

# Family Engagement Handbook



*Pro Action  
Early Head Start,  
Head Start,  
and  
Universal  
Pre-Kindergarten*



**2022-2023**

Welcome to Head Start Birth-5, a program of Pro Action Resilient Children and Family Services! We are excited to be able to partner and celebrate with you in your child's journey to school readiness!

This handbook is designed to help you understand the Birth-5 years old Head Start program (which includes Early Head Start, Head Start, and Universal Pre-Kindergarten services). It outlines the program's commitment to your family and the support we will need from you to ensure a successful year for your child. It contains answers to questions that are frequently asked. We encourage you to read it carefully and ask questions for more clarification.

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## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **What is Early Head Start?**

Early Head Start is a federally funded, comprehensive child development program for eligible pregnant women, children aged birth to three years old, and their family members. Pro Action of Steuben and Yates Inc. provides Early Head Start services via a home-based option, throughout Steuben and Yates Counties. Center based Early Head Start services are also provided to a limited number of participants in the Hornell area.

### **What is Head Start?**

Head Start is a federally funded, comprehensive preschool child development program for eligible children aged 3-5 years old and their family members. Pro Action of Steuben and Yates Inc. provides Head Start classroom-based services in school districts throughout Steuben and Yates Counties. In limited areas, home based Head Start services are also offered.

### **What is Universal Pre-Kindergarten?**

Universal Pre-Kindergarten is a state funded preschool child development program for eligible preschool aged children and their family members. School districts partner with community agencies, such as Pro Action Head Start, to ensure as many as possible interested children within the school district have access to a state-regulated pre-kindergarten program.

### **HS/UPK**

Most classrooms operated by Pro Action provide services using a combination of Head Start and UPK funding. Therefore, the early childhood program provided by Pro Action must be in compliance with the regulations which govern both funding sources, including the Federal Head Start Program Performance Standards; the Head Start Act of 2007; New York State Office of Children and Family Services Child Care Regulations; and New York State Universal Pre-Kindergarten Regulations.

**Within this handbook, the term *Head Start/UPK* (HS/UPK) refers to all program options of the Early Head Start, Head Start, and the Universal PreK program.**

### **HS/UPK Program Goal**

The overall goal of HS/UPK is to offer a wide range of social and educational experiences to help children and families become ready for school.

To develop fully and to achieve social competence, children and their families benefit from a comprehensive approach to services including education, health, nutrition, social services and family engagement. The range of services available is responsive to the unique development, ethnicity, culture and interests of each child and family.

## **Fees**

There are no fees for services under Early Head Start/Head Start/Universal Pre-Kindergarten programming.

## **\* Program Staffing / Supervision**

The *HS/UPK classroom team* consists of a Teacher, Teacher Assistant and, depending upon the number of children enrolled, may also include a Support Staff. The *Infant and Toddler classroom* teams consist of two Teachers and one Support Staff. All HS/UPK classrooms comply with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (NYS OCFS) Regulations regarding the number of supervising adults per child. CHILDREN ARE NEVER LEFT ALONE. Staff members hold credentials which comply with appropriate New York State Universal Pre-Kindergarten Regulations, Head Start Regulations, and NYS OCFS licensing requirements.

In addition to the classroom staff, families in each classroom based program have access to a Home Visitor whose responsibilities include completing enrollment applications, supporting parent/guardian engagement in the program, informing families of special events and activities which are planned for parents/guardians of enrolled children, informing families of community resources which support the needs of families with young children, and providing supportive services to families as necessary.

*Home-Based Program* staff consists of a Home Visitor who will conduct weekly educational home visits with families and twice a month socialization opportunities. The family and Home Visitor partner together to plan learning activities which meets each child's individual needs.

All HS/UPK staff members complete required background clearances prior to employment and participate in extensive training to support efforts in providing a high-quality early childhood program.

## **Virtual Services**

In order to maintain open lines of communication and provide consistent and uninterrupted services, there may be times throughout the year when virtual services are necessary and available, when face to face meetings are not possible due to illness, lack of transportation, inclement weather, or other barriers. Staff will work with families to provide alternative meetings whenever possible.

In the event of significant public health or safety risks, HS/UPK will follow the advice of school district personnel and local or state officials and may be forced to modify services or close any or all programs or classrooms for an extended amount of time. Necessary accommodations will be made in response to the situation. This may include putting practices in place to support social distancing, limiting in person contact, wearing of masks or other protective equipment, prohibiting non-essential visitors, establishing designated drop off/pick up areas, use of daily health certifications, modifications to family style meals, restriction of field trips, use of electronic signatures, or any other necessary accommodations. Staff will provide regular communication to keep families informed of program updates.

### **\*Classroom Visitors/Volunteers**

Families are welcome and encouraged to spend time in the classroom. HS/UPK has an Open Door Policy, which allows parents/guardians to visit and observe in their child's classroom at any time. Other family members may visit the classroom with signed permission from the parent/guardian.

Community volunteers (such as practicum students) who plan to work in the classroom must complete the volunteer process, including required volunteer paperwork, required clearances, and will receive ongoing training in accordance with New York State Office of Child and Family Services Child Care Licensing requirements.

Volunteers are supervised at all times by HS/UPK staff, are never left alone with children, and are not counted in adult:child ratios. Other professionals may be in the classroom to work with individual children (i.e. speech, physical therapy) or to assist in the health screenings of children. Parents/guardians are notified in advance of scheduled screenings involving their child.

During a state of emergency, the school district, NYS Office of Children and Family Services, and/or Pro Action Head Start may limit classroom visitors in order to protect the health and well-being of children, families, and staff. Families will be notified promptly of any changes to the visiting procedures.

### **FAMILY ENGAGEMENT**

A child's parent/guardian is their first, and most important, teacher. HS/UPK strives to build relationships with families that support family well-being, strong parent-child relationships, and ongoing learning and development. Research has shown that children have greater success in school when parents/guardians are involved.

Communication between staff and families is an important component, to ensure that all involved parties are working together in supporting each child's individual development. Types of effective communication include home visits, socializations, school readiness conferences, notes, phone calls, emails, and parent visits to the classroom. HS/UPK staff respectfully recognize that a parent knows their child's strengths and needs better than anyone. Parents can provide valuable information which helps staff get to know each child and helps make the transition into the HS/UPK program a positive experience.

To ensure ongoing communication, be sure to inform HS/UPK staff immediately of any changes in contact information (phone number, email, etc.)

#### **Types of Family Engagement:**

There are many ways for parents/guardians to be involved in the HS/UPK program. Some of these opportunities are listed below and families are encouraged to talk with staff about other ideas and interests they may have. The program may need to limit these opportunities in the event of a state of emergency or concerns of public health and safety.

**Classroom Visits**

Children enjoy having parents visit, and parents are welcome in the classroom at any time. Parents can participate in daily activities or work with classroom staff to plan a special activity or share a talent they may have.

**Home Visits**

Before school starts, HS/UPK staff contact families to schedule a home visit. This is an opportunity for staff to get to know each child, an opportunity for families to ask questions about the program, and to talk about any questions or concerns. HS/UPK has found that children feel more comfortable meeting their teachers for the first time when the meeting takes place on the child's 'home turf.' Home visits are also offered by HS/UPK staff at other times during the program year. Classroom teachers will offer a second home visit, typically in February, to complete a parent-teacher conference. Home Visitors will continue to offer regular home visits, for the purpose of sharing information and supporting families.

For home-based programs, staff offer weekly educational home visits. Enrolled families will receive more information about these home visits.

**School Readiness (Parent / Teacher) Conferences**

HS/UPK classroom-based staff meet with parents to discuss each child's progress at least three times per year. Additional meetings and conferences are welcomed and may be requested at any time, by the parent or staff. Feedback from parents helps HS/UPK teachers implement a program which best meets the needs of all enrolled children.

For home-based programs, parents will have an opportunity to discuss their child's progress during the weekly educational home visits.

**Drop-In Days**

Families enrolled in the classroom-based option will have opportunities to come into the classroom to interact with their child and other families. These may include classroom activities, field trips, neighborhood walks, or other events of interest to children and families.

**At-home Activities**

Throughout the year, HS/UPK staff may provide monthly Family Activity Calendars or other suggestions for activities to do at home. These will include simple activities that can support school readiness goals and are a fun way for families to be engaged in their child's growth and learning. Completion of these activities are optional and not a requirement. We also encourage families to use their own ideas for school readiness activities.

**Parent Committee Meetings**

In compliance with Head Start Program Performance Standards, each enrolled parent is considered part of the Head Start/UPK Parent Committee. The Parent Committee is an opportunity for parents/guardians to receive information, give input, and make decisions about program activities, plans and goals; participate in training about topics chosen by HS/UPK parents; and to work together to address community needs which impact families with young children.

### **Socializations**

For home-based programs, socializations are offered twice each month. Socializations are an opportunity to get to know other families and children, build on experiences that were offered during home visits, learn new skills, and observe children interacting and socializing with their peers. Attending socializations allows parents time to share resources, ideas, and challenges with other families.

\* For more information on the home-based program, refer to “A Parent’s Guide to the Head Start Home-Based Program Option” handbook.

### **Policy Council**

In compliance with Federal regulations, all Head Start programs are required to form a Policy Council. Policy Council is a decision-making group that meets once a month with the program director.

At least 51% of the membership must be Head Start eligible parents/guardians. The remaining membership may be UPK eligible parents/guardians and other community members. All Policy Council members will be voted in by current Head Start parents. The goal is to have at least one parent representing each classroom or area.

Members of Policy Council will share and receive information about the program, make decisions about program policies, participate in the staff hiring process, make decisions about the budget and how money is spent, and participate in the program self-assessment process or other advisory committees. Policy Council is a great way to meet other parents, learn more about the program, and share valuable input. Membership does not require any special knowledge or experience. The program Director will provide any necessary training and information to ensure Policy Council members are well informed before making decisions.

### **Advisory / Planning Committees**

Additional advisory committees are formed to address needs in various program areas. Membership on these committees include HS/UPK parents, staff, and community members.

- Health Services Advisory Committee focuses on the health issues of young children, program health policies, and community health topics.
- Education Advisory Committee develops strategies for curriculum implementation.
- Program Planning Committee assists with setting program wide goals and objectives.
- Other Advisory Committees as needed

## **EDUCATION**

### **Philosophy/Overview**

The *Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five* describes the skills, behaviors, and knowledge that programs will work to foster in all children. The domains that make up this framework are Approaches to Learning; Social and Emotional Development; Language and Literacy; Cognition; and Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development.



The guiding principles of the Framework are:

- Each child is unique and can succeed
- Learning occurs within the context of relationships
- Families are children’s first and most important caregivers, teachers, and advocates
- Children learn best when they are emotionally and physically safe and secure
- Areas of development are integrated, and children learn many concepts and skills at the same time.
- Teaching must be intentional and focused on how children learn and grow
- Every child has diverse strengths rooted in their family’s culture, background, language, and beliefs.

Conscious Discipline is the philosophy used when working with children to develop positive behaviors. It empowers them with self-awareness, brain information, developmental knowledge and useable skills necessary to create a safe, connected, problem-solving classroom.

Children are taught developmentally appropriate techniques for managing conflicts and emotions. The school family works to help children develop skills necessary to make positive choices.

Conscious Discipline supports Social-Emotional development by:

- Building trust through connections
- Fostering independence through choices
- Encouraging self-regulation
- Building empathy and acceptance together as a school family



HS/UPK classroom staff recognize that a child’s basic need of belonging needs to be met before learning takes place. Staff focus on helping each child feel safe and connected so that learning can occur in our classrooms for each individual child. Staff set clear expectations and establish routines and schedules to assist children in feeling safe. Daily schedules and routines are developmentally appropriate and reflect a preschooler’s need to be moving and hands-on with their environment. Schedules are adapted throughout the year to reflect children’s new skills and interests.

### **\*Curriculum / Developmentally Appropriate Program**

The curriculum for all Head Start/UPK center-based programs is *The Creative Curriculum®* Sixth Edition. This curriculum rests on a firm foundation of research, responds to the New York State Pre-K Foundation for the Common Core and aligns with the *Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five* for addressing academic content. *The Creative Curriculum®* features exploration and discovery as a way of learning and helps teachers build children’s confidence, creativity and critical thinking skills, and promote positive outcomes. *The Creative Curriculum®* features studies, hands-on, project-based investigations of topics that are relevant to children’s everyday experiences. They tap into children’s natural curiosity, resulting in a learning environment that is both fun and intentional. The five key aspects of the curriculum include: how children develop and learn, the learning environment, what children learn, caring and teaching, and partnering with families. The 38 research-based objectives are the heart of the curriculum and define the path teachers take with children in their classroom. These Objectives

for Development and Learning include: Social-Emotional, Physical, Language, Cognitive, Literacy, Mathematics, Science and Technology, and The Arts. In addition, HS/UPK staff members collaborate with local school districts to align the curriculum with the district's program as able. Children in all center-based programs are observed on a regular basis, formally and informally, to assist the staff with planning classroom activities which support each child's growth. Children are encouraged, but never forced, to participate in activities.

The curriculum for home-based programs is *Parents as Teachers Foundational and Foundational 2 Curriculum (PAT)*. *PAT* is an evidence-informed and research-based curriculum. *Parents as Teachers* promotes the optimal early development, learning and health of young children by supporting and engaging their parents and caregivers. The *PAT* approach is to partner, facilitate and reflect with families and children. It advances the delivery of high-quality services for families through a comprehensive system of supports and innovative solutions. The curriculum promotes and strengthens the following content areas: Child Development, Parenting Behaviors, Parent-Child Interaction, Development-Centered Parenting and Family Well-Being.

### 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. Head Start/UPK views school readiness as children possessing the skills, knowledge, and habits necessary for success in school and for life-long learning. For parents and families, school readiness means they are engaged in the long-term, lifelong success of their child. Head Start/UPK recognizes that parents are their children's primary teachers and advocates. The program provides parents/families with multiple opportunities to participate in and plan for their child's school readiness as well as address the program's progress in its School Readiness Goals.

When transitioning from HS/UPK into Kindergarten, or from one EHS/HS option to another program, staff provide support and involve families in the transition process, provide information on the expectations of the next program, and offer an opportunity to meet the staff and visit the classroom/program where the child will enroll. School district staff may visit or observe HS/UPK classrooms as part of the transition process.

### \*Daily Schedules

Daily plans and program schedules are available in each classroom. Schedules for preschool children offer a range of different types of activities.

A typical daily schedule may look like this:

- Arrival, Welcome, and Safe Keeper Ritual
- Morning Arrival Activities: puzzles, matching games, peg boards, and individualized activities according to need
- Transition Activity to Breakfast
- Tooth brushing
- Morning Meeting/Brain Smart Start- We Unite, Connect, Disengage Stress, and Commit
- Centers-children's choice of learning centers



- Clean-up
- Large Group Instruction – Language and Literacy, Mathematics and/or Science experiences
- Skill Groups – work on individual needs in small groups
- Outdoor/Gross Motor Play
- Transition/Calm Down Activity – movement, literacy
- Lunch
- Rest (Refer to your child’s specific napping arrangements)
- Individual Skill Instruction
- Dismissal – Reflecting on the Day – music, review, good-bye rituals



### **Dress to Play**

Children should dress comfortably to participate in activities such as climbing, running, painting, and sitting on the floor. Please have children wear clothing that allows them to move freely and safely indoors and outdoors, such as pants or shorts for both boys and girls. Please send your child in clothing without drawstrings, as this may cause a safety concern. Clothes may get dirty or torn. For this reason, we suggest play clothes. Help us keep children safe by sending them in sneakers or other comfortable shoes which are secured to their feet. **We ask that children do not wear sandals, flip-flops or open toed shoes.**

If your child’s classroom is located in a school district building, please be aware that the school district may have additional dress codes. Classroom teachers will inform families of any school district dress codes.

**Please provide an extra change of clothes, including underwear and socks, to be kept in your child’s cubby.** Write your child’s name on his/her clothing. HS/UPK children go outside every day, unless the temperature is extremely cold/hot or it is raining. Children should have clothing suitable for both hot and cold weather.

### **Individualized Planning**

Staff take into account children’s individual temperament, experiences, developmental needs, and learning styles. Activities are then planned for the children to reflect these individual needs. HS/UPK staff partner with families on a regular basis to review children’s progress and ensure that each child’s needs are being met. An individualized plan is developed that includes both classroom and at home activities that target each child’s needs. In center based programs, monthly activity calendars are sent home, giving the family ideas and suggestions for activities which support their child’s development and school readiness.

### **\*Plan for Behavior Management**

Pro Action HS/UPK’s Behavior Management Plan is developed to provide positive guidance, promote self-esteem, guide children in developing self-regulation skills and assume responsibility for his or her actions. Staff provide clear and consistent expectations and safe boundaries appropriate to their age.

Discipline, when needed:

- Is only conducted by Pro Action staff and is directly related to the child's action;
- Is developmentally appropriate;
- Implements the *Conscious Discipline* practices to support the social and emotional awareness and skills of the staff and children in HS/UPK classrooms;
- Focuses on clear expectations that tell children what to "Do" rather than "Don't Do";
- Involves staff and children modeling helpful behavior;
- Utilizes *The Second Step* curriculum to help children discuss and manage their feelings in appropriate ways, make friends, and solve problems;
- May involve physical intervention as a technique to work with a child so they can self-regulate and regain composure as quickly and safely as possible; and
- May include a Positive Support Plan (PSP) meeting between family members and classroom staff to plan for a child's success.

Discipline never involves:

- Corporal punishment or any form of physical punishment or force. This type of discipline is not allowed in HS/UPK by any staff member, volunteer, paid therapist, or support person paid by another outside agency;
- Isolation where a child cannot be seen or supervised;
- Withholding of food, rest or sleep;
- Methods of intervention that punish, demean or humiliate a child;
- Physical restraint; or any abuse or maltreatment of a child.

Children are taught developmentally appropriate techniques for managing conflicts and emotions. The school family works to help children develop skills necessary to make positive choices. Staff members help children develop self-regulation skills, a sense of what is right and wrong, and respect for the rights of others. Staff develop rules that provide clear expectations and safe boundaries for children at the beginning of each program year. These rules are posted in the classroom and are reviewed with the children frequently throughout the school year. If a child requires time away from the rest of the group to help him/her to self-regulate, he/she will be supported and supervised by a staff person until they have regained composure and are ready to rejoin the group. Staff will work with parents in developing a plan of action for children who demonstrate the need for additional supports in social and emotional development.

### **Developmental Screenings / Ongoing Assessments**

All children receive a developmental screening within 45 days of enrollment. These may be conducted during the summer or at the beginning of the school year. These screenings are administered by classroom teaching staff or home-based home visitors.

The DIAL™- 4 screening tool is used with children in center-based programming and provides a brief overview of a child's development. The ASQ®-3 (Ages and Stages Questionnaire) is the screening tool used for children participating in the home-based program.

The e-DECA helps teachers and parents assess and promote positive relationships, self-control, and initiative-taking as core skills for school-readiness. It also helps identify behaviors that are

not age-appropriate and target explicit Conscious Discipline strategies to help individual children.

Parents are informed of screening results and are given the opportunity to work together with staff in planning educational experiences for children.

Each child's progress is assessed throughout the school year using the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework and the NYS Pre-K Foundation for the Common Core. Pro Action Head Start's assessment tool is My Teaching Strategies- GOLD® and is based upon checklists and anecdotal observations of each child. Checkpoints for the assessment tool occur three times per year, typically in the fall, winter, and spring. After each checkpoint, a parent-teacher conference or an education home visit is offered to provide parents and staff an opportunity to partner and collectively provide input about plans and goals for each child. Staff use My Teaching Strategies to drive instruction and generate activities which are specific to each child's developmental progress. In addition, parents/guardians can directly access their child's assessment information via the web.

### **Services for Children with Disabilities**

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), requires that all programs, such as Head Start, are accessible to persons with disabilities including staff, parents/guardians, and children. Head Start Federal Program Performance Standards require at least 10% of a program's funded enrollment serve children with identified disabilities.

HS/UPK staff works closely with each school district's Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) office and each county's Special Children's Services. With these working relationships, HS/UPK staff can ensure children with a disability are receiving services identified in their Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individual Education Plan (IEP). The program partners with service providers, such as speech therapists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and special education itinerant teacher (SEIT) providers to support the child's identified needs and goals. These service providers can work with the children in the classroom or the home. When available, families will be given the opportunity to utilize tele-therapy services. All CPSE services are provided through the local county Public Health Special Services.

Throughout the year, parents/guardians and HS/UPK staff may identify children with potential developmental concerns. Identifying these concerns can be in conjunction with a developmental screening and/or classroom observation. Some classrooms have the ability to utilize school district related service providers to conduct a screening in their functional area (i.e. - speech, OT, PT). This screening may suggest further evaluation. Staff, with the family's consent, refer children to the local Early Intervention Services (EI) or Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) for further evaluation. HS/UPK staff are available to support families throughout this process and to become advocates for their child.

## **Holidays / Birthdays**

HS/UPK respects the ethnic, cultural, and religious practices of all families and tries to offer a culturally diverse program. Families are asked to complete a Family Interest Survey that helps staff get to know each individual family, their interests, and cultural preferences. HS/UPK does not initiate holiday celebrations. Occasionally, communities and school districts sponsor holiday related events that include the HS/UPK program. We may take part in these activities if they are developmentally appropriate, meet NYS Day Care Licensing Regulations, and as long as participation in such events is acceptable based on the diverse values and beliefs of all families and the program. Maintaining a normal classroom routine helps minimize stress children may feel during these special times.

Many families choose to acknowledge their child's birthday in the classroom. Family involvement is always welcome! We do, however, realize many families would rather keep birthday celebrations a family tradition and some family cultures choose not to celebrate this event. Do not feel obligated to provide a birthday celebration in the classroom. Call your child's teacher to discuss any plans you have. Any birthday celebration must be developmentally appropriate and fit into the curriculum and schedule.

Pro Action Head Start **PROHIBITS** any outside food, whether it is homemade or purchased, from coming into the classroom for any reason.

### Suggestions of other ways to celebrate your child's special day, if you choose:

- Come in to your child's class and read a story, participate in the day's activities, or meal time
- Bring in an item for show and tell
- Come in and share family memories/pictures
- Come in and play a game with the class
- Work with staff to plan a special activity
- Create a "Celebrate Me Book" with the class with each child drawing a picture of the birthday child.

**Please do not send any invitations for parties or other gatherings with the intent to have them sent home with other children in the classroom. Staff are not allowed to do this.**

During holidays, parents sometimes want to provide gifts to the HS/UPK staff. Please note, due to Federal regulations, HS/UPK staff cannot accept personal gifts from enrolled families.

## **Field Trips**

Field trips are a special part of preschool education. Children learn about the resources in their community when they visit special places, such as the fire station, pizza parlor, post office, farms, or parks. Classrooms may walk within the neighborhood, or travel by bus for field trips. Children will need a signed permission slip/transportation plan to attend the field trip. Parents/guardians are welcome to be a part of the planning of field trips, will be notified in advance of special trips, and are encouraged to participate. The program may need to limit these opportunities in the event of a state of emergency or concerns of public health and safety.

## **HEALTH & SAFETY**

### **General**

A child's health plays a key role in his/her ability to benefit from the HS/UPK experience. During the initial home visit, parents/guardians have an opportunity to share health information about their child with program staff. Staff members work closely with all parents/guardians to ensure a healthy learning environment for all children. Lesson plans include activities which teach children about simple preventative measures such as hand washing, getting enough rest, dental hygiene, and the importance of physical activity.

Pro Action Head Start programs meet NYS EPSDT health requirements for enrolled children which include periodic well child visits, immunizations, hemoglobin/hematocrit screening, lead screening, dental exams, hearing screening, and vision screening.

### **\*Physical Examinations / Immunizations**

NYSOCFS Child Care Regulations require that all center-based children have a current physical examination and an up-to-date immunization record on file in the HS/UPK Health Manager's office BEFORE a child can start in the classroom. A child's physical is considered current if it was completed within the 12 months prior to enrollment in the HS/UPK program. Home based children are required to have an up to date physical as soon as possible. Please note, if your child's physical expires during the program year, another physical form must be completed and returned to classroom staff or Home Visitor.

New York State Public Health Law 2164 states that all children enrolled in daycare, Head Start, and Pre-K must be up to date (following the Centers for Disease Control immunization schedule) with the following immunizations: diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (DTaP), poliomyelitis (IPV), hepatitis B, measles, mumps, rubella (MMR), varicella, haemophilus influenzae type b (HIB), and pneumococcal disease (PCV).

Children who are not up to date on any of these immunizations must receive the first age appropriate dose of each needed vaccine within 14 calendar days of enrollment or the child will not be able to attend their classroom until the program receives documentation of the appropriate immunizations. For additional required doses needed in the series, appointments must be immediately scheduled and communicated with the program. The only immunization exemption that is allowed in NYS is an approved medical exemption from your child's doctor.

For homebased children to attend events, including socializations that are held at licensed daycare facilities and/or public school buildings, the child must be up to date on their immunizations or in the process stated above.

### **Dental**

Early dental care is essential to a child's health. Infants and toddlers are strongly encouraged to see a dentist by the age of 2 years. Parents/Guardians of children 3-5 years old, are asked to

provide documentation of a recently completed dental exam (within the last 12 months), signed by a dentist.

To promote effective oral hygiene, children in all HS/UPK classrooms brush their teeth daily using fluoride toothpaste, with supervision and assistance from staff.

### **Hearing/Vision Screenings**

HS/UPK makes arrangements for hearing and vision screenings to be completed on enrolled children. Parents/guardians are encouraged to be present during the screenings and are notified of the results. If the results indicate that there is a concern, parents/guardians are encouraged to seek further evaluation. Home Visitors can provide information about the next steps in the referral process including vision and hearing providers. Please follow up as soon as possible if your child is referred for vision or hearing concerns. Your child may not realize they are having problems.

### **Illness**

Under the guidance of the Health Management Team, HS/UPK staff members are responsible for observing all children daily for indications of illness or injury. When illness is suspected, parents/guardians are notified immediately. The child is supervised until arrangements can be made for the child to go home.

If your child is not feeling well enough to participate fully in the program, including outdoor play, please keep him/her home until all evidence of illness is gone. Children need to be fever free, without medication, for a complete 24 hours before returning to school. If your child has a communicable disease, they must have a doctor's note stating the illness and the date that they may return to the classroom.

### **When to Keep Your Child Home**

- If your child is not feeling well enough to participate fully in the program
- Fever
  - \*\* Children must be fever free for 24 hours without the assistance of medication to return to the classroom (with the exception of antibiotics)\*\***
- Diarrhea-changes in the child's stool pattern-two or more loose/watery stools, uncontrollable loose stool, and/or stool that runs out of underwear/pullup.
- Vomiting
- Sore throat
- Earache
- Red eyes with discharge
- Head Lice/Nits (lice eggs)
- Rash of unknown origin, that appears and spreads quickly
- Signs of a concussion
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Other signs of illness



Sometimes a child contracts an illness which is easily transmitted to other children. When this happens, a letter is sent to all families alerting them of the illness. The letter contains information on symptoms, what to watch for, and when children can typically return to class.

In the event of a serious Public Health emergency, the program's exclusion criteria may change based on guidance from the local Public Health department and/or school districts.

### **\*Injuries/Serious Incidents**

If a child is injured in a HS/UPK classroom, the parent/guardian will be notified via telephone, text message, verbally, or a note sent home with the child that day. The method of contact will depend on the seriousness of the injury.

### **\*Emergency Information**

*NYS Day Care Licensing Regulations require that HS/UPK staff members must be able to reach parents/guardians or emergency contact people at all times.*

Families will be asked to provide names and WORKING PHONE NUMBERS of responsible adults who are at least 18 years of age and can be contacted in an emergency if parents/guardians cannot be reached. These people must be available to pick the child up from the classroom in a parent's absence and may be asked to show ID when picking up the child.

*Parents/guardians must notify staff of any changes in emergency contact information. Children will not be allowed to attend the program without current emergency contact information available to program staff.*

### **\*First Aid / Medication Administration**

Program staff are certified in First Aid and CPR.

Non-child specific, over the counter topical ointments (such as sunscreen, Vaseline, diaper cream, and lotions) can be provided in the classroom, with parent request and written consent.

Prescription medication and over the counter oral medication may be administered, but it is site specific. This requires written instructions from the child's doctor and the parents/guardians. Not all sites are authorized to dispense prescription medication. We encourage families to work out a schedule with the child's doctor so that medication is only given at home.

Emergency medication (such as inhalers, nebulizers, epinephrine auto injectors, Benadryl WITH an epinephrine auto injector) may be administered at each site, if necessary. Appropriate paperwork would need to be filled out completely by the parent/guardian and the child's physician.

*Note: The administration of any medication must be in compliance with the Head Start Program Performance Standards, NYSOCFS Child Care Regulations 418-1.11, Pro Action Head Start Medication Policy (revised 6/2015). This policy is available for review upon request.*

If your child requires any type of over the counter or prescription medication, please talk to classroom staff as soon as possible.

Children cannot be in possession of medication or over the counter topical ointments at any time, including in their backpack. **Do not send medications, including over the counter ointments (i.e.: sunscreen, lotion, diaper cream, lip balm, hand sanitizer etc) to school with your child.** Parents/guardians are responsible for transportation of all medications.

The HS/UPK program has an Anaphylaxis Policy in place for staff to follow when children with identified allergies (food, seasonal, environmental etc.) are enrolled in the program. The policy covers identification of children with allergies, prevention of allergen exposure, recognition of anaphylaxis, and response to a child experiencing anaphylaxis. For more information, please see the program's Anaphylaxis Policy.

When a classroom is located in a school district building, they have access to the school nurse. Some school nurses have access to non-patient specific Epinephrine autoinjector in case of an emergency such as an allergic reaction. If your child is having a life-threatening allergic reaction, the nurse may utilize this medication to counteract the allergic reaction.

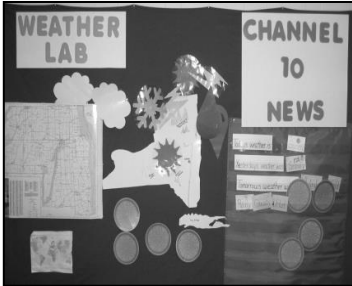
## **Mental Health Services**

HS/UPK provides mental health consultation services to support a program-wide culture that promotes children's mental health, social-emotional well-being, and overall health. The mental health consultation services help us to provide supports for effective classroom management and positive learning environments; supportive teaching practices; and strategies for supporting children with challenging behaviors and other social, emotional, and mental health concerns. These services will be provided by the program's mental health consultant or school district counseling staff (i.e. school psychologist, school counselor, social worker, etc). If further evaluation of a child is recommended, or if further mental health support is needed for a child or family, the Mental Health Consultant can facilitate an outside Mental Health referral.

## **Emergency Drills/Emergency Closings**

Classroom staff will support children in practicing emergency drills, evacuation drills, drills which require a shelter in place, and other safety drills as needed. Each HS/UPK classroom has emergency plans in place and also works with the local school districts to follow their required procedures.

In an actual emergency or weather-related event, the classroom may need to evacuate, close, or have a delayed opening. If the school district where your child attends HS/UPK issues a closing or delay, then the HS/UPK classroom is also closed or delayed.



Emergency closings are announced on the radio along with other school closings or delays.

**School cancellations/closings - *listen to:***

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**Please keep all emergency contact information up to date so that staff can reach you in the event of an emergency.**

**\*NUTRITION / FOOD SERVICE**

**General**

Nutrition services are a significant part of the HS/UPK program. They are designed to support parents/guardians' efforts in helping children develop healthy eating habits which promote life-long well-being. Lesson plans include weekly, planned opportunities for children to learn about healthy food choices and how food helps your body grow.

All HS/UPK classrooms follow the New York State Child and Adult Food Care Program (CACFP) for meal pattern requirements. All food and beverages served during mealtime are low in fat, sodium, and sugar. For additional information regarding CACFP, healthy foods, beverages, and childhood obesity, please see:

<http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition/resources/parentres.htm>

*This institution is an equal opportunity provider.*

**Meal Service**

All HS/UPK classrooms serve breakfast and lunch to the children. An afternoon snack varies by program and length of day. Children eat family style, offering a relaxed atmosphere, and meals are provided right in the classroom, unless alternate arrangements are made. HS/UPK offers children a variety of nutritious foods which are appealing to young children. Foods served include a variety and color of fruits and vegetables each week. Children are encouraged to try foods which are new to them. Children are never forced to eat. Food is not used as a reward or punishment.

Breakfast, lunch, and snack menus are reviewed by a Registered Dietician. Menus are posted in each classroom. A copy of the menu is sent home at the beginning of each month.

Meals are prepared either on site (for example, by the school district if your child's classroom is located in a school building) or by an approved kitchen off site.

### **Cost for Meals**

There is no cost to families for meals or snacks.

Expenses for meals are reimbursed through the Child and Adult Care Food Program. All meals must comply with New York State Child & Adult Care Feeding Program Regulations (CACFP), regarding food types and portion size. All children must be served meals which meet the CACFP guidelines.

**PLEASE do not send lunches or snacks for your child from home, the program provides all meals to enrolled children.**

### **Special Dietary Needs**

HS/UPK works with each family to identify specific nutrition needs of individual children. Parents are promptly notified of any concerns regarding their child's mealtime. If a child requires a specific diet for religious or medical reasons or has any food allergies, parents/guardians are required to provide appropriate documentation. **Dietary changes due to food allergies or medical reasons can only be made upon receipt of written instructions from a child's doctor.** For example, if a child is allergic to milk, HS/UPK needs a written statement from the child's doctor stating what product may be substituted for the milk, such as Lactaid or soy milk. HS/UPK provides the alternate food.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

### **Availability**

Pro Action Head Start directly operates buses in limited locations. Parents can also work directly with some school districts to arrange transportation. The transportation procedures specific to each classroom are reviewed with families at the initial home visit. Parents/guardians should be aware that transportation services are not guaranteed for all locations.

### **General Information**

If your child is transported on a Pro Action operated bus, please note the following:

- Buses pick up and drop off children at their home or an authorized location at scheduled times. Delays in these times can occur due to inclement weather, changes in bus routes or traffic conditions.
- If a child misses the bus, parents may self-transport him/her to the classroom.
- If a child will not be attending class, parents/guardians **MUST** notify the classroom. If a child does not arrive for class and we have not heard from the parent, it is important that we are able to contact a parent to verify the child's actual absence.
- Parents must provide written documentation/permission which identifies the person(s) who will take responsibility for their child at the end of the bus route.
- A responsible adult needs to assist the child in crossing the street, as necessary, when loading and unloading the bus.
- Children are not permitted off the bus unless an authorized adult is there to receive them.

**PARENTS/GUARDIANS MUST PROMPTLY UPDATE, IN WRITING, ANY CHANGES IN THEIR RELEASE AND EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION.**

**Emergency Bus Drills**

Children participate in Emergency Bus Evacuation Drills, which are done as a group to ensure everyone's safety during an emergency.

**Bus Safety/Pedestrian Safety Rules**

Review the following rules with your child to help him/her develop safe riding habits and responsibility:

- Remain in your seat while the bus is in motion.
- Keep your seat belt on until you are dropped off at home or school.
- Keep all belongings under the seat and out of the aisles.
- Large objects, bulky book bags, or toys are not permitted on the bus, as this could be unsafe for you and others.
- Keep your hands to yourself and respect other children.
- No food or drinks on the bus.
- Voices should be kept to a low or moderate tone.
- Follow the bus driver's and/or bus monitor's directions.
- When walking to and from the bus, hold hands with an adult.
- Cross a street only when accompanied by an adult and at designated crosswalks.

**Self-Transportation**

Parents/guardians are welcome to provide transportation for their child to and from the HS/UPK classroom. Please drop children off and/or pick children up at the classroom's designated start and dismissal times. Staff use time before and after class for meetings or to prepare for the day. Staff are not able to care for children before or after the classroom's designated start and departure times.

If a child has not been picked up from the classroom and the parent has not made contact or other arrangements for the child to be picked up by the scheduled departure time, staff will attempt to contact the parent and/or individuals listed on the authorized emergency contact list. If necessary, appropriate authorities will be contacted to ensure the safety of the child.

Adults must sign children in when arriving and sign them out when departing. Should there be a need for another adult to transport a child to and/or from the classroom, this person must be at least 18 years of age and parents must provide written authorization to the HS/UPK staff, in advance.

HS/UPK staff cannot release a child to anyone under the age of 18 and cannot release to anyone, other than the parent, unless the parent has provided approval in writing to do so. Staff will ask to see ID, when a child is being picked up by an adult who is not known by staff.

**Please do not leave other children alone in a vehicle during drop off or pick up.**

## **GENERAL PROGRAM INFORMATION**

### **\*Admission**

Recruitment and enrollment of children in the Pro Action of Steuben & Yates, Inc. Head Start/UPK programs is without regard to sex, color, race, religion, national origin, gender identity or disability. Head Start funded slots are filled with Head Start-eligible children; UPK funded slots are filled with UPK-eligible children. Ten percent (10%) of available Head Start funded slots must be reserved for children with identified disabilities. Annual recruitment occurs every spring, however, applications can be taken at any time during the year. A waitlist is maintained based on eligibility points. If an enrollment slot becomes available during the year, the family/child on the waitlist with the highest eligibility points are contacted to determine interest.

Actual admission of an individual child is contingent upon the program's receipt of:

- 1) Documentation of a current physical examination
- 2) Documentation that immunizations are in compliance with New York State Public Health Law

There is no charge to the family for their child's participation in the HS/UPK program.

### **Attendance**

Regular attendance is important.

Please contact the classroom at the beginning of each day if your child will not be attending school, along with the reason for the absence. Most classrooms have voicemail, allowing parents to leave a message at any time of the day. Classrooms can also be contacted by email or text message to an agency cell phone. If a child is absent and the parent has not contacted the classroom, a staff member will contact the family to confirm the child's absence. In some cases, you may be asked to provide a written statement from your child's doctor stating when he/she may return to class.

Regular attendance is also important for families enrolled in the home-based program. Home Visitors will work with families to schedule visits at a time that is convenient for families. Families are asked to notify their home visitor in advance, whenever possible, if they are unable to keep the scheduled home visit. Attempts will be made to reschedule the home visit.

Staff will follow up on patterns of chronic absenteeism. If follow up reveals that absences are due to family circumstances that prevent regular attendance, no further action is needed. Staff will provide support in an attempt to improve attendance. If follow-up reveals no valid excuse, attendance is monitored for 30 days. If no improvement is noted, parents/guardians will be notified that the child will no longer be considered enrolled in the HS/UPK program, and will be placed back on the waitlist.

Missing 30 consecutive days (for center-based programs) or 4 consecutive home visits (for home-based programs) with no valid excuse and/or no contact from the family, may be considered an enrollment vacancy.

## Drug & Alcohol Policy

Center based programs:

1. In the case of a parent/guardian coming to the classroom to pick a child up and suspected of being under the influence of drugs or alcohol, staff will ask the parent/guardian to leave the child in the classroom until an alternate release person can be located. If the parent/guardian does not cooperate with staff or insists on taking the child from the center, staff will be required to notify authorities immediately, to ensure safety of the child.
2. In the case of an alternate authorized adult coming to the classroom to pick a child up and that adult is suspected of being under the influence of drugs or alcohol, that release person will be asked to leave the child in the classroom. Staff will attempt to contact the parent/guardian immediately to arrange alternate transportation.
3. If there is a pattern of drug and alcohol abuse suspected with a parent/guardian, the program may make a report to the New York State Child Abuse Central Registry, as required by law.

Home based programs:

Home visits will not be completed if the home visitor suspects the parent is under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Whenever possible, staff will determine if there is another responsible adult present who can care for the child. If the parent is unable to care for the child due to being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and no other adult is available to provide care, staff are legally required to report to the New York State Child Abuse Central Registry. During socializations, parents must accompany their children to the socialization site. Upon arrival, if a parent is suspected of being under the influence of drugs or alcohol, staff will ask the parent to remain at the socialization site until another responsible adult can be located. If the parent/guardian does not cooperate with staff or insists on taking the child from the site, staff will be required to notify authorities immediately, to ensure safety of the child.

## Photos/Videos

Due to strict federal and state regulations regarding the privacy of children and families, the use of photographs within the program will be limited. **In an effort to respect each family's privacy, we ask that parents/guardians only take pictures of their own child/children during program events and activities. Parents/Guardians are responsible for notifying other family members or friends of the Photo/Video restrictions, if they plan to attend program events.**

Staff may take pictures, using program equipment or cameras, of daily activities, field trips, socializations, or special events. These photographs may be used for classroom displays, activities, media coverage, and various agency publications.

Some school districts take individual child or classroom photographs for use in school yearbooks and publications.

The program cannot be held responsible for any school district, individual parent/family, or media use of photographs, videos, or names if used in such things as yearbooks, press releases, publications, or sharing of such content through social media.

### **Smoke/Tobacco Free Environment**

Due to the acknowledged hazards, both to adult nonsmokers and especially to young children arising from exposure to environmental tobacco smoke, it is the policy of Pro Action Head Start to provide a smoke-free environment for staff, children, and participants. This policy includes, but is not limited to, the use of any tobacco product, cigarettes, cigars, pipes, chewing tobacco, electronic cigarettes and/or vape products, as well as legalized or illegal drugs (including marijuana). This policy applies to both employees and non-employee participants of Pro Action Head Start.

Pro Action Head Start serves as an example to other childcare and community agencies, and staff and volunteers serve as role models by not smoking in the presence of children, parents, and participants.

1. Smoking/chewing tobacco, marijuana, and vape products are prohibited on ALL Pro Action Head Start and school district properties, vehicles, field trips, and off site activities at all times.
2. All smoking debris, including cigarette butts and matches, will be extinguished and disposed of in proper containers BEFORE entering Pro Action property.
3. Head Start/UPK requests that parents refrain from smoking while waiting at bus stops with their children.
4. Staff will not smoke and will request that parents refrain from smoking during home visits. Parents will be informed of the smoke-free request prior to the home visit.

### **Sex Offenders**

Pro Action HS/UPK may limit involvement in program activities by any known sex offender, depending on the situation, relation to the child, and legal restrictions. Please refer to the *Procedure Re: Registered/Convicted Sex Offenders* for further information. Parents/guardians who are registered sex offenders, or those who would like more information about this procedure, should contact their Home Visitor or classroom staff for a copy of the procedure or to discuss their situation and options.

### **\*Child Abuse/Maltreatment Reporting Requirements**

The Pro Action Head Start/UPK program is legally required to report all situations of suspected child abuse and maltreatment to the New York State Child Abuse Central Registry. HS/UPK does not investigate whether abuse or neglect has actually taken place. That is the job of the local Department of Social Services.

Families are not eliminated from the program because of suspected or actual abuse/maltreatment. The program offers informal counseling, and information on services available in the community to assist families in coping with the emotional, social, economic, school, or discipline problems which threaten the family's unity and health. Throughout the year, families receive information on child safety and the identification and prevention of child abuse.

### **Policy Re: Children Whose Parents Do Not Live Together**

HS/UPK supports and respects the unique composition of each family, including those that are separated, divorced, and/or never married. With custody arrangements varying from family to



family, this policy does not expect to cover every situation that might arise. Contact staff or the Home Based Manager for clarification of specific family situations.

**PLEASE NOTE: It is NOT the responsibility of the HS/UPK Program to interpret custody and visitation orders. It is the responsibility of the parents and their legal representatives to work this out amongst themselves, and if necessary, provide further clarification of the orders. HS/UPK makes every effort to remain a neutral party and to work with both parents and/or guardians to support the best interest of the enrolled child. Staff are not in a position to provide legal advice.**

- Generally, HS/UPK staff work directly with the parent/guardian who has either sole custody, or physical placement in joint custody situations. Staff will attempt to encourage the involvement of both parents. Current Orders of Protection will be followed.
- Families are responsible for providing current copies of all custody orders, family court orders, and/or orders of protection. These orders will be maintained in the child's folder. Changes to custody/visitation orders will only be honored when new written orders, signed by the court, are provided by either parent. Staff may contact Family Court to be sure we have the most recent court order.
- If custody arrangements have not been established by the court, by law, each biological parent will be given equal access to the child.
- Individuals may be asked to show proof of being the child's parent, either through court paperwork or an Order of Affiliation (Statement of Paternity).
- Only a parent/legal guardian may sign enrollment paperwork, program information forms, permission forms, and/or releases. In limited situations, a parent/legal guardian may give consent for permission slips to be signed and/or information to be shared with another adult (for example; grandparent, significant other).

#### Release of Child:

- If JOINT CUSTODY has been established, both parents generally have equal rights to the child. HS/UPK will work with the parent who has physical placement to obtain a schedule of when each parent may pick up the child. If a parent comes to pick up the child on their non-scheduled day, without prior notice, HS/UPK will attempt to contact the parent who has scheduled time with the child that day. If physical placement is equally shared, the custody paperwork should reflect the child's schedule.
- If SOLE CUSTODY has been established, generally only the parent who is awarded sole custody has the right to pick up the child. If the custodial parent grants permission for another adult, including the non-custodial parent, to pick up the child, his/her name will be listed on the emergency card and/or authorized pick up list. Current HS/UPK policy prohibits the release of a child to anyone not listed on the emergency card and authorized pick-up list. Photo identification may be required when picking up a child.
- If custody has NOT BEEN ESTABLISHED, or current custody paperwork has not been provided by the parents, both biological parents will have equal rights to the child. In this case, neither parent can be prevented from picking up the child, but staff will make a phone call to inform the parent who lives with the child that the other parent has picked up the child from class. No one can restrict the rights of parent except for a court of law.

#### Release of Information:

- Typically, both biological parents have a right to their child’s academic information, and staff will be able to share information regarding the child’s progress and screenings with both biological parents, unless court paperwork states otherwise.
- Information about a parent or the parent’s household will not be shared with the other parent.
- 

For additional information on record access and parental rights, refer to the section “*Annual Notice Re: Confidentiality, Record Access, and Privacy of Personal Information*” in this Family Handbook.

#### Visiting the Classroom:

HS/UPK will offer both parents (in both sole and joint custody arrangements) the opportunity to participate in the classroom, unless court orders specifically prohibit contact. In cases of sole legal custody, the custodial parent may have the right to deny classroom visitation of the non-custodial parent. In cases of supervised visitation, staff are NOT able to provide supervision for the visitation.

### **\*Annual Notice Re: Confidentiality, Record Access, and Privacy of Personal Information**

Pro Action Head Start/UPK takes the matter of confidentiality and privacy very seriously. Federal regulations define *Personally identifiable information (PII)* as any information that could identify a specific individual, including but not limited to a child’s name, name of a child’s family member, street address of the child, or other information that is linked or linkable to the child. The HS/UPK program maintains a record on all children enrolled in the program. Child records are locked when not in use. The record includes any information pertaining to that individual child and may include documentation in print and electronic format. Access to children’s records is limited to only HS/UPK staff directly involved with the family, and members of the management team for purposes of maintaining record accuracy and compliance.

#### Release of Information with Parental Consent

A release form is obtained prior to releasing personal information to any person who is not program staff. The release form includes details on what information will be disclosed, the purpose for disclosure, the parties between who the information may be shared, and a time frame. The release form is signed and dated by the parent/guardian and a staff member. Granting consent for this type of release is voluntary and can be revoked by the parent at any time. The following releases are examples of consents which may be utilized by the program: General Release of Information; Health Information Release; Screening Consent; etc.

#### Release of Information without Parental Consent

There are times when information may be released without parental consent.

Pro Action Head Start/UPK may disclose limited information from a child record to another program or school district, when the disclosure is related to the child’s enrollment or transfer to/from another program. Parents/Guardians are notified about the disclosure in advance and are given an opportunity to challenge or refuse the disclosure. Some examples of this type of

disclosure may include, but are not limited to: information from a child's enrollment application to be shared with the local school district upon enrollment in the HS/UPK program or use of the signed Record Access/General Program Policy Agreement to allow specific health and academic information to be shared with the local school district for the purpose of transitioning into kindergarten.

The program must also allow disclosure of PII from a child's record without parental consent in certain situations, such as:

- To officials within the program, acting for the program, or from a federal or state entity, in connection with an audit or evaluation, or for enforcement of compliance with regulations. A written agreement is established with the entity to ensure Pro Action's oversight with respect to the use, further disclosure, and destruction of PII when no longer needed.
- To officials within the program, acting for the program, or from a federal or state entity, to conduct a study to improve child and family outcomes. A written agreement is established with the entity to ensure Pro Action's oversight with respect to the use, further disclosure, and destruction of PII when no longer needed.
- To protect the health or safety of children or other persons, Pro Action Head Start/UPK utilizes the Pro Action Head Start Emergency Procedures Handbook and local school district safety procedures from classrooms located within school district facilities.
- In response to judicial orders and lawfully issued subpoenas.
- Providing access to authorized representatives from New York State Department of Health to conduct program monitoring, evaluations, and performance measures for the Child and Adult Care Food Program.
- Access to a caseworker or other representative from the local child welfare agency (Department of Social Services), who has the right to access a case plan for a child who is in foster care placement. A written agreement is obtained from DSS ensuring the protection of PII.
- Access to Department of Social Services Child Protective Units to address suspected or identified child maltreatment, consistent with applicable federal, state, and local laws on reporting child abuse and neglect.

Individuals having access to children's records are asked to sign and date the "*Record Access/Sign In Form*" maintained in each child's file. In addition to complying with federal and state regulations regarding the use of Personally Identifiable Information, Pro Action Head Start/UPK will comply with relevant FERPA and IDEA regulations.

#### Parental Rights

Pro Action Head Start established procedure:

1. The parent of an enrolled child has the right to inspect the contents of the child's record. This request must be in writing on the program "Request to Inspect and Review a Record" form.
2. The parent of an enrolled child has the right to request copies of content from the child's record. This request must be in writing on the program "Request for Copy of Specified

Record” form. A written request is not needed for a copy of a child’s Birth Certificate, physical, and immunization record.

3. A non-custodial parent also has a right to request access to the child’s record, unless parental rights have been terminated or a court order states the parent has been limited to receive information. A non-custodial parent follows the same process in requesting a review of the file. The non-custodial parent only receives information pertaining to the health or academic information of the child. The program does not share information about one parent with the other parent, including a parent’s goals, referrals, Family Assessment, or other information obtained about the parent’s household.
4. If a parent completes a “Request to Inspect and Review a Record” form or a “Request for Copy of Specified Record” form, the program has up to 45 days from the receipt of the request to make the child’s record available for the parent. Line staff must obtain clearance from their supervisor prior to releasing information to the parent and report said requests in monthly reports. Staff review records and remove information from a child record that pertains to another child to ensure the parent only inspects information that pertains to his/her child.
5. A staff person is present to answer questions and provide clarification when a parent is inspecting his/her child’s file. The program ensures that the parent only inspects information pertaining to the parent’s child.
6. Child records are maintained for a period of three years beyond the end of the program year in which the child was last enrolled in the Head Start program. The agency maintains documentation of outstanding “Request to Inspect and Review a Record” in the Head Start ERSEA office to ensure records are not destroyed if there remains an outstanding request to review.

For more information, refer to the “*Pro Action Head Start Procedures Relevant to Head Start Program Performance Standards Subpart C- Protection for the Privacy of Child Records*”.

### **\*Confidentiality**

When participating in HS/UPK classroom activities, individuals may become aware of the needs of enrolled children. HS/UPK expects that all staff, parents/guardians, providers, and volunteers will maintain confidentiality and respect the privacy of others. All HS/UPK paid employees, volunteers, paid therapists, or support persons paid by any other outside agency sign an agreement to abide by the program’s confidentiality policies.

When families are enrolled in multiple Pro Action Early Head Start and Head Start/UPK program options, staff from each program may share information with one another to provide comprehensive support services for the family and prevent duplication of services.

## **\*Parent /Guardian Concerns**

*The following process will be followed to resolve parent concerns:*

1. When a parent is concerned about an issue involving a staff member, the following steps should be followed:
  - a. First the parent should speak directly to the staff member about the concern.
  - a. If the parent is not satisfied with the discussion with the staff member or the parent feels he/she cannot talk to the staff member, the parent should then talk with the staff member's supervisor.
  - b. If the parent is not satisfied with the discussion with the supervisor or feels he/she cannot talk to the supervisor, the parent should talk with the HS/EHS Director.
  - c. If the parent is not satisfied with the discussion with the HS/EHS Director, the parent can request that the matter be brought to the attention of the Policy Council.
2. When a parent is concerned about any program issue not involving a staff member (for example, budgets, space, playground, transportation):
  - a. The parent should attend a classroom team meeting to discuss the issue.
  - b. If the parent is not satisfied with the discussion, the parent can speak directly to the HS/EHS Director.
  - c. If the parent is not satisfied with the discussion with the HS/EHS Director, the parent can request that the matter be brought to the attention of the Policy Council.
3. If the concern reaches the Policy Council level, the process for resolving concerns or complaints brought forth by parents is:
  - a. The HS/EHS Director will ask the complainant to submit a written request for a meeting with the Policy Council Executive Committee, the HS/EHS Director and representative of Pro Action's administrative team.
  - b. Upon receipt of the written request, the HS/EHS Director will confer with Pro Action's Administrative team regarding the complaint. The HS/EHS Director will arrange for the meeting to hear verbal testimony from the complainant within ten (10) working days of receiving the written request for a meeting.
  - c. After hearing the testimony, the PC Executive Committee, a representative of Pro Action's Administrative team and the HS/EHS Director will agree on a solution to the complaint and be prepared to present it at the next regularly scheduled Policy Council meeting.
  - d. At the next regularly scheduled Policy Council meeting, the HS/EHS Director will review the complaint. The complainant can request to be present at the meeting, and, if the complainant desires, will be given the opportunity to address the total Council about the complaint.
  - e. After hearing the review of the complaint from the HS/EHS Director and the complainant (if present), the HS/EHS Director will present the proposed solution to the Council. If the complainant is present, he or she will be excused from the meeting while the solution is being presented and discussed. The Council will formally approve or disapprove the proposed solution (including any newly developed policy or revision to current policy).
  - f. If the complainant is present at the Policy Council meeting, he or she will be informed verbally of the Policy Council's approval of recommended solution. If the

complainant is not present at the Policy Council meeting, he or she will be informed in writing of the decision within five (5) working days of the Council meeting.

4. If the complainant believes that the solution offered by the HS/EHS Director and the Policy Council does not fully address the concern, the matter will be presented to the agency's Executive Director and Pro Action's Board of Directors' Executive Committee for further review. Pro Action's Board Executive Committee can accept the proposed solution and inform the complainant that the matter has been sufficiently addressed and no further discussion will be held. Or, the Board Executive Committee can meet with the complainant, the HS/EHS Director and the Executive Director. After the meeting, the Board Executive Committee will work with the Executive Director and HS/EHS Director to develop an alternative solution. The alternative solution will be presented to the Policy Council for approval at the next regularly scheduled meeting. The Policy Council will formally approve or disapprove the alternative solution. Notice of approval will be given in writing to the complainant within five (5) working days. If the Policy Council disapproves the alternative solution, the matter will be resolved utilizing the established Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure.

NOTE: Below are the phone numbers of individuals who can assist you with questions or concerns.

1. Your classroom staff (names/phone numbers are provided at the initial home visit).
2. Kellie Lockwood, Pro Action Head Start/UPK/Early Head Start Director  
(607) 776-2125 ext. 7100
3. Laura Rossman, Pro Action Executive Director  
(607) 776-2125 / Toll Free 1-800-618-7882

For comments or concerns related to potential violations of the NYS Child Day Care Regulations, please contact Kellie Lockwood, HS/UPK Director and / or:

Virginia Primm, Regional Day Care Manager  
NYS Department of Social Services  
Office of Child and Family Services  
Rochester Regional Office  
259 Monroe Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Rm. 301  
Rochester, NY 14607  
585-238-8531

For concerns related to potential Child Abuse/Maltreatment, please contact:  
Child Abuse & Maltreatment Reporting Center 1-800-342-3720

### **Head Start/UPK/Early Head Start Director's Assurance**

All HS/UPK employees undergo a full comprehensive background check prior to hire. The check includes screening for indicated incidence of child abuse and/or maltreatment, New York Start and Federal criminal history checks, sex offender registry check, and Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs check.

All incidents of employee misconduct or performance inadequacies are reviewed in a timely manner in order to protect the safety of the children and quality of the program. Disciplinary measures, if necessary, would be in accordance with policies outlined in Pro Action of Steuben and Yates, Inc. Personnel Policies.

The HS/UPK Management Staff oversee the various functional areas of the HS/UPK Program from the program's main office which is located at the Pro Action main office building in Bath, NY. HS/UPK Management Staff work closely with the HS/UPK classroom staff, Pro Action's Board of Directors, Head Start Policy Council, and local school districts to ensure that the Head Start Program Performance Standards and State Standards are being met.

The Head Start Program Performance Standards are the regulations set at the federal level which serve as a guide for Head Start programs throughout the United States. A copy of the Performance Standards is available for your review in each of the HS/UPK classrooms. In addition, all our classrooms must comply with New York State Office of Child and Family Services Child Care Licensing Regulations.

The Head Start/UPK/Early Head Start Director is responsible for the coordination of HS/UPK services and hereby assures that the program will meet its responsibilities as set forth in this handbook.

*Kellie Lockwood, Director*