

Hinds County Human Resource Agency
Project Head Start

PARENT ORIENTATION PACKET



***Helping Families,
Strengthening Communities***

Hinds County Human Resource Agency
258 Maddox Road
Jackson, MS 39225-2657
(601) 923-3940

Parent Orientation

Welcome, Head Start parents and thank you for entrusting Hinds County Human Resource Agency (HCHRA) Project Head Start to jumpstart your child's education. We believe that you are the most important influence in your child's education, development and general well-being. Our goal is to equip every child with the academic and social skills needed to enter and master kindergarten. You have taken the first crucial step in this preparation by enrolling your child in Head Start. This marks the beginning of our partnership with you – the parent – as we work together to ensure a quality and fun experience for your child. To ensure that you are aware of the various policies and procedures for Head Start, please carefully review the parent handbook and orientation packet. We have tried to anticipate your questions and listed some important things you need to know about Hinds County Human Resource Agency Project Head Start. We look forward to partnering with you as we work to give your child the right start with Hinds County Human Resource Agency Project Head Start!

Head Start Approach to School Readiness

The Head Start Approach to School Readiness means that children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children's learning, and schools are ready for children. Historically, Head Start often has led the early childhood field with a strong, clear, and comprehensive focus on all aspects of healthy development, including physical, cognitive, social and emotional development, all of which are essential to children getting ready for school. All agencies are required to establish school readiness goals, which are defined as "the expectations of children's status and progress across domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches to learning, physical health and well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development that will improve readiness for kindergarten goals," and that "appropriately reflect the ages of children, birth to five, participating in the program."

Head Start views school readiness as children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life. For parents and families, school readiness means they are engaged in the long-term, lifelong success of their child. Head Start recognizes that parents are their children's primary teachers and advocates. Programs are required to consult with parents in establishing school readiness goals as Hinds County Human Resource Agency Project Head Start is an integral part of a greater community. We help strengthen the community by working in partnership with families and local agencies and organizations. Through our work, we respect the strength and dignity of each family and strive to create an environment where differences are accepted and valued. Parents, as the prime educators for their children, are encouraged and supported in their active participation in all aspects of the program. Because we recognize that each child and family is unique, we individualize our approach to best meet the needs of children and families.

Attendance

It's very important for your child to come to school each day. Regular attendance helps establish a routine for your child and allows them to be much more familiar and secure in their classroom setting. When children come every day they build on the learning and friendships of the day before. We realize children will be ill and should be kept at home until well. When that happens, please call the center no later than one hour after the start of class to let us know your child will not be coming. If the child is ill or for some unavoidable reason the child cannot attend the center, parents should notify the center administrator. If a child is unexpectedly absent and a parent has not contacted the program within one hour of program start time, the parent will be contacted via School Messenger to ensure the child's well-being. **A child may be dropped from the program if the child misses five (5) consecutive unexcused days or a total of twenty (20) nonconsecutive unexcused days from the center.**

Authorization to Release Your Child

Your child will only be released to the persons you have listed on the Emergency Contact Form. This includes people picking up your child from the center, as well as receiving them off of the bus. Parents must give written authorization to the center for release of their children to such persons. Written authorization is obtained by parents completing the child's Emergency Contact Form. This form determines to whom the child may be released (with parents' consent) or whom to contact for emergency purposes. Parents should give us written notice of any changes. Written permission from the parent/guardian is always required to release their children to persons not listed on the Emergency Contact Form even if it is a temporary change.

Child Abuse and Neglect / Mandated Reporters

It is the policy of Hinds County Human Resource Agency to prevent, identify, treat, and report child abuse and neglect as a part of social services in Head Start. All staff are required by state law to report suspected child abuse and neglect. Suspected cases of possible child abuse and neglect will be reported to the Mississippi Department of Health, the Mississippi State Department of Human Services, and local law enforcement agencies. Training is provided to staff and parents in all aspects of child abuse and neglect.

Clothing

A day in the classroom is a busy, fun time for children. Due to the safety concern of your child, we ask that parents do not send children to school wearing any of the following: sandals, flip flops/beach shoes, shoes with high heels, or any shoes that have the heels and/or toes exposed. We recommend that you dress your child in comfortable clothing and shoes, so he or she can enjoy all activities without restraint or injury. We ask that parents use good judgment seeing that their child dresses appropriately for school and school activities.

Diapering / Toilet Learning

HCHRA Project Head Start follows the Mississippi State Department of Health child care diapering procedures. If cream, ointment, or lotion is needed, each parent **MUST** fill out an Authorization of Medication Administration form. We understand that all children are at different stages of toilet learning and toilet learning is a teamwork effort between the parent, child, and staff. It is most successful when new skills are reinforced both at home and at the center, adults are patient and understanding, and the child is physically, intellectually, and emotionally ready. Sending extra clothing is very helpful.

Disaster / Emergency Preparedness

In the event of bad weather, the Head Start program will follow the public schools' closing schedules. Parents are asked to listen to the radio and/or television stations and visit our website at www.hchra.org for closing schedules, the reopening of the centers, and other up-to-date information. All centers have emergency preparedness plans and procedures for dealing with emergencies. If you have questions or would like to learn more about the procedures, please ask your center administrator. Emergency drills are conducted on the bus and in the centers on a regular basis. There are center-specific disaster plans for performing emergency drills; posting evacuation plans and routes; responding to fire, natural disasters and other emergencies; and planning for the care of the children when parents are inaccessible.

Disorderly/Disrespectful Conduct

It is the policy of Hinds County Human Resource Agency Project Head Start to provide an environment that is free of threats of violence or violent acts. This includes, but is not limited to, threatening or hostile behaviors, physical abuse, vandalism, arson, sabotage, use of weapons, carrying weapons onto the center's property, or any other act which, in management's opinion, is inappropriate in our environment. Additionally, offensive comments, actions, or behavior toward other families, staff or children will not be tolerated. Staff will immediately dial 911 to call the local law enforcement agency. **Parents/Guardians or caretakers, please be aware that all violators may be banned from the Head Start property for disorderly or disrespectful conduct.**

Parent Meetings

Parent Meetings are held at each center on a monthly basis and typically include a guest speaker and fun activities for the whole family. When your child is enrolled you are automatically part of the center's parent committee. Officers are elected and training is provided for each committee.

Field Trips

Field trips will be taken throughout the year to help children know their community and to extend their learning experience. Parents are always welcome to join us on field trips to serve as volunteers along with center staff. In preparation for field trips, your child will participate in planned classroom activities prior to each trip. Parents will always receive notice concerning the scheduled field trip at least two weeks before the field trip is taken. Parents/Guardians are required to sign a Parental Permission Form before any child is allowed to leave the center on a field trip. You are encouraged to sign and return the Parental Permission Form prior to the date that the trip will be taken. The Agency will provide transportation, a nutritious lunch, and pay admission fees, if any, for a designated number of children, staff and volunteers. Each child will wear identification tags on field trips to include the center's name and telephone number. You should contact the center administrator at your child's center for additional information concerning field trips.

Home Visits / Parent-Teacher Conferences

Home visits and parent-teacher conferences are a very important part of our program. As the first teacher of your child, you will be provided information and techniques in child development practices. Further, through home visits as well as written and verbal communications, you will be made aware of developmental activities your child is involved in and encouraged to carry out these activities into the home setting to further support the Agency's curriculum. All centers will host two parent-teacher conferences and teaching staff will conduct two home visits during the program year to share your child's progress and individual goals. You know your child and family better than anyone, and it is your ideas and suggestions that help your child's teacher provide the best activities and services for your needs. Home visits and parent-teacher conferences include planning developmental goals and activities for your child, working on a Family Partnership Agreement, and learning about community resources. You will be provided information on the importance of home visits and encouraged to participate. Home visits will "link" the home and program and reinforce the center activities, provide you an opportunity to discuss the needs and progress of your child, and provide useful information.

Child Illnesses (Communicable Diseases)

To protect your child against a number of childhood diseases, Mississippi law requires that all children accepted into the program be fully immunized. To ensure all children are well, health assessments are conducted on each child for signs of injury or illness. If a parent informs us, or we determine based on an observation, that a child has a serious health condition (such as asthma) that requires medical treatment, then the parent must obtain a medical management plan from the child's medical provider and provide a doctor's prescription. **If such a determination is made after enrollment, and the parent does not obtain a medical management plan from the child's medical provider and does not provide a copy of a doctor's prescription (if medication is required) within five (5) business days of written notification, then the child may be suspended until such compliance is obtained.** Please call as soon as possible if your child is sick or will not be at school. **Sick children cannot remain at school.** If your child has a contagious condition, diarrhea, high fever (101 degrees or more, under the arm) or vomiting, they must be picked up from the center immediately. All children must be symptom free for 24 hours before returning to the center. In some cases, a written doctor's statement may be required before the child can return to the center. Written procedures are in place to administer, handle and store medication. **Only prescribed medication, in its original container, will be administered to children.** You **MUST** sign a consent form and present instructions from the physician prescribing the medication. Every effort will be made to contact the parent in case of an emergency. You will be asked to review and sign a consent form authorizing Head Start to provide emergency health care. If, for religious reasons, health and emergency procedures cannot be provided, the parent must state the reason for denial of services and sign the form. Medication **WILL NOT** be administered without a prescription and signed parental consent.

Information Updates

It is very important to let us know as soon as possible if there is a change in phone numbers, address, or child care provider. A change in address or child care provider could affect the bus route and/or the center in which your child will be enrolled. Please see contact your center administrator or your family opportunities advisor to update your contact information.

Meals

Interviewing parents at the time the child enters the program will identify each child's nutritional needs. All parents will receive a copy of the menus for your assigned center. Menus are pre-planned by parents, staff, and the nutrition specialist to provide your child with nutritious foods. The nutritional services are provided to meet one-half to two-thirds of the USDA recommended daily dietary allowance in a safe and sanitary manner each day. This includes a nutritious breakfast, lunch and snack. You will be involved in training sessions and other activities to enhance your knowledge of food preparation and other nutritional skills. All food service sites will post evidence of compliance with federal, state and local food safety and sanitation laws in the form of a Food Service Permit.

Due to our federal and state laws, parents are not allowed to send any food or drinks from home to the center, except for bottled drinking water for special outdoor activities. All foods served at Head Start must be high in nutrients and low in fat, sugar, and salt. This policy includes any school activity, such as fall or winter fest or any holiday. The nutritional staff prepares all foods served at school for your child.

Medical and Dental Exams

The Child Health and Developmental Services Program will ensure that each child has:

- A “medical home” - an ongoing source of continuous accessible health care
- A determination that the child is on a schedule of age-appropriate health care
- Further testing or treatment if there is a known or suspected problem
- A follow-up plan for any condition requiring further attention

All of these activities will be completed within 90 calendar days of the child’s entry into the program. All sensory and behavioral screenings will be completed within 45 calendar days of entry. Upon entry into the program, up-to-date immunizations, annual well-child physical exams, and annual dental exams are required for all children. These documents are mandatory for your child to attend Hinds County Human Resource Agency Project Head Start. Parents are encouraged to submit all of their medical screening forms no later than two weeks after the first day of school.

Medical Emergencies

In the case of a life-threatening emergency, staff will immediately call 911 and contact the parents/guardians. If a parent/guardian cannot be reached, we will call the emergency contacts listed and continue to call the parent. Minor emergencies such as cuts, bumps, and scrapes are assessed for level of care necessary by program staff. Staff will provide appropriate basic first aid care for minor injuries. Parents/Guardians are notified by phone and will receive an accident/incident report of any emergency or injury that involves their child.

Medications at School

Whenever possible, the schedule for administering needed medications should be adjusted so it can be given at home. If your child requires medication at school, the center **MUST** have a signed consent form from **YOU** with instructions from the physician prescribing the medication. **Only prescribed medication, in its original container, will be administered to children.** Medications **MUST** be in original containers, properly labeled with the child’s full name, date, and legible instructions for administration. Medication can only be given as directed by the label. Medications are stored in secure locations, inaccessible to children. Life threatening conditions (i.e., seizures, severe allergies requiring an EpiPen, or severe asthma) must have an approved plan in place prior to the child’s first day of school.

Parent’s/Guardian’s Role

Parents/Guardians are always welcome to volunteer in the centers, classrooms, and on field trips. We value your help in developing learning goals for your children and sharing ideas for the classroom curriculum. Parents/Guardians may also extend classroom learning by doing parent/child activities at home and reading or telling stories daily.

Head Start Policy Council and Parent Committees

HCHRA Project Head Start is funded by the federal government. The Agency’s CEO and Vice President of Head Start and Early Childhood Programs work together to carry out the management functions consistent with the authority given by the Board of Directors and in accordance with all Head Start regulations. The center administrator is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Head Start program at the center level. In accordance with federal and state regulations, HCHRA Project Head Start has a formal structure of governance consisting of a Grantee Board of Directors, Head Start Policy Council and

Head Start Parent Committees. Through this formal structure, governance is shared and parents are afforded the opportunity to participate in policy making or in other decisions about the program.

Head Start Policy Council – is comprised of parents of currently enrolled children and community representatives. The parents at each Head Start center and each Early Head Start site will elect parent representatives to serve on the Policy Council. The community representatives will be drawn from local businesses, public or private community, civic and professional organizations, and others who are familiar with resources and services for low-income children and families. Policy Council representatives are limited to three one-year terms. Meetings are held monthly on the second Thursday evening at 7:00 p.m. in the Agency’s main office at 258 Maddox Road in Jackson.

Head Start Parent Committees – are comprised exclusively of the parents of children currently enrolled at each center. All parents are members of their center’s Parent Committee. Monthly meetings of the Parent Committee are held at each center. Officers are elected and training is provided for each committee.

School Closures

In the event of bad weather, the Head Start program will follow the public schools’ closing schedules. Parents are asked to listen to the radio and/or television stations and visit our website at www.hchra.org for closing schedules, the reopening of the centers and other up-to-date information. Centers will close if, in management’s judgment, driving conditions or the facilities are unsafe. The safety of children, families, and staff is the primary concern.

Screenings and Assessments

In order to help children enrolled in HCHRA Project Head Start gain the readiness skills and confidence necessary to succeed in their present environment as well as later in life, the child development and education program will:

- Be inclusive of children with disabilities
- Provide a balanced daily program of child-initiated and teacher-directed activities, including small group and individual activities
- Support social and emotional development and provide for the development of each child’s cognitive and language skills
- Promote each child’s physical development
- Provide for the implementation of a curriculum in collaboration with parents
- Utilize a variety of strategies to promote and support children’s learning and developmental progress based on the observations and ongoing assessments of each child.

HCHRA Project Head Start will conduct medical/developmental screenings and assessments on all enrolled children to track their development, height, weight, vision, hearing, social and emotional skills. All assessment results will be shared with you. Parents will receive a copy of their child’s Teaching Strategies GOLD Individual Child Report, health screening results (i.e., hearing, height, weight, and vision), and Brigance Developmental assessment results. Screenings and assessments are used by staff and parents to take a closer look at children’s social-emotional development. The Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment is used to track children’s learning through the year and will be provided at parent-teacher conferences. Health screening results can be obtained through your child’s regular medical provider. If special concerns are identified, your child’s teacher will help you connect with appropriate resources.

Arrival and Departure

Mississippi State Department of Health Child Care Regulations Governing Licensure require parents/guardians to sign their children in and out each day using their full legal signature and writing the time of arrival and departure. If your child leaves the center midday for an appointment, you must also sign your child in and out. Center staff will show you where the sign-in sheets are located.

Toys at the Center

HCHRA Project Head Start provides a learning environment with various learning centers to offer multiple opportunities for the children to explore, discover and grow. The learning environment is arranged to help the children become independent and confident learners. There will be plenty of toys and equipment in the classroom for everyone to play with. We ask that you not send toys or other items to the center.

Transportation Safety

One of the major objectives of HCHRA Project Head Start is to provide a safe and secure transportation system for all enrolled children. In order for Head Start to do so, your full cooperation is sought in observing all of the transportation rules. For safety reasons, nothing will be transported on the school bus that is not secured. Items such as (but not limited to) toys, books, crayons, backpacks, pencils, pens, and markers can become projectiles causing injury or accident. They are to be secured or not transported at all.

Child Development and Education

As the first teacher of your child, you will be provided information and techniques in child development practices. Further, through home visits as well as written and verbal communications, you will be made aware of developmental activities your children are involved in and will be encouraged to carry out these activities into the home setting to further support the Agency's curriculum. Most classrooms have the enrollment capacity of 16-20 children with teaching support from 2 adults. A typical day includes a meal, two group activities, outside time and at least an hour of time in learning centers. HCHRA Project Head Start teaching staff are well trained in early childhood education and they develop individual learning plans for each child. Classrooms are set up so that children can engage in hands-on learning with support from adults in the classroom. You will be encouraged to attend workshops and other educational activities that will prepare you to work with your children. In addition, you will be referred to and assisted with accessing those resources that will provide services for you and your family. All classrooms are safe and welcoming environments for all children, including those with special needs.

Volunteer Services

As the primary educator of your child, you are strongly encouraged to volunteer in your child's classroom and take part in center activities on a regular basis. By volunteering, you become more aware of the kinds of activities in which your child is involved and can more readily work with your child, lending support and encouragement. We keep track of how many hours parents give to our program. This is important because we need more than \$1 million worth of volunteer hours each year to count toward required non-federal match, or in-kind requirements. Volunteer activities may include, but are not limited to, assisting in the classroom, going on field trips, riding the bus, working in the office, reading a story to the classroom or assisting staff with recruitment by distributing flyers. **Please see any staff person regarding your availability to volunteer at your child's center.**

Confidentiality of Records

HCHRA Project Head Start takes the confidentiality of our families very seriously. Project Head Start maintains the policy that all records of families and children are safeguarded to assure confidentiality. Access to records of children and families will be granted only to the following persons:

- Staff who are directly responsible for particular records relative to child and family data
- Head Start parents who have a right to access their respective child's records during the time the child is enrolled in the program
- Officials and representatives of the Administration of Children and Families, USDA, and HCHRA program auditors for the purpose of monitoring, evaluating and improving the overall operations of the program.

Parental consent **MUST** be obtained before either photographs, video and sound recordings and your child's image, likeness, appearance, or voice is used. We ask that each parent/guardian visiting the center refrain from taking photos and videos of children and to not post any photos, videos, and/or names of children and families in the program, in/on any form of social media.