

# Community Comment Policy

The Elkhart and St. Joseph Counties Head Start/Early Head Start Consortium is a team of people assembled to provide opportunity and education for families with pre-school children. This team consists of board members, administrators, educators, parents and a variety of other support staff all working together to provide the best assistance possible. It is important to improve and enhance our program providing the best and most comprehensive care possible for all involved in Elkhart and St. Joseph Counties.

As you become more involved with Head Start you may find times that you wish to offer suggestions, comments or even voice concerns to one or more of the team members. When you have a suggestion or even a problem the Community Comment Policy described in this brochure will help you get the best service possible from a valuable team member of the Head Start Consortium.

According to the regulations of the Office of Head Start Sec. 642 [42 U.S.C. 9837] (1),(E),(V), (X), (bb) The Governing Board of the local Head Start program is to establish, adopt, and periodically update written standards of conduct that establish standards and formal procedures for disclosing, addressing, and resolving—(bb) complaints, including investigations, when appropriate;

This process known as “The Community Comment Policy” has been established so that any concerned individuals may resolve their issue without contacting the Offices of Head Start (OHS) directly. Contacting the (OHS) before attempting to follow this process will result in them contacting the Executive Director to determine if there has been an attempt to resolve it within the organization using this process. The (OHS) simply notifies the Head Start Executive Director that you have lodged a complaint. The Director then has to try to find out the details and begin this process from the start. Therefore, contacting the (OHS) does not speed up the process, nor resolve the problem as it is not lawful for them to provide a resolution for a conflict between the Grantee and the families they serve.

It is the intent of the Head Start Consortium to be open to all suggestions for quality improvement of the agency and the programs that it administers.

In order to accomplish this goal, the agency utilizes the following procedure. If you have a suggestion or problem this will help you get the best service possible from the Head Start Consortium.

Each step must be taken in the correct order to ensure a timely and effective response to your concerns. Advancing to an inappropriate step or person in charge will only slow the process as it must be documented that each step was appropriately followed.

The Community Comment Tracking Form should be completed and will help you to follow the process. This form insures that you have a record of who has been spoken to and what has been accomplished.

*Staff persons receiving a complaint should sign all complaints as having been made aware of the problem. A signature does not mean that you agree or disagree with the complaint. After recording the suggested solution, action or recommendation given, make a copy and place it in the family file.*

All complaints must be in writing using the Community Comment Tracking Form and contain sufficient detail to identify the nature of the concern or complaint. The concern/complaint should be submitted within ten (10) working days of knowledge of the incident or circumstances involved. Anonymous

complaints, concerns or phone call concerns cannot be investigated. **(You must fill out a written concern on a Community Comment Tracking Form.)**

#### **STEP 1 – Take the concern to any Head Start staff person**

Should you have a concern or a complaint please feel free to speak with your Family And Community Specialist (FACS) or your child’s teacher. Using the Comment Tracking Form please describe your concern(s). Your child’s teacher or your (FACS) Family And Community Specialist can assist in transcribing an oral complaint for you if necessary.

Please provide a brief description of what your concern is. Be sure to fill in the date of the incident or date when your concern first arose. Provide a current phone number and address where you may be reached. Be sure to sign the form and attach any additional documents about the incident.

Two copies of the Concern/Comment Tracking Form will be made. The original will be placed in your family file, a copy will be forwarded to their Program Manager and you will receive the other copy. This will ensure that we each have a record of your concern and the resolution.

**(Should your concern involve your (FACS) or Teacher and you feel uncomfortable speaking with either of them, you may fill out the STEP 1 portion of the Form and take your concern directly to STEP 2 (the Site Supervisor)**

#### **STEP 2 – Your concern will be taken to the Site Supervisor**

Whether your concern is resolved or not, the Community Comment Tracking Form will be forwarded on to the staff person’s Site Supervisor. It will go along with a request for them to attempt to resolve your concern. Unless the nature of the concern is an emergency, the Site Supervisor will have 3 **business** days to respond to your concern by phone or in writing. If the concern remains unresolved following conversations with the Site Supervisor it is raised to STEP 3.

**Emergency is defined:** Any situation that implies that your child(ren) or yourself are in danger of physical harm, abuse, or would create a physical or mental risk of additional harm by not responding.

#### **STEP 3 – Your concern is taken to the Head Start Executive Director**

Should the program manager determine that your concern cannot be resolved through their authority they will speak with the Head Start Executive Director about how to resolve it.

The Executive Director will meet with all parties involved within **3 business days** (provided the process has been properly followed). Some problems require additional time to investigate details. Calling to speak with the management staff including the Executive Director during the process will not be helpful. The Executive Director cannot provide progress reports or comment on concerns during the time of investigation.

**Within 5 business days** following the meeting and all the information has been reviewed the Executive Director will provide verbal or written explanation to all parties.

#### **STEP 4 –Your concern will be taken to the Governing Board and Policy Council**

Should the Executive Director determine that your concern is a violation of a Consortium policy or requires a change in policy to be resolved she will make appropriate recommendations to the Policy Council and Governing Board for appropriate action. Dependent upon the time of the next available planned or emergency meetings of the Policy Council and Governing Board, you will

be made aware of the dates and time of such board meeting should you desire to be present to provide any additional information concerning your issue.

**At the conclusion of Step 3 or 4, the Executive Director will notify the (OHS) of any necessary changes to be made in the program as a result of the concern you raised.**