

Y.M. & Y.W.H.A. of Williamsburg, Inc.

Family Handbook



**2025
2026**



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Welcome Message

Dear Parents,

Thank you for choosing the Y.M. & Y.W.H.A. of Williamsburg, Inc. Head Start program, which offers inclusive services to the total Head Start family in a multicultural environment. For the past forty years, we have provided the Williamsburg community with excellent early childhood comprehensive services and promoted school readiness by enhancing the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development of children in a safe and healthy environment.

We take great pride in our diverse and devoted community of teachers, administrators, and families. Our skilled and knowledgeable staff has worked successfully with thousands of children and families from many different backgrounds and prepared young children to successfully begin their journey to life-long learning.

This handbook has been developed to provide all families enrolled in our Head Start with detailed information about the program. I encourage you to carefully read this handbook and participate as much as possible in the many activities available throughout the year and take advantage of the services we offer. Your involvement is very important to your child's success in our program. By volunteering you and your family will become acquainted with our Head Start program, see its strength and goals, and help staff make it a fun learning experience for all.

Sincerely,



Elzbieta Szura
Director



Program Philosophy



At the YM &YWH of Williamsburg, Inc. we believe in providing an excellent and engaging early childhood education experience. Our curriculum is built on the belief that children will excel when given the opportunity to explore and create within their classroom environment.

Our program is child-centered and art based and helps provide the foundation on which all later learning will be built. We strongly believe that the family and teachers must form a close alliance for the benefit of each child in the school.

The philosophy of YM &YWH of Williamsburg, Inc. Head Start directs us to provide developmentally appropriate programs and services to children while incorporating, involving and sustaining their parents/guardians as their primary caregivers and first teachers. YM &YWH of Williamsburg, Inc. Head Start seeks to prepare students for later success in kindergarten and the grades and indeed throughout their whole lives; we want our students to succeed as students and as individuals in their communities. YM &YWH of Williamsburg, Inc. Head Start is intensely aware of the role that high-quality prekindergarten programs can play in facilitating student success in a standards-based educational environment. We know that the earliest years of a child's formal education, especially for children who are at-risk due to developmental or economic reasons, are critical to developing the skills, abilities and attitudes which are the foundation of all that is to follow. Furthermore, we aspire to quality and are driven to create an environment which is safe, nurturing and enables each student and family to achieve at the highest levels.

Mission Statement & Strategic 5 Year Goals

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission statement of our program is clear and succinct:

"The YM & YWHA of Williamsburg, Inc. Head Start shall provide comprehensive services to the total Head Start family in a multi-cultural environment and will promote school readiness by enhancing the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development of low- income children."

Our beliefs, rooted in that mission, are strong:

- The potential for successful living for each child can be increased through participation in a comprehensive preschool program;
- Children learn. Children grow;
- If provided with a strong foundation, children flourish;
- Parents are an integral part of a child's education;
- If parents are provided with knowledge, we will help to eliminate existing or potential barriers to growth. If we help to foster pride and confidence in the family, as well as in the child, the family will succeed.

STRATEGIC FIVE-YEAR GOALS

Program Goal #1:

The Y.M and YWHA of Williamsburg, Inc. Head Start will cultivate and enhance a culture of wellness that encompasses physical, oral, nutritional, and mental wellness for children, families and staff.

Program Goal #2:

The Y.M and YWHA of Williamsburg, Inc. Head Start will create a welcome, supportive, and fair environment to foster a sense of belonging and community for children, families and staff.

MEDICAL/ DENTAL FORMS

In compliance with the New York City Department of Health, all children enrolled in the program must have a yearly physical and dental exam. All physical and dental forms must be completed by a health care professional and submitted within (forty-five) 45 days of the start date. If you do not have health coverage or do not have a primary care doctor, your family advocate can help you connect with the proper resources.

IMMUNIZATIONS

All children enrolled in the program must be fully immunized for their age group, or in the process of completing the proper immunizations in accordance with New York Public Health Law §2164 and the requirements of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC DOHMH). As of June 13, 2019, New York State law no longer allows a religious exemption to the requirement for vaccinations.

Parents and guardians of children planning to enroll at YM & YWHA of Williamsburg, Inc. Head Start and who do not have the required immunizations are encouraged to receive the first dose in each immunization series as soon as possible. The deadline for obtaining the first dose vaccination in each immunization series for children will be fourteen (14) days from the first day of school. Additionally, as required by New York State law, parents and guardians of children who enroll must demonstrate through written documentation that they have scheduled appointments for all required follow-up doses within thirty (30) days of the initial doses.

The NYC DOHMH requires all preschool students receive an annual flu shot. Families must show written proof of the vaccine from a health care provider. Every child must have one dose administered each year between August 1 – December 31. Documentation must be received in order for your child to be eligible to attend to school following Winter Break.

The change to New York State law does not affect medical exemptions. Therefore, children with valid medical exemptions as defined under New York State law will be permitted to attend YM & YWHA of Williamsburg, Inc. Head Start without the otherwise required immunizations. Please note that valid medical exemptions must meet certain requirements, including written certification from a New York State-licensed physician attesting that immunization may be detrimental to the child's health, and specifying the medical contraindication to the specific immunization.

HEALTH CONCERNS

The Y.M. & Y.W.H.A. of Williamsburg, Inc. is committed to addressing the needs of every child, including those with health-related disabilities or special needs. To ensure their well-being, our program allows for the administration of medication during school hours by qualified Head Start personnel, such as our nurse and staff members trained in medication administration. If your child has a medical condition or severe allergy, please provide the school with a complete health care plan, which must be filled out by your child's physician. All medications will be securely stored at the school, and children are not permitted to carry medication to and from school.

ILLNESSES

Children may occasionally become ill during the school day. If your child falls sick, they will be cared for in the nurse's office, and we will contact you to pick them up as soon as possible. It is essential that we have a current and working phone number on file to reach you. Please ensure that any changes to your contact information are promptly updated with your family advocate. For the safety of all children, those who are unwell are not permitted to ride the school bus home. Illnesses that may require your child to be sent home include, but are not limited to, fever, vomiting, diarrhea, and rash. The school cannot administer medication without complete physician instructions; therefore, over-the-counter medications like acetaminophen or ibuprofen cannot be given to your child in the event of a fever.

If your child shows any of the following symptoms, they must stay home and may return only after they have been both fever free and symptom free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication: fever over 100.3, excessive cough, shortness of breath, lethargy or unusual tiredness, unexplained rash, eye discharge, vomiting, diarrhea, or nausea.

If your child sustains an injury at home and returns to school with an open wound, stitches, staples, cast, or sling, a doctor's note is required detailing any restrictions regarding school activities.

ABSENCES

It is important for your child's development as well as essential to the overall operation of the program that your child attends school regularly and on time. Regular attendance is crucial to your child's success and we encourage you to make every effort to bring your child to school.

Please call the center if your child is going to be absent. Anytime a child is absent and a parent has not contacted the program within one hour of class start time, staff are required to contact the parents regarding the child's absence. If a child is absent for three or more days due to illness, a doctor's note is required before they may return to school. If a child returns after fewer than three days but is still unwell and sent home, they will also need a doctor's note to come back.

If a child is absent for 2 weeks or more and the center has not been able to contact the parent after repeated calls, it will be assumed that the family has voluntarily dropped the child from the program. Special arrangements can be made in advance for families that have vacation plans.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

The agency requires that there be two (2) people named as emergency contacts. These parties must have knowledge of their designation as your emergency contacts. Telephone numbers of emergency contacts must be correct and in working order. During the program year, the parents are responsible for contacting their child's family advocate to update emergency telephone numbers and release information. It is very important for us to have your child's up-to-date emergency contact numbers on file.

MANDATED REPORTERS

All staff members at the Y.M. & Y.W.H.A. of Williamsburg, Inc. Head Start are trained and certified as mandated reporters. As mandated reporters, they are legally obligated to report any suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. If a staff member knows, or has reasonable cause to believe, that a child is being or has been neglected, physically, or sexually abused within the preceding three years, they must immediately report their concerns to the New York State Central Register (SCR) of Child Abuse and Maltreatment.

EMERGENCY DRILLS

The agency practices emergency evacuation procedures with children on a regular basis. Fire drills are conducted on a monthly basis, during which the children are escorted by their teachers to a safe meeting place outside the building. Lockdown and shelter in drills are conducted on a quarterly basis. These drills are designed to be age-appropriate and presented in ways to minimize any fears the children may have.

CLOTHING

Please send your child in casual, comfortable clothes may get dirty during the day. Remember that dirty clothes are a sign of real involvement in school fun! All children are required to have at least one complete change of clothes because "accidents" can happen. All clothing should be marked with the child's name. Children grow, therefore, it is important to see that the clothing in the classroom fits the child and is seasonally appropriate. During cold weather, children should come to school with a coat, hat and gloves. All children go outside on clear days when the temperature is above freezing. Children should wear sneakers or closed toe shoes with socks suitable for running and climbing. Open toe sandals and flip flops may be dangerous and are not permitted.

JEWELRY / VALUABLES

Children are not permitted to wear jewelry or bring valuables to school, as these items may be lost, damaged, or cause injury during play. Small, non-dangling earrings are permitted. The school is not responsible for lost or damaged jewelry or valuables.

BOOKBAGS

Please ensure your child has a book bag and a composition notebook for us to send messages and Home School Connection (homework) materials. Additionally, make sure that your child's naptime supplies fit comfortably in the backpack, as they will be sent home on the weekends to be washed.

TOILETING

The Y.M. & Y.W.H.A. of Williamsburg, Inc. ensures that each child's toileting needs are met in a safe, sanitary, and respectful manner. Students enter the program at varying stages of proficiency in toileting. Teachers assist students in meeting their toileting needs, and developing the capacity to use the bathroom independently supports their emotional and physical growth.

For children who are still mastering toileting skills, parents and staff will work together to create a potty-training family goal and collaborate toward achieving it. Parents are expected to work in partnership with teachers to support consistent routines and ensure that their child can be potty trained as soon as they are developmentally ready. Family Advocates will also support parents in aligning toileting routines at home and school as closely as possible. If a child's doctor determines that they are not yet ready for potty training, parents must provide a doctor's note documenting this.

PARENT COMMUNICATION

Our program utilizes Class Dojo and Tadpoles for two-way parent communication. Families with children in the 3- and 4-year-old classrooms will be invited to "join" their child's class on Class Dojo. Families with children in the 2-year-old Early Head Start classrooms will receive updates through Tadpoles.

Information about upcoming school events and closures is posted through these platforms. Teachers also use them to share snippets of the children's day at school through photos and short videos.

NUTRITIOUS MEALS

Children are served breakfast, lunch and a snack throughout the school day. Our menus are planned by a registered dietitian to ensure they are nutritionally complete. To keep parents informed, we share weekly menus on ClassDojo, allowing you to stay updated on what your child will be eating each day. All meals are prepared on-site by our cooks, adhering to the guidelines set by the United States Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health. Fresh, local fruits and vegetables are served to the children thanks to our collaboration with the Common Market. To maintain high standards of nutrition, food safety, and regulatory compliance, we do not allow parents to bring any outside food into the classroom. Our dietitian will assess each child's nutritional needs and create personalized menu recommendations, accommodating any allergies. Necessary menu adaptations will be made to cater to the dietary needs of our children.

REST TIME

Children have rest time daily after lunch. Each child is provided with his/her own cot and most children nap during this time. If a child does not wish to nap, he/she can sit on the cot and can engage in a quiet activity. Please provide a crib sized sheet and blanket for your child. The sheet and blanket will be sent home every Friday to be washed and should be returned to school on Monday.

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

Each classroom celebrates children's birthdays monthly, honoring all the children born that month. If parents would like to contribute items for these celebrations, they must be non-food items, such as pencils, stickers, or crayons. If you prefer that your child not participate in birthday celebrations, please notify your child's teacher, and appropriate accommodations will be made.

BUILDING SECURITY/ PICK UP

When parents bring their children to the center in the morning, Head Start staff members greet families in the hallway, and parents may escort their child to the classroom. If a child arrives later than the normal arrival time, a family advocate will assist the parent with signing in and then escort the child to the classroom. For early pickups before regular dismissal, parents are asked to wait in the front area while a family advocate brings the child from the classroom.

Any new individuals added to the pickup list will be required to show ID before the child can be released to them. Please note that all persons on the pickup list must be at least 18 years old.

PARENT/ TEACHER CONFERENCES

Our agency conducts Parent/Teacher Conferences three times a year. During these conferences, we share your child's accomplishments, review report cards generated from Teaching Strategies Gold, and set goals for their continued development. If you are unable to attend a scheduled Parent/Teacher Conference, you can arrange an alternate time or a phone conference with your Family Advocate.

CENTER HOME VISITS

We firmly believe that parents are the primary educators of their children. To support this belief, our teaching staff and family advocates schedule center home visits throughout the school year. These visits are designed to strengthen the partnership between home and school, allowing us to gain a deeper understanding of each child by observing them in their home environment. Center home visits are planned with consideration for the convenience, needs, and preferences of each family.

DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENINGS

The Y.M. & Y.W.H.A. of Williamsburg, Inc. Head Start will complete an Early Childhood Developmental and Social Emotional Screening for all children within 45 days of initial enrollment. The Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) and the Ages and Stages Questionnaire – Social Emotional (ASQ-SE) will be sent home for families to complete. In addition, teachers will complete the Early Screening Inventory – Revised (ESI-P) for children in the 3- and 4-year-old Head Start classrooms, and the Brigance Screening for children in the 2-year-old Early Head Start classrooms.

These research-based standardized tools are used to identify concerns regarding a child's developmental, motor, language, cognitive, and social emotional skills, and provide a functional appraisal of social skills and problem behaviors for children ages 2–6. After the screenings are completed, the teacher will meet with each parent individually to review the results and discuss any next steps.

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENTS

The Y.M. & Y.W.H.A. of Williamsburg, Inc. follows the Creative Curriculum. The Creative Curriculum is a research-based approach designed to foster a love of learning and promote holistic development in young children. It emphasizes hands-on, project-based learning experiences that encourage exploration, creativity, and critical thinking. With a focus on the individual needs and interests of each child, the curriculum integrates all areas of development, including social-emotional, physical, cognitive, and language skills. Through engaging activities and meaningful interactions, children build a strong foundation in literacy, math, science, social studies, and the arts.

The Creative Curriculum also values the role of families in the educational process, encouraging active parental involvement to enhance the learning experience and support the overall growth of each child.

To ensure consistency in effectiveness of curriculum implementation the Y.M & Y.W.H.A of Williamsburg, Inc. utilizes the Gold Assessment tool which is aligned with Creative Curriculum. The program utilizes this assessment tool to provide an accurate sense of a child's progress in the various developmental areas. Assessment begins with information shared by parents with the Head Start staff upon registration, through home visits, parent-teacher conferences and ongoing exchanges with the Head Start staff.

BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

The Y.M. & Y.W.H.A. of Williamsburg, Inc. Head Start Program fosters an atmosphere of positive reinforcement. We believe in a positive approach to discipline, ensuring that children feel safe, comfortable, and nurtured as they develop independence. Our staff is dedicated to modeling acceptable behavior, providing each child with a consistent example of positive conduct.

To discourage disruptive behavior, teachers primarily focus on reinforcing good social behavior. When possible, they may choose to ignore minor disruptions, redirect children to other activities, and strongly encourage positive interactions. This proactive approach helps prevent behavioral issues and minimizes the need for disciplinary measures.

When intervention is necessary, teachers offer clear explanations about why certain behaviors are inappropriate and guide children in finding acceptable alternatives that align with classroom guidelines focused on the safety and well-being of all children. Immediate, relevant consequences for unacceptable behavior are provided in a manner that is kind, respectful, yet firm, allowing the child time to calm down and reflect. If a child struggles to manage their behavior, teachers may redirect them to a different activity to help them regain focus.

Parents will be called to intervene only if other methods to help the child control their behavior have failed. If a discipline problem persists despite these techniques, a conference with the parents will be held. Teachers, family workers, and parents will collaborate to ensure children needing extra attention receive the help, love, and support they need. Exclusionary measures are used only as a last resort in extraordinary circumstances where there is a serious safety threat that cannot be reduced or eliminated by reasonable modifications.

DISABILITIES / SPECIAL NEEDS

The YM & YWHA of Williamsburg, Inc. Head Start is committed to promoting a "least restrictive" environment where all children, including those with special needs, are accommodated equally and fully integrated into the program. Children with special needs participate in all activities alongside their peers, with individualized support tailored to their educational and social development.

We work closely with the local school district and special education providers to ensure that each child's unique needs are met. In a landscape where many NYC preschoolers with disabilities receive services in segregated settings, our program offers a distinct advantage by providing special education services in an inclusive environment. This approach allows children with special needs to learn and grow alongside typically developing peers, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

Our agency is dedicated to helping children with special needs reach their full potential by ensuring they receive the necessary services and by working in close collaboration with their families. As a result, most of the children who receive services at our agency are successfully mainstreamed into general education classrooms in public schools upon completing Head Start.

TRANSPORTATION

The Y.M. & Y.W.H.A. of Williamsburg, Inc. provides school bus services to children in the 3s and 4s classrooms. Children are seated using age, height and weight appropriate child passenger safety systems. The bus has two bus matrons who complete pre- and post-trip vehicle checks, including second or third complete interior inspections to ensure no child is ever left on a vehicle. Bus routes are planned to minimize the time children spend in transit and prevent vehicles from exceeding maximum passenger capacity. A lottery will be held if the number of children requiring service exceeds the number that can safely ride the school bus. Children receiving transportation services are taught safety procedures and participate in at least two evacuation drills during the program year.

FAMILY SERVICES

The Y.M.&Y.W.H.A. of Williamsburg Inc. Head Start Program assigns a Family Advocate to each enrolled family. They develop warm and trusting relationships with the families and support and encourage families to identify their strengths and needs in developing and achieving family goals. The family services team works with the parents of the program on a daily basis. If parents wish assistance, a member of the team is available for support and guidance. She/he becomes the confidante of the parent and acts as the liaison between family and community resources, assisting the family to formulate and achieve goals and help them address concerns and pursue interests.

MENTAL HEALTH

The Y.M. & Y.W.H.A. of Williamsburg, Inc. partners with a Mental Health Consultant to provide essential mental health services for children and families at our center as needed. Beyond individual consultations, our consultant also conducts monthly Parenting Workshops. These workshops are designed to equip parents with effective strategies, following the Positive Solutions for Families Parenting Curriculum.

Our agency also partners with the Puerto Rican Family Institute Mental Health Program to provide families in crisis with services which include individual and group psychotherapy, marital and family counseling, medication management and psychiatric evaluations, crisis intervention, and case management.



VOLUNTEERING IN HEAD START

As a Head Start parent you have the opportunity to be part of our program as a parent volunteer. The success of our program depends upon the active participation of parents and others in the community. Your knowledge, time and talents can all contribute to this effort. There are many ways that volunteers can contribute to Head Start. Each volunteer brings unique experiences, skills, and talents, making every contribution special and impactful.

PARENT VOLUNTEER POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

A volunteer orientation is held at the beginning of the school year for families interested in volunteering in the program. Volunteers must never be alone with a child and always work with children under the direct supervision of qualified teaching staff. Adhering to health, safety, and emergency procedures which are shared at the orientation is essential. Additionally, maintaining the confidentiality of all information encountered during volunteer activities is mandatory, regardless of its subject matter.

PARENT POLICY COUNCIL

All parents of children enrolled in our program are members of the Parents Committee. From the Parent Committee, a Policy Council is elected to represent all Head Start parents. The Policy Council is a key component of the governance structure and decision-making process within Head Start programs. Being a Policy Council member can be a great experience. Major decisions made by management are subject to input from this group of parents. They also work to negotiation differences that may arise between families and program staff through the Policy Council Grievance Committee. Members have the opportunity to attend educational conferences, learn how a council operates and share information and ideas with other parents and staff. The Policy Council also puts on fun activities for the children throughout the school year.

Attend the Policy Council Orientation to learn more about being a Policy Council Member.



What Our Families are Saying...

"Truly a special place!! Warm and welcoming with the most wonderful staff and teachers. Caring teachers and lots of opportunity for parent involvement make it feel like a family." -Claire H

"I seriously can't say enough good things about the program. When the entire staff knows your child's name by the end of the first day, it says a lot. Always a friendly greeting hello and goodbye everyday." -Ellen U

"Absolutely love this school. We've had the best experience here. Teachers, kitchen staff, administration all go above and beyond to make the Y a very safe and welcoming place." -Ashley S

"A 'hidden' gem! You will not find a more quality and loving environment for your child's Pre-K experience!" -Kent D

"We feel lucky to be part of this school, my kids are getting a great education in a warm, open and caring environment. Excellent school! Highly, highly recommend!" -Elena B.



The Y.M. & Y.W.H.A. of Williamsburg, Inc. Head Start is a National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredited program. The program upholds the high standards set by the NAEYC in key areas such as relationships, teaching, assessment, health and safety, curriculum, family engagement, professionalism, community involvement, physical environment, and management.