



AFL-CIO Appalachian Council, Inc.
Head Start Program



PARENT HANDBOOK



2025-2026

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Head Start is a family-centered child development program that provides diverse services to meet the educational, health, nutrition, mental wellness, and supportive services to children and their families.

Appalachian Council Head Start began in 2003 with only three counties: Boone, Clay, and Putnam. In 2007 the program expanded with Jackson, Roane, and Wood County. Further expansion of the program took place in 2011 with five more counties: Wirt, Calhoun.

Today we are one of the largest Head Start providers in the state. We operate in eight counties and serve up to 610 children and their families annually.

This handbook is intended to provide you with specific information about the operation procedures for our program. These procedures are based upon regulations that are required by the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Head Start, WV State Policy 2525, and the Appalachian Council Head Start Program.

Mission

Our mission is to provide life-changing educational training, and career development opportunities for the people of the Appalachian region.

Philosophy

Appalachian Council Head Start dedicates itself to providing a comprehensive child development program for eligible three- and four-year-old children. The program is designed to meet the child's emotional, social, health, and nutritional needs by enabling him/her to enter kindergarten healthy and with self-confidence in his/her ability to learn and succeed.

FAMILY SERVICES

The wonderful and rewarding challenge of raising a family today demands more "know-how", thought, and patience than ever before. Head Start helps families grow stronger. After the children are enrolled your Family Service Worker and Teacher will arrange to visit your home. At this time, you can talk over your concerns about your child's education expectations and any other needs you may have. The Family Service Worker will assess your needs and strengths and will provide any necessary resources and referrals as needed.

Head Start staff are always ready, willing, and able to assist families. Do not hesitate to ask questions. Your Family Service Worker will provide support, assistance, and guidance throughout your Head Start program year.

A "Family Partnership Agreement Plan" form will be established between the Head Start Program and each enrolled family will be formed to assist in achieving self-identified and realistic goals. The information you share in developing your Family Outcomes Instrument is confidential and will never go outside the program without your permission.

Your Family Service Worker is there to help you to connect to your Head Start family and many of the resources in your community and share your goals, wanting the best for your

child. They have a responsibility to work together with you and your family and to develop a relationship with you that only works if it is built on trust and respect. By developing a positive and respectful relationship with your Family Service Worker, teaching staff, bus staff, kitchen staff, etc., your child will have more success at school and in his/her own Head Start relationship.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Because we are a federal program, we are required to maintain 85% attendance in our classrooms. When your child is absent, they are missing out on valuable experiences and services. You must notify your classroom staff if your child is going to be absent within the first hour of the classroom start time. Please give the reason for absence and the expected return date. Consistent attendance is essential to your child's success. If you do not contact us regarding absence(s), the Family Service Worker will contact you to discuss the situation. Please keep us informed of illness or emergencies that will prevent your child from attending school.

CHILD ABUSE & MALTREATMENT

Under the West Virginia law (49-6A-2) Head Start staff are mandated reporters and must report any case of suspected or actual child abuse, maltreatment, and neglect. At the time of enrollment, you signed a statement which explained the law regarding our responsibilities. If you have questions regarding this policy, discuss it with your Family Service Worker or Teacher. Understand that when we report child abuse or neglect it doesn't place blame, we only report signs of and symptoms of suspected abuse or neglect. All reports are kept confidential in a locked cabinet at our Central Office.

CHILD RELEASE POLICY

Head Start children will not be released to anyone who is not designated by the parent/guardian and are on the Student Information Sheet. Everyone picking up a child will be asked to show appropriate identification, Student Info Sheet and Notification Change Form, where applicable. Any person designated by the parent/guardian must be an adult or 18 years of age per Child Care Regulations. A child will not be released to parent/guardian or any designated person who is obviously under the influence of drugs or alcohol, Child Protection Services and local authorities will be notified immediately. If a caregiver becomes hostile, abusive or produces a weapon, the local police department will be notified immediately. If a child is returned to the site, all efforts will be made to contact guardians or those listed on your emergency contacts, if this is unsuccessful, your child will be placed in the custody of the local police department and/or CPS.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. 5 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) is a

federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education.

FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to their children's education-records. These rights transfer to the student when he or she reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level. Students to whom the rights have transferred are "eligible students."

- Parents or eligible students have the right to inspect and review the student's education records maintained by the school. Schools are not required to provide copies of records unless, for reasons such as great distance, it is impossible for parents or eligible students to review the records. Schools may charge a fee for copies.
- Parents or eligible students have the right to request that a school correct their record which they believe to be inaccurate or misleading. If the school decides not to amend the record, the parent or eligible student then has the right to a formal hearing. After the hearing, if the school still decides not to amend the record, the parent or eligible student has the right to place a statement with the record setting forth his or her view about the contested information.
- ◦ Generally, schools must have written permission from the parent or eligible student in order to release any information from a student's education record. However, FERPA allows schools to disclose those records, without consent, to the following parties or under the following conditions (34 CFR S 99.31):
 - School officials with legitimate educational interest
 - Other schools to which a student is transferring
 - Specified officials for audit or evaluation purposes
 - Appropriate parties in connection with financial aid to a student
 - Organizations conducting certain studies for or on behalf of the school
 - Accrediting organizations
 - To comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena
 - Appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies
 - State and local authorities, within a juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific State law

Schools may disclose, without consent, "directory" information such as a student's name, address, telephone number, date and place of birth, honors and awards, and dates of attendance. However, schools must tell parents and eligible students about directory information and allow parents and eligible students a reasonable amount of time to request that the school not disclose directory information about them. Schools must notify parents and eligible students annually of their rights under FERPA. The actual means of notification (special letter, inclusion in a PTA bulletin, student handbook, or newspaper article) is left to the discretion of each school.

COURT ORDERS & CUSTODY

State law maintains that both parents have access to their child unless there are legal documents which define the restrictions. In situations involving child custody disputes or restraining orders, a copy of the court order **MUST** be in the child's file. We cannot prohibit contact with either parent without current court orders.

REFERRALS

Referrals requesting services for children and their families may come from Head Start staff and/or agencies to other community agencies. Head Start must receive an Authorization to Disclose and Receive Information Form from parents/guardians before sharing any information with any outside community agency. Any information is considered confidential. Family Service Workers will follow up with families about their satisfaction with their referrals.

PARENT, FAMILY, & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Parent and Family Engagement in Head Start is about building relationships with families that support family well-being, nurturing strong relationships between parents and their children, and cultivating ongoing learning and development opportunities for both parents and children.

The Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) is a roadmap for progress in achieving the types of outcomes that lead to positive and enduring change for children and families.

The PFCE 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.

The PFCE demonstrates that when parent and family engagement activities are systemic and integrated across program foundations and program impact areas, family engagement outcomes are achieved. This results in children who are healthy and ready for school. Parent and family engagement activities succeed when they are grounded in positive, ongoing, and goal-oriented relationships with families.

Families play a critical role in helping their children to prepare for school and a lifetime of academic success. Agencies are required to consult with parents in establishing school readiness goals. It matters when programs engage parents and families in their children's development and learning. In fact, research indicates that:

- Children with supportive home learning environments show increased literacy development, better peer interactions, fewer behavior problems, and more motivation and persistence during learning activities.

- Among the youngest children, daily parent-child reading from infancy prompts cognitive skills as well as early vocabulary gains that lead to more reading and vocabulary growth, a pattern of growth that has been compared to a snowball.
- Continued family engagement is important throughout the school years. Longitudinal studies of low-income children show that high family involvement offsets the risks of children growing up in low-income households with low parent education.

The PFCE is intended to inspire a renewed spirit of collaboration with families and community partners as programs identify and take next steps to engage parents, families, and the community to achieve better outcomes for children and families. Family engagement means that families take an active role in their child's education and development, helping to make decisions about their program in partnership with other parents, staff, and program specialists. The contribution of family experience, perspective and participation is of tremendous value to Head Start Program.

HOME VISITS & PARENT/TEACHER CONFERENCES

Parents of children enrolled in the program will receive two face-to-face home visits/center visits by teaching staff and the Family Service Workers during the year. Teacher-home visits are an in-depth opportunity for parents and teachers to:

- Develop/share individualized learning goals for your child
- Share observations about your child's strengths, needs, and interests
- Hear about the classroom schedule and activities
- Provide teachers with suggestions for possible goals and activities
- Update about any health requirements

Teachers will have paperwork, such as screenings and the child accomplishment summary to be reviewed and signed. These visits and conferences are highly encouraged so teachers and parents as a team can enhance learning both at school and extend it into the home.

Parent/Teacher Conferences are also offered a minimum of two times annually by teaching staff. Conferences are generally held at your home unless parent/guardians specify otherwise. These conferences must be face-to-face. Parents are asked to share information about their child's progress, ask questions, give input into individualized goals for their child and learn more about their child's progress from the teacher's observations. This is typically when teachers share assessment results. At each visit or conference, teachers will develop a form to share about the child's specific progress made since the last Parent Teacher Conference.

FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

The primary role of the Family Service Workers is to support families in their growth and development. The Head Start/Pre-K program serves as a link between families and the community. Every family enrolled in the Appalachian Council Head Start is assigned a Family Service Worker (FSW) who will:

- Assist your family in obtaining health requirements for Head Start attendance. o Support and assist you with your child's absenteeism & develop a plan to ensure good attendance.
- Support your family in setting and reaching goals and overcoming challenges.
- Keep you informed of opportunities to engage, volunteer and employment opportunities at Head Start and encourage you to volunteer in the program.
- Assist you with transportation issues to scheduled appointments when needed.
- Assist you in crisis or emergency situations. Please call in times of crisis.
- Assist you in obtaining special Head Start services, such as helping families learn about nutrition, good health, physical activity, appropriate childhood development & more.

PARENT RIGHTS

- To be welcomed in the center or classroom during all program hours and be treated with respect and dignity.
- To be informed regularly about your child's progress in Head Start.
- To choose whether to take part in the Head Start program activities.
- To participate as a member of the Parent committee meetings and sever on Policy Council to represent your school and help make decisions for the program.
- To help plan parent activities to enhance parents' daily living.
- To be informed about the operation of the program through Policy Council representative and communication.
- To receive information regarding community resources, agency activities and program planning.

PARENT/GUARDIAN RESPONSIBILITIES

Parents/guardians have primary responsibility for their child and as the child's legal guardians, they are required to care for and supervise them. This includes adhering to the rules and requirements of this program. The Head Start staff assume a secondary role in the life and education of the child. We accept responsibility delegated to us by the child's parents to care for the child, feed the child, and teach the child for a portion of the day and are accountable to parents for carrying out those responsibilities.

The following are general program rules that are the responsibility of the parent:

- Send your child to school daily.
- Notify the school as soon as possible, if your child will be absent.
- Read and follow all bus policies if Head Start provides your child transportation.
- Notify Head Start in person of any changes of information, such as a change in address, phone, emergency information, health issues, or family situations.
- Obtain all health exams and needed records.

- Work in partnership with Head Start staff to strengthen your family and prepare your child for school.
- Read and respond to all written notices, bulletins, and newsletters sent home.
- Tell us about your likes, dislikes, concerns and ideas about our program.
- Take an active interest and talk daily with your child about their Head Start experiences.

PARENT OPPORTUNITIES

1. You can set a goal or goals for yourself or your family.
2. Learn more about the resources in your community.
3. Provide In Kind by volunteering in the classroom.
4. Be an important part of any and all home visits.
5. Talk with staff about any behavioral concerns you have about your child.
6. Attend Parent Committee meetings or socializations.
7. Participate in parent/child activities at school or home.
8. Further your own education.
9. Meet other parents and other members of the community.
10. Read school newsletters and other information sent home.
11. Go with your child to the doctor and dental visits.
12. Have a regular doctor and dentist for your child and family.
13. Keep learning about health, nutrition, mental health, child development and other topics of interest through parent meetings and workshops.
14. For those parents of a child with special needs, attend the meetings and help set up special activities or plans to help your child thrive.
15. Be elected to represent your County on Policy Council and work with other parents in the program to make programmatic decisions that would most benefit your family.

PARTIES & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT.

Parties are to be scheduled for the last part of the school day. Parties must be teacher planned to coincide with our curriculum, included on lesson plans and approved by Education Specialists at least one week prior.

Family Engagement Day is for the parent/guardian/grandparent to participate in the classroom with the child/children in special activities that the teacher/aide has planned for the day, also to interact with the child's friends and participate in the everyday activities.

Siblings are welcome to attend Head Start classroom activities with parents, however; **parents are responsible for any children in attendance who are not enrolled in our Head Start program.** Staff are responsible for enrolled children only.

No outside food is permitted in our Head Start Classrooms.

MALE ENGAGEMENT

Head Start encourages male Engagement and a welcoming environment for families. Positive Male Engagement has a unique impact on a child's development, cognitive development, high math and reading scores on standardized tests and negative behavior problems are just a few areas that a positive father or male role model can influence. Research has proven over and over that positive Male Engagement is critical to a child's success in school and later in life. Intellectual/academic success for boys and physical/athletic encouragement for girls can be easily predicted by the level of male Engagement and support. School readiness and academic achievement are directly linked to the Engagement of positive male role models with young children. Men have become the "forgotten" contributors to child development.

PARENT COMMITTEE

The Parent Committee is required by the Federal government for all Head Start Pre-K Programs. All parents of children enrolled in our Pre-K Head Start are automatically members of the Parent Committee. It is a chance for you to have input into your child's education, for you are your child's first and most important teacher.

You are valued and needed, you have an important voice, and your involvement makes a difference in our program. The Parent Committee consists of parents/caregivers coming together each month to talk about their children, Head Start education and activities, community issues and/or any other concerns. Parents work together to have fun, support each other and make the Head Start program successful for children.

Parents bring to these meetings their knowledge of their own children and the needs of their families. Discussions may focus on:

- What sort of activities do I want in my child's classroom?
- What sort of activities do I want to do with other Head Start families?
- Issues concerning children
- Community issues or events

Parent Committees consist of a team which includes a President, Vice President, Secretary, and a Treasurer. The President leads the meetings and keeps the Parent Committee moving towards their established goals. The Vice President conducts meetings and handles group business in the President's absence. The Secretary takes minutes at the meetings and maintains the center's parent meeting book. The Treasurer keeps accurate records of the Parent Committee's financial transactions.

Parent Committees have a small activity fund to use each year, though there are guidelines for the funds, some Parent Committees may decide to use the funds for educational activities for parents, training fees, or special events for group socialization.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Many of the nation's most significant developments in education, government, health, and social welfare have resulted in whole or in part from the efforts of volunteers. The Head Start/Pre-K Program believes that successful programs require meaningful volunteer participation. The use of volunteers is an effective way of mobilizing resources in the community. A volunteer is someone special in the eyes of the children. By being a volunteer, you show your care, and you give of the most important thing you possess - yourself!

We encourage parents and families to visit the classroom and volunteer. Parents/Guardians who volunteer more than 20 hours per week must have a criminal background check/DHHR Background Check; a TB Risk Assessment from a doctor, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner (if a volunteer is considered high risk from the assessment, a negative TB test result or chest x-ray is required). Parents/Guardians are encouraged to volunteer as often as possible; your time and energy are always appreciated! You are always welcome in the classroom and are invited to attend field trips and special classroom events.

If you want to help but can't volunteer in your child's classroom, ask the staff if there is anything you can do from home to contribute to the classroom as an In-Kind donation! The primary aims of the volunteer program are:

- To give interested local citizens, including the parents of children, an opportunity to participate in the program.
- To expand resources available to participating families in the program.

The parent involvement and volunteer programs operate to help the children enrolled. Five overall goals guide the instructional program, all working together to enhance the social, emotional, and intellectual development of each child, enabling them to make the transition into public school better and giving that child a "head start".

- Volunteer activities include:
- Assisting with arts and crafts
- Assisting with meals
- Reading or telling stories
- Assisting with rest time
- Helping with outdoor play
- Assisting with field trips or special events
- Helping in the kitchen, the cook can always use an extra pair of hands (Parents must attend a Food Handlers Class to obtain a Food Handlers Card and have a TB test).
- Taking part in creative play (block building, dress-up)
- Taking part in musical activities
- Talking with the children about everything they do in a way which will help them learn; understand, and use more words with ease.
- Assisting with errands for the teacher .

To become a volunteer please contact your child's teacher today!!

POLICY COUNCIL

Policy Council provides governance to our program by helping make decisions regarding how the program operates to best meet the needs of the families we serve. Policy Council members include parents whose children are currently enrolled in the program and people from the community who are elected by Policy Council parents. The Parent Committees, in accordance with the structure provided in the Appalachian Council Policy Council By-Laws, will elect Policy Council parent representatives. Once the new members are chosen for the Policy Council, the members will attend a three-day training.

The Policy Council is set up at the grantee level (Appalachian Council Head Start) and is composed of parent and community representatives. The Policy Council must have a membership, which has at least 51% parents and 49% community representatives constitute the remaining slots.

Function of Policy Council: Policy Council is part of the Head Start "governance structure". This structure includes the Policy Council, Executive Director, and Head Start Director. Policy Council work with the Head Start management team to develop and approve important program policies and procedures including but not limited to:

- Program's goals and objectives
- Annual Head Start self-assessment
- Head Start personnel policies

Meetings: Appalachian Council Head Start Policy Council meetings are held once a month.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

It is recommended that communication be open throughout the Head Start system so that any problem related to the Appalachian Council Head Start programs or project will be brought to the attention of those persons directly involved and so that an effort will be made to bring about satisfactory resolution or clarification of any issue. If a resolution is not reached for those involved, the Policy Council will hear any complaint of a Head Start Parent/Guardian or Community Representative.

Grievance Procedure

1. Discuss the problem directly and as quickly as possible with the person who is supervising that area of concern, for example: classroom-teacher, bus-driver, or kitchen-cook.
2. If there is no resolution or harmony within the area of the problem, go directly to the person in charge: (County Supervisor /Content Area Specialist) and discuss the problem, within five (5) days after the first meeting.
3. If there is still no resolution or harmony after talking to the person in charge, go directly to the Head Start Director, within two (2) days.
4. If there is no resolution or harmony reached within the local program, you may contact the Head Start Policy Council Chairperson and request to have the issue placed on the agenda for the next Policy Council Meeting.

5. If there is no resolution, the complaint will be heard by the Appalachian Council Head Start Oversight Committee Chairperson, within fourteen (14) days after the Policy Council Meeting.
6. If at any point there is a need to have the policy clarified, it is suggested that the Family Engagement Specialist/Head Start Director be contacted. You may request that a call be placed to the Program Specialist from the Southeastern Region.

You may contact the Program Specialist directly if you feel that you have not received a fair hearing or if information is needed which has not been made available within the Appalachian Council Head Start Program

SCHOOL READINESS

The Office of Head Start (OHS) defines school readiness as children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life. The Head Start Approach to School Readiness means that children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children's learning, and schools are ready for children. Head Start is a leader in the early childhood field with a strong, clear, and comprehensive focus on all aspects of healthy development, including physical, cognitive, and social and emotional development, all of which are essential to children getting ready for school.

School readiness means that a child is ready to enter a social environment that is primarily focused on education. Research has suggested that many aspects of children's lives influence their preparation for formal school learning, including cognitive, social, emotional, motor development, and most importantly, home, parental, and preschool experiences. The following list of behaviors and/or characteristics are often associated with early school success. Keep in mind these are not requirements to enter kindergarten.

- Follow a structured daily routine.
- Work independently with supervision.
- Listen and pay attention to what someone else is saying.
- Cooperate with others.
- Use gross and fine motor skills.
- Write their name.
- Count.
- Recognize colors and shapes.
- Recite the alphabet and identify sounds in words and recognize rhyme.

School readiness begins at home. Parents are a child's first teacher, so it is necessary that they play a key role in preparing their child for school. The family environment is very important in shaping children's early development. A great deal of variety exists in developmental and skill levels within young children. This is normal and many children will not have developed to the level of others at the same age. Nevertheless, parents can help their children develop the skills they will need to be ready for school. The following is a list of activities that parents can do with their children to increase their general readiness for school:

- Read books to and with your child.

- Spend time with your child.
- Create and enforce a structured routine within the home that your child needs to follow (i.e., mealtimes, bedtimes, bath time).
- Talk to your child, ask open-ended questions and encourage conversations.
- Promote their cognitive development by encouraging them to think about the world around them.
- Encourage behaviors that demonstrate respect/courtesy of others.
- Encourage children to accept responsibility and build competence through simple chores such as putting away toys and picking up clothes

REMEMBER: Children are the future. You as parents must prepare them for the future. A child that is ready for school and formal learning will excel and be successful if you as parents do your part to contribute to that.

CURRICULUM

Curriculum in Head Start is a written document that serves as a road map for implementing a quality child development and education program. The term "curriculum" might not come to mind when you hear children making joyful sounds or talking about the good food they shared with their friends, the bus ride, the variety of books, the water table, building with blocks, songs, or even hugs-but that's what it is all about for the child. Children remember their Head Start experiences: how they spend their time, what they do and accomplish, how successful they feel, who notices, and what staff and parents do as part of these experiences is called curriculum.

In Head Start, curriculum is implemented within the context of sound child development principles and what we know about how children develop and learn. One of our highest priorities is-and always has been- to improve the educational experience of every child in Head Start.

Appalachian Council uses the Frog Street Curriculum in our Stand Alone Sites. We follow the Curriculum in each county for our Collaborative Board of Education classrooms. Children gain social emotional competence, promotion of physical wellbeing, increased language and cognition, and a physical environment that promotes the quality of learning.

Note: Head Start programs do not utilize the use of "ditto sheets," which equate to worksheets. This is to adhere to both federal and state guidelines that prohibit the use of worksheets in early education settings. WV State Policy 2525 (15.4.a.) states that, "instructional practices such as worksheets, extended periods of sitting, seat work at desks or tables, flashcards, prescribed sequence of content, content areas taught in isolation, requiring all children to be working on the same skill, lack of individualization, or a high level of teacher directed instruction are not permissible." Federal and state guidelines prohibit ditto sheets because evidence-based research indicates that these worksheets can dampen enthusiasm for learning, mere accomplishment of the worksheet task does not signify the child's ability to read or comprehend, and they may not be developmentally appropriate. We track educational progress to report to parents/guardians with the following practices.

- Work Samples
- Observational Records
- Parent Newsletters: Teachers can send home parent newsletters which explain the activities children are doing at school.

LITERACY

Below are some benefits that highlight the importance of reading to your child between the ages of two and five.

- A stronger relationship with you. As your child grows older, they'll be on the move—playing, running, and constantly exploring their environment. Snuggling up with a book lets the two of you slow down and recaptures that sweet, cuddly time you enjoyed when he was a baby. Instead of being seen as a chore or a task, reading will become a nurturing activity that will bring the two of you closer together.
- Academic excellence. One of the primary benefits of reading to toddlers and preschoolers is a higher aptitude for learning in general. Numerous studies have shown that students who are exposed to reading before preschool are more likely to do well in all facets of formal education. After all, if a student struggles to put together words and sentences, how can they be expected to grasp the math, science, and social concepts they'll be presented with when they begin elementary school?
- Basic speech skills. Throughout toddlerhood and preschool, your child is learning critical language and enunciation skills. Your child is reinforcing the basic sounds that form language. "Pretend reading" is when a toddler pages through a book with squeals and jabbers of delight; this is a very important pre-literacy activity.
- More logical thinking skills. Another illustration of the importance of reading to children is their ability to grasp abstract concepts, apply logic in various scenarios, recognize cause and effect, and utilize good judgment.
- Acclimation to new experiences. As your child approaches a major developmental milestone or a potentially stressful experience, sharing a relevant story is a great way to help ease the transition. For instance, if your little one is nervous about starting preschool, reading a story dealing with this topic shows them that their anxiety is normal.
- Enhanced concentration and discipline. Toddlers may initially squirm and become distracted during story time, but eventually they'll learn to stay put for the duration of the book. Along with reading comprehension comes a stronger self-discipline, longer attention span, and better memory retention, all of which will serve your child well when they enter school.
- The knowledge that reading is fun! Early reading for toddlers helps them view books as an indulgence, not a chore. Kids who are exposed to reading are much more likely to choose books over video games, television, and other forms of entertainment as they grow older.

As a parent, reading to your children is one of the most important things you can do to prepare them with a foundation for academic excellence!

CLASSROOM LOGISTICS

Classroom Schedule

Each classroom will have their daily schedule posted.

Classroom Closings

- Check your monthly calendar for days your child will not have school.
- Classrooms follow the Board of Education schedule for bad weather closings.

Things to Bring (& not to bring) to Classrooms

- Please send an extra set of clothing for your child. If your child gets wet or very dirty, he/she can change right away. Include a pair of pants, a shirt, a pair of underpants, and socks. Please label clothing.
- Please send a tote bag or backpack with your child every day. Your child's name needs to be marked on the bag. The bag is used to send artwork and notes home, so make sure you check it every day.
- It is important to dress your child for the seasons and weather. In the winter, please remember to send mittens, hats, boots, coats, and scarves. Children will be playing outside daily unless there are severe weather conditions. Please do not dress your child in flip flops, sandals, or clogs. Sneakers are a much safer and comfortable choice for your child.
- Children are not allowed to bring toys, money, food, drinks, or candy to school.
- We encourage parents/guardians to send a light blanket and pillow for rest time.

HOURS OF OPERATION

Hours may vary by location. For the most part, Head Start will have staff available between 7:00 AM and 4:00 PM. A typical school day will be at least six hours/15 minutes four days a week, 8:00-2:30 most likely in the standalone sites. There will be at least 138 instructional days per year. Some classrooms will have to make up days due to inclement weather emergencies.

ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

All parents/visitors must enter and exit the building through the MAIN entrance. Children will not be dropped off or picked up from an outside entrance. It is our policy that all parents sign their child in and out. If someone else is going to pick up your child, please contact us in advance and be sure you have completed the 'Notification of Change or Child/Family Information Form'.

If we are unfamiliar with the person picking up your child, that person will be asked to show a photo ID. People signing your child in/out and getting your child off the bus must be 18 years of age or older. We ask you to follow the scheduled arrival/departure times. A pattern of tardiness disrupts the classroom schedule.

DISCIPLINE

The long-term goal for children enrolled in the program is to provide a setting where children can slowly develop a sense of inner self-control; that they can begin to understand the reasons for limits that are set and develop a sense of both being respected and respecting others' rights and feelings.

It is important for all adults to be aware of the language, the tone of voice and the manner of speech used when working with young children. Providing each child with choices, foreseeing problems, and responding to their needs immediately enables us to help the child positively without having to use direct discipline.

One of the goals of guidance and discipline is to help children develop tools to problem solve. Discipline is the external tool to help children develop internal control. Young children learn by experimenting, testing limits, and experiencing the consequences of their behavior.

TIME OUT

Appalachian Council Head Start does not support the use of "traditional" time out. Positive statements will be used to help the child recognize the need to quiet themselves. Children will be invited to work independently for a short time to gain self-control, and in those cases, the child has an open invitation from the teacher to return to the group when she/he feels ready.

Prohibited Actions:

- Children will not be subjected to any form of corporal punishment, including rough handling, shoving, hair pulling, shaking, slapping, kicking, biting, pinching, hitting or spanking.
- Children will not be subjected to any form of emotional abuse, including name-calling, ostracism, shaming, making derogatory remarks about the child or his family, or using language that threatens, humiliates, or frightens the child. o Withholding of food, rest, or bathroom activities.
- Unsupervised isolation.
- Traditional "Time out" procedures.
- Any type of punishment that is hazardous to the physical, emotional, or mental health of the child.
- Toileting habits, or the lack of, will not be the cause of punishment in any form.
- Yelling or raising voice (unless the child is in some type of danger, such as running into the street and traffic is coming).

It is our policy and West Virginia State Law that children will not be physically or emotionally abused or punished. Parents will abide by this policy when at a Head Start classroom.

MENTAL WELLNESS

Mental health screenings are completed by each teacher for every child enrolled in the Head Start Program. If a child's scores are outside of the normal range, the Mental Health and Disability Specialist will contact the teacher to determine if a classroom observation is appropriate. After an observation is completed the Mental Health Specialist will work with the classroom staff to determine what, if any, additional support is appropriate.

Additional Mental Wellness services are available to all children and families, upon request.

DISABILITIES & INCLUSION

The Mental Health and Disability Specialists at Appalachian Council Head Start work collaboratively with classroom staff to monitor and support students, including those with suspected or diagnosed disabilities. If at any time a teacher or parent has a concern about their child's development, they should contact the Mental Health and Disability Specialist for their county to discuss options, including potential evaluation for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Appalachian Council Head Start believes that children with disabilities benefit from inclusion in regular preschool settings. Our staff strives to provide positive and nurturing environments and learning opportunities for all enrolled children.

BEHAVIOR

Behavioral challenges are often part of a child's development. At Appalachian Council we provide a positive approach to behavior management. Challenging behaviors are redirected and positive behaviors are reinforced to increase positive outcomes. If behaviors in the classroom exceed what is typical, the teacher and Mental Health and Disability Specialist may consult with families to create a plan to help the child be more successful at school.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

ENROLLMENT REQUIREMENTS

At Head Start, we view health as a combination of physical, mental, and social well-being. A child's health directly impacts their ability to grow, learn, and thrive. Our program supports the development of the whole child by promoting learning, wellness, and school readiness through early identification, intervention, and comprehensive health services.

We maintain a robust system for tracking referrals, follow-ups, and ongoing healthcare needs. We collaborate with families and healthcare providers to create safe, secure, and supportive environments tailored to each child's needs.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION & SCREENINGS

Immunization Record – Required Prior to Enrollment

Young children have developing immune systems and are more susceptible to infectious diseases. To protect all children, up-to-date immunizations are required before preschool attendance. Head Start follows immunization guidelines from the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources.

If your child is behind on immunizations, speak with your physician about “catch-up” shots. Your Family Service Worker will help you create and follow an immunization schedule. Please report any immunizations received during the school year to your Family Service Worker.

Tuberculosis (TB) Screening – Required Prior to Class Attendance

A TB risk assessment is required. If the assessment indicates high risk, a TB test or chest X-ray will be required before your child can attend.

Vision & Hearing Screening – Within 45 Days of Enrollment

Head Start requires an evidence-based vision and hearing screening for all children within the first 45 days of enrollment. If this has not already been completed by a healthcare professional. The screening will be conducted by Head Start Staff.

Medical & Dental Homes – Within 30 Days of Enrollment

Children must have both a medical home and a dental home within 30 days of their first day of attendance. A medical or dental home is an established relationship with a primary care physician or dentist—not an urgent care facility.

Your Family Service Worker can help connect you with providers and support transportation if needed.

Proof of Health Insurance

If you need assistance obtaining health insurance, please contact your Family Service Worker.

Comprehensive Child Health Exam – Within 90 Days of Enrollment

All children must have a current physical exam (within the past 12 months) on file. If a child is re-enrolled for a second year, an updated physical will be required.

The physical exam should include:

- Blood pressure
- Hemoglobin level
- Lead Blood Test
- Vision screening
- Hearing screening
- Growth assessment (height, weight, BMI)

Note: We recommend combining most health requirements in a single physician visit (excluding dental), when possible.

GROWTH ASSESSMENTS

Growth assessments are conducted by Head Start staff within the first 45 days of both the fall and spring semesters. These assessments track height, weight, and Body Mass Index (BMI). Parents are welcome to discuss results with the Health & Nutrition Specialist or their child's physician.

MEDICATION POLICY

Medication will be administered during school hours only if necessary to support a child's health and regular attendance. Some medications cannot be administered by Head Start staff due to licensing restrictions. In these cases, the parent or guardian will be required to administer the medication.

The following is required for medication to be administered:

1. Physician's Order

Must include dosage instructions, expected outcome, possible side effects, physician's signature, and parent's signature. Applies to both prescription and over-the-counter medications.

2. Parent Consent

Parent/guardian must sign a consent form and allow communication between Head Start staff and the prescribing physician.

3. Proper Labeling & Container

Medication must be in the original, tamper-resistant container with a pharmacy label including:

- Child's name
- Medication name
- Date filled
- Expiration date
- Prescribing physician's name

OTC medications must be unopened and sealed in original packaging.

4. First Dose at Home

New medications must be given at home before school administration begins to monitor for any side effects.

5. Medication Supply and Pickup

Parents/guardians must provide medication and pick it up by the last day of school. Unclaimed medications will be discarded appropriately.

6. Plan of Action

A written medication administration plan must be signed by all parties involved.

7. Nebulizer Treatments

Parents may provide a labeled nebulizer machine to be stored at school.

8. Schedule II Medications (e.g., Ritalin)

These medications will not be administered by Head Start.

9. Sunscreen

With written permission, sunscreen will be applied before outdoor time exceeding 20 minutes.

EXCLUSION POLICY

To limit the spread of communicable diseases in childcare settings, we may temporarily exclude children who are ill. Children with the following conditions must stay home for the indicated period or until cleared by a healthcare provider with a written statement:

- Chickenpox – Until all lesions are dried/crusted (7–10 days)
- Diarrhea/Vomiting – 24 hours symptom-free without medication
- Fifth Disease, Measles, Rubella, Mumps, Mono, Pertussis, TB – Must be cleared in writing by a healthcare provider
- Head Lice – Must be lice-free before returning; child will be checked discreetly
- Impetigo, Pink Eye, Strep, Ringworm, Scabies, MRSA, Mouth Sores, Rash,
- Scarlet Fever – 24 hours after prescribed treatment begins, plus a clearance note
- Fever ($\geq 100^{\circ}\text{F}$) – Must be fever-free for 24 hours without medication
- Bed Bugs in Classrooms – Parents will be notified of treatment protocol if infestation occurs

Head Start will not deny long-term enrollment based on medical needs, in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. All children are treated with dignity and confidentiality is always maintained.

NUTRITION

Nutrition Assessments

At enrollment, we will conduct a nutrition assessment for every child to understand

eating habits and identify any special dietary needs. Height and weight are measured twice a year to monitor growth. Concerns may be addressed with our Health and Nutrition Specialist or your child's physician.

A medical statement is required for children with special dietary needs.

Menus and Mealtimes

Our menus are:

- Culturally and developmentally appropriate
- Aligned with USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) guidelines
- Low in added sugar, fat, and salt
- Nutrient-dense and tailored to dietary restrictions

Menus are posted in classrooms, kitchens, on parent boards, and sent home monthly.

Outside food is not permitted. Meals provided by the center will be served to all children. Any food brought from home will be returned at the end of the day.

Meals are served family-style to support:

- Motor skill development
- Independence
- Social skills
- Healthy portion control

Children in Board of Education sites follow the guidelines of the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs and local Board of Education policies.

NON-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

In accordance with federal civil rights laws, Appalachian Council Head Start and the USDA prohibit discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal for prior civil rights activity.

Alternative communication formats are available (e.g., Braille, large print, sign language). Individuals with disabilities may contact the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a discrimination complaint:

- Visit: USDA Discrimination Complaint Form
- Call: (866) 632-9992
- Mail:
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW

Washington, D.C. 20250-9410
Fax: (202) 690-7442
Email: program.intake@usda.gov

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

TRANSPORTATION

SAFETY FOR CHILDREN & PARENTS

For twenty-three million students nationwide, the school day begins and ends with a trip on a school bus. The greatest risk is not riding the bus but approaching or leaving the bus. Before children go back to school or start school for the first time, it is essential that adults and children know traffic safety rules.

Appalachian Council Head Start wants to make sure you and your children are always safe around the school bus. Children often look forward to riding the school bus, so it is important for parents and children to understand how to enter and exit the bus, cross the street, recognize danger zones around vehicles, and to know what to do in an emergency.

The following information is from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and other transportation resources. You can view a lot of this information on-line at www.nhtsa.gov and get up-to-date information.

It is important for parents to practice safety with their children, so they understand all of the "do's" and "don'ts" around transportation safety!

SAFE PASSENGER PRACTICES

Children need to behave safely during the school bus ride. Basic safety rules include the following:

- Always sit fully in the seat and face forward
- Never distract the driver
- Never stand on a moving bus
- Listen to the driver
- Speak in a low voice, no screaming or shouting
- Never stick anything out the window (arms, legs, head, book bags, etc.)

BOARDING & DEPARTING PRACTICES

The loading/unloading area is called the "Danger Zone" because getting on and off the bus is the most dangerous part of the school bus ride. The "Danger Zone" extends ten feet in front of the bus, ten feet on each side of the bus, and behind the bus. It is where the bus driver will

have the hardest time seeing a child. Throughout the year, especially at the start of school, children need to learn how to get on and off the school bus safely.

Parents should help their children learn and follow these common-sense practices:

- Get to the bus stop at least five minutes before the bus is scheduled to arrive. Running to catch the bus is dangerous and can lead to injuries.
- When the bus approaches, stand at least five giant steps (10 feet) away from the curb, and line up away from the street.
- Wait until the bus stops, the door opens, and the driver says that it's okay before stepping onto the bus.
- If you must cross the street in front of the bus, walk on the sidewalk or along the road to a point at least five giant steps ahead of the bus before you cross.
- Be sure that the bus driver can see you and you can see the bus driver when crossing the street. Stop at the edge of the bus and look left to right to left before crossing.
- Use the handrails to avoid falls. When getting off the bus, be careful that clothing with drawstrings and book bags and backpacks with straps don't get caught in the handrails or door.
- Never walk behind the bus.
- Walk at least five giant steps away from the side of the bus.
- If you drop something near the bus, tell the bus driver. Never try to pick it up because the driver might not be able to see you.

SAFE STREET CROSSING AT STOPS

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recommends the following:

If you must cross the street in front of the bus, walk on the sidewalk or along the road to a point at least five giant steps ahead of the bus before you cross.

1. Be sure that the bus driver can see you and you can see the bus driver when crossing the street.
2. Stop at the edge of the bus and look left to right to left before crossing.

The U.S. Dept. of Transportation also recommends that parents help their children practice crossing the street, and teach children to:

1. Cross at the corner.
2. Look left, right, and left again before crossing.
3. Watch for on-coming and turning cars.
4. Stay in crosswalks.
5. If there is a traffic light, cross only when the facing light is green or when the walk sign is on.
6. Always follow the directions of the crossing guard or safety patrol.

Information was based on "How to Keep your Child in One Piece", U.S. Department of Transportation, and Helping Your Child Be Healthy and Fit. For more information, go to <https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/parents/LearnPtnrs/safe.html>

Parents of Appalachian Council Head Start will receive the bus safety handbook "Safe on the school bus: Back to School Child Bus Safety and Parents Responsibilities.