



First Start Partnerships *for* Children & Families

FAMILY HANDBOOK



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DEAR FAMILY,

Welcome to the First Start Partnerships family! Congratulations on taking an important step to prepare your child for kindergarten by enrolling in a high quality early education program! Our quality is proven by NAEYC Accreditation+ (A+), and Franklin County has proclaimed 2026 as the Year of the Young Child—a community-wide commitment to celebrating and supporting young children. I want to assure you that at First Start Partnerships for Children and Families, your child will be cared for in a safe and nurturing environment for learning. Your child will grow through fun, intentional, and developmentally appropriate activities.

Our First Start programs are designed with your family in mind. We value you as your child's first and forever teacher and seek to form a partnership with you to foster the learning and healthy development of your child. We invite you into the classroom to volunteer, observe and/or have lunch with your child, or speak with school personnel. Our goal is to make First Start Partnerships for Children and Families a vibrant community that fosters friendships and creates a supportive network.

Adjustment periods may vary depending on the age of your child and prior experience in a classroom and/or other structured settings. Our teachers are very experienced in welcoming new children and will work with you to make the process as seamless as possible.

As we develop our partnership, please feel free to share ideas and suggestions. Consider joining a parent committee or volunteering in your child's classroom. Your involvement will help your child to see just how special school is and that you value his or her learning.

We value the need for open communication between families and teachers. We look forward to getting to know you and offering you and your child a safe, caring, and joyful educational environment. Thank you again for enrolling your child in a First Start Partnerships for Children and Families program.

"Leading the way" in early childhood education,

Rodney N. Benedick, M. Ed.
Chief Executive Officer

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ABOUT US

Our Mission:

We partner with our families, schools, and communities to ensure that each child arrives ready for kindergarten

Our Values



We value **family**

as children depend on family for love, safety, health and learning. We nurture a family-friendly workplace so our staff can be there for their families too.

We value **compassion**

dedicated to love, joy, empathy and hope necessary to support children, families and ourselves to become who we want to be.



We value **excellence**

and the continuous process of setting goals, reviewing progress, and planning for improved outcomes for children, families, and our organization.

We value **partnerships**

for the connections to others that allow us to serve our children, families, and communities better than we can serve them alone.



We value **equity**

to ensure equal opportunities for children, families and staff members regardless of race, ethnicity, ability, religion, language, family income, family structure, geography, gender identity and sexual orientation.

Our Vision:

For Children:

To ensure school readiness by providing high quality education and strong foundations for social, emotional and physical development

For Families:

To create stronger, healthier families by ensuring access to community resources, increasing positive parenting practices and providing opportunities for personal growth.

For Communities:

To build more vibrant communities through advocacy, education, collaboration, and commitment to building stronger families.

Growing **Hearts**
&
Minds

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

Board of Directors 2026-2027

First Start Partnerships' Board of Directors, together with the CEO, are responsible for maintaining a formal structure for program governance, for the oversight of quality services for children and families and for making decisions related to program design and implementation. In general, the Board of Directors has legal and fiscal responsibility for First Start Partnerships for Children and Families.

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Special Education Director

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Family Outreach Director

Erica Nemzek

Bloom Center Director

The Board of Directors and CEO perform their responsibilities with input and data from a variety of sources. One important source is the parents and families we serve. There is a formal parent council for families.

Policy Council

The Policy Council supports families in becoming involved in their child's education and offers an opportunity for participation in program leadership. Policy Council offers guidance on overall program operations, including family engagement efforts, community involvement, Parent Committee activities, review of written procedures, and review of program efforts.

All family participants are invited to become members of the Policy Council. Members may voluntarily elect to serve in officer roles to guide the Policy Council's work and focus. Policy Council meets once per month.

If you are interested in serving on the Policy Council please talk to your Community Hub Director.

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

At First Start Partnerships, we continually review the high quality performance standards set by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and our funders. These standards serve as the foundation we use to deliver high-quality services to support the school readiness of our children. NAEYC and Program Performance Standards include:

- Having well-qualified and trained staff
- Specific staff-child ratios
- Length of children's day
- Comprehensive curriculum

We continually assess our children's progress and teacher practices to ensure we are meeting and exceeding the standards. We value input from families, schools and communities in this continuous quality improvement process.

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

All staff of First Start Partnerships for Children and Families commit to:

- Protecting and nurturing children.
- Ensuring that programs for young children are based on current knowledge and research of child development and early childhood education.
- Respecting and supporting families in their task of nurturing children.
- Respecting colleagues in early childhood care and education and supporting them in maintaining the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Code of Ethical Conduct.
- Serving as an advocate for children, their families, and their teachers in the community and society.
- Staying informed of and maintaining high standards of professional conduct.
- Engaging in an ongoing process of self-reflection, realizing that personal characteristics, biases, and beliefs have an impact on children and families.
- Being open to new ideas and learning from the suggestions of others.
- Continuing to learn, grow, and contribute as a professional.
- Honoring the ideals and principles of the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct.



PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES

PARENT COMMITTEES

Parent Committees are an excellent way to get involved with the day-to-day planning of First Start Partnerships for Children and Families programming. Parent Committee participants are involved with advising staff in developing and implementing local program policies and activities/services to ensure that the needs of all families are met. We look forward to having your input. Look for more information about Parent Committee opportunities from your child's classroom teacher or home visitor.

PARENT/GUARDIAN RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Your participation and involvement are essential to the success of First Start Partnerships for Children and Families. We believe that you are your child's first and forever teacher and you are valuable to our program.

Parent Rights

My rights as a parent or guardian in the program are:

- To be recognized as my child's primary educator.
- To be treated with respect by First Start Partnerships for Children and Families programming.
- To be welcomed in my child's classroom. There is an open-door policy, and I may visit the center at any time during its hours of operation.
- To receive information and guidance from the program about my child's progress and development, including regular progress reports from my child's teacher.
- To participate in discussions about my child's progress and setting goals for my child's learning and development.
- To be supported as an advocate for my child. If my child has a diagnosed disability or has been referred for concern, I will be involved by the local intermediate unit in creating an Individualized Education Plan or Early Intervention in creating an Individualized Family Service Plan and will be kept informed of my child's progress in meeting his/her goals.
- To take part in decisions regarding my child's center and the program. My ideas and suggestions will be valued, and I will have opportunities to share them with staff and other parents. Opportunities include surveys, Parent Committee meetings, and Policy Council meetings.

- To be informed about resources within the community related to education, health, social services, employment, etc.
- To review and ask for clarification on policies and procedures.
- To submit any concerns regarding the program's alleged violation of the local and federal standards.
- To report any concerns about child abuse or neglect occurring at the program to the state.

Parent Responsibilities

My responsibilities as a parent/guardian in the program include:

- Ensuring my child attends the program consistently and on time to support his/her development.
- Participating actively in the program and take advantage of the opportunities that the program offers.
- Working with teachers, staff, and other families in a respectful and cooperative manner.
- Being open to new ideas and experiences that can benefit my child(ren) and me.
- Offering my opinions and suggestions to improve the program.
- Asking questions of my child's teacher, the Community Hub Director, or other members of the staff.
- Reinforcing what my child learns at the program by working with my child at home.
- Ensuring that my child is up to date on all required medical and dental needs.
- Agreeing to access follow-up care when health concerns are suspected or identified.
- Participating in the orientation process to assist my child with transitioning into the school year at his/her center.
- Participating in home visits and parent-teacher conferences each year with my child's teachers.
- Participating in completing developmental screenings and sharing observations of my child's development.
- Volunteering with my child's program.
- Ensuring that my child has an extra, seasonal appropriate set of clothing at the center at all times.

FAMILY VOLUNTEERS- We need you!

First Start Partnerships values the important impact volunteers make in our classrooms and the program as a whole. Your children benefit from having parents and family members spend time with them and shows your commitment to your child's education. We have an open-door policy and there are many opportunities to be involved in your child's education whether in the home or in the classroom. For more information on how to volunteer in the classroom or at home, speak with your classroom teacher!

Volunteer Clearances and Training

In accordance with Pennsylvania law, First Start Partnerships for Children and Families requires volunteers to have updated clearances on file. As a volunteer, you will be required to obtain the following clearances, screenings, and training:

- PA Criminal Record
 - Go to <https://epatch.state.pa.us/>
 - Click on "New Record Check – Volunteers Only"
 - Read the information and click "Accept"
 - Complete the requested information
- PA Child Abuse History
 - Go to <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis/public/home>
 - Click "Create Individual Account"
 - Read the information and complete the profile
 - Follow the directions provided
- FBI Criminal Background Check
 - PA residents for 10 years or longer will need to sign a 10-year Disclosure form; if you have not lived in Pennsylvania for 10 consecutive years or more, the FBI Criminal Background Check must be performed.
 - If your child's classroom is in a school building, an FBI Criminal Background Check will be performed regardless of the length of residency.
- Pennsylvania state law requires that all volunteers also participate in the Mandated Reporter training. The training is provided free of charge online at www.reportabusepa.pitt.edu. Once you have completed this online training, you must submit the certificate of completion to FSP.
- If your child's classroom is in a school building, you may be required to have a TB (Tuberculosis) screening completed.

If you are interested in volunteering and would like assistance in obtaining your clearances, please reach out to your child's teacher.

METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

Here are the many ways we will be reaching out to you:

- Flyers and formal invitations
- Facebook/Instagram
- Remind
- Face-to-face conversations
- Email and text messages
- Phone calls

You can also visit the First Start Partnerships for Children and Families website for information. www.firststartpartnerships.org

School Calendars

School Calendars can be found on our website www.firststartpartnerships.org under the Resources tab. Calendars are available for download and print.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All files and information recorded in our database regarding children and families in the program are kept strictly confidential. Access to these files is limited to the staff that are involved with your child/family and consultants as needed. (e.g. in the case of a specific health concern).

Release of Confidential Information

First Start Partnerships will not release information from a child's record or file without your consent. If we need to share or receive information about your child with another organization, we will request that you sign a release form.

You may request access to your child's records. Once a child leaves First Start Partnerships, their file will be kept by our program for at least one year. You have the right to add any information to your child's record. It is also your right to request that information be deleted from your child's record. This request must be done in writing.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

First Start Partnerships is committed to creating an environment that fosters respect, tolerance, and clear, honest communication. First Start Partnerships is committed to resolving concerns and grievances as quickly as possible. Most concerns and grievances can be addressed effectively within the classroom. If a specific classroom concern arises, you should discuss the issue with your child's teacher. We encourage you to discuss more general, hub related concerns with the classroom's Community Hub Director. The Community Hub Director will involve teaching staff as needed.

If you feel that your problem is not resolved, you may wish to file a formal complaint. All complaints must be in writing and submitted to the classroom's Community Hub Director.

Step 1 - A letter must be completed and signed with details of the complaint.

Step 2 - Submit the complaint to the classroom's Community Hub Director.

Step 3 - Within 7 business days, the classroom's Community Hub Director will complete an investigation to include any observations of the situation and interview any persons directly involved. This will be completed using the External Complaint Investigation Form and the External Complaint Statement Form.

Step 4 - Within 5 business days of the completed investigation, a follow-up will be completed with you to share results and recommendations.



OUR PROGRAM

OUR GOALS FOR CHILDREN

Our teachers take great care in setting goals for each child and lesson planning to meet the interests of the children. We plan experiences to help children gain the skills that will help them to be ready for school.

Social Experiences to teach skills for “play’ with other children, self-help skills, respect for classroom materials, and being a positive member of the classroom community.

Approaches to Learning to teach skills for engagement in activities through curiosity, initiative, and self-regulation.

Language Development to understand and follow directions, ask questions, talk with peers and adults, and build their vocabulary.

Literacy Development to recognize letters, identify and write their names, and understand and value books and printed materials.

Cognitive Development to sort and match objects, count and identify numbers, recognize colors and shapes, and problem solve.

Physical Development to develop large muscles to run, jump, climb and small muscles to hold a pencil and cut with scissors.

These plans and experiences support learning in large groups, small groups, and individual children. All children develop at their own pace. Our goal is to support each child’s individual learning while maintaining a safe and healthy environment for all children in the classroom. Our goal is to partner with you to make the learning experience a positive and beneficial one for your child.

CURRICULUM

Our teachers use *Creative Curriculum* and *Teaching Strategies GOLD* to plan lessons for your child. Children's needs and interests are identified through ongoing observation-based assessments that are gathered by the teaching staff. The documentation and assessments of children's development and learning inform lessons, classroom activities, and overall program improvements. We will discuss your child's progress, gather input from you about your own observations of your child's development, and discuss any questions or concerns you have about your child's development and learning throughout the program year as requested, as well as during Parent-Teacher Conferences and Home Visits.

Our Early Head Start home visitors use *Parents as Teachers* in supporting you as your child's first teacher. The curriculum consists of four components to provide your family with quality, research-based services: home visits, group experiences, child screenings, and resource networking. Your home visitor will use these four parts to assist you in creating and achieving goals specific to your child and family.

All of our lessons at First Start Partnerships meet the *Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework* and the *Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards*. All First Start Partnerships teaching staff have been trained in the use of the *Creative Curriculum* and *Teaching Strategies GOLD* assessment. Teaching staff must complete an online certification process every three years to hone their observation skills and be found reliable to conduct the assessment.

Our Commitment to Playful Learning

Young children learn best when they are actively exploring, creating, imagining, asking questions, and interacting with others. Through play, children build language, literacy, math, science, problem-solving, self-regulation, creativity, and social-emotional skills in ways that are meaningful and joyful.

Play is intentionally woven into every part of the day—from learning centers and outdoor exploration to small-group activities, story time, mealtimes, and everyday routines. Our teachers thoughtfully plan playful learning experiences that build on each child's interests and strengths, creating opportunities for children to discover, practice new skills, and develop a lifelong love of learning.

Early Head Start Group Experiences

Family Days are held twice per month and are designed to provide opportunities to explore topics around child development, parenting, and positive parent-child interactions. We will implement a variety of parent-child activities, presentations, and discussion groups to support your family through the involvement of all families and home visitors.

- All families are encouraged to attend and participate.
- Please notify your home visitor as soon as possible if you are unable to attend.
- You will have the opportunity to develop relationships with other families and build lasting friendships.
- Each Family Day will last about two hours.
- A healthy snack or meal will be provided for you and your child(ren).

CHILD PROTECTIVE UNIT

First Start Partnerships' preschool classrooms will be participating in a program called Child Protective Unit, an additional unit of the Second Step social-emotional learning program. The Weekly Themes in this unit build on foundational skills children learn in the Second Step program in particular self-talk, help-seeking, and assertiveness skills- and teach additional skills children need to recognize, report, and refuse unsafe situations, touches, and sexually abusive touch.

In these lessons, children will learn three types of skills:

- **Personal Safety.** Children will learn important safety rules, such as safety with guns, sharp tools, fire, and when riding on wheels or in cars. They will also learn to help them decide if something is safe or not.
- **Touching Safety.** Children will learn about safe, unsafe, and unwanted touches, and to tell a grown-up if someone breaks rules about touching private body parts.
- **Assertiveness.** These lessons will also give children a chance to practice asking a grown-up for help, telling a grown-up about an unsafe situation, and being assertive to get out of unsafe situations.

Your child will bring home simple, fun activities called Home Links that will help you understand what he/she is learning about safety at school and give your child another chance to practice safety skills. The following is an outline of the lessons that are included in the program:

Week 1: Ways to Stay Safe

Week 2: The Always Ask First Rule

Week 3: Safe and Unsafe Touches

Week 4: The Touching Rule

Week 5: Practicing Staying Safe

Week 6: Reviewing Safety Skills

TRANSITIONS

First Start Partnerships aims to support you and your child through all school transitions.

Children and families who transition from the infant/toddler program to our preschool program will:

- Be encouraged to visit your child's preschool classroom.
- Be able to discuss with the teachers any follow-up as needed during ongoing home visits to support you in the transition.
- Have classroom experiences and transition meetings that include discussions about the upcoming preschool transition.
- Have child outcomes, individualized goals, and your child's portfolio shared with the receiving preschool teacher.

Children and families who transition to Kindergarten will:

- Be encouraged to attend the information-sharing meeting within your home school district.
- Be provided with a list of necessary materials needed for Kindergarten registration, as well as registration information for your child's receiving elementary school or school district.
- Be able to discuss with the teachers any follow-up as needed to support you in gathering the necessary information.
- Participate in Kindergarten Registration events in your child's home school or district.
- Have classroom experiences that include discussions about the upcoming Kindergarten transition and reading books with children about starting Kindergarten.
- Have child outcomes, readiness checklists, and work samples shared with your child's receiving Kindergarten teacher or school district.
- Receive information about summer programs, school district lunch programs, school district summer learning programs, etc.

Children and families who transition out of the First Start Partnerships program will:

- Receive resources and information, as requested, to support the transition to other high-quality early childhood programs.
- Be assisted in sharing information, as requested and with permission.

USDA NONDISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the State or local Agency that administers the program or contact USDA through the Telecommunications Relay Service at 711 (voice and TTY). Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992.

Submit a completed form or letter to USDA by:

- (1) Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Mail Stop 9410 Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) Fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) Email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

CLASSROOM POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Appropriate Clothing

At First Start Partnerships, our children are involved in active play both inside and outside. It is important that your child come to school dressed appropriately for play as well as the season.

This includes:

- Comfortable clothing
- Comfortable closed-toed shoes that allow your child to run and play safely
- Coat, mittens, hats in cold weather
- Boots for rain or snow

Please send one full change of clothing including underwear and socks with your child to be kept in the classroom. This outfit should be appropriate for the season. Please label your child's clothing with their first name and last initial.

Outdoor Play

- Outdoor play will occur if the temperature falls above 25°F (including wind chill) or below 90°F.
- When poor air quality conditions exist (including ozone levels), or when there is a heat advisory in effect we will not be playing outside.

We will not be able to accommodate requests for children to stay inside during outdoor play.

Diapering/Toileting Policy

Your child will have his/her diapers/pull-ups checked every hour and changed at least every 2 hours. We will also change diapers as needed in between the 2 hour-time frames. When your child is showing signs that he/she is ready for toilet training, staff will work with you to meet your toilet-training goals.

In addition to scheduled bathroom breaks, your child will be able to use the toilet as needed during the school day.

Arrival and Departure

To keep your child safe, you or your authorized adult must bring your child to your classroom's drop-off and pick-up area when arriving and departing school. You must sign in your child at drop-off and sign out at pick-up. Your child's teacher will share classroom hours for arrival and departure and your classroom's drop-off and pick-up areas.

To maintain the safest and healthiest environment for our children, First Start Partnerships requests that vehicles are not left idling in our parking lots or on our campuses. No children should be left unattended in vehicles without an adult present at any time. To keep classroom environments free from toxins, please wipe or remove your shoes before entering one of our facilities.

When an emergency arises and you will be late for pick up, you **must notify** your child's teacher. If there is no communication within one hour, and no one has arrived to pick up your child, the local police department and Franklin County Children and Youth Agency **may** be called.

We know you understand that for the safety and well-being of your child, it is essential that all children are picked up on time by the appropriate people. At no time will staff hold the child responsible for the situation or discuss the issue with the child. Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Emergency Contact Information

During the enrollment process, you must provide Emergency Contact information. This information will be updated at least twice per year. First Start Partnerships must have at least one phone number by which we can reach you. We recommend that there be at least two emergency contacts (authorized persons that can pick up and transport the child home in your absence).

If contact information changes at any time, the classroom must be notified immediately. You must ensure that the information is current at all times: Changes or additions to emergency contacts must be made in writing.

Tobacco and Smoke-Free Zones

Understand that we are committed to the health and well-being of our students, staff and visitors. We encourage healthy lifestyles and minimizing exposure to tobacco products on our campuses to support this mission. This policy is being implemented in an effort to enhance the health of our community. All First Start Partnerships' classrooms, parking lots, outdoor areas and offices are tobacco and smoke-free zones.

Pick Up Authorization

Children will only be released to parents/guardians and authorized adults. Authorized adults should be **18 years of age or older**. Requests for a person of a younger age to pick up your child will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

All persons picking up your child from the classroom must have a photo ID for verification (preferably a driver's license), including parents/guardians.

You must indicate in writing who is authorized to pick up your child.

If a non-custodial parent has been denied access or granted limited access to your child by court order, **we must have documentation of this**. We will keep a copy on file and comply with the terms of the documentation. If any person picking up your child is physically and/or emotionally impaired to the extent that your child would be placed at risk of harm, we will not release your child. If this happens, staff will attempt to contact another authorized person for pick-up.

Attendance

Regular attendance ensures that your child will receive the greatest benefit from our program. We want your child to experience all of the learning activities planned on a daily basis. Data shows a direct connection between school readiness and success with regular attendance. Children are expected to attend our program each day for the entire length of the classroom session, unless your child is sick. You must contact your child's teacher when your child will be absent or tardy, preferably by or before 9:00 a.m. We will contact you if your child is unexpectedly absent. This may be done via phone call, text, or REMIND app.

First Start Partnerships strives to work with you to remove barriers, which may cause your child to be absent or tardy, so that he/she can benefit from the program. This may include completing an Attendance Success Plan to identify strategies to meet your child's attendance goals.

Early Head Start Home Visiting Attendance

Regular attendance ensures that your child will receive the greatest benefit from our program. We want you and your child to experience all of the learning activities we have planned with you. Data shows a direct connection between school readiness and success with regular attendance. Home Visits are planned to best meet your family's need and we ask that you commit to your regularly scheduled visit. If you need to reschedule a Home Visit appointment, please contact your Home Visitor immediately.

If your Home Visitor arrives at your home and you are not there, we will attempt to contact you to ensure you and your child's safety and well-being. If you miss three (3) consecutive Home Visits with no explanation, the Home Visitor will contact you to complete an Attendance Success Plan. Cancelled home visits will be rescheduled.

First Start Partnerships for Children and Families strives to work with parents to remove barriers causing attendance issues, so that you and your child can benefit from the program fully.

Weather and Emergency Closings

When inclement weather occurs and it is not safe for our families to be out on the roads, we may close our program for the day. Your child's safety is our number one priority! Your child's classroom will be closed when your designated School District is closed. Two-hour delays follow the school district as well. Please tune into your local news channel, district websites, and Facebook. Information regarding First Start Partnerships closings or delays will be available via the website (firststartpartnerships.org), Remind, and our Facebook page.

Home Visits and Parent/Teacher Conferences

Our staff look forward to getting to know you and your family. Our staff will meet with each family for a home visit prior to your child starting the program. Please feel free to ask questions, share information, and get to know our staff.

These visits are meant to build upon the relationship between your child's classroom and their home. There will be opportunities for parent/teacher conferences throughout the year and possible additional education home visits that will be planned with you. Our staff are here to support you as your child grows and develops. We are also here to help you and your child reach the goals you are working towards while in our program.

Screening & Assessment

We will partner with you to assess your child's development as they enter our program. We will ask for your help in completing the Ages and Stages Questionnaire. The ASQ helps identify your child's strengths and any areas where your child may need support. We will use this to learn about your child and it will provide us with information to support their learning. First Start Partnerships teachers have been trained in conducting and analyzing Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) screening results. Teaching staff complete online training modules prior to conducting or analyzing your child's screening results.

Classroom Rules and Program Participation

Each classroom has a set of classroom rules (three to five) developed by the teachers and children. These are a set of expectations that foster learning and maintain a positive environment. Teachers use classroom rules, curriculum support, and other resources as a foundation for positive behavior guidance. Behavior guidance is viewed as a way to teach children to have control of their actions and encourage good choices. We support your child in learning how to work and play with other children, as well as how to follow the classroom routines and expectations. Classroom teachers will offer positive reinforcement in a variety of ways. These include redirection, setting expectations, encouraging independence in problem-solving, and offering choices. No methods of discipline that involve physical punishment, emotional abuse, humiliation, isolation, the use of food as a punishment or reward, or denial of basic needs will be used.

For some children, the adjustment to classroom routines can be difficult. In these cases, our classroom teachers and Community Hub Directors will work with your family to establish a support plan for your child. We want to ensure your child's success in the classroom as well as meet their individual needs. First Start Partnerships does not exclude any eligible child from participation in the program, and is committed to supporting children through behavior interventions and alternatives to suspension and expulsion practices that would remove them from the classroom setting.

Early Head Start Home Visiting

During your weekly home visit, your home visitor will:

- Share information on child development.
- Design age-appropriate activities for your child with your input and ideas.
- Observe your child's play and development along with you.

In order for your home visitor to provide quality services to your family, we ask you to follow these guidelines during home visits:

- Welcome your home visitor into your home and accept him/her as a support and resource for your family. Your home visitor will be respectful of your family's culture and beliefs.
- Drug and alcohol consumption is not permitted during home visits or prior to home visits.
- Smoking is not permitted during home visits. Your home visitor may have allergies or asthma, and smoking can heighten their symptoms and cause severe health complications.
- Weapons, such as firearms, knives, etc., must be kept in a secure, locked area.
- Please limit distractions for your child by turning off your family's television/radio.
- Pets should be kept out of the home visit area during a home visit. Your home visitor may have allergies or asthma, and pets can heighten their symptoms and cause severe health complications.
- The parent/guardian **MUST** be present and participate in-home visits.
- We welcome the involvement of other siblings during home visit activities provided they are not a distraction to the child receiving the home visit. Your home visitor will provide activities to keep other siblings entertained during specific visits, especially those involving screenings.
- We ask that you politely refrain from accepting personal telephone calls, texts, or visitors during home visits to allow for you and your child to have the best possible educational and bonding experiences.

Program Visitors

A visitor is defined as an individual from a community agency providing services to an enrolled child(ren), former employees, volunteers (families of enrolled children or community), building contractors/vendor, or other individuals who are not current employees of First Start. *Family members of enrolled children who are escorting children to/from a classroom during program hours are generally not considered to be visitors.*

To maintain a safe, respectful, and structured environment for children and staff all visitors must:

- Schedule visits in advance or according to an approved schedule.
- Report to the main office.
 - State the reason and purpose of the visit. First Start reserves the right to restrict or deny building access to visitors for any reason.
 - Show a driver's license or other photo identification (employer issued badge) upon entering the building.
 - This information will be scanned and maintained in the First Start database prior to gaining access to the building.
 - Sign a visitor log- including name, purpose, arrival time, and departure time.
- Wear an identifying visitor badge or community agency issued employee badge.
- Remain in the supervision of staff at all times and may be restricted from access to classrooms and/or other areas within the building.
- At the end of the visit, sign-out and return the visitor badge.

All visitors are expected to act professionally and must not interrupt daily routines. Visitors must adhere to First Start's confidentiality policies. No photos, videos, or sharing of information about children, families, or staff is permitted.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Food and Nutrition

First Start Partnerships participates in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) to ensure that all meals and snacks provided to children are nutritious, balanced, and in compliance with program standards and funder expectations.

All food served within the program must be provided by First Start Partnerships. Meals and snacks are planned in accordance with CACFP guidelines to support the health and development of every child.

For children with documented special dietary needs, including food allergies or medical conditions, First Start Partnerships will provide appropriate meal modifications. These accommodations will be made in accordance with an approved medical care plan on file that is signed by a licensed medical provider.

First Start Partnerships is committed to maintaining a safe, inclusive, and nutritionally supportive environment for all children in our care; outside food or drink is NOT permitted.

Food Allergies

If your child is diagnosed with a food allergy, First Start Partnerships for Children and Families must receive a Medical Plan of Care that contains special nutrition or feeding instructions before your child enters the program.

We need a signed care plan from your child's primary care physician (PCP) indicating:

- The food allergy
- Your child's reaction to those foods
- A list of food substitutions your child can have in place of the food items he/she cannot eat
- A list of medications that must be administered should your child be exposed to that food

The classroom staff will post dietary modifications in the classroom to ensure your child's safety at all times. The cafeteria/caterer will also be notified of your child's food restriction so that substitutions can be provided.

Hand Washing Procedures for Adults & Children

Proper handwashing is key to preventing illness from spreading. All program staff will follow the handwashing procedure below and will work with your children and families to do the same:

- Use soap and running water between 60 and 120 degrees Fahrenheit
- Rub your hands vigorously for at least 20 seconds (a good rule of thumb would be to sing the ABC's twice)
- Wash hands thoroughly making sure to clean the back of hand, wrists, between fingers, and under fingernails
- Rinse well
- Dry hands with a paper towel
- Turn off the water using a paper towel, not your clean hands

Hand Washing is Required

Before and After:

- Eating, handling food, or feeding your child
- Giving medication or applying first aid
- Playing in water that is used by more than one person
- Diapering
- Tooth brushing

After:

- Using the toilet or helping a child use the toilet
- Handling bodily fluid (mucus, blood, vomit)
- Handling animals or cleaning up animal waste
- Playing in the sand, on wooden playsets, and being outdoors
- Cleaning or handling the garbage
- Entering/returning to the classroom

Head Lice Policy

Children in our program will avoid head-to-head contact with other children to minimize the spread of head lice. If your child has head lice, you will be notified and informed that your child must be treated before returning to school.

In addition to applying the appropriate head lice treatment:

- Machine wash and dry clothing, bed linens and other items (car seat) that your child wore or used during the two days before the scalp treatment.
- Use hot water (at least 130 degrees F) for the laundry cycle and high heat for the dryer cycle.
- Dry clean clothing and items that are not washable and/or seal these items in a plastic bag for two weeks.
- Soak combs and brushes in hot water (at least 130 degrees F) for 5-10 minutes.
- Vacuum the floor, furniture, and car seats. Be sure to dispose of vacuum bags and/or clean the vacuum canister.

First Aid/CPR

Staff have ongoing training on program developed health, safety, and childcare requirements to ensure the safety of children in their care; including appropriate training in First Aid and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) based on the ages of the children. At least one staff person who has successfully completed training in Pediatric First Aid and CPR will be in attendance at all times.

Keeping Children's Healthcare Up-to-Date

Please provide a copy of your child's up-to-date well child or physical exam and dental exam prior to your child's first day of school.

First Start Partnerships for Children and Families will work with you to obtain records of your child's physical and dental exams, as needed. A child is considered "up-to-date" when he/she is on a schedule of age-appropriate preventative primary medical and oral dental health care. We will monitor the implementation of a follow-up plan to meet any treatment needs.

You may be asked to sign a release of information form so that we can obtain this paperwork from your child's providers.

Immunizations

Having your child immunized according to the Pennsylvania Academy of Pediatrics recommended schedule is an important part of his/her overall health. First Start Partnerships for Children and Families will need to obtain immunization records from you by your child's first day of school, but no later than 90 calendar days from when your child first attends the program.

If your child has not been immunized, we will assist you with making arrangements to bring your child up-to-date on immunizations as quickly as possible.

Children who are exempt from immunizations require the following documentation:

- Statement from your child's primary care physician (PCP).
- Legal exemption with notarization, waiver, or other state-specific document with your signature.
- Religious or strong moral or ethical convictions opposing immunizations must be submitted in writing with your signature.

Medication Administration

Teachers will only administer approved, necessary medications in the classroom. While your child is in our program, the following procedures must be followed:

- The first dose of a new medication should always be given at home to ensure there are no adverse side effects.
- If medications are to be provided in the classroom, a medication authorization form must be completed by the prescribing physician. We cannot accept medications without proper authorization.
- All medication authorization forms must be signed by you and the prescribing health professional.
- When medication is no longer necessary in the classroom, we will need written correspondence from the prescribing physician that includes the discontinue date and reason.
- All medication, with the exception of emergency "rescue" medication, will be stored in an appropriate, locked container that is only accessible to FSP teaching staff. All medication will be kept out of the reach of children.

Child Abuse Reporting

Each of our staff is responsible for the health and welfare of all children participating in the program, and as such are mandatory reporters of any suspected child abuse or neglect.

Staff members are required to report incidents where there is reasonable suspicion that abuse or neglect has occurred, either in the care of the FSP program or outside of the program. It is not the responsibility of the program to investigate whether abuse or neglect actually occurred, but rather to report probable incidents. Any staff member who is the subject of a reported case of abuse or neglect will be removed from contact with children during the investigation and until the charge is fully resolved.

Active Supervision

The safety of every child is our highest priority. First Start staff use active supervision at all times to ensure that no child is ever left alone or unsupervised.

Staff intentionally position themselves to see and hear all children, continuously counting children, using name-to-face recognition during transitions, and actively engaging with children to anticipate and prevent unsafe situations. Because children develop at different rates, supervision is individualized to meet each child's needs. Toddlers require close, constant supervision with staff remaining close by, while preschoolers are supervised through continuous observation, strategic positioning, and active engagement that supports their growing independence while ensuring their safety.

Active supervision is expected of staff in all learning environments, including classrooms, playgrounds, buses, field trips, and all transitions throughout the day.

Emergency Preparedness

First Start Partnerships places the utmost importance on children's health and safety. Teachers and children participate in a variety of drills targeted towards safety preparedness. These trainings include fire drills, building evacuations, securing the building, lockdown, immediate shelter and shelter in place drills.

More information about these drills can be found in our Emergency Response Plan. The plan outlines our process for the care and well-being of children and staff during unsafe or hazardous situations such as extreme weather, medical emergencies, and fires. This plan is available to staff at all times and can be provided to you upon request. Please review the Contact Information sheet for important evacuation/emergency information for your child's classroom.



APPENDICES

CONTACT INFORMATION

First Start Partnerships Classrooms

Classroom/Family Services Information:

My child's classroom is _____

The classroom address is _____

The classroom times are _____ am to _____ pm

The teacher's names are _____

The classroom phone number is _____

The main office phone number is (717) 263-8019.

The classroom's Family Advocate's name and phone number is _____

The Community Hub Director's name and phone number is _____

Inclement Weather Information:

My classroom will be delayed or closed when _____ School District is delayed or closed due to inclement weather. You will be notified by First Start Partnerships for Children and Families, via REMIND in the case of an unscheduled early dismissal.

Emergency Information:

In case of evacuation, the classroom will go to _____ at the address of _____.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Early Head Start Home Visiting

Home Visiting Information:

My family's home visitor is _____
My home visitor's work hours are typically _____ am to _____ pm
My home visitor's phone number is _____
My home visitor's email is _____
The main office phone number is (717) 263-8019
My home visitor's supervisor's name and phone number is _____

Inclement Weather Information:

My home visits/family days will be rescheduled when the _____
School District is closed due to inclement weather. You will be notified by
your Home Visitor if a delay or early closure will affect your weekly home
visit or group experience.

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STATEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING

Review the following list and initial each statement.

____ I give permission for my child to participate in all classroom field trips during the school year.

- I understand that children may walk or be transported in buses.
- I also understand that I will be kept informed of scheduled field trips other than routine walks in the neighborhood and nearby playgrounds.

____ I also give permission for my child to be transported as needed for services and activities First Start Partnerships provides.

____ I give permission to have my child involved in general classroom observations by staff members, outside consultants, and students.

____ I give permission for the Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment to be completed for my child.

____ I give permission to forward my child's education files and to communicate verbally with the next school my child will be attending.

____ I give permission to forward my child's health and dental records and communicate verbally to the next school placement which my child will be attending.

____ I give permission to allow my child to be photographed or videotaped to be used within the classroom setting.

____ I give permission to allow my child to be photographed or videotaped for the purpose of public relations (website, agency Facebook, brochures, etc.) and news releases.

_____ Please initial here if you do NOT want your child to participate in the Second Step Child Protection Unit curriculum.

_____ Please initial here if you would NOT like your child's photo/video taken for public relations purposes.

I have received the First Start Partnerships Family Handbook and applicable information specific to program policies. I understand and agree that it is my responsibility to read and familiarize myself with the policies and procedures of the Family Handbook.

By signing below, I agree to fully participate in First Start Partnerships' programming and to comply with all policies herein.

I have read, understand, and accept the conditions noted above.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

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First Start Partnerships *for* **Children & Families**



OFFICE OF HEAD START

An Office of the Administration for Children & Families



pennsylvania
PRE-K COUNTS



pennsylvania
KEYSTONE STARS
OFFICE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND EARLY LEARNING