



FAMILY HANDBOOK

2024-2025

LOCATIONS

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Northwest and Home-Based
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www.familystar.net
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A NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“The most important period of the life is not the age of university studies, but the first one – the period from birth to the age of six.”

Dr. Maria Montessori

For 35 years, Family Star has consistently provided a high-quality early childhood education for children ranging in age from birth to six years old, as well as prenatal care and services. We thank you for choosing us to provide early childhood education for your family and value the trust you have placed in us. The foundation of our program is built on the dedication, experience, and compassion of the staff, many of whom have taught at Family Star for over 20 years. The unwavering commitment of our staff, the leadership of our program directors, and the support of our caregivers make Family Star an exceptional environment where children can flourish, thrive, and grow.

The teaching philosophy and methods of Dr. Maria Montessori are at the heart of Family Star’s programs. The Montessori method uses a sequence of progressively challenging work, which allows children to learn independently at their own pace, leading to a strong sense of joy, security, success, and accomplishment. One of Dr. Montessori’s most astute observations was that children of different ages will naturally teach and learn from each other. We strive to foster discovery and mastery with individualized support to fit each child through the stages of learning.

This handbook is designed to serve as a guide, providing you with essential information about our programs, policies, and procedures. Whether you are new to Family Star or a returning family, I encourage you to explore its contents and familiarize yourself with the resources available to you.

Thank you for entrusting us with the privilege of being a part of your child’s educational journey. Together, let us create meaningful experiences that inspire curiosity, ignite passion, and unlock the potential within each of your children.

With warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lindsay McNicholas", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Lindsay McNicholas
Executive Director

WELCOME TO FAMILY STAR

MISSION

Through Montessori and other leading educational systems, we create learning environments that help guide and develop children. We seek to develop the whole child by providing high-quality, integrated environments and supports that educate children, strengthen families, and build community.

This mission firmly cements our belief that early childhood education should not be a privilege, but a right, for every child in our community. Our programming provides an excellent start for children of all backgrounds and abilities. When children leave our program, they leave with an advanced capability to learn, which sets them up for success in school and in life.

Family Star believes the future of our community will be enhanced when all people can live and work cooperatively. Racism, sexism, and all other forms of bias or intolerance have no place in our organization. We take an anti-bias approach; we recognize and value individual and cultural differences with a trauma-informed lens.

PROGRAM VALUES

To discover the child in inclusive Montessori environments and inspire a movement for educating children and caregivers, while breaking systemic barriers to allow children and caregivers to reach their fullest potential.

- Respect – Honor all with dignity and empathy
- Integrity – Conduct our work honestly, truthfully, and transparently
- Community – Value and work to strengthen the whole community
- Support – Support the wellness and wellbeing of children, staff, and families
- Communication – Practice ongoing, transparent, and consistent dialog with all
- Curiosity – Approach our work with a spirit of wanting to continuously learn
- Individualization – Believe every child is unique, and we strive to support each child's development uniquely
- Equity – Meet children and families where they are and provide necessary resources to overcome barriers

WHAT IS FAMILY STAR?

Family Star is a trauma-informed, inclusive, unique, successful, and comprehensive education program because we are:

- A school implementing Montessori curriculum
- A Parents as Teachers, home-based parenting education program (including prenatal)
- An Early Head Start program
- A Head Start program
- An inclusive environment offering comprehensive support services
- A diverse community

HISTORY

Family Star was founded in 1988 by a passionate group of inner-city Denver parents, educators and community members determined to stop the decline of their community and provide their young children with a healthy future. They closed an abandoned 9-plex apartment building across the street from the local Montessori elementary school in Northeast Denver. This building, reclaimed and renovated, became Denver's premier Montessori early childhood education school, Family Star School.

The success of Family Star's pilot program led to the opening of a second location in Northwest Denver in 1997, where it was selected to be one of the first Early Head Start (EHS) programs in the county to serve 75 pregnant women and children ages 0-3 years old. Later, Family Star was chosen to be one of 17 programs to participate in the first national EHS research study. In 2009, Family Star was awarded 40 expansion slots to increase services for more children and families, which allowed the program to create a home-based option. In 2011, Family Star became a delegate agency for Denver Great Kids Head Start, the Denver office of Head Start. Since then, Family Star has expanded their school and home-based program because of expanded funding opportunities through the Office of Head Start.

PURPOSE / PHILOSOPHY

The Montessori philosophy respects the individuality of each child. Dr. Maria Montessori believed in the worth, value, and importance of children. Her method is founded on the belief that children should be free to succeed and learn without restriction or criticism. Additionally, the philosophy embraces the needs, talents, gifts, and special individuality of each child that support their learning style and pace of learning. The underlying goal of Montessori is to promote the joy of learning. Children who experience the joy of learning are happy, confident, and fulfilled children.

The Montessori Method is built on the conviction that children are intelligent, active, and purposeful beings who are deeply invested in their own development. Maria Montessori believed children were not "empty vessels" waiting to be filled. The adult's job is to draw out of the child what is already there waiting to be revealed. Therefore, the Montessori Method is distinguished by three characteristics:

1. The main task of the Lead Teacher is to foster the child's development instead of just transferring knowledge. Montessori educators are specially trained to observe children. They use these skills to monitor student progress, diagnose needed interventions and plan future work.
2. The classroom is a rich, specially prepared, and developmentally appropriate environment that invites the child to active, purposeful engagement and learning.
3. Within the prepared environment, children develop at their own pace and adults guide development with quiet respect for the needs of the children and their emerging capacities as learners.

The method is a response to a universal desire among children to want to learn and an intrinsic motivation to "do it" themselves. Through carefully directed experiences guided by physical, emotional, social, and mental order, children acquire the inner discipline necessary to focus on chosen tasks, to interact with the complex world respectfully AND confidently. Recommended books, websites and resources on Montessori can be found in the **Resources Section** of this handbook.

WHAT MAKE US DIFFERENT?

- We are one of very few Early Head Start/Head Start grantees in the country with trained, certified Montessori teachers in all our classrooms as well as certified Parent Educators who provide in-home services through Parents as Teachers curriculum
- We have highly skilled and educated teachers with in-depth training, certifications, and degrees in Montessori Curriculum, Early Childhood Education, and many years of educational experience.
- We offer comprehensive services (family services, health, nutrition, mental health, and disabilities) that support the needs of the entire family.
- We provide a holistic classroom experience that honors and reflects our community, including a bilingual approach that model both English and Spanish in classrooms and provides an environment rich in cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity.
- We are an inclusive community that can serve all children including those with varying abilities.
- We meet children where they are and provide a variety of special education services.
- We are invested in changing outcomes in children and families, not just for our children, but for all children.
- We believe education begins before birth.
- In our home-based program, we receive funding through Office of Head Start, Denver Great Kids Head Start, Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visitation (MIECHV), and the Tony Grampas Youth Services Program (TGYS).
- In our school-based program, we receive funding through the Office of Head Start, Denver Great Kids Head Start, Child Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP), Universal Pre-K, Denver Preschool Program, and private pay tuition.

EARLY HEAD START AND HEAD START

In January of 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared The War on Poverty in his State of the Union speech. Shortly thereafter, Sargent Shriver took the lead in assembling a panel of experts to develop a comprehensive child development program that would help communities meet the needs of disadvantaged preschool children. Head Start has served over 32 million children since 1965, growing from an eight-week demonstration project to include full day/year services and many program options. Currently, Head Start is directed by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the Department of Health and Human Services.

In September of 1995, the first Early Head Start grants were given; Family Star was one of those first birth-to-three funded programs. All families who are enrolled in the Early Head Start Program (EHS) or Head Start (HS) programs must meet age and federal income guidelines and reside in the Early Head Start or Head Start service area. Although every effort will be made, enrollment in Head Start spots are not automatically guaranteed for children who are enrolled in Early Head Start slots.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM FAMILY START

You can expect Family Star to strive to fulfill its mission by providing excellent programs and services.

Educating Children:

- Home-Based:

Family Star provides a home-based program that uses the evidence-based curriculum: Parents as Teachers. Parent Educators provide weekly home visits for families to provide child development and parenting information, coaching and support.

- **School-Based:**
Family Star serves students ages two months through six years at our two locations in our school-based program. An inclusive Montessori education is an essential element of our success in helping children develop the fundamental capabilities they need to thrive. Each school-based program staff a School Director and Assistant Director, Lead Teachers, Teachers, and Teacher Assistants, among other Administrative Assistants and support staff.

Strengthening Families:

Family Star provides health, mental health, nutrition, and family support. The Mental Health and Disabilities team works with children, families, and staff, providing mental health supports as well as support in and out of the classroom for children with identified needs. Child Family Advocates and Parent Educators work with caregivers to identify needed resources or support, set goals, and access community resources to resolve challenges. Health Advocates work to encourage healthy habits at school and home while providing information, training, and support throughout the school year. We work to ensure our students have access to healthy food and develop an understanding of nutrition by providing them with a family-style breakfast, lunch, and snacks and hosting a free fresh food collaboration each Friday afternoon that is open to all.

Building Community:

Family Star collaborates with families, businesses, and other organizations in our neighborhoods to create vibrant communities for families we serve. Family Star also offers families opportunities to take on leadership roles to influence and inform school policy and programming. Our Parent Committee meets monthly and plans programs and events of interest to the community. The Policy Council (0-3 years) and Policy Committee (3- 6 years) meet monthly to review and approve policies, participate in the hiring of employees, and collaborate with staff to inform decisions that affect programs. We offer monthly educational and social events to connect caregivers from our programs with one another and with needed community resources. Family Star began as a group of families and community members who cared about their community and we seek to continue this legacy in our present-day programs and services.

Our first commitment is to the development of your child. Our goal is for your child to think and be independent. Equally important is your child's social, emotional, and physical development.

We believe creating an inclusive and nurturing environment for learning is essential. We strive to make our Montessori classrooms an oasis of calm and order. In true Montessori tradition, children choose their activities and work at their own pace. This freedom and self-discipline are the keys to meeting their developmental needs. By choosing their own work and following that work through completion while working independently or in cooperation with others, the Montessori child identifies their interests and develops their individual gifts. Children learn by serving their small community, i.e., classmates, classroom, and family.

We treat each child with dignity and respect. We treat each child as an individual and strive to develop each child's unique gifts – within the context of the classroom and the community. With freedom comes responsibility and each child learns to balance personal freedom with a clear sense of responsibility to themselves, to others and to the community.

You can expect Family Star to strive to maintain open, honest, timely, and respectful communication with you about your child and information affecting the community. All families will receive additional relevant information via community bulletins, personnel memos, newsletters, and letters from Family Star.

EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Family Star implements a high-quality and results-driven education program for a diverse group of children and families. It is a comprehensive educational methodology based on the observation of children.

The home-based program utilizes the Parents as Teachers curriculum which empowers families to be their child's first and most influential teacher. The program is evaluated by numerous partners and utilizes various age-related tools to track and assess the developmental milestones.

Family Star classrooms are evaluated by various partners. Education staff use a variety of school readiness tools that track and follow the progress of children in the program. Additionally, the Education Team individualizes support for each teacher to enhance classroom facilitation.

Home-Based Program

Family Star serves children and families through our innovative home-based program. These children and families may include but are not limited to stay-at-home families; pregnant mothers; families that have experienced loss of employment, childcare, or changes in living arrangements; families that prefer this model for cultural or personal beliefs. Caregivers have found this program extremely helpful in building their confidence and effectiveness as caregivers as well as the development of positive relationships with their children. Additionally, this program provides a supportive network of other caregivers which positively impacts their sense of belonging. Participants must meet eligibility requirements for Head Start/Early Head Start. Weekly home visits are provided by Parent Educators who support the caregiver in being the child's first teacher, through our **Parents as Teachers** curriculum.

School-Based Program

You can expect Family Star to provide supportive, inclusive, and Montessori-prepared environments. Family Star provides adequate indoor and outdoor space for students that is clean, free of physical and environmental hazards, developmentally/age appropriate, and accessible to all children.

Curriculum: Family Star's school-based educational curriculum is grounded in Maria Montessori's theory of human development that each classroom supports each individual child's development according to their readiness.

Mixed age classes provide a real-world experience for the developing child, as peers learn from one another and work together to maintain their community and environment.

Each environment is prepared to meet the needs of children moving through the age-appropriate phases of development. For every child, regardless of age, the day has some things in common which are outlined below:

- **Large blocks of uninterrupted time for self-directed work.**

- **Shared family style meals.** Children enjoy “family style” dining which allows children to pass the serving bowls and serve themselves to promote independence, develop table manners, promote healthy eating, and develop socialization skills and awareness of the body’s needs.
- **Teacher’s intentional focus on the children.** Successful Montessori teaching is based on detailed and ongoing observation of the children, both individually and as a group.
- **Consistency in routines and order in the physical environment.** Children are sensitive to routines and order. An orderly classroom environment (everything has its place and everything in its place) fosters independence as children are given lessons in caring for their environment and sharing responsibility for its maintenance. Routine and order allow for little adult “correcting” of students’ behavior.
- **Meticulous attention to grace and courtesy.** At all times we aspire to model good manners and sociable interactions. Families should expect to be greeted with a cheerful “good morning” or “good afternoon” during arrivals and departures. Throughout the day, students have opportunities to practice table manners, lessons in making introductions, and solving problems peacefully.

NIDO CLASSROOM

This classroom consists of babies from 2-14 months of age, or when the child is ready to transition to an older classroom. “Nido” is an Italian and Spanish word meaning “nest.” The children spend their time as they would at home – sleeping, being awake, and interacting with adults and other children. They use materials provided for their development, move about the environment. They go outside, when the weather permits, either into the garden or on a walk. The goals for this age group are:

- Movement - acquisition and development of gross motor movement
- Weaning process – from liquid food to specially selected solid food
- Independence – particularly in dressing themselves

INFANT COMMUNITY (IC) CLASSROOM

This classroom consists of toddlers from 14-15 months (walking well) to 2 ½ to 3 years of age, or when they are ready to transition to an older classroom. In this environment, the children are given many opportunities to do more for themselves, to direct their own activities and to develop a strong foundation in oral language skills. The goals for this age group are:

- Further development of gross and fine motor movement
- Increased level of independence in self-care (toileting), and care of their environment
- Development of their emergent language

PRIMARY CLASSROOM

This preschool classroom consists of children from 3-6 years of age. Each classroom is a thoughtfully prepared environment that fosters independence, concentration, and self-motivation. The materials used in the classroom aid in the intellectual development of the child. The materials are self -correcting and utilize all the senses in learning. Each child works at their own pace, repeating activities, making choices, and developing abilities and creativity through exploration of their work. Indirect learning occurs as children observe the work of others and in turn share what they have learned with their classmates. The goals for this age group are:

- School readiness as defined by Head Start and the Denver Public School System

- Motivation to learn which sets a foundation for a lifelong love of learning
- Capacity to attend and focus on learning while directing their minds and behaviors constructively
- Strong social skills, healthy habits, and a sense of their place in the community

You can expect Family Star to offer guidance and support.

- Parent Educators will help direct families through our home-based program on how to best observe their child and navigate through their learning strategies. Our Parent Educators use the parenting observation tool PICCOLO to observe and support parenting skills. Children will be evaluated annually by observations through the Ages and Stages assessment tool which will monitor child development. Parent Educators will support parents in understanding their child's developmental milestone and provide in-depth tracking to monitor their child's growth. Parent Educators also facilitate annual health screenings and support caregivers in monitoring their child's health status. This includes providing referrals and connecting families to in-depth assessments as applicable.
- For our school-based program, each Montessori trained Lead Teacher is an expert in Montessori and observation. They will always offer their best understanding of your child's progress, strengths, and needs. Their strong skills in observation, informed by input from other school staff, will provide a thorough understanding of your child. Additionally, Family Star adheres to Head Start standards by conducting various developmental and health screenings for children within 45 days of enrollment, as well as three times a year through the Teaching Strategies Gold assessment tool.

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

As a non-profit, Early Head Start and Head Start program, Family Star's mission and bylaws are administered in partnership with its Board of Directors, Policy Council, and Policy Committee. The Board has final authority for the strategic, financial, and legal oversight of the program. The Board's structure is designed to focus its energies on governance, including charting the course of the organization based on its mission; contributing to the development of policies; compliance with fiduciary and legal requirements; fiscal oversight. The Board will hire, supervise, and evaluate the organization's Executive Director and will delegate management of the program to the Executive Director and their professional staff.

As an agency that receives federal funding from the Office of Head Start and through Denver Great Kids Head Start, Family Star has a **Policy Council** and **Policy Committee**. These governing bodies encompass elected caregivers and community members which includes those of currently enrolled Early Head Start and Head Start children. The group is comprised of at least 51% of Head Start/ Early Head Start caregivers. Non-Early Head Start and Head Start caregivers may join as community members. The Policy Council and Policy Committee are responsible for the direction of the program, including program design and management. They are tasked with reviewing and approving funding proposals, policies and program and operational expenses related to program design, management, operations, and personnel.

You can expect Family Star to strive to maintain the highest standards of Montessori practice and comply with Early Head Start/Head Start Program Performance Standards.

WHAT FAMILY STAR EXPECTS OF FAMILIES

Family Star values caregivers as the primary educators of their children and encourages families to become active members in the Montessori environment and the Family Star community. By becoming active members, families extend their understanding of how their children learn and develop.

Caregivers help keep the environment clean in two ways:

First, before or upon entering the classroom environment, caregivers remove their shoes because infants and toddlers spend much of their time on the floor. Second, before interacting with children, caregivers are asked to wash their hands. This helps keep our children safe.

Caregivers help keep the environment calm:

By making their presence unnoticed and by quietly interacting with their own child, caregivers demonstrate respect for all children. Because all children need consistency, visitors (unknown or familiar) to the environment can disrupt children's strong senses of order.

Caregivers help keep the environment courteous:

By walking, speaking, and moving objects with courtesy and respect, caregivers' model appropriate interactions and support the child-schooled environment by turning off cell phones, and by ensuring their child's cubby is well-stocked for the day. A well-stocked cubby includes two additional changes of clothing. If families need additional resources, they can see their Child Family Advocate.

Expectations of Families Include:

- **Families strive to make a continuing effort to both understand and embrace the Montessori approach as well as other developmental strategies and to work with our staff to best support your family.**
- **Families understand and embrace our mission.** Family Star helps caregivers learn about our approach by providing information and opportunities for caregiver education as part of the admissions process so caregivers can make an informed decision in choosing to enroll their children. We continue to provide more educational opportunities throughout a family's tenure with our program to support their ongoing learning.
- **Families are involved in their child's education.** Once children are enrolled, the school encourages caregivers to participate in regularly scheduled Family Nights and socializations, parent committees, home visits, parent conferences, school events, and to familiarize themselves with the philosophy, policies and procedures contained in the Family Star Family Handbook and other school publications.
- **Families contribute to our community by acting as a role model.** A foundational principle of Montessori is to be a model for what you wish to see in the world. We ask that caregivers show respect for children, their classmates, caregivers of classmates, teachers, and other organization staff. By showing respect, you will help create and support an environment of trust.
- **Families strive toward incorporating Montessori principles into your parenting style and home environment.** Families are encouraged to learn about Montessori principles. Allow your child to engage in all of the age-appropriate tasks, at each stage of development. Montessori education may also entail learning a communication style different from the way in which you were parented. In general, Montessori teaching relies on "showing" rather than "correcting." Check the Resources page of this handbook for specific information.

- **Families maintain active, direct, and respectful two-way communication with their child's school/Parent Educator.** Families should read all provided communications and timely inform staff of pertinent changes in your child's life. Both school and home-based families should stay in active communication with their Lead Teacher and/or School Director, or Parent Educator (respectively). Active communication involves caregivers sharing observations, changes, and concerns about their child. For more detailed communication guidelines, please refer to the Family Communication section.

ENROLLMENT PROCEDURES

PROGRAM MODELS AND FUNDING SOURCES

- **Early Head Start/Head Start:** Serves children pre-natal to five years who meet income and other eligibility requirements.
- **Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP):** Families who qualify for either Early Head Start or Head Start “slot” at Family Star and children older than five years living in Denver County can apply for CCCAP, which helps cover the cost of tuition outside of Early Head Start/Head Start hours.
- **Universal Pre-K (UPK):** Family Star’s Enrollment Manager will work with each family to “apply” for UPK. UPK funds help support the work we do at our school for our Early Head Start/Head Start students and helps pay a portion of tuition for our private pay students during the child’s 4- year-old school year.
- **Denver Preschool Program (DPP):** Any family living in Denver County with a child who is four years old and NOT receiving CCCAP can apply for Denver Preschool Program (www.dpp.org). This funding is based on several factors including income, number of individuals living in a home, etc. and provides tuition assistance for this select age group.
- **Private Pay:** Our school-based program offers slots to private pay families in all age groups.

SERVICE HOURS / HOURS OF OPERATIONS

- **Home-Based:** Children enrolled in our Home-Based program will receive 48 weekly visits per program year and several social engagement opportunities.
- **School-Based:** Both schools operate from 7:15 am until 5:30 pm, Monday through Friday.

CALENDAR

Family Star loosely follows the Denver Public School calendar. We are closed for federal holidays, as well as various breaks and Professional Development Days. Our most recent calendar can be found on our website: www.familystar.net. There may be times where either the home-based program and/or school-based program must close for weather or other disasters. In addition, we reserve the right to adjust our schedule and/or service hours as necessary.

HOME-BASED PROGRAM REGISTRATION

Our home-based program is typically only offered to families who are eligible for the Early Head Start (EHS) and Head Start (HS) program and must meet federal income guidelines. Mothers who are pregnant or caregivers who wish to receive home-based services can be enrolled in the home-based option pending availability and eligibility. This option is based on the families and child’s needs. The Parent Educator will partner with families to identify goals and support through weekly Parents as Teachers lessons.

This program consists of 48 home visits per year and family engagement events which are conducted or supported by a certified Parent Educator. During weekly 1.5 hour visits, Parent Educators partner with caregivers to focus on the child’s healthy growth and development. Each visit includes discussion on the parent-child interaction, development-schooled parenting, and family well-being, while building upon family strengths.

All home-based families are expected to complete the following documents prior to receiving program services:

- Enrollment Application; and
- Home-Based Enrollment Consent Packet

To register a child, a parent or legal guardian must complete all enrollment forms and turn in required documents prior to or during their initial enrollment visit. These documents include verification of income, verification of address, the child's birth certificate, up-to-date immunization records and up-to-date health records.

WITHDRAWAL FROM HOME-BASED PROGRAM

Caregivers must notify their Parent Educator when anticipating termination from the program. Interruption of services or termination will be dealt with on an individual basis. Loss of eligibility, poor attendance for visits, or late arrivals to home visits are circumstances for which service interruption or termination may occur.

School-Based Program Registration: All school-based families are expected to complete the following documents prior to receiving program services:

- Enrollment Application; and
- School-Based Enrollment Consent Packet

TUITION

All families who are enrolled in the Early Head Start Program (EHS) or Head Start (HS) must meet age and federal income guidelines. All private pay families and families with a CCCAP parent fee must pay by the 5th of each month. Tuition payments received after the 10th of each month are considered late and a \$50.00 late payment fee may be applied. Our monthly tuition fees are subject to change and will be communicated via email and on the website.

ACCEPTED PAYMENTS

Family Star accepts Cash, Check, Money Order, Discover, Visa, MasterCard and American Express. If paying by cash, please get a receipt from the front desk. In addition, we encourage families to sign-up for autopay, which provides payment to Family Star on the 1st of each month.

CCCAP PARTICIPATION

CCCAP parent fees paid 30 or more days late will be reported to your county CCCAP office and may result in termination of authorization. It is the responsibility of the caregiver to apply for and reauthorize CCCAP. Support to the caregivers can be provided by Family Star's Child Family Advocate.

WITHDRAWAL FROM SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAM

Caregivers must provide a 30-day written notice to their School Director when anticipating termination from the program. Caregivers who submit the 30-day notice will receive a prorated price based on the enrollment

end-date, except for CCCAP Parent Fees, which are due in full for the month. Immediate withdrawal situations will be handled on a case-by- case basis.

CHILD CUSTODY ISSUES

Family Star's central mission is to provide quality early education to young children and supportive services to their families. When there are child custody issues, Family Star takes a neutral stance and is supportive of the child(ren) having relationships with all caregivers. Ensuring health and safety of the children, staff and the facility is a priority. Family Star will follow any court ordered direction that is provided.

ATTENDANCE

Family Star works with caregivers to maintain consistent attendance for their child to ensure educational outcomes are achieved. Caregivers are asked to inform the program when their child will be absent. The staff will contact caregivers whose children are absent. The program keeps track of attendance and absenteeism for all children.

Consistent attendance is important. The children who benefit most from the prepared environment are those who attend regularly. There are several reasons for this:

- A consistent routine provides security for children; a sense of security enables children to feel safe and learn more readily.
- A child's experiences in the classroom are cumulative, consistent attendance bolsters learning.
- Your commitment to your child's presence in school affirms the importance of school.
- Intermittent attendance, or periods of long absence, can affect both your child's adaptation to school and their learning.

If the child is absent for two (2) days in a row, and the caregiver has not contacted Family Star, program staff may make a home visit to discuss your child's enrollment and establish a plan to improve his/her attendance. The child may be placed on the waitlist if there is no contact from the family after five (5) consecutive days.

You and your child are important members of the Family Star community. Please remember Family Star staff is here to assist you with any situation that may interfere with regular attendance or your ability to meet your child's needs.

ARRIVAL FOR SCHOOL-BASED FAMILIES

Regular attendance and prompt daily arrivals provide consistency, order, and sense of empowerment. This is important to young children and essential in developing lifelong skills. Children may be dropped off anytime between 7:15-9:00am. Caregivers are asked to notify the school before 9:00am if their child will be late or will not attend on a given day.

CHILD PICK-UP

Children will only be released to caregivers or authorized persons who are 18 years or older, listed on the child's Emergency Contact Form. Authorized persons must sign in/out in our electronic system daily when dropping-off or picking-up. Caregivers are responsible for updating their child's Emergency Contact Form as changes occur. To ensure safety for all children, authorized persons unfamiliar to program staff will be asked

to provide photo identification before the adult is granted entrance past the front desk and before the child is released.

In the event someone attempts to pick-up a child who is not on the child's Emergency Contact Form, caregivers will be immediately notified.

Any caregiver, or other person who is authorized to pick up a child, who arrives at school intoxicated or in an impaired physical condition which may prevent him/her from assuring the child's welfare, will not be allowed to pick up a child. Should it be determined the person is in a condition that prevents them from assuring the child's welfare, staff will make alternative arrangements for child pick-up, including attempting to contact another person on the Authorized Child Pick-up list.

Children must be signed out by 5:30pm. This includes regularly scheduled school events such as Family Nights and Policy Council meetings. Late fees will be assessed to all caregivers whose children have not been signed out at the designated time. These fees will be added to your monthly statement. Late fees will be assessed as \$1.00 per minute late per child for the first 30 minutes, after that, the fee is \$2.00 per minute. If children are picked up late more than three times in any month, further action may be taken.

When a child is left later than Family Star's designated closure time, Family Star staff will attempt to contact the caregiver and all other persons designated on the authorized Emergency Contact Form. Children who are still in the building at 6:00PM may be turned over to the Denver Police Department or Denver Department of Human Services.

COMMUNICATION

Family Star strives to provide regular, consistent communication to families and staff, so they are informed of changes and areas of importance. We have developed specific procedures to communicate information on a regular basis. In addition, the following is an outline of our communications procedures.

URGENT AND IMMEDIATE INFORMATION

Program Closure

Family Star will be closed for inclement weather on a case-by-case basis. Please watch News 4, Channel 7 or 9 News (and their websites) for updates on whether Family Star will be closed. Additionally, we will post closures on our Facebook page, so please follow us to receive updates and we will send out an email. When we are closed, both of our schools and all our services (including scheduled home-based visits) will be unavailable.

The safety of our students, families, and staff is of utmost importance to us. We expect our families and staff to use their best judgment when travelling in inclement weather and are happy to accept cancellations/absences if families and/or staff are not comfortable travelling.

Health and Safety Related Information

Any urgent individual updates related to the health and safety of children in the school or home-based programs will be delivered by phone to the child's caregiver directly, and if necessary, to their emergency contacts. School-wide urgent safety updates (i.e., emergency lockdown) will be communicated via our automated notification system. Less urgent yet still immediate important updates will be sent via memo by email. Updates will be posted on each School's bulletin board, at the front desk and, if appropriate, outside of classrooms.

Emergency or Disaster Notification

Caregivers will be contacted by automated notification letting them know of the status of the school. If school has been evacuated to an offsite location the notification will include instruction of alternate location and procedure for picking up children. Staff will remain with the children until the last child is picked up from an alternative site.

URGENT FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION

Special Family Meetings: Special meetings may be scheduled at times to share urgent information about the program, Family Star, or the health and safety of children and their families. Notices will be posted in each school and sent out via email of any scheduled meeting.

NON URGENT FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION

Family Nights and Socializations: Monthly Family Nights and socializations provide information, programming, and education relevant to children and their families. Announcements are made during most Family Nights to update families on important information and changes.

WHO TO CONTACT

From time to time, we also understand that you may need additional direct communication about your specific experience. The chart below offers guidance as to who to contact to gain more specific information and to solve problems.

FIRST POINT OF CONTACT	MATTER RELATED TO
Home-Based: Parent Education School-Based: Lead Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child's Progress • Specific educational curriculum and activities • Class procedures • Behavior and guidance
Home-Based: Parent Education School-Based: Child Family Advocate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family support or resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Food ○ Shelter ○ Transportation ○ Clothing ○ Hygiene supplies ○ Car seats and other equipment ○ CCAP assistance ○ Financial supports • Family engagement opportunities including Policy Council and Policy Committee • Family partnership goal planning
Health Advocate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health or nutrition paperwork, procedures, or requirements • New health condition or medical accommodation needed at school • Special dietary needs
Mental Health & Disabilities Manager Mental Health Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developmental concerns • Social concerns • Interest in or questions about mental health services • Information related to IEPs or IFSPs, services, or therapies • Developmental or academic accommodations needed at school
Admissions & Enrollment Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waitlist • Admissions (initial) • Enrollment (ongoing/recurring) • Transitions • Universal Pre-K requirements
Montessori Coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-based education and curriculum
Senior Director of Programs Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive services

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Head Start or Head Start funding or programming • Feedback on child or family services staff
<p>Home-Based: Home-Based Supervisor</p> <p>School-Based: School Director or Assistant School Director</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner agency requirements • Facilities • Feedback on classroom or home-based staff performance • Feedback on Assistant Director • Feedback on program services • Daily scheduling • Student records • Observations • Volunteering • Billing and Accounts • Changes in tuition
Senior Director of Community Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-kind donations • Fundraising • Grant opportunities • Capital campaigns • Organization-wide communication
Executive Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetitive items not resolved above • Feedback on senior directors • Legal

PROGRAM SERVICES

Family Star's program services are built on the fundamental belief that strong, healthy, educated, and self-sufficient families are children's greatest assets. Delivering a strength-based approach program, Child & Family Advocates (CFA) and Parent Educators (PE) partner with families to identify families' strengths and connect them with the community to enhance their lives. The relationship is family and culturally driven, as well as community-responsive, with a focus on establishing lasting and trusting relationships.

FAMILY SERVICES

Child & Family Advocates (CFA) and Parent Educators (PE) provide one-on-one partnerships with families. They empower families with support throughout their time at Family Star. They are available to connect caregivers with local resources, to set and achieve goals, and provide crisis intervention if needed.

CFA's and PEs provide the following services to enrolled families:

- A partnership with families to identify and meet personal/family goals through individual meetings.
- Assist families in accessing community resources such as food banks, furniture banks, parenting classes, English as a Second Language classes, GED classes, health services, etc.
- Facilitate workshops focusing on general health, mental health, nutrition, education, and special needs.
- Empower families to enhance leadership and advocacy skills through caregiver engagement.
- Provide crisis intervention through referrals to services available in the community.
- Encourage families to learn about their children's development and school readiness.

HEALTH SERVICES

Family Star's staff embraces families as partners in evaluating and identifying health and developmental services for children. With a focus on preventive care, our Health Team provides families with education, support, and connections to community health resources. With parental consent, children enrolled at Family Star will receive vision, hearing, oral health, and speech screenings annually, performed by trained professionals. Family Star will notify families of screening dates and share screening results and recommendations.

Family Star provides support for children with special medical needs so that they can learn and thrive in an inclusive environment. Medications can be administered onsite for children with common ongoing care needs or chronic condition management like asthma, allergies, diabetes, or seizures through health care action plans developed by the child's health care provider. Support for more complex needs, medication management and/or procedures can also be provided through Individualized Health Plans developed in partnership with the child's caregiver(s), the child's health care provider, Family Star's Nurse Consultant, and the Health Advocate.

MENTAL HEALTH AND DISABILITIES SERVICES

Family Star employs a Mental Health and Disabilities Manager (MHDM) and Mental Health Specialist (MHS) who work with staff, young children, and their families, as well with other child development professionals, to improve the social-emotional and behavioral health and development of children enrolled in our programs. The MHDM and MHS build the capacity of staff and families to understand the powerful influence of their

relationships and interactions on young children's development. The support provided by the MHDM and MHS is effective in increasing children's social skills, reducing children's challenging behavior, improving child-adult relationships, and identifying child concerns early, so children get the supports they need as soon as possible.

The internal Mental Health Specialist and external Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant are licensed mental health professionals. They provide embedded services such as classroom observations, consulting with program staff on developmentally appropriate behavior, classroom management, and challenging behaviors, in addition to training, including Circle of Security Classroom. They also facilitate group social emotional curricula delivery for classrooms and Circle of Security Parenting groups for caregivers. Like other Family Star staff, they are available for individual consultations with caregivers via phone, text, email and in-person conversations. These support mental health-informed teaching and parent educator practices.

Direct services such as individual child observations, coaching staff on interventions that fall outside of mental health-informed teacher or parent educator practice, individual work with children in classrooms, and social emotional assessments require an additional consent from caregivers. If your child's teacher or parent educator would like to request or suggest these direct services, you will be invited to sign a specific consent form, which you may decline.

All Mental Health services will be provided in keeping within Family Star confidentiality standards and according to FERPA and/or HIPAA as applicable.

Family Star offers an inclusive program for children with moderate to severe needs and disabilities. We collaborate with caregivers, the Mental Health and Disabilities Manager (MHDM), The Mental Health Specialist (MHS), Sewall, Denver Public Schools, Early Intervention Colorado, and other community partners. Family Star and our partners recruit, identify, evaluate, and provide direct services to children needing additional developmental support in the classroom. Additionally, children are identified through the developmental screening process. As children are enrolled, the role of the MHDM shifts to coordinating, consulting, training, and providing technical assistance to classroom staff and therapists to strengthen the inclusive environment. Additionally, Family Star conducts a developmental and social emotional screening on all children within 45 days of enrollment and annually. This helps us to gain a better understanding of their developmental level, to assist Lead Teachers in developing individualized lesson plans, and to identify children with potential developmental delays.

If a child's developmental screening indicates potential delays, a conversation is initiated with caregivers to assess the need for further evaluation. If further evaluation is needed, Family Star staff will help coordinate services and support caregivers in the evaluation process. Throughout the process, caregivers are kept informed and actively involved in all planning and decision-making regarding additional services for their child.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that makes a free and appropriate public education available to eligible children throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children. These services are provided through Early Intervention Colorado and the local school district.

NUTRITION SERVICES

In our School-Based program, Family Star provides breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snacks to all enrolled children every day. Caregivers in the Nido classrooms prepare breastmilk and/or formula, purees, and solid foods for infants as developmentally appropriate. Meals for children over 12 months are prepared by our catering service and portioned onsite.

Family Star staff promotes healthy habits and attitudes toward eating, with an emphasis on “family - style” meals and nutrition education in the classroom. Family-style dining allows children to participate in mealtime, by serving themselves, promoting independence and developing socialization skills. Children are encouraged, but never forced, to try all foods served. Family Star’s nutrition services are guided by the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). CACFP requires that parents fill out an Income Eligibility Form (IEF) every year. This form is completed at the time of enrollment and treated as confidential.

At enrollment, Family Star obtains dietary information from caregivers to ensure successful nutrition services. Caregivers of infants should fill out an Infant Feeding Form indicating their preference for breastmilk, formula, or both. Dietary modifications will be made for allergies, intolerances and/or religious or cultural preferences within the CACFP meal pattern requirements. You may be asked to complete a Non-Medical Diet Request Form or Milk Request Form according to your child’s needs. A Special Diet Statement will need to be filled out by the child’s medical provider if special accommodations are needed or the child has a food allergy. Special Diet Statements must be updated annually. Due to health and safety regulations, outside food is not allowed in the classrooms. Peanuts and Tree Nuts, including nut products, nut milks etc. Are NOT allowed in classrooms due to the risk of life-threatening allergies. Parents who have specific nutrition-related questions or concerns can meet with their Health Advocate.

Through a partnership with Denver Health WIC, Health Advocates can provide a referral for caregivers to meet with a registered dietician at either Family Star location, by phone or at the WIC office to receive support with WIC sign up, appointments or services. The dietician can also provide consultation and support related to breastfeeding, infant feeding, growth, picky eating, child nutrition, special dietary needs and more. Caregivers can reach out to their Parent Educator or Health Advocate to be connected and do not need to be WIC participants to access these services.

BREASTFEEDING PROMOTION AND SUPPORT

Family Star provides information on the benefits of breastfeeding to families. If you are interested in resources for breastfeeding or have specific questions, we are happy to provide additional support or referrals to community partners. Family Star is happy to accommodate breastfeeding families in any of our classrooms and can offer provided breastmilk on demand (Nido) or at mealtimes (IC & Primary) as desired. Family Star provides a space for breastfeeding or pumping onsite and employer guidance and resources as desired.

HEALTH PROCEDURES

CHILD HEALTH STATUS

As a licensed facility, Family Star requires caregivers to submit all pertinent health information for their children at enrollment. This includes but is not limited to up-to-date records of immunizations and well-child check-ups/general health appraisals. Health Appraisals and Immunization Records must be updated according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommended schedule throughout the school year. If required health appraisal or immunizations are over 30 days past due, the child may be excluded from attendance. Family Star will assist families in obtaining required documents or scheduling an appointment with a doctor or dentist as needed.

Family Star may accept non-immunized children with a completed immunization exemption as required by CDPHE. In the event of an outbreak, non-immunized children may be excluded, for their own protection as advised by public health authorities.

If a child needs any health or medical accommodations, has food or other severe allergies or a chronic condition, additional medical forms will be required, and child enrollment may be contingent upon the completion of such documents to ensure the safety of the child.

Family Star also tracks dental examinations as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatric Dentists (AAPD) and can support families with resources for both preventative and acute pediatric dental services. Staff promote effective dental hygiene among children with daily toothbrushing and an annual dental exam onsite provided by a Denver Health Pediatric Dentist. This service is provided through Denver Health's School Based Health Clinics. Families may access additional services such as physicals, immunizations, mental health services and more for free at the School Based Health Clinic locations.

CHILD HEALTH AND ILLNESS POLICY

Family Star fosters open communication with families regarding the health status of their child(ren). Family Star staff monitors children's health status through observation and evaluation of activity level, mood, and general appearance, both upon arrival and periodically throughout the day. It is required that the Daily Health Check be completed at drop-off by the caregiver to document child health status. If a symptom of illness is observed or worsens while at school, we will provide this information to the child's family.

Family Star's staff are trained in Standard Precautions, First Aid and CPR, and health and safety practices. Family Star staff sanitizes and disinfects classroom materials regularly to prevent the spread of germs in an effort to decrease child illness. They also encourage children to wash their hands upon arrival, after using the restroom, before snacks and meals, and throughout the day.

Family Star follows the guidelines of the CDPHE and Children's Hospital "How Sick is Too Sick" Illness Policy. To promote a healthy environment and reduce the spread of illness, Family Star requests caregivers keep their children at home if their symptom(s), or diagnosed condition is on the Illness Policy and staying home is recommended. If a child begins to exhibit any symptoms listed on the Illness Policy for which exclusion from school is recommended, a symptom record will be completed and sent home at pick up. Families will

be notified and expected to plan a pick-up of their child within one hour. If a child is unable to participate in normal classroom activities and outside play, the caregiver will be asked to keep the child home.

REPORTING ILLNESS

Family Star follows the recommendations and requirements of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) for reporting communicable disease. Caregivers must notify their School Director immediately if their child or immediate family member contracts a communicable disease such as COVID-19 to prevent the spread of the disease. This information will remain confidential.

MEDICATION ADMINISTRATION

(In Accordance with the Nurses Practice Act (Section 12-38-132, C. R. S.) Family Star contracts with Children's Hospital to train and delegate school staff to administer basic medication to children in our care. Additional training is available for staff to administer special medication on an ongoing basis.

Medication at the school will be stored according to childcare licensing standards to ensure the safety of all children. Family Star requires a Health Care Plan be completed prior to attending school for all children with special health care needs. The School Nurse Consultant and the Health Advocates are available for further guidance and resources. All medication administered at the school must follow the following guidelines:

- A Medication Administration Permit or Health Care Action Plan signed by a health care provider must be completed prior to the administration of any medication, including over the counter medication.
- Information on the permit should include the child's name, date of birth, dosage, special instructions, times to administer, purpose of medication, possible side effects and the starting date and ending date for the length of time medication is to be given.
- Caregivers must sign the Medication Administration Permit or Health Care Action Plan authorizing Family Star to administer medication as indicated by physician.
- All medications must be in their original package and given directly to a designated Health Team member.

Family Star will maintain a formal record of all medications administered in a Medication Log and this will be reviewed with caregivers upon request. If a child receiving medication shows signs of behavior changes, these symptoms will be documented and discussed with the parent. Health Team staff will assist caregivers in communicating their concerns to their physician regarding the effect of medication on their child, as needed.

Family Star's staff may also apply preventive ointments/creams to children, as needed with a signed permission. If caregivers prefer a specific product, they are responsible for providing the product directly to a designated Health Team member. Clearly label the product with your child's first and last name and request a Topical Preparations Permission Form. Creams, lotions, and ointments will not be applied without a signed form.

Family Star will not administer any medication without meeting the minimum requirements as described above. On occasion, additional information may be required to support staff in providing the best care for children.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Being a family at Family Star assumes both a major investment and commitment. Children thrive when home and schoolwork are in harmony, with both environments sharing the same educational values and expectations.

We build our most productive relationships with families who understand and embrace the mission of the organization. To that end, we help families learn about the Montessori approach and general child development by providing information and opportunities for family education as a part of the admissions process. This helps enable families to make an informed decision in choosing to enroll their children.

We aim to continue to provide educational opportunities throughout the year to support ongoing learning. Once children are enrolled, the school encourages families to attend regularly scheduled family engagement events, Parent Committee, home visits, family-teacher conferences, and other school events. This helps families to familiarize themselves with the philosophy, policies and procedures contained in this Family Star Family Handbook and other school publications.

One of the goals of Family Star is to strengthen families in their role as primary educators for their children. Family Star supports this goal by soliciting feedback on how the program operates and actively involving caregivers in program planning. Below is a list of opportunities available to caregivers for involvement. To receive additional information, contact your School Director, Child Family Advocate or Parent Educator.

Opportunities

Family Star has a talented and involved caregiver/community body. We depend on the support of caregiver volunteers throughout the year. When you donate your time and talents, you make a valuable contribution to the children of Family Star, and you get the opportunity to meet other caregivers. You can volunteer in a variety of ways:

- **Family Engagement Events:** Family Engagement Events at Family Star consist of opportunities throughout the year which include educational presentations, classes, parent-child interaction events, CARES (Caregiver Alliance for Resilient Emotional Support) and other activities focusing on family well-being and wellness. Each month we focus on a theme which may include an in-person and/or virtual event, or other engagement opportunities for your family.
- **Policy Council/Policy Committee:** These groups consist of caregivers and community members who review and approve important programmatic and federal funding opportunities, policies and procedures, staff hiring decisions. These groups meet monthly.
- **Health Services Advisory Committee:** The Health Services Advisory Committee (HSAC) is comprised of community health partners, professionals, caregivers, and staff members. The HSAC works together to identify and address health trends and concerns in the community. The purpose is to shape the focus of health services at Family Star and advise in the planning, operation and evaluation of Health, Mental Health, Disabilities and Nutrition Services. The HSAC committee meets 4 times a year.
- **Food Collaborative:** The Food Collaborative distributes donated and rescued foods weekly to caregivers, staff, and community members. This program is made possible through the support of volunteers. There are a variety of flexible opportunities to support and be a part of this initiative from picking up food donations to set up, sorting, packing, and assisting shoppers.

- Annual Self-Assessment: Families will work with staff to evaluate program operations and provide recommendations for improvements based on the framework provided by the Office of Head Start.
- Fundraising: Family Star aims to provide the best early childhood education for every child enrolled. While grants, tuition, fees, and government reimbursements cover the majority of expenditures, these dollars fall short of the actual operational costs. Therefore, we encourage families to participate in fundraising activities, volunteer time, or support through donated goods and services.
- Committees: Family Star has various committees that focus on various departments within the agency and invite our families to join any of our committees in which you have experience or interest in:

Parent Committee
Finance Committee

Education Committee
Development Committee

Personnel Committee

Your Child Family Advocate, School Director, or Parent Educator can help connect you to the appropriate staff person.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

ACCIDENTS AND INJURIES

All accidents that occur during school hours will be communicated to caregivers with an Incident Report Form at the end of the day. For additional information, please call to speak with your Lead Teacher or School Director. If a child requires medical attention, certified staff members will perform First Aid and/or CPR and call 911 if needed. Caregivers will be immediately notified, or a message will be left with the number listed on the Emergency Contact Sheet.

ANTI-VIOLENCE

Family Star strives to provide an environment that is free of threats or acts of violence. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Threatening or hostile behaviors
- Physical abuse
- Vandalism
- Arson
- Sabotage
- Use of weapons
- Carrying weapons onto Family Star property
- Any other act deemed inappropriate in our environment

Additionally, offensive comments, actions, or behavior toward other families, staff, or children will not be tolerated. Any violations of this policy may result in penalties up to and including program expulsion.

CELEBRATIONS

To ensure celebrations are non-biased and culturally consistent, and planned activities are developmentally appropriate and consistent with our curriculum, all Family Star Programs will conduct celebrations and end-of-year activities in strict accordance with the Head Start performance standards and program practices. Outside food for birthdays or other celebrations are not allowed in the classroom.

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT REPORTING

Any person who has reasonable cause to know or suspect a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect or who has observed the child being subjected to circumstances or conditions which would reasonably result in abuse or neglect, shall immediately report this concern to the county department or local law enforcement agency. All Family Star employees are mandated child abuse and neglect reporters. Family Star acts in the best interest of the child and the family.

Caregivers who witness inappropriate behavior on the part of staff or other adults and feel this behavior should be reported to the Denver Department of Human Services (DDHS) should call the Crisis Hotline at: 1-844-CO-4-KIDS (1-844-264-5437). Per Family Star policy, any report made to a School Director or other administrative staff involving inappropriate behavior of another staff member will be reported by the administrator immediately to the DDHS.

Under the Child Protection Act of 1987 (C.R.S. 19-3-301) all staff of Family Star will be informed of their legal obligations to report any suspected or known child abuse and neglect. Staff who observe a child being

subjected to circumstances or conditions, which would reasonably result in abuse or neglect, shall immediately report such facts to the county department or local law enforcement agency. All staff will be trained in how to identify and properly respond to suspected or known child abuse as defined in Head Start Performance Standard 45 CFRR 1340.2(d) whether it occurs inside or outside of the program.

COMPLAINT REPORTING

Family Star possesses childcare licenses for the Northwest and Northeast Schools through the Colorado Department of Human Services. Family Star encourages all community members and parents to provide suggestions that will enhance program services. Family Star is dedicated to the appropriate development, safety, and general well-being of all children. Formal complaints should be made to:

Colorado Department of Human Services Division of Child Care
1575 Sherman Street
Denver, CO 80203-1714
(303) 866-5958 or 1-800-799-5876

CONFIDENTIALITY

In accordance with PL 90-23 (Freedom of Information), June 1967, caregivers may request and review their child's file. Requests must be submitted to the Child Family Advocate who will review the contents with the caregiver and answer questions regarding items contained in the file. A copy of the child's file will be obtained within one week of a request. In accordance with The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) and PL 93-579, no information from a child's file may be shared without the caregivers' permission except information needed for documentation of Head Start eligibility, for local, state, or federal funding and evaluation reporting requirements, litigation procedures, and education planning purposes. Family Star complies with HIPAA where necessary in the request and retention of applicable health records.

CRITICAL INCIDENT REPORTING

Family Star staff will respond immediately and properly document all incidents and accidents that occur during Family Star operating hours, which involve Family Star children.

DISCIPLINE

Family Star staff provide children with the skills and tools to control their behavior effectively. This process takes love, patience, time, and effort.

The purpose of discipline is to provide boundaries that allow for a safe and nurturing environment for all children. Children are redirected and given positive choices when they demonstrate unsafe or aggressive behaviors. It is our policy that Family Star staff treat children with care and respect using positive guidance methods that promote increased social competence and enhance children's self-esteem.

Children are not subjected to physical or emotional harm or humiliation. Staff does not use physical, corporal, emotional, or other harsh or frightening punishment. Discipline is not associated with food, rest, or toileting. Verbal abuse and derogatory remarks about the children and families are not permitted.

Family Star employs a Mental Health and Disabilities Manager (MHDM) and Mental Health Specialist (MHS) who works with staff, young children and their families, as well with other child development professionals, to improve the social-emotional and behavioral health and development of children enrolled in our programs. The MHDM and MHS build the capacity of staff and families to understand the powerful influence of their

relationships and interactions on young children's development. The support provided by the MHDC is effective in increasing children's social skills, reducing children's challenging behavior, improving child-adult relationships, and identifying child concerns early, so children get the supports they need as soon as possible.

EMERGENCY OR DISASTER PROCEDURES

Family Star has a written Emergency and Natural Disaster Preparedness Plan. All staff are trained in planning and drills are conducted on a regular basis. In the event of an Emergency or a Natural Disaster, families will be reunited with their children by the members of the School Staff contacting them by phone or text. Family Star staff will stay with the children until an approved guardian arrives for the child to be released safely into their care.

If a child requires accommodations, medication, and/or any other items pertaining to special needs, the teachers in the child's classroom will bring the accommodations, medications and

any other items pertaining to special needs along with emergency contact information, health care plans, medication plans, emergency bin/supplies, attendance, and all other required items. If a child has any specific requirements and/ or accommodations, those accommodations will be stored in a state of readiness, when not being used, that is easily accessible to ensure prompt acquisition during a time of emergency. A specific staff member will be assigned to each child with disabilities so the staff member can assist the child personally in case of evacuation.

Drills

- **Evacuation Drills:** Family Star conducts monthly evacuation drills. Emergency evacuation plans are posted in each classroom, detailing exit routes out of the building as well as the destination. Classroom staff take all child Emergency Contact Forms and sign-in sheets outside and immediately take attendance. Children and school staff do not re-enter the building until official notice has been granted by the local authorities that it is safe to return. If relocating the children to another facility is necessary, caregivers will be contacted (see Communication).

Evacuation drills are consistent with local fire department procedures. A record of the fire drills held over the past 12 months are maintained by the school, including date and time of drill, number of adults and children participating, and the amount of time taken to evacuate. Drills are held at unexpected times and under varying conditions to simulate the conditions of an actual fire. Drills emphasize orderly evacuation under proper discipline rather than speed. Drills include suitable procedures for ensuring that all persons in the building or all persons subject to the drill participate.

NE location: The staff and children will convene together at the meeting site to the south of the school building and to the south side of the administration building. At that point, staff will take attendance and in an orderly manner, either reenter the building or walk to the Montessori Academy of Colorado. Upon arrival, the staff will take attendance. When an account of all children and staff is done, we will walk back to our location and resume the daily schedule.

NW location: The staff and children will convene together at the meeting site east of the building in the SE corner of the parking lot. At that point, staff will take attendance and in an orderly manner, either reenter the building or walk to either Riverside Baptist Church or to Adams Mystery Playhouse. The decision will depend on the weather conditions at the moment of evacuation. Upon arrival, the staff will

take attendance. When an account of all children and staff is done, we will walk back to our location and resume the daily schedule.

- **Shelter-in-Place Drills:** Classroom staff are trained to deal with tornado emergencies. During regularly scheduled shelter in place drills, classroom staff guides children to designated locations at each site. Prior to evacuation of the classroom, classroom staff secures daily attendance sheets, child emergency contact information, first aid kit and an emergency supply kit.

Upon arrival at the designated locations, attendance is verified, and children and staff wait for clearance to re-enter the classroom environments. Shelter in place drills are held monthly between March and October for all occupants to become familiar with the drill procedures and their conduct is a matter of routine. A record of the drills is held over the past 12 months are maintained at the school.

NE location: All staff evacuate their classrooms and go directly to the interior hallway bathrooms and to the interior gymnasium bathrooms.

NW location: All staff evacuate their classrooms and go directly to the interior hallway.

- **Lock Out and Lock Down Drills:** On occasion, Family Star is notified of dangerous activity in the surrounding communities by authorized personnel or program parents. In the event that dangerous activity is reported, the designated school and classrooms will be in a LOCK OUT and the proper authorities will be contacted for further guidance. During a LOCK OUT, all external doors of the school will be locked to prevent entry. When on LOCK OUT, to ensure safety, Family Star staff only allow parents, caregivers, and staff to enter or leave the building. During a LOCK OUT no children will be on the playground. During a Lock Out situation, the school team may deem it necessary to go into a controlled release. If this happens, the door will physically be opened for caregivers to enter and exit the building. LOCK OUT drills are held quarterly in order for all occupants to become familiar with the drill procedures and their conduct is a matter of routine.

In the event Family Star is notified that dangerous activity is reported to be inside the building, directly outside, or on the grounds of the school, the designated school and classrooms will be in a LOCK DOWN and the proper authorities will be contacted for further guidance. During a LOCK DOWN, all classroom staff remove children from view to predetermined hiding locations and verify attendance. Administrative staff secure the building, confirm classroom safety, and maintain communication with authorities. When on LOCK DOWN, to ensure safety, Family Star staff does not permit anyone to leave or enter the building, including parents and caregivers, until the danger has passed. LOCK DOWN drills are held quarterly in order for all occupants to become familiar with the drill procedures and their conduct is a matter of routine.

Continuity of Operations After a Disaster

During and after a disaster, all essential staff will resume their predetermined roles during and after an emergency or disaster. If the facility were to be rendered inoperable for a period of time, classes would resume if a suitable location can be found. Classes would resume at the school affected by the disaster after the original location would be deemed safe and operable. An emergency waiver to move to a temporary location, or exceed capacity, on a temporary basis, to accept children and families from affected areas. All children, staff, financial and confidential files are kept both physically and electronically. If files were destroyed by a disaster, they would be retrieved electronically and printed again in physical form.

HOME VISITS/FAMILY TEACHER CONFERENCES

Program staff work with caregivers of children in our Primary, IC, and Nido classrooms to conduct two home visits per year. The initial home visit is completed before the child's start date, with the second being conducted approximately six months after the first. The home visits are utilized to gain a better understanding of the child, strengthen the relationship with the family and discuss goals and progress. It is part of our program's philosophy that all families receive home visits. All visits should be conducted in the families identified home unless the caregiver requests for them to be at a community site or one of Family Star's locations.

Each child's family engages in two family-teacher conferences per program year, one in the fall and one in the spring. During the family-teacher conferences, parents learn about their child's development and work collaboratively with classroom staff to develop appropriate goals.

INFANT SAFE SLEEP

Family Star creates safe sleep environments for all infants in care. Evidence-based safe sleep procedures aim to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), suffocation death and other infant deaths that could occur while an infant is asleep or in a sleep environment. Family Star procedures protect infants from obstructed breathing, assure direct observation of infants, and provide comfortable room temperatures.

NEIGHBORHOOD WALKS

Children at Family Star go for short walks in the neighborhood near the school, using a pre-approved route. During walks, children are supervised, and child-adult ratios are maintained at all times. Classroom staff complete a "Walk Sign-Out" sheet which specifies which of the pre-approved routes they will take, the amount of time they will be gone, the number of children, the names of staff, contact phone numbers and the time they will be back. Staff are in contact with the school through their cell phone and/or walkie-talkie at all times.

OUTDOOR TIME/ACTIVE PLAY

Classrooms provide children with a minimum of 60 minutes of active play every day. Children must be dressed appropriately for outdoor activities at all times. Caregivers are responsible for providing seasonally appropriate clothing such as hats, boots, gloves, and jackets. Resources are available if needed. Outdoor time is scheduled daily when conditions are within the acceptable ranges of the Child Care Weather Watch Guidelines and EPA UV Index Forecast. Outdoor time will be adjusted accordingly during dangerous weather conditions, such as thunderstorms, extreme heat, tornadoes, or blizzard conditions.

During the summer months (between Memorial Day and Labor Day), the outdoor schedule is adjusted so children have the opportunity to be outside earlier in the morning and later in the afternoon to avoid the hottest part of the day. Weather will dictate outdoor play for our school-based students. If weather conditions do not afford the opportunity for children to be outdoors, gross motor activity will occur indoors.

PERSONAL ITEMS

Children are provided a space for personal items in their designated classroom. Caregivers are expected to provide at least two complete changes of clothes at school (younger children may require more). Children's clothes (extra clothes, coats/jackets, hats, etc.) must be labeled with the child's name. To maintain a safe environment, toys, candy, gum, lotion, lip balm, phones, and/or money will not be permitted in the classroom. Such items will be stored out of reach of children and returned to caregivers at the end of the day. When additional clothing items are needed, families may be notified by classroom staff to bring more. If you are

unable to provide the school with any of the items listed above for any reason, please speak to your Child Family Advocate.

SAFETY

To ensure the safety of all the children in our care and to meet state licensing and Office of Head Start regulations, all adults employed by Family Star and/or volunteers or guests who are onsite regularly have had a thorough background check. Any individual without a background check must be accompanied by a Family Star employee at all times. Additionally, Family Star takes the following precautions:

- Children are closely supervised in all settings by program staff (please see more about this under “Supervision”)
- Attendance is verified at each meal and snack, each classroom has a name-to-face sheet when going on walks, and before and after transitioning from one setting to another
- All building exits are continuously monitored by program staff
- In the event a child cannot be located, classroom staff will begin an immediate search of the building and contact the School Director. If the child cannot be located within five minutes, the local law enforcement agency will be notified. Staff will continue searching for the child until the child has been found or appropriate authorities arrive. In addition, an Incident Report Form will be completed and given to the parent/guardian, Child Care Licensing, and the Office of Head Start within 24 hours.

SMOKING

Family Star is a smoke-free environment. Smoking or the use of tobacco products or marijuana is prohibited in the classroom, at program events, and during any activity sponsored by Family Star. This includes buildings, playgrounds, and parked vehicles. Smoking is not allowed on any of Family Star’s premises.

SUNSCREEN

In accordance with Colorado State Licensing requirements, all children 6-months and older (infants, toddlers, and preschoolers) enrolled in Family Star will have sunscreen applied to all exposed areas including the face, tops of ears, bare shoulders, arms, legs, and feet 15-30 minutes before outdoor activities (year-round). Sunscreen will not be applied to any broken skin or if a skin reaction has been observed. Any skin reaction observed by staff will be reported to the parent/guardian. Family Star will provide a SPF 30+ sunscreen for all children. If parents prefer a specific product, they are responsible for providing it directly to the School Director or designated Health Team member. Clearly label the product with your child’s first and last name and request a “Topical Preparations Permission Form.”

SUPERVISION

Family Star’s priority is to keep children safe. Family Star uses active supervision which involves creating a safe environment and preventing injuries in children. This provides children with an opportunity to explore their environments safely. At no time will a child be left alone or unsupervised during or after regular classroom hours. In addition, all staff must follow all requirements of the Office of Head Start and Colorado State Licensing Regulations rules of active supervision, which include but are not limited to:

- Children must be under sight and sound supervision at all times
- Staff create an environment where children are visible and do not have the opportunity to hide
- Staff know how many children are in the care of the teachers as well as doing “name-to-face” checks at every transition
- Staff anticipate children’s behavior and look for inconsistent and/or new behaviors

- Staff position themselves in the classroom and on the playground to support seeing the students at all times
- Staff listen to the children and pay attention to times when the children are “too quiet”
- Staff redirect children who are not using materials appropriately
- All staff are trained in the active supervision at hire and then multiple times a year.

SUSPENSION AND EXPLUSION

Family Star, in keeping with Head Start Program Performance Standards, neither suspends nor expels children from its program because of a child’s behavior. The Mental Health and Disabilities Manager and Mental Health Specialist/Consultant work with staff and caregivers to find appropriate community resources, to support children engaging in serious challenging behaviors. If a temporary withdrawal from the classroom is necessary, Family Star staff will help the child return to full participation in all program activities as quickly as possible while ensuring child safety by:

- Continuing to engage with the caregivers and a mental health consultant, and continuing to utilize appropriate community resources
- Developing a written plan to document the action and supports needed
- Providing services that include home visits; and, determining whether a referral to a local agency responsible for implementing IDEA is appropriate

TELEVISION AND VIDEO VIEWING

Family Star’s philosophy is children learn by actively interacting with materials and other people in their environment. Therefore, Family Star does not endorse the use of television and video as part of the daily routine. However, on rare occasions, for after hour care, age-appropriate videos, or special programs, such as child safety may be shown.

TOILET LEARNING

Family Star provides opportunities for young children to understand how their bodies work by providing cloth training underpants/diapers to children in Nido and IC classrooms. Infants can feel when they are wet and are changed immediately by a caregiver. Infants who can stand confidently are changed standing up to allow their active participation.

The daily routine in the Infant Community (IC) classroom provides opportunities for children to use a child-sized toilet based on their own interest and readiness. There is no attempt to “toilet train,” but the process of “toilet learning.” This is supported by using cloth pants, having child- sized toilets and promoting independence in dressing and undressing. The cloth underpants are cleaned off-site by a diaper service provided by Family Star.

In the home-based program, parents are provided developmentally appropriate information to support their child and home environment with toilet learning. We provide bi-weekly diapers or underpants to the family.

TRANSITIONS

A key to independence is the ability to transition from home to school in a calm manner. We have found the process to run most smoothly when drop-off is swift, confident, and focused on school. A struggle at the classroom entryway is difficult for everyone involved, so we are happy to offer suggestions and support.

Family Star supports caregivers as their child's primary educator during the transition process. Two different types of transitions take place during a child's time at Family Star:

- As children enter the school-based program for the first time, Family Star staff work with caregivers during a one-week transition process, which happens after an enrollment meeting update (home visit). As the time increases for the child in the classroom, time in the classroom for the caregiver decreases. This provides caregivers with the opportunity to ask questions about the child's routine and the environment. Additionally, the process provides more time for caregivers and staff to strengthen their relationship.
- As children become older, their developmental needs will need to be met in different classrooms. Program staff and teachers work with caregivers to develop a plan for transitioning children from one classroom to another through activities at home and school. Similar to the transition process mentioned above, children move from one room to another over a one-week period, gradually increasing the amount of time spent daily. This will occur between Nido to IC (from 13-16 months) and IC to Primary (at from 30-36 months). During the internal transition, caregivers are not required to be on site. Depending on the individual child, some transitions may not take the entire week while others may take longer.

TRANSPORTATION

State Law requires children to use an appropriate safety seat when traveling in a vehicle. Family Star will assist caregivers with securing a safety seat for children when caregivers request support. Caregivers are expected to always utilize a safety seat for their children. Family Star employees cannot and will not transport children or caregivers for any reason.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS YOU MAY HEAR AROUND FAMILY STAR

The Program Performance Standards of Head Start and Early Head Start convey definitions of quality services and regulatory structure for monitoring enforcement of quality services in programming. The Glossary of Montessori Terms presented relates to the theory and practice for children in the 0-6 age level. This glossary is an alphabetical list of special technical words or expressions for Head Start/Early Head Start and Montessori. These are words you might hear spoken around school or by your Parent Educator.

Absorbent mind is a mind able to absorb knowledge quickly and effortlessly. Dr. Maria Montessori said the child from birth to six years has an absorbent mind.

Assessment is the ongoing procedures used by appropriate qualified personnel throughout the period of a child's eligibility to identify:

- The child's unique strengths and needs and the services appropriate to meet those needs; and
- The resources, priorities and concerns of the family and the supports and services necessary to enhance the family's capacity to meet the developmental needs of their child.

School-Based Program Option is the Head Start or private-pay services provided to children in classroom settings.

Days of Operation are the planned days during which children will be receiving direct Head Start component services in a classroom and in group socialization, or when caregivers are receiving a home visit.

DGKHS is an acronym for Denver Great Kids' Head Start, a program through the City and County of Denver, which provides funding, services, and resources to Family Star Montessori.

Group socialization activities are sessions in which children and caregivers enrolled in the home-based program option interact with other home-based children and caregivers in a community facility, home, or on a field trip.

Developmentally appropriate is any behavior or experience that is appropriate for the age span of the children and is implemented with attention to the different needs, interests, developmental levels and cultural backgrounds of individual children.

Practical life is one of the four areas of activities of the Montessori prepared environment. The exercises of practical life resemble the simple work of life in the home: sweeping, dusting, washing dishes, etc. These purposeful activities help the child adapt to their new community, learn self-control, and begin to see themselves as a contributing party of the social unit. The child's intellect grows as they work; their personality becomes integrated as body and mind function as a unit.

Grace and courtesy are an aspect of Practical Life. Little lessons which demonstrate positive social behavior help the young child adapt to life in a group and arm them with knowledge of socially acceptable behavior: practical information, useful both in and out of school.

Early Head Start/Head Start eligible a child that meets the requirements for age and family income as established in this regulation or, if applicable, up to ten percent of the children enrolled may be from families that exceed the federal low-income guidelines.

Home-Based Program is an Early Head Start/Head Start service provided to children and families, in their child's home, through intensive work with the child's caregivers and family as the primary factor in the growth and development of the child.

Home visits are the visits made to a child's home by the Teacher and Child Family Advocate in a school-based program option, or Parent Educator in the home-based program option, for the purpose of assisting caregivers in fostering the growth and development of their child.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a written statement for a child with disabilities, developed by the public agency responsible for providing free appropriate public education to a child, and contains the special education and related services to be provided to an individual child.

Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is a written plan for providing early intervention services to a child eligible under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Normalization is when young children are repeatedly able to experience periods of spontaneous concentration on a piece of work freely chosen. They will begin to display the characteristics of normal development: a love of work, an attachment to reality, and a love of silence and working alone. Normalized children are happier children: enthusiastic, generous, and helpful to others. They make constructive work choices, and their work reflects their level of development.

Parent Committee comprised of and run completely by currently enrolled Family Star caregivers that plans programs and events of interest to the community, as well as nominate members for Policy Council/Committee and share ideas with those two governing bodies.

Family/Teacher Conferences are the meetings between the child's teacher and the child's caregivers during which the child's progress and accomplishments are discussed.

Performance Standards are the Head Start program functions, activities, and facilities required and necessary to meet the objectives and goals of the Head Start program as they relate directly to children and their families.

Policy Council is the formal, governing body comprised of EHS and Non-EHS caregivers of children 0- 3 years old and community representatives, required to be established by the agency, to assist in decisions about the planning program design and direction.

Policy Committee is the formal, governing body comprised of HS and Non-HS caregivers of children 3-6 years old and community representatives, required to be established by the agency, to assist in decisions about the planning program design and direction.

Prepared environment is an environment prepared by the adult for children. It contains all the essentials for optimal development but nothing superfluous. Attributes of a prepared environment include order and reality,

beauty, and simplicity. Everything is child-sized to enhance the children's independent functioning. A trained adult and a large group of children of mixed ages make up a vital part of the prepared environment.

Sensitive periods are when young children experience transient periods of sensibility and are intrinsically motivated or urged to activity by specific sensitivities. A child in a sensitive period is believed to exhibit spontaneous concentration when engaged in an activity that matches a particular sensitivity. For example, children in a sensitive period for order will be drawn to activities that involve ordering. They will be observed choosing such activities and becoming deeply concentrated, sometimes repeating the activity over and over, without external reward or encouragement. Young children are naturally drawn towards those specific aspects of the environment which meet their developmental needs.

Sensorial materials are the materials that were created to help young children in the process of creating and organizing their intelligence. Each scientifically designed material isolates a quality found in the world such as color, size, shape, etc. and this isolation focuses the attention on this one aspect. The child, through repeated manipulation of these objects, comes to form clear ideas or abstractions. What could not be explained by words, the child learns by experience working with the sensorial materials.

Service area means the geographic area identified in an approved grant application within which a grantee (Family Star) may provide Early Head Start & Head Start services.

Work cycle is a period of uninterrupted time when children are given the freedom to choose independent work, become deeply engaged and repeat to their own satisfaction.

Work is, from an evolutionary perspective, the long period that children can learn and experiment in a relatively pressure-free environment. Most social scientists refer to this pressure-free experimentation as play, although Montessori preferred to call this activity the "work" of childhood. Children are serious when engaged in the kind of play that meets developmental needs and given freedom and time, will choose purposeful activities over frivolous make-believe ones.

RESOURCES

To learn more about Montessori education, child development, parenting and family life, we suggest the following:

Last year, one of our founders wrote and published, *The Family Star Story* written by Dr. Martha M. Urioste and Amy Clarke Moore. Please see the front desk for information on how to purchase.

Books by Maria Montessori

Most books available by Dr. Montessori are actually transcribed lectures from her many training courses. Most titles are widely available; others can be obtained through the North American Montessori Teachers Association.

- The Absorbent Mind
- The Secret of Childhood
- The Discovery of the Child
- Education and Peace
- Education for a New World
- To Educate the Human Potential
- From Childhood to Adolescence

Books related to the Montessori Experience

- Shannon Helfrich, *Montessori Learning in the 21st Century: A Guide for Parents & Teachers*
- David Kahn (Ed.), *Montessori Talks to Parents*
- Paula Polk Lillard, *Montessori Today: A Comprehensive Approach to Education from Birth to Adulthood*
- Lynn Jessen and Paula Polk Lillard, *Montessori from the Start: The Child at Home from Birth to Age Three*
- Angeline Stoll Lillard, *Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius*

Books recommended on Parenting and Family Life

- Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, *How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk; Siblings without Rivalry: How to Help your Children Live Together So You Can Live Too*
- Jane Healy, *Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect our Children's Minds – And What We Can Do About It*
- Jane Nelson, *Positive Discipline: The Classic Guide to Helping Children Develop Self-Discipline, Responsibility, Cooperation, and Problem-Solving Skills*

Books in Spanish

- Dr. Maria Montessori, *La mente absorbente, El niño: secreto de la infancia, Formación del hombre, La educación de las potenciales*
- Silvana Montanaro, *Un ser humano: La importancia de los primeros tres años de vida*
- Aline Wolf, *Cómo cultivar el espíritu del niño en un ambiente laico, Una guía para padres al aula Montessori*

Useful Websites

- www.montessori-ami.org
- www.montessori.namta.org
- www.montessoriconnections.com
- www.public-montessori.org
- <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/> (Early Head Start/Head Start information)
- Welcome to Parents as Teachers - Parents as Teachers
- Five by Five Sign-up
- Denver Preschool Program

