

Family Handbook

2024-25 School Year



1 Meadow Lane, Pittsfield, MA 01201
413-499-0137
www.berkhs.org

Family Advocate _____ Work cell phone _____
Work hours _____

Teacher _____ Classroom # _____

Teacher _____

Teacher _____

Education Site Manager _____

Support Specialist _____



Dear Berkshire County Head Start Families,

Welcome to Berkshire County Head Start (BCHS) where we work to enhance opportunities for success by inspiring each child's love of learning, partnering with families, advocating for equity, and fostering a connection to community. Our Family Handbook and program calendar should prove to be a great resource that you may refer to throughout your tenure at BCHS.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to partner with you in supporting kindergarten readiness for your child. We could not be more excited that you chose to begin your child's educational journey with us, and we look forward to partnering with you. At BCHS, we believe that parents/caregivers are their child's first and most important teachers. We invite you to become an integral part of your child's education by participating in parent events, activities, and learning opportunities. We embrace the "whole child, whole family" philosophy in all aspects of our programs and services and invite you and your family to engage in them.

Your child's Head Start experience will help them become successful learners, making all the difference when entering a kindergarten program.



BCHS supports children's growth in a positive learning environment through a variety of services, which include:

1.Early Learning & Development: Children's readiness for school and beyond is fostered through individualized learning experiences. Through relationships with adults, play, and planned and spontaneous instruction, children grow in many aspects of development. These include social skills, emotional wellbeing, language and literacy skills, mathematics, and science concepts. Early learning experiences also include the cultural and language heritage of each child and family in relevant ways. Additionally, Head Start programs work with families, school districts, and other entities to facilitate a smooth transition to kindergarten for each child.

2.Health: Health and physical development are crucial for early learning opportunities that require children to fully explore and experience their environment. Head Start programs provide safe and healthy learning experiences indoors and outdoors. All children receive health screenings and nutritious meals, and programs connect families with medical, dental, and mental health services to ensure children are receiving the care and attention they need.

3. Family well-being: Parents and families are offered program services to support family well-being and to achieve family goals, such as housing stability, continued education, and financial security. Programs support and strengthen parent-child relationships and engage families in the learning and development of their child.

We look forward to an exciting year of preschool at Berkshire County Head Start.

2024-2025

Welcome to Berkshire County Head Start. Thank you for choosing our program. We are excited to begin a new school year and are committed to providing a quality program that is safe, educational, child-friendly, and fun! We are dedicated to ensuring that your child has an opportunity for a high-quality early childhood experience. We are looking forward to getting to know you.

There are a few things that set us apart from other child care programs. When you accept our program, you agree to engage in our comprehensive services.

- **Home Visits** are a tradition at Head Start. These visits help us build strong relationships with your family. Our Teachers and Family Advocates will each visit your home at least twice a year. We want to get to know you. We will bring gifts and take pictures that we can share in our classrooms. The first visit will be within 2 weeks of enrolling.
- Our staff understand that negative actions, words, and attitudes endanger the health and safety of children and families. We will not use profanity, sarcasm, threats, or derogatory language when speaking to you. We will respect you and your family's unique composition. We expect that you will follow this **Code of Conduct** in all communications with our staff, other families, and children as well.
- We want all children to be safe, healthy and well, learning and developing, engaged in positive relationships with family members, caregivers, and other children, ready for school, and successful in school and life. In order to keep all children safe, all employees of Berkshire County Head Start are **Mandated Reporters**. Anyone who sees evidence that may indicate abuse or signs of neglect, or who learns about an incident of abuse from the victim or a witness, we must immediately report. As difficult as it will be, we will work with you, without judgement or bias to give you support.
- Did you know that missing just one or two days of preschool every few weeks can make it harder for your child to gain early math skills, build relationships, develop reading skills, and to be prepared for kindergarten. **Attendance matters!** You must call us and let us know when and why you are keeping your child at home. We will be visiting on the 3rd day if we have not heard from you.
- Please take the time to tell us about all the adults who care about your child. We will share invitations to special events, newsletters and offers to volunteer to all. Please list these supportive adults as **Emergency Contacts** if you are unable to drop off or pick up your child from programming. We must have names and phone numbers of adults that pick your child up from our care if you are not able to reach you.
- For children to be healthy and ready to learn they must be up to date on all medical and dental care. Review and sign the '**Portrait of a Healthy Child**' with your Family Advocate. It highlights all mandatory medical and dental information for your child to attend programming.

- Join us monthly for the **Families In Power** meeting. Help us to create the best programs for your child and your family. Assist us in designing the program, reviewing the budget, and engaging all families.
- **Always hold your child's hands in our parking lots.** Our parking lots can be very busy. Please help us to keep your child and all children safe by insisting that they hold your hand to and from the car to our building.
- The last item really sets up apart from other preschool programs. When you accept a spot in our program, you agree to **partner** with us. You agree to identify some goals for you and your child. You agree to work with us towards those goals. We will hold each other accountable to those goals. The first goal in our Individual Family Partnership Agreement (IFPA) is:
 - **Family Engagement in Transitions:** Our family will encourage and advocate for our child's learning and development as they transition into the new learning environments at Berkshire County Head Start.

We look forward to getting to know you and your family. At Head Start, **I Belong, You Belong, We all Belong!** Please reach out to your Teacher or Family Advocate with any questions you may have.

Signature of Parent/Guardian _____

Date _____

Sincerely,

Maggie Steele
Director of Engagement Services
Berkshire County Head Start
1 Meadow Lane, Pittsfield, MA 01201
413-499-0137 ext. 248

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About Us

Statement of Purpose - 7.04 (17)(a). Berkshire County Head Start was established in 1976. It is an early childhood program providing education, health, and comprehensive services to children and their families. We serve all of Berkshire County with sites in Great Barrington, Pittsfield, and North Adams. We serve children who are 2 years 9 months old until they are age eligible for kindergarten.

Mission Statement

We enhance opportunities for success by inspiring each child's love of learning, partnering with families, advocating for equity, and fostering a connection to community.

Our Program Values

Integrity & Openness: We commit to structured, consistent time with individuals and teams. We agree that our conversations will be transparent and open to feedback from all levels. We commit to this value to ensure continuous open communication and to ensure the highest level of service to each other and families.

Enthusiasm & Engagement: We commit to talk often about BCHS's vision, "the big picture" and its mission - the impact on families. We commit to ensuring that the impact on staff and finances - performance expectations, budget, processes and policies - are communicated often. We agree to clearly articulate plans, follow through on them, and communicate any changes when they occur, including the "whys" behind the changes. We commit to this value to ensure that everyone is on the same page and understands how they contribute to BCHS's success.

Teambuilding & Reliability: We commit to maintaining the synergy of our teams by supporting and respecting each other. We'll reflect this value by listening and considering other's opinions, feelings, and core beliefs in all interactions and communications and by our ability to work through strong emotions and come to mutually agreeable and beneficial solutions. We agree to ask for, offer, and accept help when it's needed. We commit to this value to ensure that the combined talents, experience, skills, and education of all team members are recognized and supported.

Reliable and Accountable: We commit to demonstrating reliability by being on time, available, and by taking the initiative to pitch in when and where needed. Being accountable means, we will take responsibility for individual commitments, work, and interactions by following through, accepting consequences, and learning from our mistakes. We understand the results of consistently demonstrating reliability and accountability are strong, trusting relationships with families, children, co-workers, and the community.

Our policies and statements are accompanied by our Massachusetts licensing regulation number 7.01 and the Head Start Performance Standard 1302. The numbers coincide with the appropriate regulation and/or standard.

Program of Quality

Our program is funded by the Office of Head Start which is a division of the Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services. We follow the guidance of the Head Start Act and the Head Start Performance Standards (HSPS). We strive to be a program of quality. For additional information, families can review the Head Start Performance Standards at their website:

The Department of Early Education and Care (DEEC) is the licensing authority for all of our sites. This includes a comprehensive application and renewal process every two years. A licensor also makes un-announced health and safety inspections periodically. Families can contact EEC for information regarding the program's regulatory compliance history. For additional information, families can contact the Department of Early Education and Care at (413) 788-8401 or visit their website: <https://www.mass.gov/lists/eec-laws-and-regulations>

Berkshire County Head Start also follows the mandates, regulations, and standards of:

- Local Boards of Health (BOH)
- Funding from our community, government and private sources

Mandated Reporting 1302.47(5) 7.08(6)

We are required by law to report suspected incidents of child abuse or neglect to the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Berkshire County Head Start staff is to ensure the safety and well-being of children enrolled in our program, we are Mandated Reporters. (i.e., If a child comes to school with a serious physical injury or tells staff members that an incident happened at home (e.g. domestic violence incident between caretakers), staff do not have a choice; being mandated reporters requires that we make a report to DCF regarding the situation.

It is our goal to work together without judgment or bias and give you support during these difficult times. We are here to support your child AND your family, including any situations that involve DCF.

All allegations of abuse are taken seriously, and we follow our process by filing a report with our licensing agency, Early Education and Care, Department of Children and Families and Office of Head Start to begin an investigation.

Program Evaluation 1302.102(A)(1)

Throughout the year, we will ask you to provide feedback via parent surveys about your experiences to improve our services to both you and your children. You will be invited to offer suggestions, make recommendations, and share your story as part of our ongoing evaluation of the program. Your input will help guide us in making decisions about programming and help us better understand the needs of the children and families we serve. Remember, this is your program, and your input is valuable.

Education

Mabeline Burgos, Early Education Manager
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Curriculum 1302.31 and 1302.32, and 7.06

The curriculum is designed to follow the Creative Curriculum Cloud model English and Spanish, also known as the (HUB), The curriculum is a strength-based, interactive approach. The curriculum is well-balanced and consists of specific intentionally planned learning experiences that support all children's social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and language development.

Classroom activities and themes are tied to the interests of each unique group of children. The curriculum is designed with activities in English and Spanish and experiences inside and outside the classroom. Teachable moments occur throughout the day with inquisitive children. The curriculum lesson plans are planned for the entire year, by the curriculum team specialist. The lesson plans are posted inside and outside classrooms and shared in the monthly newsletter with parents.

Our classrooms are inviting and diverse, welcoming to all children and staff from all backgrounds and cultures. We are following recommended health and safety practices from the **Center for Disease Control** and local boards of health to provide a safe and healthy environment. There are an abundance of activities, projects and toys for them to explore, question and use their imagination, as well as art and messy materials. Remember, children use their senses when exploring and we welcome this at our program.

- Our school readiness goals are based on the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, the Massachusetts Guideline for Preschool Learning Experiences, and the Massachusetts Common Core Standards. The School Readiness Goals are updated annually with feedback from Teachers, families, community partners, and our local public schools. Our goals are reviewed by our governing boards and used to inform purchasing for classrooms and professional development for staff.

Learning experiences include:

- Language and vocabulary building (focus is on phonemic awareness)
- Emergent literacy (books, alphabet, songs)
- Emergent writing activities
- Science and math (numeracy)
- Social and emotional skills: respect, tolerance, and understanding rules
- Gross motor and creative movement
- Fine motor development using manipulatives, puzzles, and play dough
- Block building and dramatic play
- Sand and water play

Personal Belongings

Your child may bring in a blanket and stuffed animal for rest time in their backpack. Labeling your child's items is strongly encouraged. If a transition object is needed, please work with your teachers on the appropriate item for your child. We ask for two additional complete sets of your child's clothing for potential bathroom accidents or messy play.

Child Guidance, 7.05(5)

Our program places high priority on creating learning environments that are safe, respectful and nurturing. Teachers are responsible for developing expectations and rules that create safe classrooms. All adults in the classroom will model positive behavior and interactions.

- Teachers work with children to develop clear and consistent rules. When rules are broken, children are guided through a problem-solving process to resolve conflicts and develop empathy.
- Teachers and families will discuss positive discipline techniques and coordinate consistent rules and methods between home and school.
- When children are exhibiting frequent, prolonged, and/or dangerous outbursts that create concerns for the safety of the individual child, the classroom, and/or staff, steps will be initiated, and a plan will be developed with the teaching team, supervisors and family.

Transitioning to Kindergarten 1302.71 and 7.06(4)

- We begin talking to families and children about the steps involved in transitioning to kindergarten at the beginning of the program year.
- We encourage families to register their children for kindergarten at their home school as soon as the registration period begins. **Being enrolled at Berkshire County Head Start does not automatically enroll your child in kindergarten.** You must register your child for the school in the district where you live. Family Advocates will share kindergarten registration information with families when it becomes available from the local school district.
- Original birth certificates and up-to-date immunization records from the pediatrician are required to register for kindergarten. Family Advocates, with parental consent, can copy any information we have on file to assist in the registration process. Make sure your child's physical is up to date or schedule an appointment BEFORE kindergarten.
- Each school has a visiting day for families and children to see the classroom and meet the Kindergarten Teachers. Family Advocates will send out information to families for the school districts children will later attend.
- Berkshire County Head Start partners with elementary schools to help families get acquainted with school readiness skills and assist with registration. Please feel free to call your teachers or Family Advocate if you have any questions about this transition

Support Services Department

Briana Higgins-Wabshinak, Support Services Manager, MSW
413-499-0137 X 270, bhiggins-wabshinak@berkhs.org

Family & Student Support Services 1302.45 and 7.04 (17) (h)

Our program is here to serve underserved children and their families. It is our duty to work together and do everything we can to help them all be successful. With challenges come learning opportunities and behaviors are a form of communication. Use the following guidelines to help you discover how to help your student who demonstrates a concerning or challenging behavior.

- The Family and Student Support Specialists play a key role on the Student Intervention Team providing programming and services that are responsive to the diversity of the populations served by the agency.
- The primary responsibility of the Family and Student Support Specialists is to work with the children and families of Berkshire County Head Start (BCHS) to strengthen parent/child relationships, assist with the implementation of child and family mental health and wellness policies and procedures, and to expand family resources. This position uses knowledge of the principles of family engagement to support your role as your child's first and most important Teacher. It encourages parent-child relationships that promote healthy development and your family's well-being. This position works in coordination with the Support Services Manager to coordinate mental health services, Department of Children and Families (DCF) service provider meetings, and other service provider meetings as outlined by BCHS program policies, Department of Early Education and Care, and the Office of Head Start.
- The Student Intervention Team executes the Student Support Referral process with a child exhibiting difficulties being successful in the classroom setting. The Family and Student Support Specialists will support the classroom when a child has escalated beyond the point of general intervention to be successful. The Student Intervention Team will then receive the Student Support Referral from the Education Site Manager and will meet with the child's families/guardians, DCF and/or involved agency, Teacher, and Education Site Manager to discuss a classroom action plan that meets the specific needs of the child to address developmental and/or social emotional struggles. Families/guardians will sign a family contract that presents the responsibilities of the agency and that of the parent/caregiver. The Family and Student Support Specialists and Education Site Manager will continue to monitor progress with the implementation of the classroom action plan, and observations. Additional observations and meetings will take place as needed, along with any updates to the classroom plan.
- Berkshire County Head Start contracts with The Brien Center for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services to provide mental health services. The assigned mental health clinician works with program staff and families on a variety of issues such as:
 - ✓ Conducting classroom observations as well as individual observations (occurs monthly for each classroom, parental permission for this observation is given/denied on the Parental Consent Form that is given to parents/caregivers at the intake meeting).

- ✓ Working with Teachers/staff to help understand and meet the social and emotional needs of individual children
- ✓ Assisting in locating community resources for children and families

The **BCHS Child Guidance Policy** outlines the steps the program will take to support children's regular attendance and address instances that could jeopardize a child's placement.

In the event a child's attendance needs to be suspended, or our program is no longer an appropriate placement for the child, the following steps will be taken:

- A meeting will be held with a parent/guardian to discuss the reasoning for suspension or termination of services. The meeting will include a description of the behavior, interventions implemented in the classroom, and accommodations made by the program to support the child and family.
- The parent/guardian will be offered referrals to mental health, medical, public school, or other community-based services to support the child and family outside of the program day.
- A transition plan will be crafted to help the child and family transition from the program. As appropriate, BCHS staff will assist in identifying another program more appropriate to meeting the needs of the child and family.

In rare cases, a child may be suspended from the program until the termination date at which time they will no longer be enrolled in the program.

Suspension and Termination, 1302.17 and 7.04 (17) (i)

All efforts will be made by Berkshire County Head Start to ensure that children are able to regularly attend our program and participate in the program day.

Conversations regarding potential termination or suspension are most often related to:

- Several incidents of causing harm or displaying dangerous behavior towards other children, staff, or self
- Non-compliance with program policies, procedures, or regulations.
- Repeated refusals of service (i.e. refusing to sign or follow through on referrals for medical, mental health services, special education services, or other service provision recommended by the team)
- Non-payment of fees
- Excessive absences

Child Guidance Policy, [BCHS Child Guidance Policy \(Termination and Suspension\)](#); due to the new proposed rulemaking in Head Start, this is subject to change.

Health

Lorie Harrington, Director of Health and Safety
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Donna Boschetti, Health and Safety Manager
413-499-0137 ext. 247., dboschetti@berkhs.org

Classroom Health Practices 1302.42(c) and 7.06(5)(a)

Extra Measures and Procedures

- Handwashing: As soon as students arrive in the classroom, they will wash their hands properly. The teacher's hands will also be washed frequently throughout the day with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Hand sanitizer will be used when soap and water is not available.
- Sanitizing/Disinfecting: All frequently touched objects and surfaces will be cleaned and disinfected, as needed throughout the day and as well as at the end of each day. Any toys that go into a child's mouth will be disinfected promptly.

Health Screenings 7.04 (7)

- State and federal regulations require health screenings for each child. Screenings are done only with your permission. These results are shared with you.
- Berkshire County Head Start staff has been trained in the following screenings:
 - Vision - screened using the Welch-Allyn SPOT Vision Screener. This technology allows us to screen all children, including hard to screen children. It is ideal for our dual-language learners, children with language disabilities, and children younger than 3 years of age.
 - Hearing - screened with the Welch-Allyn Otacoustic Emission (OAE) Hearing Screener or AUDEX. This technology precisely screens for hearing loss in preschoolers and children under the age of 3. The OAE and AUDEX rapidly screens with minimal cooperation required. Standard Massachusetts Preschool vision screening and Maico hearing and screening will be used for our home-based children.
 - Height and weight - measured twice a year and the Body Mass Index (BMI) is calculated. BMI report cards are done in the fall and distributed to those families whose child is <5% or over 85%.
 - Blood pressure is done if not included on the physical.

Lead and Hemoglobin requirements 1302.42 (B)(i) and 7.04 (13)(c)

- All children are required to have a current, up to date physical and dental examination and to maintain this while in our program. Children are also required to have a Lead and Hemoglobin test within 30 days, if not already received, to maintain enrollment. Your family advocate will assist you in finding a medical and/or dental home if you need one.

Admission/Exclusion due to Symptoms of Illness 1302.50 (7)(iii) AND 7.08 (6)(i)

- Children who are obviously ill with fever (100 or greater), cough, diarrhea, vomiting, or other symptoms of illness will not be admitted to the program. If you have any doubts about your child's health, please call us at 413-499-0137 to be sure they may attend. If your child appears to be sick or has any of the symptoms of an illness while at school, we will notify the parent or guardian immediately, and it is necessary that the child be picked up within 30 minutes of notification. We perform regular health monitoring though out the day.
- Children with fever, vomiting or diarrhea cannot return to school until they have been 24 hours WITHOUT the symptom and without medication (**see detailed information next page**).
- We have Covid-19 testing protocols in place under our Head Start Covid-19 Mitigation Policy. Please refer to this for symptoms of Covid-19, positive Covid-19 tests and/or Covid-19 exposures. Call your family advocate or 413-499-0137 if you have questions.

Health Guidelines

In addition, we also follow these general health guidelines. Our goal in giving you these guidelines is to reduce the spread of communicable disease at school and to promote a healthy environment for students attending school. They were created to help you in your decision-making process as to whether to send your child to school or to keep your child at home. Your child's pediatrician can also provide advice on whether your child should be seen for an office visit.

- **Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis):** If your child's eyes are mildly red and watery and no other symptoms are present; this may indicate irritation or allergy. However, if your child's eyes are markedly red (including under the eyelids) and accompanied by thick, yellow or green drainage, he/she may have pink eye or conjunctivitis. This condition can be caused by a virus, bacteria, or allergies – only a health care provider can determine the cause. Bacterial conjunctivitis is contagious if a child rubs his/her eyes, and then touches another student or an object that another student uses, and that student then rubs his/her eyes. For this reason, your child should remain home until treatment has begun or the symptoms are gone.
- **Rashes:** Rashes can be caused by many things, a few of which may be contagious. The sudden appearance of a rash over any part of the body with an unknown cause and accompanied by fever or other symptoms should be evaluated by the doctor. However, a rash caused by poison ivy/poison oak is not contagious and is not a reason to miss school.
- **Vomiting and Diarrhea:** A single episode of vomiting or diarrhea without accompanied fever may not be enough reason to miss school. However, children with watery diarrhea (loose runny stool) or cannot get to the bathroom in time, should remain at home until resolved (24 hours after last episode). Vomiting illness (2 or more episodes of vomiting in the previous 24 hours) until vomiting resolves (24 hours after last episode). If diarrhea or vomiting is frequent or accompanied by fever, keep the child at home and consult your health care provider.

- **Open Sores:** If your child has a blister or open sore on the skin that becomes covered with a yellowish crust, it may be contagious. These open sores are often seen around the nose or mouth but can be seen anywhere on the body and need to be evaluated by your health care provider. Your child's health care provider will determine when your child can return to school. Any other open areas must be covered.
- **Head Lice:** If your child persistently scratches his/her head or complains of an itchy scalp, check for pinpoint sized grayish white eggs (nits) within ¼ inch of the scalp that will not flick off the hair shaft. The louse bug is very small and wingless, and the eggs are more easily detected. They are often found behind the ears, along the nape of the neck or on the crown of the head. If you notice these eggs or a live louse, your child must be treated with special shampoo available at drug stores and grocery stores. Please follow the instructions on the container carefully. **Your child must be nit free before returning to school.** Please see the BCHS Head Lice Policy for additional information.

Please refer to “When to keep your Child home” for further information.

Medications 1302.43 (D) AND 7.11 (2)

Berkshire County Head Start encourages medication to be given at home whenever possible. Circumstances may indicate a need for staff to administer medication to your child on site while he or she is attending the program. Our medication policy must be followed, and the necessary forms must be completed before any medication is given in school.

- Your Family Advocate will help you gather the required forms including the written permission forms for the parent and doctor.
- The parent(s)/guardian should administer the first dose at home in case of an allergic reaction.
- All medication must be handed directly to the Teacher or Family Advocate by the parent. The medication must be in the original pharmacy labeled container. Medication must remain at Berkshire County Head Start unless it is preplanned with your child's classroom. Medication cannot be transported on the school bus with your child or in your child's backpack.
- All medication is stored in a locked box unless it is an emergency “rescue” medication. All unused medication will be returned to the parent when it is no longer needed.
- The teacher will be responsible for the administration of the medication per the Medication Consent form.
- Berkshire County Head Start will maintain a written record of every dose given including the child's name, the time and date of dose given, name and dose of the medication and the name of the staff person administering the medication.
- This complete record will become part of your child's file.

Sunscreen/Hand Sanitizer 7.11 (L)

- Children enrolled in the program are required to have a signed permission slip for the application of sunscreen. You must provide and label the sunscreen with your child's name.

- Due to allergy concerns, Berkshire County Head Start cannot provide sunscreen for children.
- Along with this policy is the use of hand sanitizer when soap and water are not available. Your permission is required for your child to use hand sanitizer in our program.

Safety Is A Priority in our Program 1302.47 (5) AND 7.07

We take several steps in order to ensure the health, safety, and wellness of our children, families and staff.

- **All classroom staff are certified in First Aid and CPR.**
- We practice emergency drills (lockdown, shelter in place, and stay in place) at all our sites, including monthly fire drills as required by Department of Early Education and Care regulations.
- Safety checks are done in each classroom on a regular basis and playground safety checklists are completed daily.
- When entering or leaving our buildings, **please hold your child's hand.** Parking lots can be very busy, especially at drop off and pick up times.

Emergency Preparedness Plan 1302.47 (4) (G) AND 7.11(7)

- Berkshire County Head Start, in cooperation with our local police and fire departments, has created procedures that support response to a range of emergency situations. These include, but are not limited to, missing children and evacuation of the site in the event of a fire, natural disaster, loss of power, heat and hot water, or other emergency situation.
- All parents and families receive a letter outlining our Emergency Preparedness Plan. In the event of an emergency situation, communication with you will be primarily through calls made to contact you and/or emergency contact numbers on file.
- Should an evacuation be necessary all students and staff will report to the evacuation site according to posted evacuation routes and attendance will be taken. Emergency personnel will advise when it is safe to return to the building or whether we will start re-unification procedures.
- Please make sure your contact information is always up to date. In the event of an emergency, **we need accurate information in order to be able to reach you.** Your child cannot attend school if we do not have a way to reach you or your emergency contacts.

Nutrition 1302.46 AND 7.12

- Breakfast, lunch and snacks are provided daily for all Berkshire County Head Start children attending full-day programming. Children attending the part-day or “morning program” receive breakfast and lunch.
- Berkshire County Head Start employs a registered dietician as a nutrition consultant. The dietician monitors the nutritional health and growth of every child as well as conducting staff and parent training on healthy meals and snacks.
- The food provided by the program follows the United States Dietary Guidelines for Americans (USDA guidelines). We provide foods that are low in sugar or salt, are high in

fiber, and include fresh fruits and vegetables. Children are encouraged to try all foods but are never forced to eat. Substitutions are available for children with food allergies or based on religious beliefs.

- Our nutrition curriculum includes lessons on nutrition and healthy foods. Menus are sent home monthly for families. Our meals and snacks are served family style. Food is served in serving dishes on the table with serving utensils and children are supported in serving themselves and passing food/beverages to their classmates. Classroom staff and children are encouraged to engage in conversation at mealtimes.
- Berkshire County Head Start collaborates with Berkshire Health System's Operation Better Start and the WIC program. We work together to ensure that every child and family has access to nutrition counseling, healthier food choices, and resources regarding lifestyle changes that make a difference.

Family Advocates share activities with our families for their benefit.

- Holiday celebrations and birthdays are child focused and not solely centered on food themes. When planning seasonal events, we focus on family traditions and activities that are developmentally appropriate. Our activities include multicultural themes that reflect the background and lifestyle of the children in the classroom. If your religious belief does not include celebrations such as birthdays or holidays, please let our staff know so we may respect your wishes.
- No foods, baked goods, nuts, etc. that have been prepared at the child's home or commercially prepared foods, are allowed at school unless it is part of an Individual Health Care Plan or Nutrition Plan. Please speak with your Family Advocate regarding alternative options other than food if you want to send something for your child's birthday.
- Special dietary requests for medical problems (such as food allergy, diabetes, and lactose intolerance) can be accommodated with a physician's note and/ or Individual Health Care Plan. You will be notified when a child with life threatening allergies is in the classroom.
- All BCHS Sites and classrooms have been designated "Nut Safe Zones". No peanut or tree nut products are allowed. You will be notified when a child with life threatening allergies is in the classroom.

Berkshire County Head Start Policy states that no outside food or drinks can be brought into the classrooms.

Family Engagement

Maggie Steele, Director of Family Engagement
413-499-0137 ext. 248., msteele@berkhs.org

Berkshire County Head Start will strive to build positive and goal-oriented relationships with you, our families. We will share this responsibility and require mutual respect for the roles and strengths that we each have to offer. Family engagement means doing with—not doing to or for—our families. Family engagement involves your engagement with your children and with our staff as we work together toward the goals that you choose for yourselves and your children.

It also involves us working toward goals to improve the program. Berkshire County Head Start staff will work together with you, other professionals, and community partners in ways that promote equity, inclusiveness, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness.

- Children are at the heart of meaningful family engagement. They are the inspiration for positive, goal-oriented, parent-provider relationships.
- Families enter relationships with staff on their children's behalf, and they deepen these relationships with their children in mind. You know their children better than anyone—their temperaments, personalities, strengths, vulnerabilities, talents, and special needs. You know your own culture and what you want to pass down to your children. When you share that knowledge with us, you will help us to improve our program practices and quality.

Families in Power (Policy Council) 1301.3

- The Families in Power is a group of Head Start families and community members who help lead and make decisions about the program. Families in Power members are elected by the families of children enrolled in the program.
- The Families in Power represents your voice and perspective to guide decisions about the program.
- You are being asked to join because you are the most important teacher in your child's life. We value your ideas about how to best serve all the children in the program.
- The most important reason to join is that you want to help our program provide a positive learning experience for your child and other children. Once elected, you will receive training about how Families in Power works. Some things that you may discuss in Families in Power meetings are decisions about program policy, budgets, center activities, and hiring staff.
- Families in Power typically meets monthly on Tuesday evenings. At this time, we are meeting in person with a zoom option.
- Families in Power cannot happen without you. Your commitment and dedication to Berkshire County Head Start will improve your child's preschool experience and your engagement will ensure that our Head Start program is successful.
- **You are the decision makers. You offer so much based on your own personal experiences. Your Family Advocate will contact you with information on the next meeting.**

Board of Directors 1301.2

Families in Power and the governing board work together to develop program goals and oversee services. Program activity and finance reports are reviewed monthly by Families in Power and the governing board to inform decisions and guide program improvement. Our Governance is involved in completing an annual self-assessment which inform overall goals for the program. Our major program objective is always to promote the best possible outcomes for children and families. The program's active governing bodies and management team utilized training and data analysis to support program goals and oversee effective Head Start services.

Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment & Attendance

Our Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance (ERSEA) team ensures the process will guide a successful transition for you and your child(ren) entering or transferring within the program.

Eligibility 1302.12

After verifying a child's age, verifying eligibility is based on income. Income is based on tax returns, pay stubs, or other proof of income to determine the family income for the relevant time period. For childcare, public assistance, documentation from local or state public assistance or shows the family is potentially eligible to receive public assistance.

Recruitment 1302.13

We follow our recruitment process throughout Berkshire County. We do this to assess and find all families with eligible children within the recruitment area of availability to program services and encourage and assist them in applying for admission to the program.

Selection of Children 1302.14 AND 7.04 (13)

We actively locate and recruit children with disabilities and other vulnerabilities, including children without a consistent, safe place to stay, children experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care. We make the necessary modifications to meet a child's specific individual needs.

Enrollment 1302.15

We maintain our funded enrollment level and fill any vacancy as soon as possible. We must fill any vacancy within 30 days. It is through community assessment that we assess the needs of our families within the community where they live.

Attendance 1302.16

We track attendance for each child to maintain Head Starts expectation that is above 85%. Children's absences are documented and maintained. We encourage regular attendance.

Please contact your Family Advocate before 9:30 am if your child is going to be absent, so the absence can be excused. If you do not contact your Family Advocate or if the Family Advocate must contact you to ask about the absence, the absence will be unexcused.

We are required to reassess your childcare subsidy after 3 days of unexcused absences. A home visit is needed, and funding may be affected.

Nondiscrimination Policy

Admissions to BERKSHIRE COUNTY HEAD START shall be made without regard to race, color, religious creed, ancestry, national origin, disability, age or gender.

Emergency Contact Information 7.04 (7) (D)

- At enrollment, you MUST provide BCHS with emergency contact information in case we cannot reach you. The program can only release a child to an adult that is 18 or older that is listed on the emergency contact card.
- If there are any changes in contact information, please contact your Family Advocate or Home Visitor as soon as possible. Children cannot attend school unless there is current, working emergency telephone numbers and emergency contacts on file. Please be sure your emergency contact numbers are current as well.
- The program must have a hard copy of any court orders, restraining orders, or custody agreements. Please make sure your Family Advocate has copies of any necessary legal documents. We may request a meeting with you to discuss the situation to ensure that all parties have a common understanding of how the order will be implemented.
- NOTE: If one parent/guardian “not wanting the other parent allowed to pick up”, is not sufficient for staff to prevent the parent from picking up the child. If a parent/ guardian is on the pick-up list or listed on the birth certificate, staff CANNOT prevent that parent from picking up unless we have written statement from the court, DCF, etc. If you feel there is an unsafe situation, please take the steps to get the necessary legal paperwork so we can support you.

Resources

Your Family Advocate or Home Visitor can direct you to agencies in the community when you need them. If you need assistance in finding any kind of resource, DIAL 211 on your telephone and a United Way resource agent can assist you.

Finance

Hunter McCormick, Director of Finance, hmccormick@berkhs.org

Ivania Mottos, Finance Manager, imottos@berkhs.org

Michelle Larabee, Finance Specialist, mlarabee@berkhs.org

413-499-0137

We offer childcare services at our Meadow Lane, Muddy Brook, Brayton, Taconic, and North County locations for families who need a longer day of care.

- The childcare classrooms are currently open from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm year-round, except for Taconic, which is open from 7:00 to 4:30 pm and summer 7:00 – 3:00.
- Please refer to the parent calendar for specific information regarding closure days for all program options.

Parent Fees

Children and families paying privately:

- You will receive a monthly statement. Payments can be made on site by cash, check or money order. They can also be done in the Finance Office or mailed. We do not mail receipts.
- Per EEC regulations, families **MUST** have their account in good standing in order to continue with childcare services. We will not provide services for children whose accounts are more than one week behind.

The daily fee for **self-payment contract (private pay)** is:

- \$52.00 Full Day (6 Hours or more), when Head Start not in session
- \$42.89 Before & after Head Start
- \$34.34 Half-day (full day/full year rooms)

The **childcare EEC** rate is:

- \$57.23 Full Day
- \$43.21 Before and after Head Start

Rates for childcare transportation:

- \$12.00/day; one way and \$18.00/day roundtrip

Program Options:

- Full Year
- Part time/school year
- Home Base
- ACE Space (Achieve, Collaborate & Engage)

Payment Policy

- Bills for childcare services are delivered bi-weekly. We will bill the whole month in advance. However, payments are due in full every Friday for the upcoming week.
- **NOTE:** Please be aware that if for some reason you do not receive your bill, your weekly fee is still due, as printed on your voucher, agreement, or contract. Any payment not collected on Friday will be considered late.
- **A termination notice will be issued if payments are missed on two consecutive Fridays.**
 - **NOTE:** If there is a problem or special situation in which payment cannot be made, contact the Program Manager or Finance Manager before payment is due and we will work with you to make suitable arrangements.

- Full days are charged when the Head Start morning program (Conte) is closed, i.e. school vacation recess weeks.
- Payments can be made at the locations that have payment boxes or you can give the check or money order to the Education Site Manager. There is a \$35 fee for all returned checks.
 - **NOTE:** any parent fees owed to the program but not paid will result in a filing through Small Claims Court with an additional \$50 to \$60 filing fee. EEC will be informed, which could put your next voucher renewal in jeopardy.
- Families who are income eligible for Head Start may be eligible for a childcare subsidy if available. Please call the Director of Program Operations for more information regarding the availability of subsidies.

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Childcare Late Pick-up Policy

- If children are not picked up from the childcare program before the center closes, families will be charged a \$1 per minute late fee for every minute of late care.
- If families have not called to tell us there is a problem, emergency numbers will be called to pick up your child. If your child has not been picked up after the center closes and we have not been able to make contact with you, DCF may be called to assist staff.

Arrival and Departure Procedures

Our facilities at North County, Brayton, Meadow Lane, and Muddy Brook are currently operational from 8:00am – 4:30pm. Our Taconic facility is operational from 7:00am – 4:30pm, and in the summer from 7:00 – 2:45pm. Our Conte facility is operational for 3 ½ hours a day, Monday through Friday, from September to June.

We encourage all children to be dropped off to their program by 9:30 to access curriculum, morning meetings, and daily learning experiences. If your child is going to be late, please contact your Family Advocate. It is important that you hold your child’s hand when dropping off or picking up. The parking lot is extremely busy, and safety is our top priority.

Please remember that the program can only release a child to an adult that is **18** or older, with photo identification that matches and who is listed on the emergency contact card.

**Transportation Services,
Pam Wittig, Transportation Manager,
(413) 499-0137 Ext 272., pwittig@berkhs.org**

Berkshire County Head Start transportation is provided by Dufour Bus Company. Our program requests that families assist with the following:

- Please have your child ready for the bus at the appropriate time. We ask that you be at the bus stop 10 minutes early for pick-up and drop-off. Per EEC regulations, children may not be on the bus for more than 1 hour. Please help us maintain our route schedule by being at your bus stop at the assigned time and not waiting in your car.
- Toys are not allowed on the bus. If your child is bringing a blanket for rest and extra clothing, please have the items labeled with your child's name and in a backpack.
- Berkshire County Head Start is not able to make last minute bus changes to different addresses.
- Families who must cross the street with their child are asked to cross **AFTER** the school bus lights are on and to cross **ONLY IN FRONT OF THE BUS**. Use the crosswalk if one is available. We ask that you hold your child's hand while crossing the street.
- Drivers do not use horns to announce their arrival to families and will not wait.
- If changes occur our Head Start staff will be in contact with you.
- It is your responsibility to call your Family Advocate to keep your addresses and telephone numbers up to date, so you and other authorized persons can be reached at all times.
- On the Emergency Contacts Form, please list everyone you wish to authorize to receive your child from the bus. Children will not be released to unauthorized persons. Authorized persons must be at least 18 years old and have a picture ID to show the bus monitor.
- If you are not at your bus stop to meet your child at drop-off, you will be asked to come and pick up your child at his/her site within 30 minutes of being notified. If we are unable to reach you or an emergency contact to come get your child within a reasonable amount of time, DCF will be contacted.
- Families of children riding the buses will receive a copy of the Program Transportation Plan.
- We will continue to follow the Berkshire County Head Start COVID-19 mitigation policy.

Snow Days and School Cancellations

- The primary source of information on closings and delays will be the television. You will receive a robo-text message with the program updates. Information will be also posted on our Facebook page. If your cell phone number changes, please tell your Family Advocate immediately so they can update your phone number in the system, and you will continue to receive robo-texts.
- Local radio stations will also make announcements.
 - WUPE radio 1110 AM & 100.1 FM
 - Live 95.9 FM WBEC
- In general, the morning Head Start program follows the public school's closings and delays for the district in which they are located.
 - If the public school is delayed 1 hour, the morning program is delayed 1 hour.
 - If the public school is delayed 2 hours, the morning program (9 am – 12:30 pm) will be closed for the day unless your classroom has a 6-hour day.
 - If the public school is closed, the morning Head Start program (9 am – 12:30 pm) is closed. Childcare programming may remain open, but without transportation.

- The program could also delay opening or close early if it is determined to be necessary for the safety of children and staff. Please watch for announcements specific to the site where your child is enrolled.
- If the Bus Company or local police indicate that bus travel is unsafe, we may close the morning program, even if the public schools remain open. The Childcare Program will generally remain open, with transportation provided by families - unless severe weather conditions warrant closing.
- If your child's site needs to close early due to an emergency, such as inclement weather, or building conditions like "no heat" or "no water," we will call you and/or your designated emergency contacts to have your child picked up from school.

Please make sure all your information is current and up to date.

Families Rights and Responsibilities

Families Rights and Responsibilities 1303.23 7.04 (7) – (12) and 606 CMR 7.08(8) (a-f) **Notification To Families**

Mutual respect between staff and families is the primary goal of parent program relations. Through ongoing communication, Berkshire County Head Start will attempt to work closely with each child to provide the best possible program for children and their families.

Parent Visits 7.08 (4)

We encourage unannounced visits by parents to the program and/or to their child's room at any time while their child is present.

Progress Reports to Families 7.06 (3)(4)

Berkshire County Head Start will periodically, but at least every six- (6) months, prepare a written progress report of the participation of each child in the center's records. Educators shall use progress reports to adapt the program to the children's individual strengths, interests, and needs; maintain ongoing communication with the child's family; and with parental permission, facilitate the child's transition to another early education and care program or to kindergarten, as appropriate. Berkshire County Head Start will provide a copy of each report to the parent(s)/guardian(s) or meet with them at least two (2) times per year to discuss their child's activities and participation in the center. In addition:

1. For children with special needs, Berkshire County Head Start will complete a written progress report of the child's development every three (3) months and provide it to the parent(s)/guardian(s).
2. Berkshire County Head Start will bring any issues, challenges, or otherwise significant developments to a family's attention as soon as they rise.

Parent Conferences and home visits 1302.34 (b)(3 - 7)

Teachers hold parent conferences, as needed, but no less than two times per program year, to enhance the knowledge and understanding of both staff and families. Teachers also have home visits, no less than two to update the family of the child's education and developmental progress, and to keep families informed of ongoing curriculum and activities in their child's classroom. Berkshire County Head Start will also offer the opportunity for families to meet with staff for individual conferences, at the family's request.

Complaint Resolution Process

1. Please bring any questions, concerns or complaints to the attention of your child's Teacher, Family Advocate, Home Visitor, or Site Director.
2. If the matter cannot be resolved informally the program will offer a meeting to discuss your concern.
3. If you are not satisfied with the response, please contact their supervisor or call the Main Office at (413) 499-0137 to be connected to the appropriate administrator.
4. If the issue is not resolved to your satisfaction, please request a meeting with the Executive Director.

Please note that the program will not respond to comments made on social media. In the event that comments made on social media pose a real or perceived threat to the safety of children or staff, participation in the program may be suspended until the matter has been resolved.

Confidentiality and Distribution of Records

- Information contained in a child's record will be privileged and confidential. Berkshire County Head Start will not distribute or release information in a child's record to anyone not directly related to implementing the program plan for the child without written consent of the child's parent(s)/guardian(s). Berkshire County Head Start will notify the family if a child's record is subpoenaed.
- The child's parents(s)/guardian(s) will, upon request, have access to their child's record at reasonable times. In no event will such access be delayed more than two (2) business days (after the initial request) without the written/verbal consent of the child's parent(s)/guardian. Upon such request for access, the child's entire record regardless of the physical location of its parts will be made available.
- Berkshire County Head Start will establish procedures governing access to, duplication of, and dissemination of such information, and will maintain a permanent, written log in each child's record indicating any persons to whom information contained in a child's record has been released.
- Each person releasing information contained in a child's record will enter into the child's record the following: his/her name, signature, position, date, portions of record which were released, purpose of the records which were released, and signature of the person to whom the information is released. Such log shall be available only to the child's family and program personnel responsible for record maintenance.

Copy charge

Berkshire County Head Start will not charge a fee for copies of any information contained in the child's record.

Amending The Child's Record

A child's parent(s)/guardian will have the right to add information, comments, data or other relevant materials to the child's record.

A child's parent(s)/guardian will have the right to request deletion or amendment of any information contained in the child's record. Such request will be made in accordance with the procedures described below:

- (1) If such parent(s)/guardian is of the opinion that adding information is not sufficient to explain, clarify or correct objectionable material in the child's record, he/she will have the right to have a conference with the licensee to make the objections known.
- (2) Berkshire County Head Start will within one (1) week after the conference, render to such parent(s)/guardian(s) a decision in writing stating the reason or reasons for the decision. If the decision is in favor of the parent(s)/guardian(s), the program will immediately take the necessary steps to put the decision into effect.

Transfer Of Records

When a child is no longer in care, Berkshire County Head Start will transfer the child's record to a family member(s), caretaker(s), or any other person the family identifies, upon written request of the parent(s)/guardian(s).

Signature of Parent/Guardian _____ Date _____