

**JOINT COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT
BETWEEN
(Name of Head Start/Early Head Start Agency)
AND
ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES (DCFS)**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this agreement is to enhance working relationships and foster collaborative strategies in order to improve program performance and outcomes for children, families, and communities in the service area of _____, Illinois. The “parties” to this agreement are the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, herein referred to as DCFS or “Department” and (Name of Head Start/Early Head Start Agency)

Applicable definitions for this agreement include:

- **Caseworker:** Refers to the person(s) responsible for providing direct services to children with whom the Department is involved. These services include specialized areas (i.e. adoptions, resources, licensing, service coordination, liaison to courts) and as general casework (i.e. working with families, children and, if need be, courts to effect placement of children and maintain protection of the children and families and their rights).
- **DCFS Service Plan:** Refers to a written plan that is established between the worker and the children/family served, and any involved service providers. Its purpose is to formulate goals for the child based on their needs for health, safety and well being that were identified during the assessment process, what actions need to be taken, and identify what interventions and service will be provided to meet the child/family’s needs.
- **Foster Parent/Caregiver:** Refers to persons designated by DCFS to be responsible for the day-to-day care of children and youth for whom the Department is legally responsible.
- **Purchase of Service (POS) Agencies:** Refers to child welfare agencies that contract with DCFS to provide casework services to children and families.
- **Ward:** Refers to children for whom the Department has temporary protective custody, custody or guardianship via court order, or children whose parents have signed an adoptive surrender or voluntary placement agreement with the Department.
- **Family Partnership Agreement (FPA):** Refers to a written plan offered to and established between Head Start and/or Early Head Start programs and all enrolled families that describes family goals and strategies/progress in achieving them. The collaborative partnership-building with parents is to establish mutual trust and to identify family goals, strengths, and necessary services and other supports. To avoid duplication of effort or conflict with any pre-existing family plans Head Start and/or Early Head Start families may have with other agencies, the FPA must take into account and build upon as appropriate these other plans.

- **Center Based Program:** Refers to Head Start and/or Early Head Start services provided to children primarily in classroom settings.
- **Home Based Program:** Refers to Head Start and/or Early Head Start services provided to children primarily in the child's home through intensive work with the child's parents and family as the primary factor in the growth and development of the child.
- **Family Child Care:** Refers to care and education provided to children in a private home or other family-like setting. Head Start and/or Early Head Start family child care means a comprehensive service provided to a small group of children through their enrollment in family child care.
- **Statewide Provider Database (SPD):** The SPD is an online database with comprehensive information on service agencies and programs throughout the state of Illinois. The SPD was initially developed to assist caseworkers in identifying and locating appropriate services for their clients. SPD contains information on services that are open to children and families, DCFS affiliates or not, regardless of whether an agency holds a Department contract.

The cooperative agreement will consist of the following goals and objectives:

I. Participation of Child Welfare-Involved Children and Families in Head Start and /or Early Head Start Programs

Goal: To enroll and sustain the participation of eligible children and families involved with the child welfare system to include: wards of the state that are in substitute care, children of wards, and children in intact families that participate in Head Start and /or Early Head Start programs.

A. Recruitment, Enrollment, and Information Sharing

1. DCFS/POS will identify children who are or will meet the entry requirements for public school in that service area. Caseworkers will give parents and foster parents' information on Head Start and/or Early Head Start. DCFS will provide **(Name of Head Start/Early Head Start Agency)** with lists of child welfare-involved children and children of wards who are of the appropriate ages on a quarterly basis. To the extent permissible by DCFS/POS confidentiality rules and other applicable laws, information will include: name and birthday of the child, contact information of child's caseworker and supervisor, child welfare status of child (ward, child of ward, or intact family), address and phone number of child and with whom he or she is residing (i.e., biological parents, foster parents, home of relative), and the name of any non-custodial parent. In the case of children of wards or those residing in intact families, Head Start/Early Head Start will need to determine eligibility based on family income. In the case of wards, who are all eligible for Head Start and/or Early Head Start, in addition to the above information, DCFS/POS will provide information about the child's health status and special needs (including a physical examination within the (6) six months, up to date immunization records, a dental exam within the last (6) months and an IFSP or IEP for special needs documentation).

Early Head Start can be a good support for many young children and their families if utilized appropriately. Children benefit the most when they have the opportunity to maintain and establish healthy attachments to their primary caregivers. Children for whom the Department has a legal responsibility who have already experienced loss and separation are at risk for not only developing unhealthy attachments but also falling behind their peers in meeting milestones. For children, birth-2 years old, there is a consistent need for nurturing a care giving relationship. Therefore, IDCFS has developed an Early Head Start referral process.

DCFS Early Head Start referral process for birth-age 2 will be as follows:

- a. If the child is a ward in the custody of DCFS, the referral for Early Head Start (EHS) will be driven by the Integrated Assessment (IA), Early Childhood Screening (ECS), Child and Youth Investment Team (CAYIT) recommendations, or other intervention. The results of the assessment or staffing shall support the need for Early Head Start programming. The early childhood specialist will provide the child's information to the caseworker or designee to make the appropriate referral.
 - b. If the child is involved in the Intact Family and/or teen parenting programs, the process should proceed as outlined in section A(1) of the joint collaborative agreement. **(The distinction being made between wards, children served through Intact and a teen parent program is that the latter groups consist of children who remain in the care of their biological parents and have not had the adverse experience of losing that relationship. Early Head Start Home Based option has the benefits of increased attachment. Families enrolled in a home based option will receive weekly- 90 minutes of in home visiting to promote parent-child interaction).**
 - c. If a child who has been seen through IA and or ECS does not receive a recommendation for EHS after the completion of the assessment, the caseworker in consultation with ECS should revisit the idea of making a referral after there has been an indication that developmental and social emotional stability has been achieved.
 - d. Caseworker may by- pass the referral step mentioned in step 1, when a foster parent is in need of day care- related services for their child. However, efforts shall be made to ensure that the Early Head Start provider is aware of the child's history and is able to alert the caseworker of any concerns they observe while caring for the child.
2. DCFS/POS will provide parents/caregivers, foster parents and caseworkers for both wards and intact families with information on Head Start and/or Early Head Start programs on an ongoing basis. Enrollment may be initiated by either the caseworker or the caregiver.
 3. **(Name of Head Start/Early Head Start Agency)**, will actively recruit children and families referred by DCFS/POS whenever open slots are available and will welcome children and families involved with the Department and prioritize their enrollment via the agency's selection criteria.
 4. Semi-Annually, **(Name of Head Start/Early Head Start Agency)**, in conjunction with the Head Start State Collaboration Office, will provide delegate/site agency updates, as needed, to the Department's Statewide provider Database (SPD). A directory of Head Start and /or Early Head Start programs, which include the number of slots and program options, shall also be included in the (SPD). This current information shall be accessible to child welfare agency staff. The child welfare staff shall share this accurate information with caregivers.

5. At the time of enrollment, caregivers or caseworkers will share information directly with Head Start and/or Early Head Start staff that is directly related to the child's educational needs, social-emotional needs, their performance, strengths, and needed supports.
6. Head Start and/or Early Head Start will share appropriate information with DCFS/POS staff referencing the child's development in the program. Head Start and/or Early Head Start will follow the Head Start Program Performance Standards to meet the needs of child and family by utilizing collaborative partners, including DCFS/POS. DCFS/POS and Head Start and/or Early Head Start will collaborate on resources to the maximum extent feasible when family needs are identified and community resources are not available.

B. Educational Stability for Wards

1. When issues arise, such as inadequate attendance, or behavioral, physical, or medical challenges, that may threaten a child's continued enrollment in the program, Head Start and/or Early Head Start will contact both the caseworker and the caregiver and will include both in the resolution of the issue.
2. When contacted by a Head Start and/or Early Head Start program, caseworkers will respond proactively to all concerns, i.e., by convening a family meeting.
3. If the child should move, efforts for the child to remain in the Head Start and/or Early Head Start program through the end of the program year will be explored and employed, as warranted and possible.

C. Transition Procedures

1. If it is determined that a child should transition to another program upon a placement move, Head Start and/or Early Head Start staff, caseworkers and caregivers will work together to develop and implement an appropriate transition for the child, which may include: opportunity for the child to say goodbye to Head Start and/or Early Head Start staff and other children, as appropriate; collection of art work and other educational materials; and necessary paperwork for transition to another Head Start and/or Early Head Start program.
2. When a Head Start child moves to kindergarten, or an Early Head Start child moves to preschool, the caseworker will collaborate with Head Start and/or Early Head Start to help the caregiver select a preschool or kindergarten setting that is an appropriate setting for the transition of the child.

II. Service Provision

Goal: To encourage and enhance collaboration among the parties in order to improve service delivery to target families.

A. Case Conferences

Within 10 days of enrollment and prior to each six-month period, an Administrative Case Review (ACR) shall be conducted. They are also conducted on an as-needed basis. The caseworker will confer with Head Start and/or Early Head Start program personnel regarding the child's educational services and outcomes.

B. Operationalization of Joint Cooperative Agreement

1. The DCFS/POS child welfare specialist may list the name and mailing address of the appropriate Head Start and/or Early Head Start staff person on the case review mailing request (CRMR) i.e., notification form of any child enrolled in the Head Start and/or Early Head Start program. When possible, the designated Head Start and/or Early Head Start staff will attend the (ACR) during the portion regarding the child's education, as determined by DCFS.
2. Head Start and/or Early Head Start will follow the Head Start Program Performance Standards for the provision of services and provide information to the caseworker and the caregiver regarding progress, outcomes, and results, as appropriate. Head Start and/or Early Head Start will work with the DCFS/POS caseworker, the child, and family members, as appropriate, to support the case plan, including the permanency plan.
3. The DCFS/POS team supervisor or designated staff shall meet with a designated Head Start and/or Early Head Start staff person at least quarterly during the program year to discuss new referrals from intact families being served by the Department. It will be the responsibility of DCFS/POS to have discussed the program with the parents and to obtain an appropriate release, as determined by DCFS.

At this meeting, numbers of possible referrals can be discussed, but no specific family will be discussed without above mentioned signed release.

4. DCFS/POS shall accept Head Start and/or Early Head Start program staff as participants in the child and family team and will invite them to child and family team meetings as well as ACRs, as needed.
5. In order to share information regarding the goals and services established by the program, the child's progress, their relationship with foster and birth parents, and the child's health and well-being issues, Head Start and/ or Early Head Start will invite DCFS/POS caseworkers of wards in substitute care or children of wards and intact

families to participate in parent conferences or Family Partnership Agreement reviews, as appropriate and needed. Head Start and/or Early Head Start staff will participate in DCFS/POS team/case planning meetings, as feasible. The Department, POS and the Head Start and/or Early Head Start agency will adhere to all applicable confidentiality rules and laws, as specified in Section VI of this agreement, related to sharing information at these meetings.

III. Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

Goal: Head Start and/or Early Head Start programs will play a conscious and active role in preventing child abuse and neglect.

- A. DCFS upon request may provide training and technical assistance for Head Start and/or Early Head Start program staff and parents on child abuse and neglect prevention, including protective factors that keep families safe and recognizing and responding to signs of family stress.
- B. Head Start and/or Early Head Start programs will adhere to the Head Start Program Performance Standards that support family strengthening and child abuse prevention.
- C. Head Start and/or Early Head Start programs will include an assessment of family services in their annual self assessment. Head Start and/or Early Head Start may integrate the Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education Illinois tool into their annual program self-assessment process.

IV. Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

Goal: Ensure the safety of children participating in Head Start and/or Early Head Start programs.

- A. Head Start and/or Early Head Start program staff will report all cases of suspected abuse or neglect via the hotline. In the case of reports made on child-welfare-involved children and families, where there is an existing relationship between Head Start and/or Early Head Start program staff and the caseworker, staff will also inform the caseworker of the report.
- B. Child protection investigative staff are responsible for the completion of the investigation. Once an investigator is assigned, he or she will work with the Head Start and/or Early Head Start program to ensure that an appropriate safety plan and supports are available to the child and the caregiver.
- C. All Head Start and/or Early Head Start program staff will cooperate with DCFS investigators during child protection (abuse and neglect) and licensing investigations.
- D. IDCFS investigator will acknowledge to the reporter the investigation is active and determine if the reporter has more information to share. The investigator will not share specific investigatory information with the reporter. The investigator shall keep all

reporting sources anonymous. The reporter will be notified of the investigations finding.

V. Training

Goal: All DCFS and POS caseworkers and their supervisors and all Head Start and/ or Early Head Start program staff have the information they need to fully collaborate with each other to benefit child-welfare involved children and their families.

- A.** DCFS and Head Start and/or Early Head Start will coordinate and provide cross-training on policies, procedures, and services that inform or are included in this collaborative agreement, including, but not limited to:
1. DCFS Educational Services – Procedures 314.
 2. Basic orientation of services offered by the parties.
 3. Head Start and/or Early Head Start eligibility and enrollment procedures for DCFS wards, children of wards, and children in intact families involved with the child welfare system.
 4. Roles of caseworkers, caregivers, and Head Start and/or Early Head Start staff.
 5. Cross-eligibility and payment.
 6. Completion of the CFS 407and/or 407-2 - IDCFS Education Report Form/Education Records transfer Request by Head Start/Early Head Start staff in accordance with DCFS procedures.
 7. Coordinating case management and service planning processes, as appropriate.
 8. Appropriate policies and procedures regarding mandated reporter status.
 9. Prevention and identification of child abuse and neglect.
 10. Head Start Program Performance Standards.
- B.** Head Start and/or Early Head Start will include a review of this agreement in their staff pre-service or in-service training annually.
- C.** The parties will collaborate to create training tools and to provide training to caseworkers, supervisors, and other applicable staff from either agency, as possible and appropriate.
- D.** The parties will keep one another informed of efforts and outcomes related to training and technical assistance and will coordinate their professional development activities, as possible and appropriate.

VI. Confidentiality

It is the parties' intent to safeguard the privacy of child welfare-involved children and families and to comply with applicable confidentiality rules and laws including, but not limited to, the following:

- Rule 402 (Licensing Standards for Foster Family Homes)
- DCFS Rule 431 (Confidentiality of Personal Information of Persons Served by the Department)

- Child Care Act of 1969, 225 ILCS 10/15
- Children and Family Services Act, 20 ILCS 505/1
- Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act, 325 ILCS 5/1
- Illinois Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Confidentiality Act, 740 ILCS 110/1
- Alcoholism and Other Drug Abuse and Dependency Act, 20 ILCS 301/1-1
- Adoption Act, 750 ILCS 50/0.01
- Head Start Program Performance Standards
- DCFS Rule 406 (Licensing Standards for Day Care Homes)
- DCFS Rule 407 (Licensing Standards for Day Care Centers)
- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, (HIPPA), 45 CFR Parts 160-165 and the Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. 1320d-2 through 1320s-7.

(Name of Head Start/Early Head Start Agency) and the Department shall inform their employees, consultants, and subcontractors of such confidentiality obligations and require their compliance therewith, except as may be required by state or federal law, regulation, or order.

(Name of Head Start/Early Head Start Agency) shall not release information about child welfare-involved children and families received from DCFS without the prior written approval of the Director of DCFS or his authorized designee.

VII. Review and Framework

The Term of this Agreement is July 1, 2011 - June 30, 2012. The agreement may be reviewed and updated on an annual basis. The agreement establishes a framework for cooperative interaction between **(Name of Head Start/Early Head Start Agency)** and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

This agreement shall not constitute a legal obligation on the part of either party to engage in the activities described and may be terminated by either party for any reason upon thirty (30) days written notice without penalty. Only the section of this agreement that pertain to the agency's services apply to that agency, i.e., if the agency does not provide Early Head Start, then the birth-3 sections do not apply and conversely, if the agency does not provide Head Start then the preschool sections will not apply.

(Name of Head Start/Early Head Start Agency)

Name and Title

Date

**Illinois Department of Children
and Family Services**

Erwin McEwen, Director

Date