

Merced County Community Action Agency

Early Learning Preschool Programs



Parent Handbook

Amended August 2014

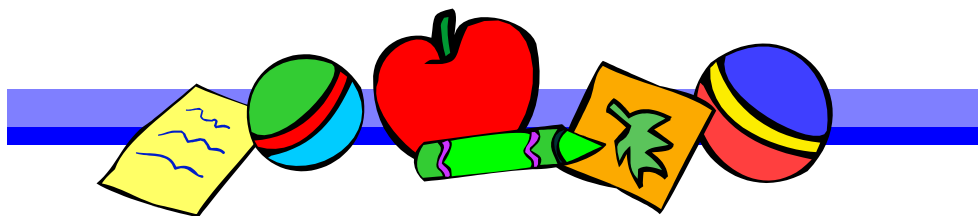


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Introduction

Welcome to the Merced County Community Action Agency (MCCAA) Early Learning Preschool Programs! We look forward to sharing our program and getting to know you and your child. You are important to us. Please feel free to share your ideas with us.

Statement of Purpose

MCCAA is a local non-profit organization that has been serving the needs of the low-income population through a variety of programs in Merced County since 1965. MCCAA changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other. Our preschool programs provide children with developmentally appropriate early learning activities to prepare them for their elementary years. The mission of MCCAA Preschool Programs is to work within our communities to provide comprehensive, top quality services to participating children and families: **one child, one family at a time.** We currently have five preschool sites located throughout Merced County. We serve families with children 3-5 years of age who are not yet eligible for kindergarten. Our programs operate part-day and/or full-day, throughout the year. Families must meet income eligibility requirements for all programs, and those families requesting full-day care must also meet need requirements.

Preschool Sites

Delhi State Preschool

16249 Delhi Avenue, Building B
Delhi, CA 95315 (209) 668-6125
Site Supervisor: Christine Nielsen
cnielsen@mercedcaa.org

Merced Child Development Center

720 S. Highway 59
Merced, CA 95341 (209) 723-1046
Site Supervisor: April Cox-Oseguera
acox@mercedcaa.org

Le Grand Early Learning Center

4140 Cook Street
Le Grand, CA 95333 (209) 389-4117
Site Supervisor: Yolanda Hernandez
yhernandez@mercedcaa.org

Stevinson State Preschool

19977 W. Third Avenue
Stevinson, CA 95374 (209) 669-8884
Site Supervisor: Carmen Villar
cvillar@mercedcaa.org

Los Banos Child Development Center

(Martin Luther King Jr. Building)
1624 San Luis Street
Los Banos, CA 93635 (209) 826-1011
Site Supervisor: Amy McBride
amcbride@mercedcaa.org

Preschool Programs Administration

1235 W. Main Street
Merced, CA 95340 (209) 722-7129
Program Director: Rosanne Pitz
rpitz@mercedcaa.org
Family Support Specialist: Michelle Gustellum
mgustellum@mercedcaa.org

Licensure

MCCAA Early Learning Preschool Programs are licensed by the California Department of Social Services, Community Care Licensing Division. The programs operate for children 3-5 years of age residing in Merced County. The facilities, staff, and programs meet the State guidelines as determined by Title 22 and Title 5 regulations. The program follows the Funding Terms & Conditions and Program Requirements for California State Preschool Programs as mandated by the California Department of Education.

Philosophy

The philosophy of the MCCAA Early Learning Preschool Programs is derived from the following Standards of Conduct:

- We respect each child's individuality and uniqueness.
- We believe that growth takes place in orderly sequences, one stage following another.
- We believe that development of the whole child depends on appropriate physical, mental and social nourishment supplied by the home, school, and community.
- We believe that play, both formal and organized, is significant to intellectual growth.
- We believe it is important for a child to have a pleasant childhood and a good beginning toward a successful life.
- We believe that the family is the primary influence on the child's development and must be a direct participant in the program.

In order to realize these philosophies, our staff applies the theories of development to each and every child by assessing developmental levels, preparing a developmentally appropriate environment, and guiding children through play activities in a manner that promotes confidence, competence, and learning.

Program Requirements

Our programs admit well, ambulatory preschool children, ages 3 to 5 years who do not yet qualify for kindergarten. We include and welcome children with special needs.

To determine eligibility for MCCAA Early Learning Preschool Programs, the family will be invited to an intake interview appointment. During this interview, thorough documentation is required including: birth records of all children in the household, proof of residency, documentation of all countable income, and required forms for each eligible child. When determining family size, documentation must be provided for each parent in the household

who is responsible for the child. The applicant must provide proof that an absent parent does not reside in the home with the child. Every family must meet the income eligibility guidelines. For families requesting full day services, a verification of need will also be required. The intake appointment is the time to see the center, meet the teacher, and get your questions answered about the early learning program.

Admission Priorities

First priority – 4 or 3 year old children referred by Child Protective Services

Second priority – eligible 4 year old children

- Children enrolled in the program as 3 year olds
- Four year old children whose families have the lowest income ranking

Third priority – eligible 3 year old children

[Four year old children are defined as children turning four on or before September 1 of that school year. Three year old children are defined as children turning three on or before September 1 of that school year].

Income Eligibility

Families enrolling in this State funded program must show documentation of total countable income. Eligibility will be based on where families are placed on the current Family Fee Schedule according to both the gross monthly family income and the family size. Some families will be required to pay family fees for services.

Physician's Report

The center must receive a written Physician's Report for each child within 30 days of enrollment and annually thereafter. The physicians report must state that the child is in good enough health to be around other children in group care, and must include:

- A record of any infectious or contagious diseases that would preclude care of the child by the program staff
- Results of a test for tuberculosis (TB test) or a physician's documentation that no risk factors are present
- Identification of the child's special problems and needs, if any
- Identification of any prescribed medications being taken by the child
- Ambulatory status

- Signature of a licensed physician

Immunizations

Children entering MCCA Early Learning Preschool Programs should have a minimum of 4 DPT, 3 Polio, 3 Hepatitis B, 2 Hepatitis A, and 1 MMR and at least 1 HIB (both must be on/after the first birthday), 1 Varicella or history of chicken pox, and 1 negative TB test. Only children who have up-to-date or complete immunizations may attend class.

Any child who is not fully immunized because of personal or religious beliefs must have a written statement completed by the parent or guardian **and** must have a letter from the child's physician stating that the doctor is aware that the child is not fully immunized and can fully participate in the classroom with other children.

Emergency Information

Every child must have current emergency information on file. This will enable us to reach you at any time in case of an emergency. If your child becomes ill or gets injured at the preschool site, contacting you immediately is crucial. Please be sure we have correct information for you and others on your pick up list. **Up-to-date information must be available to the center at all times.**

Family Need

The family need will be determined by documentation of one of the following activities for each adult in the home:

- Employment – verification must include, name of business, address, telephone number, days and hours worked, duration of employment, signature of supervisor, and a signed consent to release employment information.
- Training - verification with school schedule, proof of mid semester adequate progress, and successful completion with a grade point average of 2.0 each semester is required
- Seeking employment - not to exceed 6 hours per day
- Parental incapacitation - written document signed by licensed practitioner verifying the number of hours per day that care is required

Recertification of eligibility and need will take place each program year at intervals not to exceed 12 months. **Parents must notify the agency within 5 days of changes in family size, income, or need.**

Program Goals

Education Program

The preschool programs are designed to meet each child's individual early learning needs. They also aim to meet the needs of the community served and its ethnic and cultural characteristics. Parents and staff will work together to ensure that the needs of each child are met.

Recognizing the power to learn rests in the child, we focus on active learning practices. The adult's role is to support and guide children through these active learning adventure and experiences. Children participate in indoor and outdoor play and are introduced to the concepts of life skills, literacy, colors and numbers, oral language, and school readiness. Children are encouraged to express their feelings and to develop self-confidence and the ability to get along with others.

Our preschool curriculum consists of daily learning activities based on Frog Street Press, Creative Curriculum for Preschool and the California Preschool Learning Foundations and Curriculum Frameworks. The curriculum is developmentally, linguistically, and culturally appropriate for all children. We encourage respect for the feelings and rights of others. Our curriculum encourages children to learn from play and promotes child development in multiple learning domains including:

- Social & Emotional Development
- Cognitive Development
- Language Skills
- Physical Development
- Health and Safety Practices

A Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) will be completed on each new child within 60 calendar days and every 6 months. The teaching staff will complete the DRDP assessment, use it to plan curriculum, and share a summary of the results with the parent at a parent conference.

The program refrains from religious practice and instruction.

Parent Involvement and Education

Parents are the most important influence in a child's development. They are the child's first teacher. Parent involvement contributes to the program's success. The program assures that parents give input and are partners in making decisions that affect their child's experience in the program. Parents are required to follow the policies of the program, participate in parent conferences, regularly attend parent meetings, and participate in special events of the program. Our preschool programs achieve its highest success when parents are involved. We promote parent participation in the following ways:

- An orientation for parents that includes topics such as program philosophy, program goals and objectives, program activities, eligibility criteria and priorities for enrollment, fee requirements, and due process procedures.
- At least two (2) individual conferences with the parent(s) each year.
- Monthly parent meetings with program staff.
- An open door policy that encourages parents to participate in the daily activities whenever possible.
- A Parent Group that supports the program staff on issues related to services to families and children.
- Daily sharing of information between staff and parents concerning the child's progress.

Parents who have special skills, hobbies, interests, or information are encouraged to talk with the teachers so that a time can be arranged to share with the children. Proof of a negative TB test will be required before parents can volunteer in the classroom.

Parents are strongly advised to participate in the classroom and attend parent meetings.

At least once per year parent group leaders from each site will meet with the Program Director to participate in a program self-study.

Health and Social Services

The preschool programs emphasize the importance of early identification of health problems and social service needs. Staff members work with families to connect them with health providers in their community for ongoing health maintenance. We strive to follow up with parents to ensure that the needs have been met. Our programs support our families' health and social service needs by:

- Identifying the needs of the child and the family for health or social services.

- Referring a children and/or family to appropriate agencies in the community based on their identified health or social service needs.
- Conducting follow-up procedures with parents to ensure that their needs have been met.

Community Involvement

Our preschool programs ask for support from the community including the solicitation for donated goods and services. We provide information to the community regarding the services available. We may utilize media or other forms of communication in the community.

Nutrition

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is available to all children. Our preschool programs include a nutrition component that ensures that the children have nutritious meals and snacks during the time in which they are in the program. Our meals and snacks are culturally and developmentally appropriate for the children being served and meet the nutritional requirements specified by the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Menus are posted monthly and available to parents. No child is discriminated against on the bases of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity, religion, reprisal, and where applicable, political beliefs, marital status, familial or parental status, sexual orientation, or all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program, or protected genetic information in employment or in any program or activity conducted or funded by the USDA.

Program Evaluation

Annually the program conducts a self evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the services provided. Staff, parents, administrators, and board member are involved in this process.

Program Policies

Attendance Policy

Children are required to attend the preschool program according to the schedule established to meet the family needs. In the event of an absence, the family must report the absence to the school staff by 9 am each day. The nature of the absence will be required.

Excused absences: In order to be excused, absences must be documented as:

- Illness of the child or parent
- Family emergency - not to exceed 10 days per fiscal year because of illness of sibling, bereavement of immediate family member, or family catastrophe
- Court ordered visitation - a copy of the Court Order must be in the child's file
- Best Interest of the Child days – not to exceed 10 days per fiscal year for any of the following reasons: family needs, out of town visit by immediate family, or vacation

Unexcused absences: All other reasons not listed above will be considered unexcused. Any child who has in excess of five days of unexcused absences per fiscal year may be dropped from the program.

Families planning to disenroll from the preschool program **must** give the site two weeks notice. The site supervisor will issue a Notice of Action documenting the final day of services. During this two week period, children will be in attendance.

Arrival and Departure

Children **must** be signed in and out each time they enter and leave the classroom. A full signature is required with the time of arrival and departure. Children will only be released to persons listed on the pick-up sheet with picture identification. No child will be released to any individual who, deemed by the teacher and site supervisor, cannot adequately care for the health and safety of the child.

It is illegal to leave children unattended in vehicles. Children cannot be left alone even for a short period of time in a vehicle parked in front of or around one of our centers.

Late Pick-up

It is the parent's responsibility to call the site when he/she will be late picking up the child past their scheduled time. The site will log each late pick up. More than three late occurrences will be a reason for a conference with the parent and could lead to the termination of services.

If a child has not been picked up at the center's closing time, and all authorized pick up contacts have been called, we will wait one hour before making a call to Child Protective Services or a law enforcement agency to place the child into protective custody.

Discipline

Children will be helped through negative behavior episodes so that they may be successful in our program. When children need guidance and discipline, each will be talked to by the teachers in a way he or she can understand. Positive discipline techniques will be used. Children may be re-directed into something else, or take a short time away from an activity but will be given a chance to return to try again. Children will be encouraged to use words to describe his or her thoughts and feelings. Directions will be given to children in a positive manner. Parents will be notified of children's behavior as it is necessary for classroom success. As a team, the parent and staff will work together to act in the best interest of the individual child and the classroom as a whole.

Children will learn to respect people, property, and the rights of others. They will be responsible for helping pick up materials and supplies, and cleaning up after themselves. Independent skills will be taught and enforced. Helping others will be encouraged. Children will gain self-control, confidence, and independence while being supportive and encouraging of others. No one will be permitted to physically or verbally assault children, parents, or staff members.

Physical punishment is never used for any reason. No child will be left alone without adult supervision.

Field Trips

Our preschool programs may include short field trips within walking distance of the site; for example, to the local Post Office, Fire Department, or County Fairgrounds. Permission slips will be issued to parents prior to any field trip. Parents are encouraged to attend and help to supervise the children during field trips. Children should be dressed comfortably, including appropriate footwear.

Things from Home

The teaching staff provides a wide variety of experiences for the children throughout the year. Some of these experiences are outdoors, some are messy, and some require easy body movement. Children should be dressed appropriate for playing and discovery. Loose fitting clothing appropriate to the season and shoes that fit, are necessary. For safety reasons absolutely NO backless shoes (thongs, flip-flops, slip-ons, etc), cowboy boots, and slippers are permitted. Tennis shoes are preferred.

Parents are required to bring a change of clothing for the child in case of accident or spillage. Please bring pants, top, underclothing, and socks labeled with the child's name

and place them in his/her cubbie. Children must leave personal toys at home, except on teacher approved show-and-tell days.

For children in full day programs, please bring a clean crib-sized sheet and small blanket for rest time at the beginning of each week. Cots or mats will be provided. Please take home the bedding at the end of each week for laundering.

The program is not responsible for any loss or damage to personal items brought from home.

Daily Health Screenings

State guidelines require each child to be screened daily to determine whether the child is well enough to be in school. Children not found to be well will be sent home. Your child needs to be kept home when he/she has any of the following:

- Fever of 100 degrees axillary (under the arm).
- Eye drainage, discharge, redness and/or burning
- Bronchitis and/or croup
- Skin rashes
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Severe cold or flu symptoms
- Head scratching
- Severe breathing difficulties
- Any condition that inhibits a child's ability to participate in the daily classroom routine

Your child may return to school after being free of the contagious symptoms of these illnesses for at least 24 hours. Some illnesses may require a physician's diagnosis and clearance before return. In the case of head lice, the child may not return until they are free of all lice and nits.

Guidelines require that the site must verify the child's absences if they are not at school. Please call to notify the site by 9:00 am if your child is not coming to school and verify the reason for the absence. If your child has missed five consecutive days of school because of illness, you must provide documentation from a physician allowing your child to return to school.

Outside play is an important part of our daily activities. If your child is too sick to play outside, then he or she should not be brought to school that day.

Medication

If prescription medications are required during school hours, the parent/guardian must complete Authorization to Administer Prescribed Medication form with signature giving the staff directions and permission to administer medication. All medication must be in the original container with a prescription label naming the child, physician, name of medication, date prescribed, and clear dosage instructions. Prescription medication may only be given to the child named on the bottle. Nonprescription medication can be given with written approval from the parent/guardian.

Please notify the teacher if you have given your child medication prior to bringing him/her to the school that day.

Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting

MCCAA Preschool Program staff members are mandated reporters. They are required to report all suspected child abuse and neglect to a child protective service or law enforcement agency immediately by phone and in writing within 36 hours.

Days of Closure

All sites will be closed for the following 12 holidays:

- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King Day
- Presidents Day
- Cesar Chavez Day
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Veteran's Day
- Thanksgiving Holiday – Thursday and Friday
- Christmas Eve
- Christmas Day

Each site will close early on the last Friday of each month to have a staff meeting and cleaning time.

There will be two or three days per year designated as staff inservice days. Parents will be notified of these days of closure in advance.

Evacuation Procedures

Fire and earthquake drills are held regularly. If there is a need to evacuate one of our buildings, the relocation site and emergency phone number will be posted on the front door.

No Drug/Smoking Policy

Smoking and drug use on the premises of a licensed child care center are prohibited. Smoking within 25 feet of the outdoor playground is also prohibited.

Family Fee Policy

The fee rate is determined by the State and adopted each year. Rate changes will be effective the month following the release of new fees.

- Family fees are to be paid one week in advance. Fees are based on child enrollment not attendance. Bills will be issued during the last week of the month for the following month of service. Fees will be due on the first day of each month. No credits will be given for absent, sick or vacation days.
- A fee credit may be applied to the family's subsequent fees during a billing period if the parent is paying for other child care services. Receipts or cancelled checks are required by the program to substantiate the payment of other child care fees. No carryover for fees will be permitted beyond that month.
- If the parent pays by personal check and the check is returned for insufficient funds, the parent will be required to pay in cash the owed fees with any bank charges. All future payments for services will be handled in cash only.
- Family fees are considered delinquent after seven (7) calendar days from the date the fees were due. If fees are not received by the 8th of each month, Notice of Actions will be issued to terminate services for delinquent fees. If fees are received by the end of the notice period, a Notice of Action will be issued reinstating services.
- Parents planning to disenroll from the program will be required to give two weeks notice and pay family fees for the entire month. No refund of fees will be issued.
- For a recipient of services who is determined ineligible due to fraud, the recipient will be required to reimburse the program for the cost of services.
- Fees not paid will be cause for termination.

Termination of Services

Reasons for the termination of services may include, but are not limited to:

- Falsification of records
- Failure to meet timelines for health requirements
- Failure to notify center immediately of changes in income, employment, training, contract hours, residence, telephone number or family size
- Failure to submit required documentation
- Delinquent fees
- Failure to comply with attendance and all other center policies

Appeals Process

A parent who does not agree with an action of the agency as stated in the Notice of Action may appeal the intended action. All steps must be followed in the appeals process to assure that the appeal will be considered. The appeal process is outlined in full on the back of each Notice of Action.

Transportation

Parents are responsible for the transportation of children to and from the preschool program site. No transportation is provided by the program or staff.