

Family Handbook

2022-2023 School Year



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Family Advocate _____ Work cell phone _____



Resources to Empower & Advocate for Children and Households

BERKSHIRE COUNTY HEAD START

Family Handbook

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Welcome Families to BERKSHIRE COUNTY HEAD START. The staff are excited to begin the 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 all children have an opportunity for a high-quality early childhood experience by developing ongoing relationships between staff, you and your families, and community partners. We know that outcomes for your child are improved when you are actively involved in their program.

Berkshire County Head Start recognizes YOU as your child’s first Teacher. We want you to feel welcome and encouraged to participate in your child’s preschool experience. From the first home visit to your child’s transition into Kindergarten, we will provide information and opportunities to participate in your child’s program and to support your work in guiding the healthy development of your child. We want to build a collaborative and trusting relationship with your family by establishing a connection between your home and your child’s school. We will be sending home newsletters, invitations to family nights, and notices for updates as just a few ways to build connections between school and home.

Additionally, we will be asking for your help as we collect data to improve our programming and as part of reporting for our funders. Please see your Family Advocate for ways to get involved. We ask parents and families to provide input about the program through our Policy Council and our annual self-assessment process. If at any time you have a suggestion for how we can improve our work or an idea that would enrich our program, please contact your Family Advocate or the Main Office so we can have a conversation. Throughout the Family Handbook you will notice on the headings that we have provided the Head Start Performance Standard (HSPS) and/or the Early Education and Care (EEC) number for reference.

Home visits are a tradition at Head Start. They provide families the opportunity to meet one on one with staff members. At this time because of the pandemic, visits are taking place virtually through zoom meetings. Home visits help staff build a strong relationship with your family by exchanging information, recognizing and building on family strengths, addressing any issues facing your family, or simply touching base to say, “Hello”. Thank you so much for welcoming us into your home!

Many COVID procedures remain in place for the safety of all; including the Testing for Child Care program. This handbook will lay out the updates as we continue in this COVID-19 pandemic. This situation is fluid, so all changes included in this handbook will be updated as needed. We will make sure that all changes are realistic and feasible for staff and children by following CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL (Center for Disease Control) guidelines as well as those put forth by the Office of Head Start, the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, and local Boards of Health.

Please feel free to contact your Family Advocate if you have any questions about the policies and procedures that are outlined in this Family Handbook. They are in place to ensure that BERKSHIRE COUNTY HEAD START is a safe and enjoyable place for your family.

Brett Westbrook, Executive Director

MISSION STATEMENT; 606 CMR 7.04(17)(a) *STATEMENT OF PURPOSE*

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 parents, children, co-workers, and the community.



POLICY COUNCIL 1301.3

The Policy Council is a group of Head Start parents and community members who help lead and make decisions about the program. Policy Council members are elected by the parents of children enrolled in the program.

The Policy Council 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 you are elected, you will receive training about how Policy Council works. Some things that you may discuss in Policy Council meetings are decisions about program policy, budgets, center activities, and hiring staff.

Policy Council typically meets monthly on Tuesday evenings. At this time we are meeting electronically via zoom.

Policy Council 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 runs smoothly.

You are the decision makers. You offer so much based on your own personal experiences. Your Family Advocate will be contacting you with information on the next meeting.

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.

SELECTION OF CHILDREN 1302.14 AND 7.04 (13)

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

A 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 (HSPPS). We strive to be a program of quality.

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. Parents can contact EEC

for information regarding the program's regulatory compliance history. For additional information, parents can contact the Department of Early Education and Care at (413) 788-8401 or visit their website at www.mass.gov/eec.

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

- Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS)
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- Local Boards of Health (BOH)
- Center for Disease Control (CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL)

EDUCATION AND CURRICULUM 1302.31 AND 1302.32, AND 7.06

- Curriculum is designed following the Creative Curriculum model, a strength-based, interactive approach. The curriculum is well-balanced and consists of specific, planned learning experiences that support the social, emotional, physical, and intellectual, and language development of all children. Classroom activities and themes are tied to the interests of each unique group of children. The curriculum is designed with activities and experiences for inside and outside the classroom. Teachable moments occur throughout the day with inquisitive children. The curriculum plans are posted inside and outside classrooms and shared in the monthly newsletter.
- Our classrooms are inviting and welcoming to our children and staff. We are following recommended health and safety practices from 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 with 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
- Ignite by Hatch, digital learning experience that prepares children for Kindergarten

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 parents 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 plan will be developed with teaching team, supervisors and family.
- Modified plans for challenging behaviors are developed at meetings with parents. Plans may include screening request to local agencies or public schools, specialized instruction, and referral to play therapy or wellness counseling for the child/family.

If necessary, a child may be transitioned from the program to one that may be better suited for the family's need. BCHS Child Guidance Policy outlines the steps we take as a program to support regular, on-time attendance for all children. We work in partnership with you to address issues and concerns so that your child can experience success and learn the skills they need for a positive transition to Kindergarten. Service Provider Meetings are held to promote communication and comprehensive planning for our students. A copy of the BCHS Child Guidance Policy is available upon request.

BCHS Suspension and Termination Policy

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

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.

CLASSROOM HEALTH PRACTICES 1302.42(c) and 7.06(5)(a)

Extra Measures and Procedures

- Handwashing: As soon as students arrive to the classroom, they will wash their hands properly. 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:
 - You and your child will use hand sanitizer upon entering the building. You will sign topical lotion consent for their child to use hand sanitizer. This will stay on file.
 - All frequently touched objects and surfaces will be cleaned and disinfected after each use, as needed, and as well as at the end of each day. Any toys that go into a child's mouth will be disinfected promptly.
- Mask wearing and social distancing:
 - Children are required and strongly encouraged to wear a mask when indoors. Children age 2 and over should be able to safely and appropriately wear, remove and handle masks with some direction from staff if needed.
 - Masks must not be worn while children are eating/drinking or napping. Physical distancing will be encouraged at all times during activities. Masks do not need to be worn while engaging in active outdoor play.
 - All children must be supervised when wearing a mask. Children should be encouraged to avoid touching their face and eyes and not to put hands under their mask.
 - You should provide your child with a sufficient supply of clean masks to allow replacing the masks as needed. You must have a plan for routine cleaning of cloth masks.
 - Cloth masks must be routinely washed (at least daily and any time the mask is used or becomes soiled) depending on frequency of use. When possible, masks must be machine washed in hot water and dried fully before being used again. If machine washing is unavailable, masks must be washed with soap and hot water and allowed to dry fully before being used again. Disposable masks are available in all classrooms.

- You must wear a mask when on the premises and at all times during drop off and pick up

TRANSITIONING TO KINDERGARTEN 1302.71 AND 7.06(4)

- We begin talking to parents and children about the steps involved in transitioning to Kindergarten at the beginning of the program year.
- We encourage parents 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.
- 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.
- Each school has a visiting day for parents and children to see the classroom and meet the Kindergarten Teachers. Family Advocates will send out information to parents for the school districts children will later attend.
- Berkshire County Head Start partners with elementary schools to help parents 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.

CLINICAL SERVICES 1302.45 AND 7.04 (17) (H)

- 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 Clinical Support 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 parents/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. Parents/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 parents on a variety of issues such as:
 - Observation of all children/classrooms
 - 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

HEALTH SCREENINGS 7.04 (7)

- State and federal regulations require health screenings for each child. Screenings are done only with your permission. The 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 parents whose child is <5% or over the 85%.
 - Blood pressure is done if not included on the physical.

ADMISSION/EXCLUSION DUE TO SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESS 1302.50 (7) AND 7.08 (6)

- Children who are obviously ill with fever, cough, diarrhea, vomiting, or symptoms of COVID- 19 will not be admitted to the program. It is a danger to other children and staff members at our facility. 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 above while at school, we will notify the parent or guardian immediately, and it is necessary that the child be picked up within 1/2 hour of notification. We will perform regular monitoring though out the day.
- If household members have tested positive for Covid-19, keep your child home and call your Family Advocate.
- If a child is showing COVID-19 symptoms (fever, difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, new loss of taste or smell, muscle or body aches) OR has been in close contact with a person or child testing positive for COVID- 19, we ask you to keep your child home and test your child for Covid-19. Your child will not be able to return without a

negative Covid-19 test and possibly a note from your child's health care provider and possibly a quarantine from our program.

- We ask that all parents let us know of any potential exposure immediately. A potential exposure means being a household contact or having close contact within 6 feet of an individual with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 for at least 15 minutes. The timeframe for having contact with an individual includes the period of 48 hours before the individual became symptomatic. If there is a positive case of COVID-19 in a child or an adult who has been present in the childcare center, we will inform employees and families about the exposure but maintain confidentiality, local Board of Health, EEC licensor, and OSHA.
- We have also added a testing program called "Testing for Child Care". With a signed permission from parent or guardian, if your child has a Covid-19 exposure in our program or develops symptoms of Covid-19 we will be able to supply you with testing supplies for your child. Speak to your Family Advocate about this important program and for information that you can review.

HEALTH GUIDELINES

In addition to our current pandemic, we also follow these general health issue 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. A 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 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 could be seen anywhere on the body and need to be evaluated by your health care provider. Your health care provider will determine when your child can return to school. Any other open areas must be covered.

Lice: If your child persistently scratches his/her head or complains of an itchy scalp, check for pin-point 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.

MEDICATIONS 1302.43 (D) AND 7.11 (2)

Berkshire County Head Start encourages medication 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 must 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. Medication cannot be transported on the school bus with the child.
- 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 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 the child’s file.

SUNSCREEN/HAND SANITIZER POLICY 7.11 (L)

- A. Children enrolled in the summer childcare 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.
- B. Due to allergy concerns, Berkshire County Head Start cannot provide sunscreen for children.
- C. Along with this policy is the use of hand sanitizer throughout the day such as entering the building or 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 a number of 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 of 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.
- All of our staff members follow the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care Reopening Minimum Requirements for Health and Safety Guidelines
- When entering or leaving our buildings, **please hold your child's hand**. This is especially important in the sites with parking lots.

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 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 snack are provided daily for all Berkshire County Head Start children.
- 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 conducts staff and parent trainings 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 parents. Due to COVID-19 restrictions meals currently are not served family style. Each child has their own individual portion, is properly distanced and partitions are used to maintain safety. Classroom staff and children are encouraged to engage in conversation at meal times.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

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

ENROLLMENT/ELIGIBILITY, RECRUITMENT, SELECTION, ENROLLMENT, & ATTENDANCE (ERSEA), 1302.14 AND 7.08 (5)

Our ERSEA team ensures the intake process is complete and all valuable information is communicated effectively. The information will be followed up by the ERSEA team, Family Advocates, Health office, Transportation, Teachers, and Education Site Managers. This process

will guide a successful transition for you are your children entering or transferring within the program.

We believe our enrollment process provides both you and our staff the opportunity to share information through the enrollment package one on one.

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 listed on the emergency contact card.
- **If there are any changes in contact information, please contact your Family Advocate or Home Visitor. 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.

MANDATED REPORTING CHILDREN/FAMILIES AND STAFF 1302.47(5) 7.08(6)

Berkshire County Head Start employees are mandated reporters. We are required by law to report suspected incidents of child abuse or neglect to the Department of Children and Families (DCF). It is our goal to work together without judgment or bias and give you support during these difficult times.

Berkshire County Head Start staff is expected to do all they can to ensure the safety and well-being of children enrolled in our program. If you or someone who is responsible for picking up or dropping off your child appears to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, we are mandated reporters and will take steps to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our children.

If any person has reason to believe that Berkshire County Head Start employee or volunteer has abused a Berkshire County Head Start student, that person must immediately notify the Berkshire County Head Start Executive Director. All allegations of abuse are taken seriously and we follow our process by filing a report with our licensing agency, Early Education and Care and Department of Children and Families for them to begin an investigation.

FEE AND PAYMENT POLICY

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, with the exception of Taconic, which is open from 7:00 to 4:30 pm.

- Please refer to the parent calendar for specific information regarding closure days for all program options.

Children and parents paying privately:

- You will receive a monthly statement. Payments need to be mailed to the Finance Office. Payments must be made by check or money order. You will receive a receipt, by mail, attached to the new statement.
- Per EEC regulations, parents must have their account in good standing in order continue with the childcare services. We will not provide services for children whose accounts are more than one week behind.

The daily fee for the childcare program is:

\$45.82– Full Day (Head Start not in session)

\$36.85– Before & after Head Start

\$27.50– Half-day (full day/full year rooms) Rates for childcare transportation:

\$12.00/day; one way

\$18.00/day; roundtrip

PARENT FEES & PAYMENT POLICY

- A security deposit and the first week of the parent fee are due on or before the child enters the program.
- Bills for childcare services are delivered every first day or the beginning Month. We will bill the whole month in advance. Payments are due in full every Friday for the upcoming week. The first bill you receive will have a security deposit included. 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. If there is a problem or special situation in which payment cannot be made, contact the Program Manager or Finance Specialist **before** payment is due and we will work with you to make suitable arrangements.
- Full days are charged when the Head Start morning program is closed (such as the one day per month for staff training, school vacations, holidays, and snow emergency days).
- 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. Please note that 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. The State will be informed and the next renewal will be in jeopardy.

CHILDCARE SUBSIDIES & ATTENDANCE

- Parents 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 availability of subsidies.

- Regular attendance is encouraged. If you have more than 30 excused absences in a six-month period or 3 consecutive unexplained absences your subsidies may be terminated, also we are required to reassess after this happens.
- For families enrolled in the childcare program, we are required to reassess your enrollment after 3 days of unexcused absences.

CHILDCARE LATE PICK-UP POLICY

- If children are not picked up from the childcare program before the center closes, parents will be charged a \$1 per minute late fee for every minute of late care.
- If parents 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.

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 accidents or messy play.

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. Our Conte facility is operational from 9:00am to 12:30pm, all Monday through Friday. We encourage all children to be dropped off 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. If you see another family being checked in, please be patient during this time and remain socially distant.

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. Masks must be worn at all times during drop-off and pick-up.

VISITORS

All visitors, consultants, contractors will be required to wear a mask and follow the process at each individual site.

FIELD TRIPS/SPECIAL EVENTS

There may be socialization opportunities in our communities following Center for Disease Control recommendations for gathering. Family Advocates will be reaching out to schedule

parent meetings and to share community opportunities at museums, libraries and community agencies. Virtual meetings may continue to be an option as well.

PROGRAM EVALUATION 1302.102(A)(1)

Throughout the year, we will ask you to provide feedback via parent surveys about your experiences in order 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!

We also gather data from staff, local agencies that provide services to our children. We also coordinate with our local public schools throughout the year about their experiences and any trends or changes.

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.
5. *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.*

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.

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

Berkshire County Head Start requests that parents assist with the following:

- Please have your child ready for the bus. Be at the bus stop 10 minutes early for pick-up and drop-off. Per EEC regulations, children will not be on the bus for more than 45 minutes. Help us maintain our route schedule by being at your bus stop at the assigned time and not waiting in your car.

- Bus stops are determined in areas to allow for 6 ft. of social distancing and safely conducting health checks before boarding the bus.
- Parents/guardians and children must sanitize hands by washing with soap and water or applying hand sanitizer before arriving to the bus stop.
- 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.
- Parent/guardian and children will be required to wear a face mask at the bus stop and 6 ft. social distance.
- Berkshire County Head Start is not able to make last minute bus changes to different addresses.
- Parents 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 a 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.
- Bus monitors will complete a visual health check of each child for any sign of illness before they are allowed to board the bus. Once your child(ren) are cleared, your child(ren) will be allowed to board the bus.
- Interruptions of bus services could be a result of:
 - Illness of bus monitors or drivers
 - Change in COVID related regulations
- 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 where they and authorized persons can be reached at all times.
- Please list everyone on the permission form 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 home to meet your child at drop-off, you will be asked to come and pick up your child at his/her center within ½ hour 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.
- Berkshire County Head Start transportation is provided by Dufour Bus Company, Parents of children riding the buses will receive a copy of the COVID/ program transportation plan. The COVID/transportation plan is also available upon request.

SNOW DAYS & 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 update and information will be also posted on Facebook.
- 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 **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 parents unless severe weather conditions warrant closing.
- If your center 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 or your designated emergency contacts to have your child picked up from school. Please make sure this information is current and up to date!

COVID-19 Emergency Closing

- Berkshire County Head Start may have to close for the following reasons;
 - Staff illness, including that which may compromise staffing numbers and negatively impact ratios and supervision of children;
 - Child illness;
 - Required sanitization and disinfection of the locations;
 - Advisement by the local board of health and/or other COVID-19 related reasons.
- Parents will be notified in the event of any closures; by phone, robo text, email, Facebook, website and/or letter.

PARENTS RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES 1303.23 7.04 (7) – (12)

606 CMR 7.08(8)(a-f) Notification To Parents

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.

Progress Reports To Parents 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; to maintain ongoing communication with the child’s family, and; with parental permission, to 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) or meet with them at least two (2) times per year to discuss their child's activities and participation in the center. In addition:

- (a) 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).
- (b) Berkshire County Head Start will bring problems or significant developments to parent's attention as soon as they rise.

Parent Conferences 1302.34

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 parents of the child's education and developmental progress and activities in the program. Berkshire County Head Start will offer the opportunity to meet with staff for individual conferences with parents at parental request

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). Berkshire County Head Start will notify the parent(s) if a child's record is subpoenaed.
- The child's parents(s)/guardian 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, purpose of such release, and signature of the person to whom the information is released. Such log shall be available only to the child's parent(s) and center 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) A child's parent(s)/guardian will have the right to add information, comments, data or and other relevant materials to the child's record.
- (b) 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 a decision in writing stating the reason or reasons for the decision. If the decision is in favor of the parent(s), he/she will immediately take steps as may be necessary to put the decision into effect.

Transfer Of Records

Upon written request of the parent(s), Berkshire County Head Start will transfer the child's record to the parents(s)/guardian, or any other person the parent(s)/guardian identifies, when the child is no longer in care.

PARENTS RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Signature of Parent/Guardian _____

Date _____

Berkshire County Head Start

Parent or Guardian Handbook with COVID updates Receipt Form

Parent or Guardian,

Please thoroughly review the Parent Handbook *with COVID 19 updates * for the 2022 - 2023 school year, which contains the policies and procedures for Berkshire County Head Start.

We will continue to monitor the reports issued by the Center for Disease Control, Office of Head Start, the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, and local Boards of Health. This Handbook may change as the information we receive is updated.

After reading the handbook, please complete this form and return it to the school as soon as possible. This form will be kept in your child's file for the duration of the school year. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Maggie Steele
Director of Engagement Services
Berkshire County Head Start
msteele@berkhs.org

I, _____ (print your name), the parent/guardian of
_____ (print child's name), hereby

acknowledge receipt of Berkshire County Head Start's Parent Handbook *with COVID 19 updates *.

I have read and agree to adhere to all the policies and regulations set forth in this handbook.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____