



# COMMUNITY ACTION HEAD START & EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS



# PARENT HANDBOOK



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# Our Mission

We partner with families in all that we do and believe that parents are the experts on their children.

Together, we build a solid foundation for resilient and resourceful caregivers; caring, confident and curious children; and responsive, invested communities.



# Our Approach



We value the critical partnership between caregiving staff and parents in support of healthy child development. Our Program understands that parents have expert understanding about their children and we work in collaboration with families to figure out the best strategies and supports for each unique child.

We understand that parenting is a life long process of learning and reflection, and offer a variety of research and strength based parenting programs. We strongly encourage all families to participate.

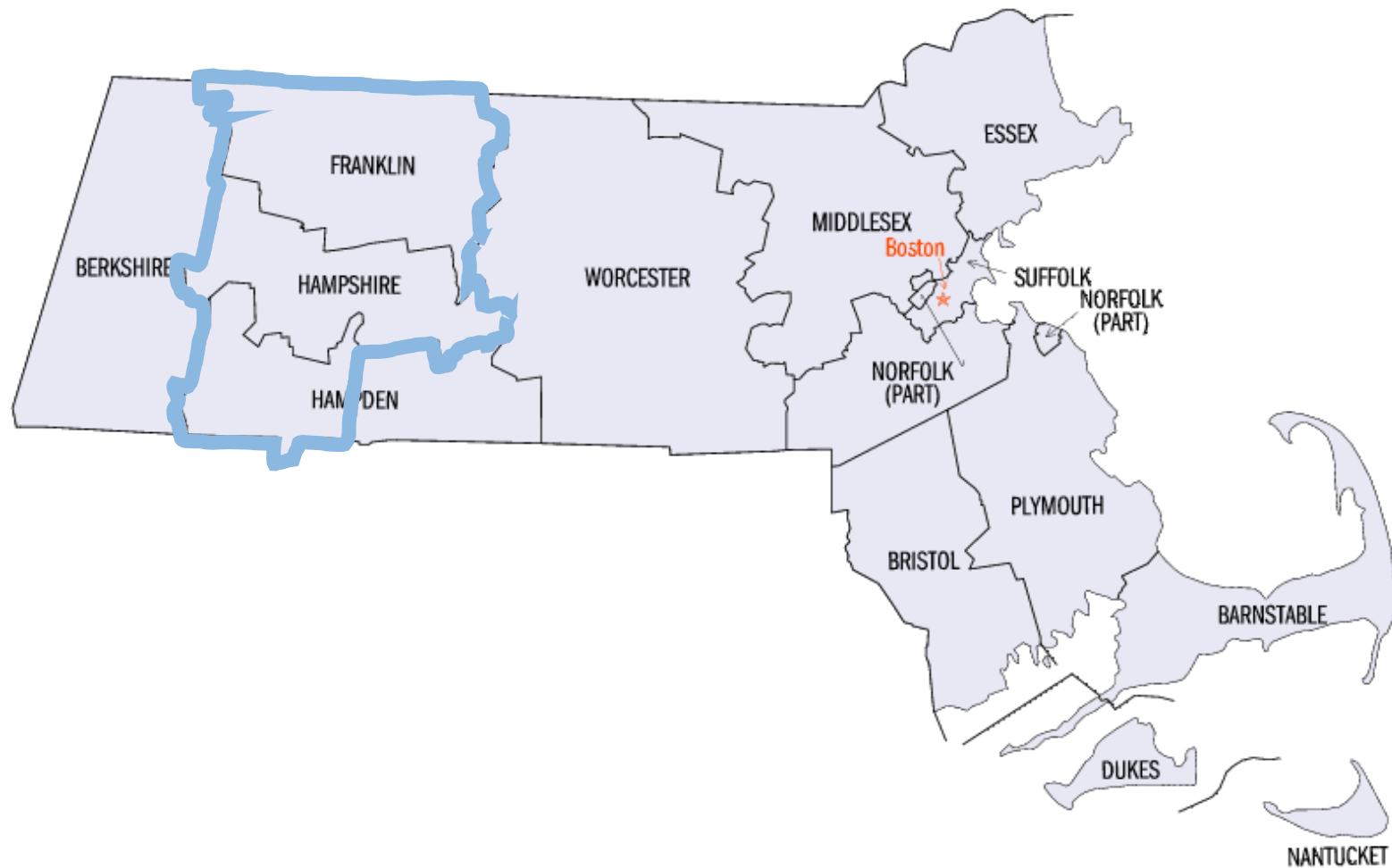
We also support our staff as lifelong learners and prioritize their development. Touchpoints is a culturally-responsive family engagement practice that gives staff tools to build deep partnerships with families, and it reflects the values described above. We are committed to this approach because it has been shown to improve outcomes for children and families as well as to reduce staff stress.

## We are a Touchpoints Site!

### **Dr. Jayne Singer of the Brazelton Touchpoints Center said this of our program:**

*"They have taken on the implementation of the Touchpoints approach with deep dedication to highest quality care. Having witnessed the Head Start & Early Learning Programs Touchpoints team in action, I've seen the excellence of their use of Touchpoints relationship based practices and strengths-based attitudes."*

# HS & ELP Service Area



# Our Agency

Our Agency supports families with high-quality child care as well as with the following programs offered throughout the valley:

- **Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)**
- **Youth and Workforce Development Programs**
- **Family Support Programs**
- **Community Services**
- **Energy Programs**

Our programs assist hundreds of people with filing their taxes, heating their homes, avoiding eviction, feeding their families, getting connected to other local parents, and so much more.



**COMMUNITY ACTION  
PIONEER VALLEY**

**Access • Opportunity • Community**

**As a Head Start & Early Learning Programs participant, you are under the umbrella of Community Action!**

**We encourage you to go to our website at [www.communityaction.us](http://www.communityaction.us), call our main number at (413) 774-2318, or talk to a staff member to learn more!**

# Parent Testimonials

**“I had no idea Head Start included everyone in the family. As a young mom trying to juggle the challenges of being a student and being a mom, I really flourished with the extra support the program provided.”**

**—Former Policy Council Parent**

**“I was frustrated and exhausted trying to figure out how to help my son, who has a speech delay. Our Home Visitor reassured me that I know my son best. Based on this encouragement and with my Home Visitor’s help, I made the decision to change his services, and he started to flourish. I had the confidence to do this because my Home Visitor treated me like the expert on my child. She was a consistent, non-judgmental presence, who supported me but did not preach to me.”**

**—Home-Based Parent**



**“The program has provided a very sound foundation and preparation for success in Kindergarten for our child. The teachers and providers also show concern about the general development and welfare of the family.”**

**—Family Survey Comment**



# Our Staff

**We employ over 130 dedicated staff with a wide range of professional and personal backgrounds who are passionate about working with you and your children!**

All employees go through an extensive background check process, and meet or exceed State and Federal qualifications in their area of expertise.



## Did you know?

**Our staff rate their work with children and families as their #1 reason for staying with our Program.**

**15% of our staff were once Head Start parents just like you!**

HS & ELP is a learning organization, and all of us participate in ongoing professional development to assure we are doing our best!

We value our staff and know that we are stronger when we hear everyone's input, so we ask staff about their experiences and how they think we could make our services even better.



# Things to Know

1. We encourage you to dress your child ready-for-play! This includes weather-appropriate layers, secure shoes, and an extra set of clothes for messy art projects.
2. We have plenty of fun things to do in our program, so please leave your children's belongings at home so they don't get lost, stolen, or broken while in attendance.
3. Children receive health, developmental, and behavioral screenings in our program. These are not tests, rather, ways to get to know your unique child. No two children develop in the exact same way, so we will ask for your consent to do these screenings. You are welcome to be present when the screenings occur.
4. No child is required to be toilet trained in order to receive services. Educators will work with you when your child is ready.

5. Health and safety has always been one of our top priorities and it has become even more important in recent years. Our program has developed effective health and safety protocols aligned with local, state, and national guidelines to ensure the health and wellness of all children, families, and staff and to minimize risks. Our staff will orient you to the most current protocols.
6. Head Start Educators and Family Advocates conduct home visits to set goals and become acquainted with you. They also hold parent conferences to talk about your child's education. Speak with your classroom Educators about the best way to contact them if you ever want an additional meeting.



**We have policies and procedures readily available to the public at:**

**[www.communityaction.us/program/center-based-head-start/](http://www.communityaction.us/program/center-based-head-start/)**

**Ask our staff and they can easily print you a copy!**

# Head Start: Then & Now



**In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared “The War on Poverty” in his State of the Union Address.**

**Head Start was launched the next year as one part of this initiative.** The program was designed to help break the cycle of poverty by providing education and comprehensive services to low-income families with preschoolers. One central tenet from the beginning was to establish programs that were culturally responsive and led in partnerships with parents to meet family and community needs. This is still very much true today.

Head Start has since expanded to include Early Head Start services as of 1995. The federal program now serves over 32 million children in all 50 states.

**Family engagement and leadership drives the direction of our program and ensures that we are responding to community needs.**

We know from a growing body of research that parent and family engagement is crucial for all young children’s learning and development. By building strong relationships with children and their families, our staff are able to help children succeed in school.

**We want communication to be a two-way street between staff and caregivers.**

**Your input is valued and we want to hear from you!**

# Eligibility & Attendance



## Children are eligible for Head Start or Early Head Start services:

- If their family meets the Federal Poverty Guidelines and/or receives public assistance
- If they are a foster child
- If they are homeless

Although most participants must be income-eligible, we can enroll some slightly over-income families as space allows. Head Start does not require citizenship for participation.

## Once enrolled in the Program:

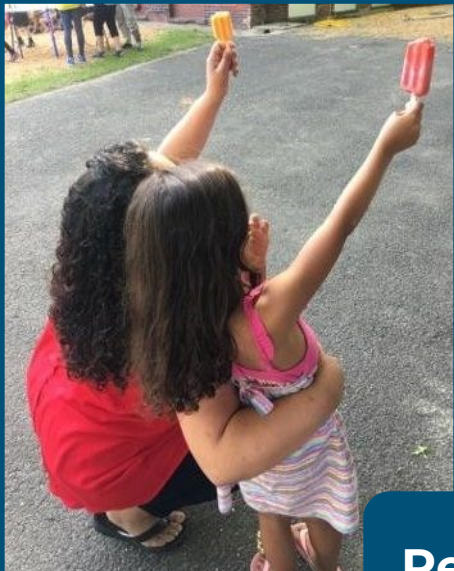
**An Early Head Start child remains eligible** until moving into a Head Start program

**A Head Start child remains eligible** for 2 program years

Eligibility is reassessed as your child transitions or continues in the program.

**Do you or someone you know want to enroll?**  
Call us now at **(413) 387-1250!**

Or go to our website to learn more and apply online at  
[www.communityaction.us/hself-enrollment](http://www.communityaction.us/hself-enrollment)

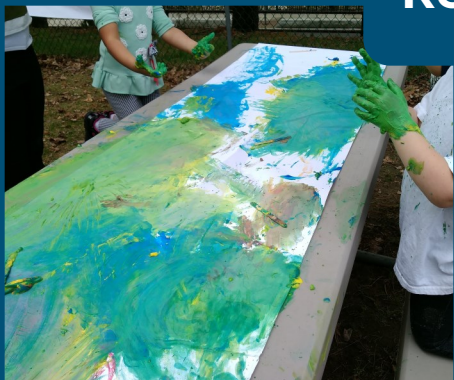


## Regular Attendance

Consistent attendance ensures that your child gets the maximum benefit from our program and helps prepare the whole family for Kindergarten!

If your child is going to be absent, you are required to contact your Educator or Family Advocate prior to your usual arrival time.

If transported by bus, you must also call the bus cancellation line before the bus departs at 6:45 AM. (see p. 25)



# Child Testimonials

“I like playing with games and puzzles at school.”

“Da-da!”

“My teachers help me if I am fighting over something.”

“I like to sit next to my friends at circle.”

“I get to sleep well at school. I like naps.”



“I like to play in housekeeping with my teachers.”

# Our Services

## Our Program Options

- **Part-Day/School-Year Head Start** (preschool) in centers in Franklin and Hampshire counties
- **Full-Day/Full-Year Early Head Start & Head Start** (infant, toddler, and preschool) in Amherst, Northampton, and Turners Falls

*Funding from the Massachusetts Department of Early Education & Care (EEC) makes it possible for us to provide full-day services.*

- **Extended-Day/School-Year Programs** for children birth to five in Westfield, and for preschoolers in Agawam and Orange
- **Head Start at Home (Home Visiting)** for pregnant women, infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in all counties

**We work with you to meet your needs and to find the right option!**

All program options include "comprehensive services." These services help you meet your goals for your family and for your child's development. A Family Advocate will be your partner in a long-term relationship with your family. We also have staff who support health, mental health, nutrition, and more.



Most of our centers are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). All of our classrooms participate in the state's Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS).

## Everyone is welcome!

We value diversity and are enriched by our differences! We welcome people from all backgrounds, family structures, and identities.

Many families' first language is not English. There are many benefits to being bilingual, so we will work with you to keep your home language alive. Our staff will also work with you to incorporate elements of your family traditions while your child is in our care.

Let us know ways we can do that!

# Head Start at Home



In our Home Visiting program, we offer weekly play-based learning activities in your home, which are tailored to your child's interests and needs.

Your Head Start Home Visitor will partner with you as you care for your young child and will support you as your child's primary Educator.

You will also have access to information, referral services, and opportunities to connect with other local families!

## Services for Pregnant Women

- **Head Start & Early Learning Programs Home Visitors partner with you and your family for you to learn more about pregnancy, parenting, and child birth.**
- **Your Home Visitor will provide information or trainings based on your unique needs and questions.**
- **Your newborn can be automatically enrolled into our Early Head Start home-visiting program, and we will continue to provide postpartum support.**



# Early Head Start

The first three years of life lay the foundation for all development, and we recognize the importance of high quality care for the youngest children and families in our communities.

- We care for infants starting at 6 weeks old
- We provide diapers, wipes, and formula
- We also fully support breastfeeding



Early Head Start centers utilize a primary caregiver model, allowing the youngest children to develop attachments with our caring Educators. Infants and toddlers are supported to learn through play and build skills in the context of caring relationships and daily routines.

**First language is an important part of Early Head Start services, and we support bilingual families in the use of their home language.**

As is true throughout our program, we see the parent as the child's first teacher and want to know what your caregiving preferences are. Our staff will help to make arrangements that keep you and your child comfortable and safe while you're at work or school.

# Head Start

We operate many Head Start sites including large multi-classroom sites and one-classroom models. Our services for pre-schoolers are fun, engaging, and responsive to your family's cultures and needs.



**We use the “Creative Curriculum,” which provides a flexible framework for Educators to instruct children and ensure they are ready for Kindergarten.**

**Children learn through play** and hands-on experiences. The daily schedule consists of large and small group activities, time for imaginative, child-directed play, outdoor time and rich child-Educator interactions.



**We work with families and the community so that children can develop caring relationships, confidence, and curiosity.**

# Family Well-Being

In addition to our high quality learning environments, we also provide a wide array of **Comprehensive Services**. This includes (but is not limited to):

- Health and nutritional screenings
- Dental referrals
- Meals and snacks
- Resources for parents as learners
- Mental health support
- Developmental services and special education support
- Leadership and volunteer opportunities
- Referrals and family advocacy
- Transportation (as available)



As our mission statement indicates, family engagement is at the heart of what we all do. In Head Start, we pride ourselves in partnering with all families and responding to the unique needs of our community.

# Health

Good health is the necessary foundation for children to feel safe, attend consistently, and be ready to learn.

Our Specialists partner with families to provide health information, screenings, and access to medical care.



**Children need immunizations, physicals, and dental exams to be accepted into the program and are expected to remain up to date. We additionally support families in getting connected with reliable, consistent, and accessible dental, medical, and mental health services as needed.**

# Nutrition

With funding from the USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program, our program provides healthy, well-balanced meals and snacks.

We work with families to develop diet modifications for any child with food allergies, intolerances, or restrictions.

## USDA Nondiscrimination Statement

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

- **mail:** U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
- **fax:** (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
- **email:** [Program.Intake@usda.gov](mailto:Program.Intake@usda.gov)

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.



# Developmental Services



**Serving all children in an inclusive environment is at the core of the mission of Head Start.**

Our multi-disciplinary team works closely with families to support each child's individual needs. Children with developmental delays, disabilities, or other special needs are welcome in all our programs.

We have close partnerships with many community service agencies, and we can help you get connected to appropriate services for your child's time in our program and beyond.

**We want to partner with you to work with your child and we know that you are your child's best advocate.**

# Families as Advocates & Leaders

## We need YOU!

Parents who take on leadership roles can change their community and the lives of their children and themselves for the better. **Your contributions, big or small, make a big difference for our program!**

There are so many opportunities for you to be a bigger part of our program depending on your schedule and desire.



Each center and Home Visitor facilitates **Family Meetings** where you can participate in local leadership as part of the parent committee and discuss what's important to you.

Each parent committee also elects a **Policy Council** representative to participate in program governance and to vote on important decisions, like hiring staff, applying for grants, and how to use fundraising money.

We have **advisory committees** and **self-assessment focus groups** that require as little as 1-3 meetings yearly where you can help us in our long-term planning or discuss specific topics affecting the community, like health, oral health care, disabilities, or social services.

If meetings aren't for you, then you can still participate by attending **field trips and special activities** with your child.

# Families as Learners

Each year, we offer a number of opportunities for family members to join our **Touchpoints™ Parent Groups**! Parent Groups are a supportive environment for parents to partner with other parents as you navigate your family's unique journey.

Each session will provide you with tools to:

- better understand and guide your child's development
- help with challenging times or confusing behaviors
- remain close and connected and have fun with your child

**“I loved all the parents. I love that we come from all different backgrounds, but we share the same moments and experiences with our children.”**  
—Parent Participant



The **Touchpoints Parenting Curriculum** is research-based and focuses on the strengths of children & families. Over the course of 5 sessions, we will partner with you to explore:

- The Joys and Challenges of Parenting Your Unique Child
- Understanding Your Child's Development
- Your Family's Culture and Language
- Nurturing and Caring for Your Children
- Discipline: Your Role as Parents Over Time

**Talk to your Family Advocate, Home Visitor, or Educator about how to join a group!**



# Families as Educators

**Would you like to become a substitute teacher or volunteer regularly in the classroom?**

**We would LOVE your help!**

Talk to our staff about how to complete a background check and/or apply.

**Substitutes** can earn money, gain valuable work experience, and be an important resource for staff who need planning time and to take time off.

**Volunteers** do not earn money, but their donated time helps us with local matching funds for our federal funding (see details to the right).

**When you volunteer, we count your time as a donation!**

- 1 hour** of volunteer time: **\$22.91**
- 2 hours** attending a family meeting: **\$77.86**
- 1 month with 1 hour a week** of suggested learning activities with your child: **\$91.64**
- 1 hour** as a Policy Council Representative: **\$68.22**

**Ready to become a substitute now?**

Submit your resume and a cover letter at [www.communityaction.us/job-openings](http://www.communityaction.us/job-openings)



**Opt in to School  
Messenger to receive texts  
when there is cancellation  
information!**

# Severe Weather



**Under certain severe weather conditions, sites may delay opening or close, and home based services and transportation may be impacted.**

**Bus cancellations, delays and closings will be announced on WGGB, Channel 40.  
([www.wggb.com](http://www.wggb.com))**

Up-to-date information can also be found on the Head Start Weather Line (p. 25) and on our Facebook Page.

If you are in Head Start at Home, your Home Visitor will be in touch with you if they are not able to deliver regular services.

# Contact Us!

Site	Main Number	Weather Line	Bus Cancellation
Amherst Community Child Care	413-548-1290	413-387-1260	
Easthampton	413-203-8270	413-387-1260	
North Amherst	413-548-1282	413-387-1260	
Vernon St, Northampton	413-387-1200	413-387-1260	
Ware	413-277-1275	413-387-1260	
Central Street, Turners Falls	413-475-1520	413-475-1560	
G Street, Turners Falls	413-475-1400	413-475-1560	
North Orange	978-575-0522	413-475-1560	978-575-0522, ext 91
Washington Street, Greenfield	413-475-1530	413-475-1560	
Agawam	413-654-1340	413-654-1760	
Westfield	413-654-1750	413-654-1760	
Home-Based Supervisor	413-475-1514		



**Check out our website at: [www.communityaction.us](http://www.communityaction.us)**

**We would love a like on Facebook!  
[www.facebook.com/CAPVHeadStart](http://www.facebook.com/CAPVHeadStart)**

