in the Classroom

Parents are always welcome in the classroom. Come as a volunteer, share your talents, and learn more about working with preschoolers. The children enjoy it and, with extra help, teachers can plan activities they wouldn't be able to otherwise. There may be a need for volunteers to have clearances. Staff will help you obtain them.

When volunteering in the classroom, please do not use your cell phone unless it is an emergency.

3. At Home Activities Calendar

At home activities are fun ways or you and your child to spend time together and to learn!

You will be provided with monthly activities. These ideas coordinate with what is going on in the classroom or home, and with the curriculum that we use. During home visits and parent/teacher conferences we also receive ideas from you also to what you want your child to learn.

Some possible at home activities could be:

- Counting the number of circles in your home.
- Reading together.
- Making a creation with shapes (circle, squares and triangles).
- Gather a collection of leaves. Look for similarities and differences.

Parents can earn up to 50 hours of in-kind a month for the program.

Please be sure to indicate your hours and sign the "At Home Activities Form" so that we can count your time as in-kind. **THANK YOU!**

In Kind is a term you will hear often in Head Start and Early Head Start. Because our program is funded by a grant awarded by the Federal Government, we are required to provide 25% local matching funds. The time that you volunteer in the program will be converted into a dollar amount so that our program meets its in-kind amount.

4. Health Advisory Committee

Parents, staff and community professionals provide guidance and oversight to the medical, dental, nutrition and mental health components of our program.

This group formulates health policies, develops and approves program work plans, participates in program evaluations, and occasionally sponsors health-related events.

HOME AND SCHOOL CONNECTIONS FOR CENTER BASED HEAD START

- **“Home to School Connection Folder”**. Each day your child will bring home this folder in his/her backpack. Please check the folder daily for valuable information. We will also send home creative art work that your child has made. You, too, can use this folder to communicate with us. Send us notes and any other information that you want to share with us
- **Home Visits** are a very important part of our partnerships with parents/guardians. Your Family Service Worker will visit you at least 2 times a year and together you will talk about things that are important to you and your family. Your child’s teacher will also visit your home 2 times a year. During this time, you will talk about your child’s development and talk with the teacher about what you would like your child to be learning.
- **Parent/Teacher Conferences** are held 2 times a year in the classroom setting when children are not present. Like home visits, these two meetings are also a time to talk about your child’s growth and development, and it is your time to talk about what you would like your child to be learning.
- **Classroom Times** is written by your child’s teacher and is sent home weekly. Look over it to find out what books will be read, what special events and study units will be occurring (Pets!, Buildings!, Trees!, Recycling!, etc.)
- **In Home In-Kind Activity Calendar** is developed by your teacher for your child and you to do together. It is sent home monthly, and is full of ideas for learning. These activities go along with what is occurring in the classroom. Returning them to the teacher at the end of the month is valuable for you and Head Start.

HOME VISITS IN EARLY HEAD START

Whether you are new to Head Start or are the parent of several children who have been in a program for years, *you are your child's first teacher.*

Your Home as a Learning Center

Your child learns about himself or herself, other people, and the surrounding world every day. For your child, everyday moments like getting dressed, preparing a meal, setting the table, taking a walk, taking a bath or reading a book are learning moments. They are filled with interesting things to see, touch, smell, hear, taste, explore, and do.

Your home is filled with interesting things to see and do for your infant, toddler, or preschooler. Things that are fun and can help them learn are right there in your own kitchen, living room, closet, and even the garage.

Weekly Home Visits

To further support you as your child's first teacher, the programs consists of weekly home visits with your Parent Educator. By observing and interacting with your child, you and your Parent Educator visitor will work together to establish goals based on the child's development. These home visits provide opportunities for you to strengthen your relationship with your child and help them develop and enhance skills they already have. The Parent Educator will also work with you to establish family goals, provide community resource referrals as needed and will share information about program activities and training opportunities that are available.

Home visits are scheduled for a minimum of an hour and a half at the parent's home. As the parent, you are encouraged to help plan the home visits and will participate in the planned activities with your child/children.

Home Visiting Schedule

When you enroll in the Program, you and the Parent Educator work together to set a visit day and time for weekly visits. Establishing a set visit schedule benefits parents, children and home visiting staff.

- Families will be expected to participate in visits on this day/time weekly and notify the Parent Educator as soon as possible if they are unable to participate in a visit (appointment, travel, illness, etc.)
- If a family is unable to attend their scheduled visit on their regular day and time the home visitor will attempt to schedule a "make-up" visit that same week.
- If the Parent Educator is unable to attend the scheduled visit, he/she will notify you in advance
- Home visits are scheduled to last a minimum of an hour and a half.

THE PARENT TO DO LIST

- Provide a small light weight back pack that you and the teacher can use to send things back and forth between home and school.
- Check your child's backpack each day for information from the teacher.
- Dress your child in casual, comfortable clothing keeping in mind that classroom activities can at times be a little messy (painting, playing outdoors etc.)
- Send a complete change of clothes to be left in the classroom in case of accidents. Include tops and bottoms as well as underwear and socks.

When your child has to change into an item of extra clothing, the clothing that has been soiled will be sent home to you in your child's backpack. Use this as a reminder to send in a replacement item to add to your child's extra clothes.

- Label your child's belongings with a permanent marker. Put your child's first and last name on coats, hats, sweaters boots, mittens etc.
- If you self-transport, please walk your child to the teacher and pick your child up from the teacher.

Specific procedures for drop off and pick up will be determined by each classroom, and will be based on the safest and efficient system for each classroom's location.

- Each day that your child is absent or tardy, call the classroom to let the teacher know that your child will not be in or will be late, and arriving at a certain time.
- On the day your child returns to school after an absence, send in a written excuse that tells why the child was not in school.
- Keep the lines of communication with your child's teacher open. Your questions, comments and concerns are welcome and contribute to continuous quality improvement.