



**Worcester Community Action Council, Inc.
Head Start/Early Head Start**

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Southbridge, MA 01550
508-765-4738

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Webster MA 01570
508-461-5840

www.wcac.net

PARENT/GUARDIAN HANDBOOK



Welcome to WCAC's Head Start and Early Head Start program!

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Thank you for entrusting us with the care and education of your child. Head Start/Early Head Start supports children and families. You, the parent/guardian, play a vital role in your child's development as you are the main educator of your child. Head Start/Early Head Start provides you with many opportunities to actively take part in your child's early learning experiences. With your input, help and support, we will give your child a fun and valuable experience that supports their growth and overall well-being.

As a parent/guardian, there are numerous ways in which you can participate in our Head Start/Early Head Start programs. All parents/guardians are encouraged to volunteer in our classrooms, attend meetings, and parent /teacher conferences. In addition, we have several committees you may wish to join. Each center, including Early Head Start has a parent committee. Parent committees meet monthly to discuss and plan activities and other important information pertaining to the program. The Policy Council is a parent advisory component of the program. All are encouraged to join the Policy Council and take an active role in learning more about how our program operates and provide input. By being an active participant, both you and your child will benefit.

This handbook was developed to help you familiarize yourself with the Head Start/Early Head Start programs, functions, and philosophies. Please use the handbook as a reference guide.

We look forward to getting to know you and your child and partnering with you throughout your involvement with the Head Start programs.

Sincerely,
Head Start / Early Head Start Staff

Statement of Purpose:

- A. The Worcester Community Action Council, Inc. (WCAC) Head Start/Early Head Start program is based on the premise that all children share certain needs and can benefit from a comprehensive developmental program that meets the needs of

individual children. The Head Start/Early Head Start program approach is based on the philosophy that:

1. A child can benefit most from a comprehensive, interdisciplinary program to foster development and remedy problems as expressed in a broad range of services.
 2. The child's entire family, as well as the community, must be involved. The program should maximize the strengths and unique experiences of each child. The family/guardian, who takes part in the child's development, must be a direct participant in the program. Local communities collaborate in developing creative program designs, so the basic goals, objectives, and standards of a comprehensive program are adhered to.
- B. The goal of the Head Start/Early Head Start program (0-5), is to bring about a greater degree of social competence which considers the connection between cognition and intellectual development, physical and mental health, nutritional needs, and other factors that enable a developmental approach to helping children achieve social competence. To the accomplishment of this goal, Head Start objectives and performance standards provide for:
1. The improvement of the child's health, physical abilities, and overall well-being.
 2. The encouragement of self-confidence, spontaneity, curiosity, and self-discipline will assist in the development of the child's social and emotional health.
 3. The enhancement of the child's cognitive skills with particular attention to conceptual and communication skills.
 4. The establishment of the patterns and expectations of success for the child, which will create confidence for present and future learning efforts and overall development.
 5. An increase in the ability of the child and the family to relate to each other, enhancing the sense of dignity and self-worth within the child and family.

Statement of Non-Discrimination:

Everyone eligible shall have an equal opportunity to take part in the services provided by the WCAC Head Start/Early Head Start program. WCAC Head Start/Early Head Start is passionately committed to a program of equal opportunity. There shall be no discrimination in any activities or programs because of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, ancestry, creed, physical or mental disabilities, and toilet training status is not an eligibility requirement for enrollment; cultural heritage, political beliefs, marital status, or gender identification. Discriminatory practices are against the law.

Early Education and Care Programs

WCAC Head Start and Early Head Start:

Early Head Start and Head Start serve families prenatally through the child's transition to kindergarten (typically age 5).

Early Head Start Home-based Program:

The home visiting services are available Monday-Friday from 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. The Early Head Start program also offers center-based activities through socializations at the Head Start centers or in the community such as the libraries or local parks.

Head Start Program Options:

Head Start programs service three to five-year old children Monday through Friday with the following options available:

Part Day/ School Year: from 8:30am - 12:30 pm for 10 months from September – June. This option follows the public-school vacation schedule closing for winter break, February, and April vacation weeks.

Full Day/ School Year: from 8:00am – 4:00pm for 10 months September -June. This option follows the public-school vacation schedule, closing for winter break, February, and April vacation weeks. The full-day option is offered to parents who are working, in training, or attending school a minimum of 25 hours per week, verification must be provided.

Full Day/ Full Year: from 8:00am – 4:00pm for 12 months. This option remains open for winter break, February, and April vacation weeks. The full-day option is offered to parents who are working, in training, or attending school a minimum of 30 hours per week, verification must be provided.

Open Door Policy:

Worcester Community Action Council, Inc. Head Start believes in an “Open Door” policy for parents/guardian. Parents/guardians are welcome to visit without advance notice at any time, spend time observing and participating in our activities. Parents do not need to inform the classroom teacher when coming into the building.

Regulatory Agency:

WCAC Head Start is licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care. Parents/guardians may contact the EEC (Early Education and Care) office regarding regulatory compliance at:

Main Office
50 Milk St 14th Floor
Boston, MA 02109
(617)-988-6600

Western MA Office (Region 1)
1441 Main St Suite 230
Springfield, MA 01103
(413)-788-8401

Expectation of Families

Expectation of Families:

Please familiarize yourself with the following expectations:

1. All children should arrive at school at 8:00 (full day)-8:30 a.m. (half day)
2. Parents/Guardians are responsible for supervising their child while bringing them into and out of the program at the beginning and end of the day.
3. Cell phones must not be in use when dropping off and picking up children.
4. Parents/Guardians should keep their child/children home if they appear sick in any way (elevated temperature, diarrhea, or a cold, etc.).
 - o When children are sick, parents/guardians are expected to contact the program at the beginning of the day to report their absence. Attendance is important and monitored. You may be contacted by your Family Advocate if your child is chronically absent.
 - o If a child is on medication, such as penicillin, antibiotics, etc. or under a physician's care, parents must notify the Health/Nutrition Coordinator by phone before taking the child to school. The first dose must be given at home and the child should be monitored for allergic reactions.
5. Parents/Guardians will make transportation arrangements for their children. At no time are program staff allowed to provide transportation to children and families enrolled in the program unless they are a family member.
6. Parents/Guardians will participate in two home visits with their child's teacher, a minimum of three home visits with their Family Advocate, and two parent/teacher conferences during the program year.
7. Parents/Guardians must inform the child's Family Advocate of any restraining orders that prohibit someone specific from picking up the child.
8. Parents/Guardians must inform their Family Advocate of any change in family information such as address, phone number, emergency numbers and places of employment/school.

9. Parents/Guardians must inform the Health/Nutrition Coordinator of any allergies to food or environmental hazards (bee stings, mosquito bites, insect bites) or if the child has any health conditions (asthma, seizures).
10. Please be sure there is someone that we can reach at home or a number where we can reach you or an emergency contact if your child gets sick or injured at school.
11. The WCAC Head Start/Early Head Start center is a smoke-free environment. Smoking is not allowed in the building or on the grounds.

Attendance:

Attendance is taken daily and monitored by the program. It is important for your child to attend the program and to be on time. The program needs to call in the lunch order in the morning. If the parent/guardian does not contact the center, the Family Advocate will call to find out why the child is absent. If your child is ill, please contact the center/Family Advocate by 9:00 a.m. to inform the staff that your child will not be in that day and the reason. Documentation about attendance will be gathered by the Family Advocate. A home visit will be made after two consecutive unexcused absences, or any time considered necessary by the Family Advocate.

When a child is identified to be at risk of missing 10% or more of the service days the family, Family Advocate, teachers, and ERSEA (Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance) Coordinator will meet to determine if an attendance plan is needed to address the excessive number of absences.

Child Drop Off Procedures: for the safety of everyone, please remember:

- Watch for running children.
- Shut your engine off and take the key.
- Never leave your child unattended once in the building. Wait for the child’s classroom teacher to greet you and your child.
- Do not leave other children in the car without proper supervision.
- When walking your child to or from your car, please make sure they are with you and not running ahead.
- Parent/guardians must sign in when dropping off and picking up their child from the center.
- Always have all children in the proper age-appropriate safety restraints in the vehicle.
- Enter and exit the center through the designated door. Do not use side doors.

Pick-up Policy:

At the time of enrollment, you may choose others who have your permission to pick up your child from the program. This may be updated at any time, as necessary. It is important that you keep us informed of any changes as soon as possible.

Commented [TP1]: Shouldn't this be above this paragraph with the attendance?

Commented [KC2R1]: yes. i'll move it up

Commented [TP3R1]: much better! Thanks!

Your child will not be released to anyone without parental/guardian permission. Written or verbal permission will not be accepted from the person picking up your child. They must be at least 16 years old and will need to provide a photo ID, which will be photocopied and kept on file.

In the event someone on your approved pick-up list comes to pick up your child, you must notify the program in advance. If you call to inform us, you will have to provide a code to verify your identity.

The well-being of children enrolled in the Head Start program is our primary concern. It is the staff's responsibility to ensure that children are always supervised to include arrival and pick-up times. When an adult appears to be "under the influence," intoxicated or impaired in their ability to safely get the child home the staff will assist with contacting others on the pickup list to have the child picked up.

Late Child Pick Up:

For the half-day program, if your child is still at the center at 1:15 p.m. and we have not been able to contact anyone on the pick-up list, your child will be considered abandoned.

For the full-day program at 4:45 p.m., if we have not been able to contact anyone on the pick-up list, your child will be considered abandoned.

The staff will inform the DCF (Department of Child and Family), and the local Police Department as stated above, if your child is considered abandoned.

Child Abuse and Neglect:

The safety and wellbeing of children attending our program is the WCAC Head Start/Early Head Start primary concern. The State of Massachusetts under Chapter 119, Section 51A of Massachusetts General Laws requires that all staff members file a report with the Department of Children and Families when they have reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused or neglected. The filing of an abuse or neglect report (51A) is not done with the purpose of punishing the family but with the explicit purpose of protecting the child.

If for any reason a program staff member or a parent suspect that a child is the subject of abuse or neglect by a staff member, they must report that information to the accused staff person's direct supervisor who would immediately document the reported abuse and/or neglect.

The supervisor will inform the WCAC Head Start/Early Head Start Director of the allegation. An internal investigation will be conducted relative to the accusation.

The employee is removed from the program location and will have no contact with children pending the results of an internal investigation in cooperation with EEC (Early Education and Care) and DCF (Department of Children and Families).

All WCAC personnel will be cooperative with any agency investigating the suspected abuse and/or neglect charges.

If the allegations are substantiated, employment with the agency will be terminated.

Family Engagement

Parent's Rights:

ALL PARENTS HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- Ask a teacher or staff member for an individual conference.
- See their child's file and ask for copies of the information. Children's records are kept for at least five years after a child has left the program. Upon written request of the parent/guardian, a copy of the child's records will be provided.
- Give their input on policies and on the development of the center and request a written response.
- Sign or not sign specified items on the permission slip.

Home Visits:

Home visits are an important part of the staff and parent/guardian connections. They provide the staff and parent/guardian a wonderful opportunity to be together in an environment that is comfortable for the child and the parent/guardian. Teachers conduct two home visits per year at the beginning of the year and in the winter. The Family Advocates will conduct at least three 3 home visits per year.

Parent/Guardian Teacher Conferences:

The classroom staff will meet with the Parent/Guardian of the preschool children to discuss the child's progress in the program at the center. These conferences occur in the Fall, during the winter Home Visit, and in the Spring.

Parent Volunteers:

Volunteering in the program is fun for both Parents/Guardians and your child! It helps to promote awareness about how your child spends their day and helps to build a good relationship between parents/guardians and the staff who care for your children. Volunteers are welcome in the classroom to help in curriculum planning, attend and organize field trips, and plan center events. All regular volunteers (more than once a month) must have a background record check (BRC) and provide a COVID 19 Vaccination card. Please speak with you Family Advocate for further information.

Program Governance:

Head Start governance consists of the Leadership Team, Policy Council, and WCAC’s Board of Directors. Each branch has a role to play in ensuring that the Head Start program is providing the best service and meeting our obligations to implement Office of Head Start Performance Standards.

Center Committee:

Each center, including Early Head Start, establishes a Center Committee comprised of parents/guardians whose children are currently enrolled in the program. The Center Committees plan and execute projects working closely with classroom teachers, Family Advocates, and all other center staff members. All are welcome and encouraged to participate. Center Committee officers approve spending of center committee money and elect representatives to Policy Council and advisory committees.

Policy Council:

The Policy Council is comprised of elected representatives from each center committee, including Early Head Start and community agencies. Composition of the Policy Council is determined within the Policy Council By-Laws. The Policy Council is the governing board of Head Start. They assist the Leadership staff in decision-making, program policies, recommending new staff, reviewing the budget, and providing input on grants and advocating for the program.

**WCAC EARLY HEAD START/HEAD START
CHILD DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

Developmental Screening:

Upon enrollment in the program the Family Educators and the Teachers screen each child’s overall development including large and small motor abilities, speech and language development, and social skills using the Brigance screening tool.

The Early Head Start Family Educator and the Head Start Teachers discuss with the parents the child’s social emotional health using the Ages and Stages Social Emotional Screening Tool. This screening is completed by the parent/guardian of the child.

The goal of this screening process is to identify the child’s strengths and any areas of concern. In the case of a developmental concern, under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) parents may be referred to the local public school system for additional screening and/or

evaluations for preschoolers. Infants and toddlers will be referred to an Early Intervention program to be fully assessed for appropriate services.

The Education/Disabilities Coordinator or the Early Head Start Coordinator will help parents through the evaluation process and attend any related meetings if invited to participate.

Early Head Start Program:

The WCAC Early Head Start is a home-based program that understands that the parent/guardian is the child's first teacher, and that the parental/guardian relationship is crucial to the development of infants and toddlers. We involve the parent/guardian in the Home Visits and during the Socializations meeting the needs of their child.

Early Head Start is a home-based program provides comprehensive services to expectant women, children ages 0-3 and their families. Early Head Start provides parents/guardians with valuable opportunities to actively participate in their child's early educational experiences at home visits, socialization activities, trainings, and workshops.

Early Head Start Home Visit:

The Early Head Start Home Based Family Educator visits each family for 90 minutes once a week. During this visit, the Family Educators assist the parents in developing interactive play skills. Parents/guardian and their educator jointly plan these visits. Activities focus on child development, health and nutrition, parent involvement, and community resources.

Early Head Start Assessments:

WCAC Early Head Start uses Desired Results and Developmental Profile (DRDP), which is an online assessment tool, to do observations and assessments on the children 4 times a year, culminating with statistical data.

Early Head Start Socialization:

Socialization gives parents/guardians the chance to meet and share ideas with other parents and expectant moms. Transportation may be provided if necessary and a nutritious meal is provided. Parents/Guardians learn skills necessary to guide their children with social development. Socializations give children the opportunity to interact with other children their age, learning social skills such as sharing and taking turns.

The WCAC Early Head Start program prepares families for the transition to Head Start with individualized plans and the choice of the best option for the child and family. Families are invited to visit classrooms and hold individual planning meetings with staff of the Head Start program.

Head Start Program:

Head Start is a five-day program that runs Monday through Friday. Each classroom will have a maximum of 18 children with a Lead Teacher and a Teacher. Developmentally appropriate practices guide our work with the children. The classrooms use an evidence-based curriculum framework; Creative Curriculum for Preschool to design their classroom environments. The Head Start day provides experiences in art, music, literature, creative movement, and science. A large part of the daily curriculum is the “work/play” period in the morning, when the children are encouraged to participate in a variety of activities to promote physical, social, and mental growth. Breakfast and lunch are served each day. An afternoon snack is provided for children who are in the classroom during the afternoon.

The Teachers using the Creative Curriculum online database Teaching Strategies Gold conduct an assessment three times a year. Creating a foundation for this process are monthly child development observations and collecting examples of children’s work. This provides the necessary support to validate the accuracy of the data being collected. Ongoing assessment is linked to curriculum goals and provides information on a child’s progress This information is shared during the home visits or the parent/ teacher conference and allows for the parent school connection of individualized goals for each child during the program year.

The WCAC EARLY HEAD START/ HEAD START School Readiness plan is available upon request, please ask your Family Educator or the Site Supervisor for a copy at any time.

Classroom Design:

WCAC Head Start preschool classrooms are places where children feel well cared for and safe. In our classrooms, your children will be valued as individuals. Individual classrooms are set up to allow children the flexibility to interact with numerous materials of their own choosing. The areas include Art Area with Easel, Block Area, Discovery Table, Literacy/Listening Center, Manipulative Area, Writing Center, Family Living, and Water Table.

Classroom schedules have a balance of activities that are active and quiet, teacher and child directed, indoor and outdoor, individual, small group, and large group.

Sample of the Daily Schedule:

8:00 a.m. **Centers open:** All children wash their hands before entering the classroom.

8:30 a.m. **Breakfast:** When the children are finished, they clean their area and brush their teeth.

9:00 a.m.	Greet children: Sing good morning song, take attendance, and choose helpers for the day.
9:30 a.m.	Circle Time: Talk about the activities for the day and special centers that need explanation. Teach new songs, read special books, etc.
10:00 a.m.	Learning Centers: Teacher and children-initiated activities. Teachers provide individual and small group instruction at centers when needed. Gross motor and small motor activities are planned daily.
10:45 a.m.	Gross Motor: Prepare for indoor or outdoor play.
11:30 a.m.	Preparation for Lunch: Hands are washed. Helpers set tables for lunch.
11:45 a.m.	Lunch: Children and teachers sit for lunch and converse until everyone is finished. Everyone cleans their own space.
12:15 p.m.	Half-day children recap the day and prepare to be picked-up.
12:30 p.m.	Half-day children are dismissed: Full-day children prepare for rest time/quiet activities.
1:00 p.m.	Rest time/quiet time: Parents/Guardians provide the child with a small pillow, blanket, stuffed animal. Please label all items with your child's name. Blankets will be laundered by the WCAC Head Start cleaning staff. Each child has a cot and a designated space in the classroom.
2:00 p.m.	Snack: Individualization, Small Group activities.
3:00 p.m.	Gross motor activities/ Outdoor play
3:45-4:00 p.m.	Dismissal

Children's Clothing

Every day, the children have a chance to take part in activities that may be messy or require them to sit on the floor or ground. Please dress your children in clothing that is okay for them to get dirty. Because young children have accidents, it is important to bring in a full set of extra clothing (underwear, socks, shirt, and pants). Please label the inside of the clothing with your child's name so it is easily identified. Children should not come to school wearing jewelry, clothing with drawstrings, flip-flops, crocs, or clogs. These may cause injury on the play equipment.

Toileting:

No child must be toilet trained to receive services. The teachers will work with you when your child is ready.

Please always provide a change of clothing for your child. Soiled or wet clothing will be handled discreetly. No child is punished, verbally abused, or humiliated for soiling, wetting or for not using the toilet.

Naptime Policy

NAP TIME:

Parents supply the child's sleeping gear (small pillow, blanket, stuffed animal). Staff will wash sleeping gear weekly and return to the classroom for the children.

The activities described below are just a few of the many ways that children can productively use quiet time without being forced to remain on a cot or in the napping area. Just as adults use knitting, painting, reading, scrap-booking and other activities for rest and relaxation, safe, developmentally appropriate, quiet activities will support the children's growth and development as well as their need for rest and relaxation and will help prevent children from seeing rest time as "punishment."

- **SLEEP, REST, AND QUIET ACTIVITIES**
- During sleep, rest or quiet activities, educators must ensure that children are easily accessible during an emergency.
- Restraints may not be used on sleeping children under any circumstances.
- Program includes, as part of the daily schedule, an extended period of sleep, rest, or quiet activities for children in care for longer than four hours.
- The length of the sleep, rest, or quiet activity period must be appropriate to the needs of the children.
- When children choose not to sleep, or awaken early, they must be offered quiet activities for the rest of the sleep or quiet activity period.
- The staff must minimize noise and disturbances, provide a separate cot for each child that is individually labeled, in good repair and is clean. Head Start staff will also ensure safe and sanitary storage of blankets and bed linens.

Educators must ensure that there is a distance of at least two feet between each crib/cot, or there is a distance of at least three feet between children's faces while resting or napping. Also, there must be space and adequate lighting to allow proper supervision and for quiet activities for children who do not sleep.

Head Start Holiday Philosophy

At Head Start we are committed to exposing children to a diversity of traditions, customs, and experiences through curriculum activities and parent involvement. Throughout the year, we

offer a variety of literature, arts, music, and cooking experiences that expose children to other cultures. We encourage parents to spend time in the classroom sharing their family's traditions.

Regarding the "celebrating of holidays," we feel that to support our philosophy of inclusion and diversity, it is important to celebrate the individuality of all children.

Disability Services:

After all screenings and assessments are completed or at any time during the program year, program staff may meet with the parent to share concerns resulting from the screenings and observation, usually with the Education Disabilities Coordinator or the Early Head Start Coordinator. During this meeting, the parent may receive information discussing a recommendation for further assessment and a request for written permission to help with making a referral. Referrals are always requested by the parents with support from the WCAC team.

In the case of a developmental concern, under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) parents may be referred to the local public school's system for more screening and/ or evaluation for preschoolers. The Early Head Start infants and toddlers will be referred to the local Early Intervention program to be fully assessed for appropriate services.

Head Start/Early Head Start Health and Nutrition:

The philosophy of the WCAC HS/EHS Health/Nutrition Component is to encourage and foster healthy habits for all staff, children, and families enrolled in the program. This will be done through meeting the following objectives:

- Provide current age-appropriate Health/Dental/Nutritional Curriculum.
- Offer parent training specific to Health/Dental/Nutritional issues.
- Provide access to Health/Dental/Nutritional services through collaboration with community services/agencies.
- Provide and help families with referrals to health-related services.
- Please call the health office and we can assist when needed.

The following assessments are done on all children annually and the results are kept in the child's health record:

- Hearing/Vision Checklist/Screening. Results of the screening are sent home to parents and to the pediatrician if referral is needed.
- Height/Weight Screening: The height and weight are measured as part of the Nutrition assessment.

Health Documentation Requirements

(Mandated by Office of Head Start Performance Standards, Department of Early Education and Care and MA State EPSDT Schedule)

- Current Physical within one year prior to enrollment. Including Height/Weight, Medical History, and Blood pressure (age 3).
- Immunization History - Certification that the child has been successfully immunized in accordance with the current Department of Public Health's recommended schedules.
- Dental Exam within one year prior to enrollment. (Every 6 months thereafter).
- Lab Tests such as Lead and Hemoglobin/Hematocrit - Following the Department of Public Health requirements, all children, regardless of risk, must be screened for lead poisoning at least once between the ages of nine and twelve months and annually thereafter at ages two and three.
- Individual Health Accommodation Plans are required for all chronic health conditions. (Such as Asthma, Food allergies, etc.)

Child Injuries:

If a child is injured while they attend the Head Start program, the staff member who saw the accident/injury will complete an injury report form. The parent/guardian will be notified by telephone when the injury occurs. A copy of the injury report form will be provided to the parent/guardian the day the injury occurred. The parent/guardian must sign the injury form and return it to the agency, and a copy will be provided to you too.

In the case of a severe injury, 911 will be called and the child will be transported to the hospital with a DEEC (Department of Early Education and Care) (Department of Early Education and Care) (Department of Early Education and Care) licensed staff member in attendance.

Any injuries/accidents/illnesses that require hospitalization or medical treatment must be reported to the Department of Early Education and Care (DEEC).

Plan for Meeting the Needs of Mildly Ill Children:

When your child becomes ill at school, the parent will be contacted, and the child will be supervised in a quiet area until the parent(s) or emergency pick up eligible person can be reached. In cases when the parent or alternate cannot be reached, the staff will meet the following needs of the ill child: supervision, food, drink, rest, toileting, comfort, quiet play materials and activities until the child is picked up.

WCAC Head Start Medication Policy:

WCAC Head Start personnel will administer prescription medications only for children with chronic health conditions with a written health accommodation plan and medication authorization form in place signed and dated by the parent and physician. These forms must be updated and completed for the child to be enrolled in the Head Start program.

Plan for Managing Infectious Diseases

WCAC Head Start/Early Head Start plan for managing infectious disease is in accordance with the Department of Early Education and Care (DEEC).

The Head Start Health Coordinator must be contacted when a child has an illness or infectious disease.

The staff must follow strict handwashing & disinfecting procedures.

Children who show symptoms of the following types of infectious diseases, such as gastrointestinal, respiratory, and skin or direct contact infections, may be excluded from the center if it is decided that any of the following exist:

- The illness prevents the child from taking part in the program activities or from resting comfortably.
- Illness results in greater care need than the childcare staff can provide without compromising the health and safety of other children.
- The child has a fever, unusual lethargy, irritability, persistent crying, difficult breathing, or other signs of serious illness.
- Diarrhea.
- Vomiting two or more times in 24 hours at home or once at the center.
- Mouth sores, unless the physician says the child is non-infectious.
- Rash with a fever or behavior change until the physician has decided that the illness is not a communicable disease.
- Pink eye, child can return after received a dose of treatment medication.
- Tuberculosis, until the child is non-infectious.
- Impetigo, until 24 hours after treatment has started or all the sores are covered.
- Head lice, free of all nits or scabies and free of all mites.
- Strep infection, until 24 hours after treatment and the child has been without fever for 24 hours.
- Chicken pox, until the last blister has healed over.

The Health/Nutrition Coordinator may request a doctor's note for a child to be admitted back to school after an illness.

WCAC HS/EHS reserves the right to exclude children/staff or close a center based on information from the Department of Public Health.

WCAC Head Start Mealtime Policy:

Mealtimes are conducted in a relaxed atmosphere conducive to social communication and learning. Staff members are seated with the children during mealtimes and actively take part in the lunch.

Food is not used as punishment or reward. Each child is encouraged, but not forced, to eat or taste their food. Sufficient time is allowed for each child to eat. All meals are served family style.

To be compliant with all state, federal, education and nutritional requirements and to ensure proper monitoring of food allergies WCAC Head Start /Early Head Start cannot allow parents/guardian or family members to bring outside food into the center.

The program provides food for meals and snacks. The food is prepared, served, and stored in accordance with USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) guidelines.

Social Services:

The Family Advocate /Early Head Start staff members assist the parents with resources in their community, review community resource information, and evaluate strengths and needs within the home. Family Advocates participate in three (3) or more home visits each year to complete the Family Partnership Agreement and follow-up on any referrals. Early Head Start staff meet with families weekly. The Family Partnership Agreement is a working tool used throughout the year based on the head start parent, family, and Community engagement framework.

Parent and family engagement in Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS) is about building relationships with families that support family well-being, strong relationships between parents and their children, and ongoing learning and development for both parents and children. The Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework is a road map for progress in achieving the kinds of outcomes that lead to positive and enduring change for children and families. The PFCE Framework was developed in partnership with programs, families, experts, and the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. It is a research-based approach to program change that shows how an agency can work together as a whole—across systems and service areas— to promote parent and family engagement and children’s learning and development.

Case Management System

The Worcester Community Action Council, Inc. Head Start/Early Head Start program’s case management system is a multi-disciplinary team approach. Case Management meetings are held in house and Case Conferences occur when needed with families and outside providers. An extensive Family/Child Review will be conducted for each child at weekly meetings between Family Advocates and teachers.

The Case Management system includes the following:

- **Initial home visits (Head Start)**
- **Weekly-Family/Child Reviews**
- **Case Management Meetings**
- **Case Conferences**

Initial Home Visit

The Teachers and Family Advocates will conduct the first home visit together whenever possible. This is an opportunity for staff to get to know the family and to discuss the goals parents have for their children.

Weekly Family/Child Reviews

The family/child review is a complete family story exploring all component areas. This is

an opportunity for teachers and Family Advocates to share information with each other and to delve into the child's file to ensure all information is complete and accurate. These forms should be reviewed at case management meetings when applicable.

In the Early Head Start program, families will be discussed once a month during individual supervision with the Family Educators. The Family Educators and their supervisor will decide the need for case management meetings, or an in-house or outside referral based on the family's situation. An in-house referral will be made if concerns arise related to any issues.

Case Management Request

If a concern related to health, disability, mental health, development, atypical behaviors, or social services arises the following steps will take place:

- Site Supervisors will be asked to attend a weekly meeting with the teacher and Family Advocate. The Site Supervisor will discuss and decide what is contributing to the child's behavior in the classroom. The Site Supervisor will determine if additional support is needed from the Education/Disability Coordinator and/or the Mental Health Coordinator. The Site supervisor may also determine if a Case Management Meeting (an in-house meeting with the teachers, family advocates, site supervisor and coordinators). If, at this meeting, an outside observation or testing is needed, the Family Advocate will contact the family for the proper releases and paperwork signed.

Home based

1. The Early Head Start Family Educators assigned to the family will discuss the case/concerns with their supervisor during individual supervision. Three (3) to Five (5) families will be discussed.
2. Early Head Start Coordinator will make recommendations/plan of action in working with the family (i.e., providing resources, contacts, setting guidelines with parents).
3. Early Head Start Family Educators will implement recommendations and plan of Action.

If after recommendations have been implemented, the Family Educators and the EHS (Early Head Start) supervisor made the determination that further services-referrals may be necessary, the child and family will be discussed at the next Case Management meeting. The staff working with the family will make a presentation regarding the issues. Following the presentation, a discussion of the information presented will take place and a plan of action will be developed.

Case Conference

A case conference is used when the family meets with multiple members of the Head Start Team to discuss the child. If a family is engaged with multiple agencies, the Family Advocate or Family Educators may ask the family to have those providers present. The goal of the Case Conference is to support families and their children through a wraparound approach in the

home and at school.

Positive Guidance Plan for Head Start

A positive guidance plan is a philosophy and approach that all Head Start staff implements to help children develop positive self-esteem, self-control, and social competence. This philosophy is used to handle behavior management in the classroom, as well as the home.

Positive Guidance Philosophy

The focus on positive guidance is on the behavior, not on the child. WCAC Head Start staff believes that behavior has a meaning. Often, a child engages in challenging behavior because they do not have the vocabulary to express their feelings. Challenging behavior can result when transitioning children from one event to another as sometimes the child behaves in a certain way to avoid doing something or going somewhere. The goal of our staff is to identify the purpose of the behavior and replace the challenging behavior with a new appropriate skill. Tools from the Pyramid Model, AI's Pals, and strategies from them are used to enhance a child's social emotional skills.

Techniques for Positive Guidance

Using instruments from Pyramid Model and AI's Pals, classroom staff members assess themselves and the environment to identify potential physical or personal stressors that can lead to challenging behaviors.

These are some of the techniques used in our classroom to promote children's social and emotional skills development and independence:

- Age-appropriate materials and activities are used.
- Shelves and containers are labeled with pictures and words to encourage children to put toys away where they belong
- The use of Pyramid Model and AI's Pals teach children how to identify, recognize, and express feelings, and how to solve problems with peers when conflicts develop.
- Staff plan and implement an organized daily schedule with a diverse group of age-appropriate activities. Such schedules are posted with visuals and cues that help children understand the classroom routine and daily events.
- Staff and children develop a set of classroom rules that are well defined, simple, and consistent.
- Positive language is used to remind children of the rules.
- Staff will work with the child to redirect them to an appropriate activity or behavior.
- Staff will respond to children who are upset with comfort, support, and empathy.

Behavior Support Plan

If a child acts in a way that is putting other children or themselves at physical risk (hitting, kicking, throwing furniture, biting, etc.), every attempt will be made to comfort the child until they regain control. If the child does not respond to limits/redirection, the other child or

classroom children may be removed from the immediate area to maintain a safe environment. A staff member will help the child stay safe and transition back to classroom activities.

Parents will be informed of the incident. If necessary, a parent will be called to pick up the child. A meeting will be scheduled to develop a Behavior Management Plan.

At no time will any staff member use corporal punishment, physical restraint, or any verbal or physical abuse.

Suspension/ modified plan Suspension and expulsion 7.04(17)i

Head Start uses temporary suspension due to children's challenging behavior only in extraordinary circumstances (Please see definition below). Otherwise, the staff will use positive guidance plans, de-escalation strategies, consult with mental health consultants and follow the child's Positive Behavior Support Plan. If the child does not have a behavior support plan, a meeting will start the process immediately. Before WCAC will determine whether a temporary suspension is necessary, WCAC will engage with the mental health consultant, collaborate with the parents, and utilize appropriate community resources-such as the TFK (Together for Kids) clinician, school districts etc.,-as needed, to determine no other reasonable option is appropriate. WCAC will help the child return to full participation in all program activities as quickly as possible while ensuring child safety by continuing to engage with the parents and a mental health consultant, continuing to utilize appropriate community resources, developing a written plan to document the action and supports needed, and make any community referrals for help in the home if needed.

Suspension is described as: Any time a child is excluded from the classroom's curricula for exhibiting challenging behavior (for example, sending the child to the office, sending the child home, excluding child from activities in the classroom because of behavior, etc.)

Extraordinary circumstances are defined as: The child is exhibiting behavior that will seriously harm themselves or others or is very unsafe **and** the behavior is not responding to any de-escalation strategies or reasonable modification.

Expulsion:

WCAC will not expel or unenroll a child because of a child's behavior. When a child exhibits persistent and serious challenging behaviors, WCAC will explore all steps and document all steps taken to address this behavior and facilitate the child's safe participation in the program. These steps include engaging a mental health consultant, consulting with the parents/guardian and the child's teacher. Create a Positive behavior support plan and if needed a safety plan. If the child has an IEP (Individualized Education Programs), we will consult with the agency responsible for the IEP (school district) to ensure the child receives the needed support

services. If the child does not have an IEP, WCAC will collaborate, with parental consent, with the school districts to determine the child's eligibility for services. If, after WCAC has explored all options and documented all steps taken as described above, WCAC, in consultation with the parents, the child's teacher, the school district (If on an IEP), and the mental health consultant, determines WCAC is not the most appropriate placement for the child, they will be referred to a more appropriate placement.

Mental Health Services:

WCAC Head Start and Early Head Start programs collaborate with outside mental and behavioral providers.

Mental Health Clinician's Role in the Classroom:

1. Classroom consultation. This entails meeting with classroom staff regularly and identifying problem areas within the classroom or relationships with peers and staff.
2. If staff would like to discuss specific issues regarding specific children who are not referred and may not need a referral, a release must be signed by parents before the meeting takes place.
3. Classroom Observation: Once a release is signed by the parents/guardians the clinician can come into the center for observation. Once the observations are completed, the clinician will meet with the staff and families to discuss a plan.

Emergency Procedures

Emergency information:

The Head Start Emergency Card will be completed and reviewed at enrollment, Parent/Guardian-Teacher Conferences in the fall and spring, and during the two (2) home visits by the Family Advocate developing the Family Partnership Agreement. Parent/guardians must maintain updated phone numbers including names and phone numbers of emergency contacts.

Fire Emergency Procedure:

1. Site Supervisors develop a written fire evacuation plan for the center and all staff are trained in the procedure. The plan is posted by each exit (fire drill procedure) door in classrooms, offices, meeting spaces, or exits out of building.
2. A floor plan must be drawn so that each room on the floor is represented. A red arrow must mark the primary exit path and a green one the secondary one.
3. The teachers practice this plan monthly and twice a year it is monitored by the local fire department.
4. Alternate exit routes are practiced, as well.

Teachers will walk children out and away from the building to the designated location. Teachers bring with them their First Aid Kit and classroom attendance. Everyone in the building must exit the building. Attendance is taken.

In the case of an emergency (including Inclement weather) WCAC Head Start/Early Head Start uses the Learning Genie system/email and the WCAC Facebook page to alert parents/guardians with relevant information in the case of emergencies including the following

- A power outage
- Loss of heat
- Loss of water
- Carbon Monoxide concern
- Natural Disaster

Severe weather:

In severe weather, Head Start/Early Head Start uses the Learning Genie and the WCAC Facebook page to alert parents/guardians with relevant information in case of school closings. You may also call (508) 765-4738 **ext. 300** for cancellations or delayed openings or early closing.

Confidentiality:

To comply with federal regulations and to respect the privacy of each Head Start participant, confidentiality of information is of primary importance.

- All records are confidential. They are kept in a locked file. When working on records, files are inaccessible to anyone other than the staff.
- At no time are records available for parents to go through unless it is their child's record.
- Children and families are not discussed in the presence of anyone other than program staff and/or other professionals involved with the family.
- In most conversations, names are not needed. Every family has the right to their privacy to be respected.
- Information is not given to other individuals/agencies about families without a written authorization to release the information.
- Families and staff are not discussed on social networking sites or through the internet.
- All staff members are required annually to sign a Statement of Confidentiality.

WCAC Policy and Procedure regarding Complaints:

WCAC Head Start/Early Head Start strives to continually provide quality programs and services. Input from parents, guardians, clients, and community members can provide helpful

information to ensure that quality services are maintained and any concerns involving staff or programs may be resolved. We believe that working together is important.

Parent/Guardian Concerns and Complaints:

If a parent/guardian has concerns about the program, they should speak with their site supervisor as soon as possible. All concerns will be listened to, documented, and investigated promptly. You may be contacted for more information if necessary to resolve the matter. We will work together with all involved to come to a mutually agreed upon solution whenever possible. If you are unsatisfied with the outcome, you may contact the Executive Director of the Worcester Community Action Council.

2022-2023 School Closure Dates			
Closure Date	Programs Closed	Closure Date	Programs Closed
August 29th through September 2nd Staff Trainings	NO SCHOOL	February 10th Professional Development	NO SCHOOL
September 5th Labor Day	ALL PROGRAMS CLOSED	February 20th Presidents Day	ALL PROGRAMS CLOSED
September 6th -9th Staff Trainings	NO SCHOOL	February 21st- 24 February Break	SCHOOL YEAR PROGRAM CLOSED
October 7th Professional Development	NO SCHOOL	March 17th Professional Development	NO SCHOOL
October 10th Indigenous People's Day	ALL PROGRAMS CLOSED	April 7th Professional Development	NO SCHOOL
November 11th Veteran's Day	ALL PROGRAMS CLOSED	April 17th Patriots Day	ALL PROGRAMS CLOSED
November 23rd Professional Development	NO SCHOOL	April 18th-21st February Break	SCHOOL YEAR PROGRAM CLOSED
November 24th-25th Thanksgiving Break	ALL PROGRAMS CLOSED	May 19th Professional Development	NO SCHOOL
December 16th Professional Development	NO SCHOOL	May 26th Early Release	3:00 P.M. CLOSURE FOR ALL PROGRAMS
December 23rd Christmas Eve	ALL PROGRAMS CLOSED	May 29th Memorial Day	ALL PROGRAMS CLOSED
December 26th through December 30th Winter Break	SCHOOL YEAR PROGRAM CLOSED	June 19th Juneteenth	ALL PROGRAMS CLOSED
January 2nd New Year's Day Observed	ALL PROGRAMS CLOSED	July 4th Independence Day	ALL PROGRAMS CLOSED

January 13th Professional Development	NO SCHOOL	August 21st-30th Staff Trainings	ALL PROGRAMS CLOSED
January 16th Martin Luther King Day	ALL PROGRAMS CLOSED		
Extenuating Circumstances and/or inclement weather may cause changes to these closure dates throughout the program year			
First Full Day of Head Start 9/14/22		Last Day of Head Start 6/9/23	
(Full Day Full Year and Early Head Start remaining open during the summer)			

Worcester Community Action Council, INC
Head Start/Early Head Start

Parent Handbook Receipt

I have received a link to access the WCAC Head Start/Early Head Start Parent Handbook.

I understand and will follow the procedures as noted in the handbook. If I would like more information regarding a certain policy, it will be available upon request.

Enrolled child's name

Date

Parent/Guardian Name (please print)

Parent/Guardian Signature

