

2023-2024 Family Handbook

Important School Information

School Location: _____ Phone #: _____

Teachers/Home Visitor: _____

Classroom Hours: _____

Arrival: _____ Departure: _____

Bus Number: _____ Bus Staff: _____

Family Advocate: _____ Phone#: _____

Emergency Evacuation Location & Address:

Weekly Home Visits (day/time): _____

(Home Visiting Only)

2023-2024 Family Handbook

Tri-County Head Start 2023-2024 School Calendar

August

August 10 Early Head Start Last Day
August 28 First Day of School!

August 2023						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

September

Sep 1 No Students/Professional Development Day
Sept 4 No School/Labor Day
Sep 22 No Students/Professional Development Day

February 2024						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29		

September 2023						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

October

Oct 9 No School/Indigenous Peoples' Day
Oct 13 No Students/Professional Development Day
Oct 27 No Students/Professional Development Day

March 2024						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

November

Nov 10 No Students/Professional Development Day
Nov 13 No School/Veterans Day
Nov 20-24 Thanksgiving Break

October 2023						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

December

Dec 15 No Students/Professional Development Day
Dec 25- Jan 5 Winter Break

April 2024						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

January 2023

Jan 8 No Students/Professional Development Day
Jan 15 No School/Martin Luther King Holiday
Jan 26 No Students/Professional Development Day

November 2023						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

February

Feb 2 No Students/Professional Development Day
Feb 16 No Students/Professional Development Day
Feb 19 No School/Presidents Day

May 2024						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

March

Mar 1 No Students/Professional Development Day
Mar 15 No Students/Professional Development Day
Mar 18 No Students/Professional Development Day

December 2023						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

April

Apr 1-5 Spring Break
Apr 12 No School/Professional Development Day
Apr 19 No Students/Professional Development Day

June 2024						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

May

May 3 No Students/Professional Development Day
May 17 No Students/Professional Development Day
May 23 Head Start Last Day
May 27 No School Memorial Day

January 2024						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

June

Jun 7 No Students/Professional Development Day
June 14 No Students/Professional Development Day
Jun 19 No School/Juneteenth
June 28 No Students/Professional Development Day

July 2024						
S	M	T	W	TH	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

July

Jul 1-5 No School/Summer Break
July 19 No School/Professional Development Day
Jul 26 No Students/Professional Development Day

August

Aug 8 Last Day Early Head Start

- No School - Agency Closed
- No Students - Staff Only
- First Day/Last Day

2023-2024 Family Handbook

Dear Families,

Welcome to our Tri-County Head Start (TCHS) school family!

For the past 51 years, Tri-County Head Start's (TCHS) dedicated staff have worked successfully with more than 40,000 children and families, in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties. Our Head Start and Early Head Start programs provide a comprehensive and educational experience for young children to successfully begin their journey to life-long learning.

At TCHS, we take great pride in our staff, classrooms, and the services we provide to your child and family. You are your child's first and most important teacher and we will form a partnership to provide the support your child needs to succeed in school and life.

We welcome you to become involved in the various activities offered throughout the year. Your involvement is very important to every child's success in the Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

We are excited to have you join our school family.

Sincerely,

Chanda Hillman
CEO/Executive Director

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Mission Statement, Vision, and Philosophy

Our Mission...

To be a vibrant and progressive educational agency supporting the development of children 0-5 years of age while promoting healthy family functioning for Head Start children and families in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties.

Our Vision...

To partner with families, staff, and communities in providing quality services with compassion and professionalism to achieve stability, guidance, and a positive educational experience.

Our Philosophy...

Two factors distinguish Head Start from any other early childhood programs in the communities we serve; the comprehensiveness of the program and the degree to which families are involved in all aspects of the program. We believe we must prepare, educate, and develop our children and their families to be positive contributors to their community.

We believe all young children are individuals who learn best by actively exploring, interacting with their environment (physical setting and materials), and engaging with quality teaching staff and families. Caring adults help children create, experiment, and question within a positive atmosphere that facilitates problem-solving, beginning concepts, and the formation of relationships. We strive to individualize learning and help each child develop a positive self-image. We think it is important to attend to children's overall health as we foster social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development.

Our Promise to You

At Tri-County Head Start (TCHS) we believe that all children have the right to equitable learning opportunities that help them achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society. Thus, our TCHS team members have a professional obligation to advance equity. They do this best when they are effectively supported by the early learning setting in which they work and when they and their wider communities embrace diversity and full inclusion as strengths, uphold fundamental principles of fairness and justice, and work to eliminate structural inequalities that limit equitable learning opportunities.

(Our position statement is an adaptation of NAEYC's, "Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education" position statement)

Our Pedagogy...

At Tri-County Head Start, we believe an intentionally designed space can inspire and guide students ages 0-5. Using the High Scope curriculum as our foundation we draw inspiration from both Reggio-Emilia and Montessori approaches. Building trust and loving relationships is the cornerstone of our practices. Our classrooms support social-emotional wellness using the Conscious Discipline method. Our safe and open-ended classrooms are intentionally designed to allow students to explore, grow and build developmental skills. Using loose parts, real items for play, and, natural elements, we provide experiences for problem-solving and critical thinking. At Tri-County Head Start, we are responsive to students' ideas and culture by ensuring the environment reflects and respects individuals, families, and the communities they live in.

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Important Information

Employment Opportunities

At Tri-County Head Start we love to welcome families of enrolled students to our TCHS workforce. In the event of vacancies, parents/guardians are welcome and invited to apply. The job posting can be found in our Classroom Welcome Centers, posted on the Tri-County Head Start Website www.tricountyhs.org, and on our social media outlets. We also offer educational and credential assistance, so please reach out even if you don't qualify right now.

Before you apply, try volunteering in the classroom. Hands-on experience with your child's preschool or early head start class and teaching staff is an excellent way to find out if early childhood education is the right field for YOU!

Enrollment Opportunities

Refer Expectant Parents and Families with Young Children to TCHS

Tri-County Head Start is always accepting intakes for children from birth to age 4 and expectant families. If you have a friend, a neighbor, or a family member who needs preschool, prenatal, and or early childhood services, please encourage them to call Tri-County Head Start at 269-657-2581 or visit our website www.tricountyhs.org and click the "Tri-County Head Start Intake Form" link to complete the online application. A Family Advocate will contact them to complete the remainder of the application.

You have taken the biggest step toward making sure that your child (ren) is ready for school by the time they reach kindergarten age. The best referral is a trusted friend. Now, help your friends and loved ones apply for quality preschool and early childhood education services, at no cost to the family.

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Locations

<p>ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE (HSO) 775 Hazen St. Paw Paw, MI 49079 PH: 800-792-0366 or 269-657-2581 Fax: 800-834-2500 or 269-657-6608</p>	<p>BANGOR ANNEX <i>Head Start and Early Head Start</i> 305 W. Douglass St. Bangor, MI 49013 PH: 269-427-4020 Extensions: Office: 5 HS Room 1: 2 HS Room 2: 1 EHS Room 3/4: 3 EHS Room 5/6: 4 FA's & Dual Language: 6</p>	<p>BENTON HARBOR (DEC) <i>Head Start</i> 465 S. McCord Benton Harbor, MI 49022 PH: 269-757-0030 Extensions: Office: 4 Transportation: 5 Room 1: 1 Room 2: 2 Room 3: 3</p>
<p>CASSOPOLIS <i>Early Head Start</i> 725 Center St. Cassopolis, MI 49031 Room 1/2 PH: 269-228-5828 Room 3/4 PH: 269-228-5831 Room 5/6 PH: 269-228-5841</p>	<p>DECATUR <i>Head Start</i> 405 Harrison St. Decatur, MI 49045 PH: 269-423-9661</p>	<p>DOWAGIAC <i>Head Start</i> 203 S. Paul Dowagiac, MI 49047 PH: 269-782-2983</p>
<p>GOBLES <i>Head Start</i> 409 N. State St. Gobles, MI 49055 PH: 269-628-5083</p>	<p>GRAY ST. <i>Home Based</i> 355 Gray St. Benton Harbor, MI 49022 PH: 269-944-5007</p>	<p>MATTAWAN <i>Head Start</i> 56920 Murray St. Mattawan, MI 49071 PH: 269-668-3361 Extensions: Room 1: 1804 Room 2: 1803</p>
<p>NEW BUFFALO <i>Head Start and Early Head Start</i> 704 W. Merchant St. New Buffalo, MI 49117 PH: 269-586-3921 Extensions: EHS Room 1/2: 102 EHS Room 3/4: 103 HS Room 1: 104</p>	<p>NILES BELL <i>Head Start</i> 1830 South Third St. Niles, MI 49120 PH: 269-684-6010</p>	<p>PAW PAW CEDAR ST. <i>Head Start</i> 555 Cedar St. Paw Paw, MI 49079 Office PH: 269-415-5703 Room 1 PH: 269-415-5729</p>

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<p>RIVER OF LIFE <i>Head Start</i> 671 McAllister Benton Harbor, MI 49022 PH: 269-757-7406</p>	<p>RIVERVIEW <i>Early Head Start</i> 777 Riverview Ave Bild. D Suite 108 & 109/110 Benton Harbor, MI 49022 PH: 269-925-9541 Extensions: Office: 5 Room 1/2: 1 Room 3/4: 2 Room 5/6: 3 Room 7/8: 4</p>	<p>SAWYER <i>Head Start</i> 5791 Sawyer Rd (PO Box 247) Sawyer, MI 49125 PH: 269-426-4400</p>
<p>SOUTHWESTERN MICHIGAN COLLEGE (SMC) <i>Head Start</i> 58900 Cherry Grove Dowagiac, MI 49047 PH: 269-782-4593</p>	<p>SOUTH HAVEN <i>Head Start</i> 540 Aylworth St. South Haven, MI 49090 PH: 269-639-8936</p>	<p>SPINKS <i>Head Start</i> 1720 S. Park Benton Harbor, MI 49022 PH: 269-944-4119</p>
<p>WATERVLIET <i>Head Start and Early Head Start</i> 188 Lucinda Lane Watervliet, MI 49098 PH: 269-201-7247 Extensions: Office: 110 FA's: 111 EHS Room 5/6: 112 EHS Room 7/8: 113 HS Room 1: 114 HS Room 2: 115 HS Room 3: 116 HS Room 4: 117 Kitchen: 118</p>		

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Program Governance

You are valued and needed, you have an important voice, and your involvement makes a difference for your child. TCHS *needs YOU!*

Tri-County Head Start could not exist without tremendous parent and caregiver involvement and interest in the program. Parents and caregivers are the most important participants in the program as they are their child's first and most important teacher.

Family Committee

All parents and caregivers are automatically a member of the Family Committee at your child's school. Family Committees are established at the beginning of the year. Look for information about the meeting time and location at your school location! Each school location elects a Family Committee Chair/Policy Council representative to represent the school located at the Policy Council meetings and to lead the Family Committee meetings, and a Family Committee Vice-Chair who will become the Policy Council Representative if the elected representative cannot fulfill their duties.

Policy Council

The Policy Council (PC) is a critical part of all Head Start programs. Policy Council is part of the governing body of the program and acts as the family's voice in making major decisions for the program. It is comprised of parents or caregivers of currently enrolled students who are elected at each school, as well as representatives of our community.

The Policy Council works in partnership with key administrative staff and the governing Board of Tri-County Council for Child Development to ensure that families have the opportunity to be involved in shared decision-making regarding Head Start program operation, grants, and policies.

The Policy Council meets monthly. Childcare and transportation will be provided or reimbursed for elected Policy Council representatives for in-person meetings. All families are welcome to attend the meetings.

Resolving Community and Family Concerns

Tri-County Head Start values all input from the community and families and it is important that when a concern is brought to our attention that it is responded to immediately to ensure it is quickly resolved.

Community and families, please use the following procedure:

1. The concern should first be discussed with the teacher or home visitor. Any concerns regarding the health and safety of a student need to be discussed immediately.
2. If the concern is not resolved with a teacher or home visitor, the family or community member may express concerns to the agency Director.
3. If the concern is not resolved with the teacher, home visitor, or agency Director, the family or community member may express concerns in writing to the Policy Council (PC) representative that represents them. These concerns will be brought before the Policy Council. The PC representative will contact individuals with the outcome.

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Education Services

Head Start and Early Head Start students learn...

- **reading and writing** through a wide variety of experiences. Students learn to recognize and use written symbols on labels, charts, graphs, personal books, signs, and pictures. They learn about letter names and sounds.
- concepts related to **mathematics**. Students practice classifying, ordering, patterning, and counting with many kinds of materials. They use numbers in games, projects, charts and graphs, measuring, songs, and more.
- to be active **problem solvers** as they use all kinds of materials to experiment and explore. Activities offer opportunities to try out ideas, make observations, and do experiments. Interesting projects from making mixtures to testing magnets to growing plants engage children's curiosity.
- to use their natural **creativity**. Students explore art, music, movement, and drama. We provide a wide variety of materials for expressing creative ideas and feelings. Children's ideas are respected and valued.
- **Motor skills**- Students will practice **fine motor** skills with construction toys, pegboards, playdough, and art materials. Children will exercise their developing **gross motor skills** in activities planned to challenge their coordination and strength in fun ways.
- **independence** by making choices and decisions. Students learn self-help skills – hand washing, tooth brushing, serving themselves at snack and lunch, dressing skills, cleaning up, and so on are practiced so often they become routine.
- to develop **positive relationships** with other children and adults. Students learn about **resolving conflicts**. They are helped to practice skills and express their feelings in words.
- **about other cultures and traditions**. Students will learn and celebrate there are many differences and similarities among people the world over.
- **health and safety**. Students develop awareness about many topics including fire, poisons, and abuse prevention. They learn about **nutrition** and participate in gardening and cooking activities.

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Your Child's Development

At the beginning of the school year or when your child starts at TCHS teachers and families will complete two screenings, Ages and Stages Social-Emotional, and the Ages and Stages Developmental assessments. These screenings give us baseline knowledge of each student's developmental and social skills. These screenings can also help to determine if a student may need additional classroom support.

We use research-based valid and reliable Child Assessment systems to assess our student's progress throughout the year. Teachers observe students and plan intentional activities to assess student skills. Your child's teacher will finalize their observations three times a year (four for Early Head Start). They will share your child's progress report with you at a conference and as requested. TCHS teachers are trained in the assessment system and receive support and coaching as needed or requested.

We track growth in the five domains of learning as aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework.

Classroom Daily Schedule

Both Early Head Start and Head Start classrooms follow a daily schedule. We know that children thrive in a predictable environment. We also know that in preschool, things happen, and the schedule cannot always be followed. Teachers will designate their classroom schedules based on the needs and interests of their students. Each classroom participates in the following activities:

Morning Message: This is a short whole group circle to get ready for the day. During this time the daily activities are introduced, and students greet each other and plan for the day.

Outdoor Gross Motor: Students go outside daily, weather permitting. Small and large group activities are planned.

Breakfast/Snack: Meals are served family-style at tables. Mealtime allows the class to make connections and have conversations. In Early Head Start infant students are fed on demand.

Work Time: Students choose activities from a variety of areas. Teachers facilitate learning through play in an intentionally planned environment.

Small Group Time (Head Start only): Small group lasts about 10-15 minutes. Teachers plan activities to complete at the tables. The activities have a specific area of focus such as literacy, math, science, etc.

Read Aloud: Reading Aloud- Reading aloud helps develop essential competencies that infants, toddlers, and preschoolers will need to become skilled readers later on, including vocabulary knowledge and world knowledge. Besides helping children focus on what they want to say, reading aloud expands comprehension skills and provides a framework for children's oral responses when listening to books or having group discussions.

Lunch: Food is passed, family style, students serve themselves and are encouraged to try new foods.

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Tooth brushing: All students brush their teeth after a meal. Adults teach healthy dental habits.

Rest Time: 7-hour classes have a 45-minute rest time. In Early Head Start infant classrooms students rest as needed, on demand. Students are encouraged to rest but do not have to sleep.

Classroom Home Visits and Conferences

School-based families participate in at least two home visits and two conferences with their child's teacher. You are welcome to request additional home visits or conferences at any time. The purpose of the home visits and conferences is to share information about your child's progress, share information on topics of interest to families, set goals for your child, and answer your questions.

During home visits and conferences, your child's teacher reviews the child assessment portfolio with you. Together, you set goals and plan activities for home and school to help your child learn. The first home visit occurs before classes start, or when your child begins attending the program. Orientation to the classroom is scheduled so each child and family can meet the school staff, see the classroom, and feel comfortable on the first day.

Celebrations

Tri-County Head Start embraces all cultures and beliefs, holding none more important than any other. We recognize that holidays are a huge part of family cultures, and we want to provide families with an appropriate way to share their traditions while teaching our students to embrace others. In our classrooms, every experience should be intentionally planned with learning objectives; holidays and celebrations are not exempt from this rule.

TCHS takes a "learning vs. celebrating" approach to these holidays. We will do this by hosting a "Day of Sharing." Teachers will invite families to share a special tradition, food, song, or ritual. These experiences will teach students about the similarities and differences among families and the unique ways they celebrate the holiday. The goal is for students to understand that all families are different and celebrate in ways that work for them.

Curriculum

Tri-County Head Start uses the High Scope Curriculum. High Scope is an active learning curriculum which means your student will learn through open-ended materials and experiences to guide children's learning. Our home-based option utilizes Growing Great Kids (GGK), which is strength-based and parent-focused.

Our teachers use their curriculums to guide their lesson plans and make adaptations as needed based on students' needs and interests.

We believe you are your child's first and most important teacher! We value your ideas and encourage you to share your observations with your teacher.

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CLASS/GGK Observation Tools

Our school-based classrooms are observed using the CLASS (classroom assessment scoring system) and our Home-Based programming is observed using the GGK Fidelity Tool tools two times a year.

The CLASS™ tool focuses on the quality of the interactions between teachers and students as well as the extension of learning. The GGK tool focuses on family engagement/support, parent-child interactions, and Home Visitor facilitation of visits.

Dress Code

Clothing for preschoolers should be appropriate for school. The clothing should be easy to manipulate for the child, simple, comfortable, weather friendly, and should not create a tripping hazard.

Closed-toe shoes (such as tennis shoes) are encouraged for safety. No sandals or flip-flops.

Weather-appropriate clothing must always be worn as students go outside to play most days. Reminder: Boots for rain or snow; coats or light jackets depending on the season, snow pants for cold winter days and wet playgrounds, hats, and gloves. Make sure your child is dressed appropriately when they leave the house, some classrooms start their day on the playground. If you are unable to provide weather-appropriate clothing, please reach out to your Family Advocate or Home Visitor.

For Adults: When volunteering in the classroom, we ask that you please follow the same dress code guidelines as we ask our staff. Open-toe shoes are not permitted. Please wear shoes or boots appropriate for the weather. Tight-fitting, revealing, and low-rise pant styles are not appropriate for interacting with students in the classroom.

Home-Based Home Visits

Families and their highly trained Home Visitor will set personalized goals for their young students (ages 0-3 years old) to support specific skill building and prepare them for Preschool. Home Visits are held once a week in the family's home for 90 minutes. Together, the family and their home visitor plan activities and experiences to build those specific skills during each visit using common household items.

Families also get to attend SCHOOL! 2 times a month. Going to a classroom 2 times a month allows the family and their student to practice being in school, have a snack, practice taking turns with materials, and even make friends. These experiences connect to the skill-building that happens on each home visit. As a parent, you have opportunities to build relationships with other families during SCHOOL! Sessions.

Through the partnership with families and their home visitors, community resources are shared to support families in meeting their needs.

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Home-Based Expectant Family Program

Becoming pregnant and having a baby is one of the most joyful experiences families can have. Pregnancy often brings excitement as well as anxiousness at the unknown. Attachment to an unborn baby begins during pregnancy. This program is centered around the entire family. The stronger the attachment is prenatal, the more secure the baby will be after birth.

The first three months of pregnancy is a critical time for a baby's development. All the brain cells the baby will ever have are formed during these first three months. Trimesters 2 and 3 are also of great significance for the developing baby, as well as preparing for the changes in the growth of the family.

A specially trained home visitor plans home visits with families. All Home Visitors are Infant Massaged trained as well as trained in prenatal development and prenatal early reading. Home Visitors also share prenatal information- including fetal development, labor, delivery, and recovery as well as supportive postpartum care with families.

Expectant families are also invited to attend SCHOOL! offered twice per month to connect with other families enrolled in the program. At SCHOOL! families can expect to see other expectant families and their young students interacting in a classroom environment as they prepare to enroll their students in a classroom setting.

Expectant Families receive 1 book per month to start building their baby's library at home before they are born.

Skill Builder Kits for Home-Based

Every week parents and home visitors plan activities/experiences to build their child's skills in between home visits. As you and your child work together to build the skill you had discussed with your home visitor, parents write their observations down on the Skill Builder Kit. The home visitor and parent will talk about how the skill building went at the next visit and discuss how your child is developing as we will track your child's development together.

Building skills every week helps you and your child prepare for preschool and strengthens your child's school readiness skills.

We hope you enjoy the time you spend with your child completing the activities, reading, and building skills for their next step!

"Skill Builders"

Skill Builders are a big part of what you and your child will work on together this year!

Skill Builder is a collection of activities that are created individually for each child, each week. Sometimes your teacher will send home materials, other times it will be activities you will be able to complete with items from your home.

Skill Builders are important for two BIG reasons...

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- 1.) They extend the classroom experience into your home.
- 2.) The time you spend completing Skill Builder kits is donated to our program, which is critical for TCHS to meet our in-kind requirements.

While doing the Skill Builder activities, watch and observe what your child is doing and write your comments on the form. When activities are complete, send the form back to your teacher and they will use your observations to assess your child's development.

Doing Skill Builders together helps you and your child prepare for Head Start and/or kindergarten. It increases your child's outcomes and school readiness.

We want you and your child to enjoy the time you spend completing the activities and reading! Talk to your teacher about the kind of Skill Builders you would enjoy!

Family Services – Attendance, Enrollment, Family Advocates, Resources

Attendance

If your child will be absent, please contact the classroom or the family advocate before the beginning of the school day. When a student is absent from their class without explanation from the family, within one hour, TCHS staff will contact the family to confirm the safety of the student and offer support if necessary. It is an expectation that students maintain an 85% average daily attendance rate over a month-long period.

Attending school regularly helps children feel better about school—and themselves. Start building this habit in preschool to develop the importance of getting to school on time, every day.

Regular attendance is essential for students to receive the benefits of the Early Head Start and Head Start Programs. Young students with poor attendance in preschool also lose out on valuable learning time and if chronic absence continues into kindergarten, it can pull down academic achievement.

- If your child misses school and our classroom staff have not heard from you, they will make every attempt to reach you within the first 60 minutes of class on the phone or make a home visit to learn the reason for the absence.
- When two days are missed, Head Start staff will contact you directly or make a home visit to discuss ways to improve attendance at preschool for your child.
- Teachers will also discuss attendance concerns and set goals with families at conferences.
- Family Advocates can provide strategies, resources, and referrals to community partners that may help families overcome barriers to regular attendance at preschool.
- If every effort has been made to improve attendance, yet chronic absenteeism persists, a student's spot may be considered an enrollment vacancy.

Late Pick-Up

If a student is picked up late from the classroom and/or bus, staff will start calling the family and individuals listed on the Child Information Card.

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If a student is left at school or the bus and no one on the Child Information Card has responded within 30 minutes, the teacher/bus staff will call the local police. Once the local police arrive at the school, the student will be released to the police with a copy of the Child Information Card.

First Notice

If a parent/guardian is more than 5 minutes late, the teacher/bus staff will start the late pick-up notice form and explain the late pick-up procedure.

Second Notice

If a parent/guardian is more than 5 minutes late, the teacher/bus staff will review the late pick-up notice form and explain the process that follows. The teacher/bus staff will have a conversation with the family about the importance of picking up on time and set an informal action step/goal to assure it will not happen again.

Third Notice

If a parent/guardian is more than 5 minutes late, the teacher/bus driver will review the late pick-up notice form and explain the process that follows. The teacher/bus staff will contact the Family Advocate, who will then contact the family to set more formal goals to ensure they can pick up their child on time.

Final Notice

If a parent/guardian is more than 5 minutes late the teacher/bus driver will review the late pick-up notice form and explain the process that follows. The teacher/bus driver will let the family know that the child cannot return to school and/or bus (depending on the method of pick-up) until the family is contacted by the Family Services Director or the Transportation Coordinator.

Criteria for Enrollment

TCHS serves children ages 0-5 years and expectant families within Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties. There are no organization affiliation requirements. We prioritize serving families who are at or below 100% poverty, McKinney Vento eligible families, foster children, families receiving qualifying SSI, SNAP, or TANF, or children with Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) and/or an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

These are items needed before a child can attend; documentation of eligibility, proof of birth, immunization records, Well Child Exam documentation, signed application, signed health test and release, written packet documentation, child health history, Child Information Card, signed Transportation Agreement, Permission to observe, parental rights of privacy and custody documentation.

Withdrawal from program

Parents/guardians can withdraw their students at any time.

Tri-County Head Start does not withdraw or expel students per the Head Start Performance Standards for any reason, including persistent aggressive behaviors. Every student is provided with the appropriate support and services to address necessary concerns. A student's behavioral difficulties are unlikely to be resolved without intervention and dismissing students from early childhood programs decreases access to such services.

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Determining appropriate intervention requires formal evaluation, including classroom observations by mental health professionals. Evaluation results address preventative strategies and outline the teacher supports and guidance needed to enable the student to learn and display more appropriate classroom behavior. This may require ongoing consultation with mental health and/or special education service providers, both internal and external. For some students, implementing such approaches may require that a classroom aide be assigned to work more closely with the student.

In rare circumstances, when, despite the provision of a well-managed classroom, supplemented by well-implemented behavioral and mental health interventions, a student's aggressive behavior presents a significant threat to their safety and the safety of others, the program may consider an alternative means of serving the student and family. This might include temporarily providing child development services through home visiting as the program works with mental health service providers to identify more intensive services and behavioral supports to enable the student to re-enter and participate successfully in the classroom. Efforts to acquire needed services are carefully documented and done in partnership with the family. In exceptional cases, when recommended by an outside mental health professional serving the student, transitioning to a more intensive program may be necessary. The program works closely with the family to support this transition. (R400.8140(4), NAEYC 1E.1)

Fee Policy

There are no fees to attend Tri-County Head Start.

Custody Matters

It is our goal to always advocate for children. In cases involving child custody, we need a copy of the current parenting time court order. We will support any decisions that have been determined by the court.

To ensure that all parental rights are respected, the following has been established for dealing with custodial arrangements.

- The person(s) with physical custodial rights of the Head Start enrolled student is responsible for listing all persons on the Child Information Card to whom their child may be released and for notifying staff of any changes.
- The most current court order regarding the release of children to a particular parent/legal guardian shall be kept on file at the student's school location.

To learn more about custody, and custody resources, please see the Family Resource Book.

Family Engagement

Families are the cornerstone of Head Start. We believe that parents are the first and best teachers of their children. Families have much to contribute to Head Start including their cultural heritage, family values, and experiences. Head Start serves a diverse population and we do everything possible to assure all families feel comfortable and included. We encourage families to be involved in all aspects of the program and their child's education. The more involved families are, the more their children will achieve. Teachers partner with families to ensure their children get the best preschool education possible!

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Family members have many opportunities to participate in the program. They can:

- Read Aloud in the classroom.
- Volunteer in the classroom (See Volunteer Policy).
- Attend Family Nights, Fantastic Fathers and Families events, and Family Training events, virtually or in person.
- Share ideas about learning that can be used in the classroom and on home visits.
- Participate in TCHS Sub Committees such as Enrollment, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, Attendance (ERSEA), Community Assessment, Self-Assessment, and more. For more information on these committees, please reach out to your Family Advocate or Home Visitor.
- Attend Family Committee Meetings. This is the place to connect with other families in the program.
- Participate in Policy Council which meets monthly. They work with administrative staff to make decisions about the program.

Family Advocates

Tri-County Head Start employs Family Advocates who are ambassadors of our program and champions of our students and families. Their role includes, but is not limited to:

- Forming relationships with families and working with the family to assess areas in need of support through a family strengths assessment and Family Partnership Agreements, a strength-based, goal-setting process
- Referring families to community resources and following up on families' satisfaction with resources to which they have been referred
- Assisting families in meeting all Head Start health requirements
- Promoting regular attendance in school-based and home-based programs
- Recruiting families and completing applications for eligible children

Family Nights

Family Night is all about getting Ready for School – for families and students alike! It is just one of our training opportunities for families. Family Night provides families the opportunities to assist in the development of activities that address their interests and needs and that support the education and healthy development of their children.

- For families of all students participating in School-Based and Home-Based options.
- Includes essential information, training, resources, activities, and a meal.
- Addresses issues specific to each community.
- Provides resources to assist families in working with community organizations.

Family Strengths Assessment & Family Partnership Agreements

An important piece of Head Start programming is to help families reach goals towards personal, family, and professional success. Tri-County Head Start Family Advocates and Home Visitors use the Family Strengths Assessment, a Head Start specific interview and assessment tool, to identify each family's strengths, determine areas needing support, and support families in writing achievable goals for themselves. TCHS staff support families with resources and encouragement on their path to goal achievement. Families are linked to other agencies and organizations offering programs including but not limited to:

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- Housing
- Employment
- Food
- Clothing
- Child Care
- Counseling
- Domestic Violence Assistance
- Education (GED, Diploma, College, Skilled Trades, etc.)
- Family Literacy
- Financial Education (Budgeting, Savings, Banking, Tax Credits, Tax Filing, etc.)
- Health Needs (Finding a doctor, getting insurance, etc.)
- Substance Abuse Assistance
- Utility Payment Assistance

Dual Language Department

The Dual Language Department assists the families in our communities by providing interpretation and translation services on behalf of the agency. The Dual Language Staff becomes a communication bridge between families and staff that may otherwise experience a language barrier. The role of a Dual Language staff member includes but is not limited to:

- Recruiting Families
- Completing applications, registrations, and re-enrollments
- Connecting Dual Language families with resources in their communities
- Assisting families in meeting the Head Start health requirements
- Providing interpretation and translation services during all events held by TCHS; including home visits, parent-teacher conferences, and any form of communication needed
- Providing classroom observations for dual language students to assess their home language development every week
- Partnering with other Community Agencies to ensure that multilingual approaches are being implemented

Fantastic Fathers and Families Events

Tri-County Head Start recognizes the importance of fathers, father figures, and male role models in the lives of children. We support the idea that father engagement means making committed partnerships between staff and the significant males in a child's life and education. Fathers, father figures, and male role models are included and encouraged to participate at all levels of our agency, such as program governance, Skill Builder Kit activities, classroom volunteerism, employment, and other areas. Our philosophy of inclusion of all significant males in a child's life contributes directly to strengthening the foundation of family engagement across our entire program and positive outcomes for the family and child.

Fantastic Fathers and Families events are designed to be an informational and fun evening for children to bond with the male figures in their lives. While all family members are welcome to attend, the evening does

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put an emphasis on the involvement of fathers and father figures and the positive impacts they play on the lives of children. The event embraces the concept of using household items to educate and build relationships with children and other families in the program.

Resource Book

Each family participating in the program receives our Resource Book. The Resource Book contains valuable information on community organizations and services available to families. A few examples are WIC and Michigan State University Extension (nutritional services), Mental Health Services, Domestic Violence resources, services for children with disabilities, and many more. If you need assistance and cannot locate it in the Resource Book, please call our office at 1-800-792-0366.

For additional community resources sign up for Bright by Text for notifications of local resources and events, text SWMICHIGAN to 274448.

Weather and Closures

We keep families informed through the One Call Now system. We use One Call to deliver closure messages to families by telephone, cell phone, e-mail, or in any combination. One Call is used to notify families of any school closings or delays and to send reminders regarding events and other important program information.

This messaging system is kept up to date with our database. Make sure to keep your Family Advocate and/or Teachers informed of any changes so that you will not miss an alert or notification.

When local schools are closed due to weather, our Head Start school location(s) are closed and Head Start home visits are canceled in those areas. Decisions to close for weather, other than when the public schools are closed may occur based on current weather conditions and any other factors that may affect the safety of students and staff.

In the event of an early dismissal based upon weather, illnesses, building issues, power outages, etc. families are notified using the information from the Child Information Card. Every attempt will be made to notify the parent or guardian listed on the card. If a parent or guardian cannot be notified of the early dismissal, the emergency contact numbers will be called.

We also contact local TV regarding delays and closures. Below is a list of stations we notify:

TV Stations

Berrien County – WSBT 22, WNDU 16
Cass County – WWMT 3, WSBT 22, WNDU 16
Van Burren County – WWMT 3, WOOD 8

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Health Services

Accidents/Injury

While we make all attempts to ensure the safety of your child while in our care, occasionally accidents happen. Head Start has staff trained in First Aid and CPR at all school locations by the State of Michigan Licensing Regulations. For a non-emergency illness/injury, parents/guardians will be notified by phone, in writing or in person on the day it occurs. Should your child require immediate medical attention, we will call 911 and then notify you.

Discipline Policy

All Staff and Volunteers adhere to the following Childcare Licensing rule for discipline, R 400.8140 Discipline Rule 140.

- 1) Positive methods of discipline that encourage self-control, self-direction, self-esteem, and cooperation must be used.
- 2) All the following means of punishment are prohibited:
 - a. Hitting, spanking, shaking, biting, pinching, or inflicting other forms of corporal punishment.
 - b. Placing any substances in a child's mouth, including but not limited to, soap, hot sauce, or vinegar.
 - c. Restricting a child's movement by binding or tying him or her.
 - d. Inflicting mental or emotional punishment, such as humiliating, shaming, or threatening a child.
 - e. Depriving a child of meals, snacks, rest, or necessary toilet use.
 - f. Excluding a child from outdoor play or other gross motor activities.
 - g. Excluding a child from daily learning experiences.
 - h. Confining a child in an enclosed area, such as a closet, locked room, box, or similar enclosure.
 - i. Time out must not be used for children under 3 years of age.
- 3) Non-severe and developmentally appropriate discipline or restraint may be used when reasonably necessary, based on a child's development, to prevent a child from harming himself or herself or to prevent a child from harming other persons or property, excluding those forms of punishment prohibited by subrule (2) of this rule.
- 4) A written policy is developed and implemented regarding the age-appropriate, non-severe discipline of children. The policy is provided to staff and parents/guardians.

All Head Start staff adhere to the Michigan Child Care Licensing Rule 400.8140, 140 and meet the expectations by implementing Conscious Discipline, a social-emotional learning program. Calm-down steps are taught and practiced in each classroom and an area of the classroom is set aside as the "Safe Place" for students to use for comfort and relaxation.

If a student is harming themselves or others a safety hold may be used only as a last resort. Conscious Discipline strategies are used first to assist students and are documented. The parent/guardian is notified if a safety hold has been used in the classroom. Safety holds are never used as a form of discipline or control.

Any employee who observes staff, volunteers, or visitors using inappropriate disciplinary practices must report the incident to their supervisor immediately.

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Emergency Procedures

Immediate and appropriate First Aid is given by certified staff at the school or on the bus. For students who require immediate* medical intervention staff will call 911 then notify families, and the Health Services Director or designee at the Head Start Office. If no answer, the Preschool Program Director will provide directions until the Health Services Director or designee can be contacted.¹

Staff will follow all Tri-County Head Start procedures during emergencies. Including notification of Health Services staff, and parent/guardian. If the student needs to go home in an emergency and the families cannot provide transportation, two staff members will transport the student. Students will never be left alone or in the care of someone not listed on the Child Information Card.

If a sick or injured student is taken home, and further care is needed, staff will assist the family in calling a family physician or dentist. If the family does not have a family physician or dentist, or cannot afford private care, they will be instructed how to proceed to obtain the services of a physician, hospital, or dentist.

Staff involved in an emergency will complete the appropriate report and forward it to the Health Services Director.

Staff will follow up with families within 24 hours of an initial injury. (i.e., a phone call or home visit).

Facility Cleaning and Sanitizing Procedures

Tri-County Head Start ensures all schools are clean and sanitary. Staff wear nonporous gloves and clean surfaces initially with paper towels and wash the area thoroughly with soap and water. Surfaces are disinfected using a solution of bleach and water mixed according to sanitation procedure.

Health Exams

Students enrolled in Head Start are required to have a current yearly Well Child Exam to attend; and an initial Dental Exam within 90 days, then every 6 months.

Your child must meet the minimum immunization requirement to attend a Head Start classroom.

The minimum immunization requirements in the State of Michigan are:

- 1-DTaP
- 1-POLIO
- 1-HepB
- 1-MMR at/after 12 months of age
- Varicella at/after 12 months of age or proof of disease
- Completed series of HIB or one at/after 15 months of age.

¹*Immediate Medical Intervention: Loss of consciousness, breathing difficulties, severe bleeding, seizure, neck or back injury, a possible broken bone, or shock.

*Dental Emergency Care: Tooth knocked out baby/ permanent or chipped tooth does not require 911 unless the student became unconscious. Staff will follow the Dental Care Emergency Poster instructions and contact the parent/guardian. We recommend that the student be seen by their dentist in this situation.

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- Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine - 1 dose at or after 24 months of age or an age-appropriate completed series

Immunization (shot) records must be on file at the administrative office for your child to attend a classroom session.

The COVID-19 vaccine is not required to attend our program. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends COVID-19 vaccines for everyone six months and older.

Health Updates

As part of your child's enrollment in Head Start, we ask you to share any new or ongoing health concerns that may arise during the year. Please report any diagnosed or suspected communicable disease(s) your child may have. Our staff will keep you informed of health issues at school locations that may arise during the year that may be of importance to you, your child, and your family.

TCHS continues to follow the recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Michigan Child Care Licensing, and our local health departments. If your child has been exposed to a communicable/transmissible disease or test positive (i.e., flu, COVID-19, etc.), please let your teacher know immediately. We may need to take further steps in our classrooms.

Hygiene

Hand Washing

Hand washing is the most effective way to prevent the spread of germs and illnesses. Students are taught to perform hand washing daily with meals, after toileting, and touching soiled surfaces. Staff and volunteers also wash their hands before meals, after toileting, and after touching soiled surfaces/items.

Tooth Brushing

An essential part of being healthy is having healthy teeth. Poor dental health may cause trouble with eating and/or drinking and may lead to other health/behavioral issues.

During flu season or increased numbers of illnesses due to other circumstances, we may discontinue toothbrushing until we are sure it is safe to resume.

Students need to learn the importance of brushing their teeth. A toothbrush will be sent home for every student, and we ask you to help your children brush their teeth at least one time a day.

Families can learn to "Lift the Lip" check monthly on children's gums and teeth to watch for early signs of decay (chalky white spots, brown spots, or other discoloration).

Illness

The health and safety of all children is a top priority. There are situations in which students should be kept at home so they can rest and feel better. These include:

- If experience symptoms or test positive for COVID-19

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- If your child has a temperature of 100.4 or higher (Children should remain at home until they do not have a fever for 72 hours not using fever-reducing medication)
- If your child is coughing and cannot stop, breathing hard or fast, and/or has a fever.
- If your child has many watery stools (diarrhea “the runs”)
- If your child is vomiting (not explained by other medical conditions i.e., asthma)
- If your child has a rash that is spreading or is accompanied by a fever or scratching.

If your child becomes ill at school with a rash, fever, vomiting, or diarrhea, we will make every attempt to contact you so you can take your child home to provide comfort and rest.

Due to the safety concerns surrounding transferable viruses (i.e., flu, COVID-19, etc.) You will be asked to pick up your child immediately. Have a plan in place if you will not be available to pick up your child.

TCHS students and employees are not required to wear a mask every day. There are circumstances that a classroom or center may have to mask as a requirement by the local health department. The masking timeframe is typically 10 days. This information is subject to change based on guidelines.

If you have any questions about sending your child to school do not hesitate to call and speak with your child’s teacher or a member of our Health Services Team.

Bed Bugs

Occasionally a bed bug may be discovered in one of our classrooms. If a bed bug is found in the classroom the teacher follows the Bed Bug Procedure. Families will receive a letter to inform them of the discovery and the steps that TCHS will do to prevent passing the bed bugs.

Bed Bugs can be very difficult to get rid of. If you need information about bed bugs you may call Tri-County Head Start Health Services or speak to your Family Advocate.

Communicable Disease Procedure

According to the State of Michigan Public Health Code (Public Act 368, of 1978 as amended), the local health department shall be notified of the occurrence of any reportable communicable disease.

Tri-County Head Start follows those guidelines established by the Van Buren/Cass County District Health Department and Berrien County Health Departments for Communicable Childhood Illness for the exclusion of children, employees, and volunteers.

The Health Department provides TCHS with an updated list yearly that we will post to our website tricityhs.org.

If your child or someone in your household has COVID-19 or has been exposed to COVID-19, Tri-County Head Start will follow all local and state reporting procedures, in addition to Childcare licensing procedures. This may include notifying the local Health Department and the designated Childcare Licensing consultant. Please read the Guide to Safe Start for further information.

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Head Lice

Tri-County Head Start follows the recommendations of the Michigan Department of Community Health and the Michigan Department of Education which focuses on the exclusion of active head lice infestations only. Active infestations can be defined as the presence of live lice or nits found within $\frac{1}{4}$ " of the scalp. Nits that are found beyond $\frac{1}{4}$ " of the scalp have more than likely hatched or are no longer viable.

When live lice are discovered on a student, staff will contact a parent/guardian to pick the child up as soon as possible. Staff will provide the parent/guardian with treatment information. Immediate treatment at home is advised. If the parent/guardian cannot be contacted, the staff will continue with emergency numbers until someone is reached who can pick the child up. If contact cannot be made, every attempt will be made to decrease close contact with other students. The student will be re-admitted to school after treatment and examination by staff. If, upon examination, there are NO live lice or nits closer than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the scalp, the student may re-enter the classroom.

Returning to School

If your child is injured at home and you have taken them to the doctor, or the emergency room or they needed some type of surgery, a note is required from the doctor allowing your child to come back to school. Please contact the teacher first, before the student can return to school, to notify them that the child does not have restrictions (special things that must be done to care for an illness or injury). If the doctor has noted restrictions on the return to school note, the teacher will contact Health Services Staff to make sure it is safe for your student to return.

Lead Poisoning

Tri-County Head Start works with each family to assure that their child is safe from lead poisoning. Each family will complete a lead questionnaire at registration, and we ask for parent/guardian consent to perform a lead test on their child if they have not been previously tested for lead. Lead testing requires a finger poke to analyze the blood.

All children should be blood tested for lead at 12 months of age and 24 months of age. Additionally, if a child was not tested for lead between 36 months and 72 months of age, a blood lead test should be performed.

If your child has a lead value of 5 or more, a Tri-County Head Start will contact the local health department. A public health nurse will contact you to provide lead education and support.

Many families live in areas that have been identified as high risk for lead exposure; precautions can be taken to keep children safe and help lower their lead levels.

Medication Procedure

If your child requires medication to be administered at school, please notify your Family Advocate, Home Visitor, or Teacher. They will contact the Health Services Department and the Health Services team will work with you and your child's doctor to set up a schedule for medication administration. Before medications are administered at school, written instructions from your child's doctor are required. Once written instructions

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are received, classroom staff and/or Health Services staff will meet with you to review medication administration and potential emergency plans. Accommodations will be made based on an individual basis.

Non-emergency medication is stored in a lock box out of reach of children. Emergency medication is stored in the classroom out of reach of children. Emergency medication follows the students throughout the day as they transition to different areas of the school campus, including the playground and the bus. (NAEYC 5A.21)

Mental Health

Head Start Mental Health Consultants promote positive mental health, emotional well-being, and resiliency; and as a program, we strive to create conditions where young children and their families have the necessary support system for school readiness success.

Mental Health Consultants post their schedule in each classroom and are available to meet with families upon request. If you have questions, please contact your child's teacher.

Nutrition

The purpose of our nutrition plan is to make mealtime a learning experience for students. We practice family-style meals to mirror the home atmosphere. Students gain health benefits by eating healthy meals in the correct portions, as well as building a variety of language and motor skills.

Head Start provides meals for students based on the USDA Child & Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) guidelines for breakfast, lunch, and/or snacks. Food is never used as a reward or a punishment. Meals are served family style. Staff and volunteers present in the classroom during mealtimes eat with the students. Students will be introduced to a variety of new foods.

In addition to meals provided at our kitchen, Tri-County Head Start partners with several public schools to provide food. The public schools may use other free food programs such as National School Lunch, or the School Breakfast Program. The same quality and Head Start guidelines are followed when using other food service programs.

Families will receive copies of the menu at orientation, and it will be posted in each classroom. Students with special dietary needs will receive meals/snacks in accordance with the child's needs. Food substitutions will only be provided for doctor-diagnosed food allergies/intolerances, in accordance with CACFP guidelines. Tri-County Head Start is responsible for providing food substitutions.

Families of Head Start students can advise Head Start staff of concerns regarding their child's nutrition through the Child History Form completed at the time of application. During the school year, a Nutrition Questionnaire is provided to families, to address any nutrition issues. In addition, families are encouraged to discuss individual concerns with their child's teacher. The teacher can follow up by notifying the Nutrition Consultant, who will then make contact with the family. Nutrition concerns can be communicated one-on-one between the family and the Nutrition Consultant at individual nutrition counseling sessions. If families wish to speak with the Nutrition Consultant directly, they may get the contact information from school staff.

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In accordance with the Michigan food code, and per Health Department regulations, no left-over food or drinks served at TCHS Schools at meals, during Family Nights, etc., may be taken home by families, volunteers, or staff.

Young Athletes Program

Special Olympics Young Athletes is an early childhood play program for children with and without intellectual disabilities, ages 3 to 5. Young Athletes introduce basic sports skills, like running, kicking, and throwing. Young Athletes provides children of all abilities the same opportunities to advance in core developmental milestones. Children learn how to play with others and develop important skills for learning. Children also learn to share, take turns, and follow directions. These skills help children in family, community, and school activities. It is one of the three components of a Unified Champion School partnership with Special Olympics of Michigan.

Non-Discrimination 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, audiotape, 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/USDA-OASCR%20P-Complaint-Form-0508-0002-508-11-28-17Fax2Mail.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:

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

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Food Safety

Due to health concerns including food allergies/sensitivities, we **cannot** allow foods in the classroom which have been prepared outside of our Head Start kitchens/classrooms. Tri-County Head Start understands

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families may wish to bring a special treat to celebrate their child's birthday. Please review the list of allowed items and discuss with your teaching staff what you have selected so they can monitor the treats for food allergies.

Healthy foods to share with friends: granola bars without nuts, fruit bars, fruit cups, prepared Jell-O and pudding cups (only those that do not need refrigeration and do not contain red dye) animal crackers, vanilla wafers, cheese crackers, 100-calorie snack packages.

Recommended foods to keep home: cake/cupcakes, ice cream, cookies, donuts, and snack chips.

Foods that are NOT ALLOWED at Head Start due to Choking Hazards: all candy, popcorn, peanuts, and other nuts, raisins, or dried fruit, unless cooked in food, or any nut butters.

Outdoor Activity Restrictions

Students at Head Start play outside every day, weather permitting. All school staff are required to be on the playground to assure the safety of students. Students at single classroom sites who have medically documented outdoor restrictions; may need to stay home or adjust attendance times to exclude outdoor playtime. At multiple classroom sites, students with medically documented outdoor restrictions may be allowed to stay inside based on medical need, if staffing allows. Health Services staff will work with you and your child's health provider to meet your child's needs.

Special Needs

Children develop quickly during their early years; at times they may need extra support to meet milestones. Every student is initially screened to identify any delays and develop individualized plans to assure the best learning opportunity.

If you have concerns about your child's development, speak with his or her teacher. A Head Start Disability Consultant will contact you to discuss your concerns and ask for permission to observe your child. The Disability Consultant supports families in getting needed services for children who may need additional support.

Disability Consultants work with classroom teachers in lesson planning for students who already have an Individual Education Plan or Individual Family Support Plan. This may include activities in your weekly Skill Builder Kit that provides continued support for your child.

Students who do not qualify for services outside of Head Start will be provided additional strategies to assist their school readiness success.

Transportation Services

Your child's safety is our main concern. Students must be accompanied by a responsible adult to and from the bus stop, or to and from school. Students are only released to a parent or legal guardian or another individual identified on the Child Information Card by the parent or legal guardian. If a person who is listed on the Child Information Card is not familiar to staff, identification will be required. Be sure to carry identification daily to the bus stop in the event there is a substitute driver or monitor.

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General Transportation Information

- If your child is not coming to school, call your school and let us know or send a note the next day with your driver to let us know why your child was absent.
- If you must cross the street to put your child on or off the bus, the driver will signal you when it is safe to cross with the crossing paddle.
- There are DANGER ZONES around the bus that you and your child need to be aware of:
 - Directly in front of the bus
 - Directly behind the bus
 - Ten feet out on both sides of the bus
 - Directly in front of and behind the front and rear wheels
 - Stay away from the DANGER ZONES

Bus Routes

Families at schools that provide transportation are assigned a bus stop. They may go to their assigned stop or provide their own transportation. Enrollment changes cause route changes.

- Only students enrolled in the school location may use Head Start transportation. Family volunteers may be able to ride the bus, depending on available seats.
- Be at the bus stop 5 minutes before pick-up and drop-off times to ensure you do not miss the bus.
- Hold your child's hand to and from the bus stop.
- Assist your child up and down the bus steps. Remind your child to hold the handrail.
- The bus monitor will buckle your child into the seat.
- If your child misses the bus, you may bring them to another bus stop or school.
- When drivers are unable to work or buses break down, you may be asked to provide your own transportation. We make every effort to keep these times to a minimum.

Transportation Concerns

Transportation policies were designed to comply with all state, federal, and childcare licensing laws, and regulations and for the safe and efficient transportation of our students. If you have questions, please talk with your Bus Driver, Teacher, or Transportation Coordinator.

Self-Transportation

- Buckle your child in your car according to Michigan State Law.
- Stay with your child for 15 minutes to help them transition into the classroom and pick up your child 15 minutes before the end of the session to help them transition out of the classroom.
- Use extreme caution in the parking lot and always hold your child's hand.

Volunteer Policy

Tri-County Head Start welcomes family and community volunteers. Tri-County Head Start is required to complete a comprehensive background check on all volunteers. Any individual registered on the public sex offender registry (PSOR) is prohibited from having contact with any child in care.

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Family Volunteers:

One of Head Start's fundamental principles is based on parents being the first and best teachers to their children. Families are considered valued partners in the process of helping children develop to their fullest potential and volunteers are an essential part of that process. Having a special person come to volunteer is very meaningful to each child. Families are asked to participate, when they can, in Head Start activities such as:

- Volunteering at their child's school
- Attending Family Committee meetings, Family Nights, and other Head Start/Early Head Start events
- Participating in Home Visits & Conferences
- Assisting in planning and making activities at home or school
- Completing Skill Builders and weekly individualization calendars
- Reviewing and returning the Family Communication folder weekly
- Participating in socialization activities
- Participating in the Health Services Advisory Committee, the Head Start Policy Council, Family Committee, Location Committee, ERSEA Committee, etc.

Community Volunteers:

Volunteers from the community are welcomed at our schools. Volunteers from the community may:

- Volunteer at a school
- Act as a resource person
- Assist in planning and making activities
- Participate on the Health Services Advisory Committee, the Head Start Policy Council, the School Readiness Committee
- Participate in our annual Self-Assessment

At Tri-County Head Start schools no volunteer is ever alone with students, although parents may assist their own child with toileting. Volunteers, including parents, are supervised by Tri-County Head Start staff at all times.

All volunteers are required to read and sign the Volunteer Code of Conduct. All classroom volunteers will require iChat background checks before they can volunteer.

Regular Volunteers: (four hours per week for more than two consecutive weeks)

Michigan Licensing Regulations state: Evidence that all volunteers who have contact with children at least four hours per week for two consecutive weeks are free from communicable tuberculosis, verified within one year before volunteering, and shall be kept on file at the school. Regular volunteers also require a comprehensive background check, to be completed by Human Resources Department.

The Center Director (CD)/Classroom Program Director (CPD) is responsible for assuring the State of Michigan Child Care Licensing Rules for regular volunteers are met. The CD/CPD is responsible for assuring the required documentation is completed, including application and Tb test results. The CD/CPD is also responsible for community volunteer scheduling and assuring ongoing volunteer training occurs. The CD/CPD is responsible for keeping documentation for regular volunteers in the Center Licensing file.

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Volunteer Training and Development:

All volunteers receive training and development opportunities. The training for volunteers begins during the first home visit when teachers review the Family Handbook. Training is also provided during the open house. School staff provides training via the Volunteer Training Checklist for families and community volunteers. Ongoing training is provided to volunteers as they work with staff in the classroom.

All Head Start families are invited to attend a variety of planned events throughout the year. A variety of activities and training topics are presented. Topics may include mental health, Conscious Discipline, transition, nutrition, etc. Community volunteers are invited to schools throughout the year as resources for families.

Head Start parents/guardians are given the opportunity to run for Policy Council and take an active role in program planning and policies. Policy Council members receive training and information which they share with families during Family Committee meetings.

Volunteers who are interested in working for Head Start are encouraged to apply for open positions within the organization.

What you can do in the classroom

When you are a volunteer in the classroom you can help with a variety of activities. You may be needed to help with an activity, to supervise an area of the room, or to work with an individual student. You can also help by eating lunch with students, joining in group activities, and participating in outdoor play.

Here are some things you can do in the school:

- READ! READ! READ!
- Attend a field trip
- Write a student's name – have them trace it with a finger/pencil.
- Join students while they play. Look for the signs in each area with suggestions for things to say or ask.
- Help with grounds maintenance.

In-Kind/Non-Federal Share

Tri-County Head Start is a 501c3 nonprofit organization funded through a federal grant from the Office of Head Start with a mission to be a vibrant and progressive educational agency in the communities we serve. To remain in compliance with our federal grant we are required to raise an additional \$25 for every \$100 we receive in federal funds. We rely heavily on the support of our volunteers and community partners to meet our Non-Federal share goal. Each year, we need to document approximately 2.6 million dollars of non-federal share. There are so many great ways to get involved at Tri-County Head Start that help us achieve that goal and we hope that you will join us in our mission.

There are several ways to help by volunteering:

- In the classroom
- Skill building with your student
- Riding the bus with your student
- Attending Family Committee Meetings
- Participating in the Policy Council
- Bring your talents to share with the class

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- Office/Clerical duties
- Landscaping projects
- Donating items needed in the classroom

Please contact your student's teacher to volunteer or donate items for the classroom.

Each hour spent volunteering contributes \$15.04 towards our non-federal share goal. Volunteers are the most valuable asset our program has, and we appreciate your support.

Thank you for your contribution to the mission of Tri-County Head Start.

General Information

Code of Conduct

Adult Behavior Expectations Policy

Tri-County Head Start expects all adults to behave in a manner that does not violate the Code of Conduct. Our expectation for adults is to resolve issues, problems, and conflicts in a manner that includes mutual respect among all parties.

Unreasonable and/or disorderly behavior, language, or mannerisms that threaten, intimidate, demean, harass, or provoke employees or families, or are generally considered vulgar or offensive are not acceptable. Violence or threats of violence, either displayed, plainly stated, or implied will not be tolerated.

The Tri-County Head Start Code of Conduct applies to employees, and adult visitors including spouses, boyfriends/girlfriends, relatives, or any other person who may have contact with agency staff in relation to the enrollment of a child or children. Such contact may be at agency locations, on home visits, at bus stops, or in the community while staff and children are engaged in agency-sponsored activities.

Any person, determined by the Health Services Director, to have violated this policy will be personally notified of the violation. They will be reminded of the expectations to follow the Code of Conduct and will be given an Adult Behavior Expectation Notice.

If the inappropriate behavior, language, or situation continues after notification, the Mental Health Consultant will meet with the individual(s) in conflict and develop strategies to ensure compliance with the policy.

If there is a third occurrence, the Director and Policy Council will be notified and will determine if the violator will continue participation in the program.

Incidents of violation of the policy are brought to the attention of the Health Services Director IMMEDIATELY by phoning the Head Start Office at (800) 792-0366 ext. 118 and speaking directly to Health Services Director. Health Services Director will begin the investigative process and document the incident.

The severity of the violation of the Code of Conduct will determine the actions that will be taken.

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Code of Conduct and Professional Ethics Policy

All staff, volunteers, and interns are required at the time of hire or placement to understand and abide by the codes of conduct as outlined in the Federal Head Start Performance Standards. The following standards specify that:

1. I will respect and promote the unique identity of each child and family and refrain from stereotyping or discriminating on any basis, including gender, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or family composition.
2. I will follow program confidentiality policies concerning information about children, families, and other staff members. Confidentiality includes both verbal and written information. I am required to protect this information by safeguarding it when in use, filing it properly when not in use, and discussing it only with those who have a legitimate need to know per Tri-County Head Start Policy Safeguarding Personally Identifiable Information (PII) 140.1.
3. I understand children must be supervised by a Tri-County Head Start staff member at all times and no child shall be left alone or unsupervised while under my care.
4. I will use positive methods of child guidance to support children's well-being and prevent and address challenging behavior.
5. I will not maltreat or endanger the health or safety of children.
6. I will not:
 - i. Use corporal punishment.
 - ii. Use isolation to discipline a child.
 - iii. Bind or tie a child to restrict movement or tape a child's mouth.
 - iv. Use or withhold food as a punishment or reward.
 - v. Use toilet learning/training methods that punish, demean, or humiliate a child.
 - vi. Use any form of emotional abuse, including public or private humiliation, rejecting, terrorizing, extended ignoring, or corrupting a child.
 - vii. Physically abuse a child.
 - viii. Use any form of verbal abuse, including profane, sarcastic language, threats, or derogatory remarks about the child or child's family
 - ix. Use physical activity or outdoor time as a punishment or reward.
 - x. Place substances in a child's mouth, including but not limited to, soap, hot sauce, or vinegar
7. I understand no child should be removed from the presence of staff other than by the child's own parent, guardian, or other authorized person.
8. I will not solicit or accept gratuities, favors, or anything of significant value for personal use or enrichment from contractors/vendors or potential contractors/vendors who have been awarded contracts or provide services or materials for Tri-County Head Start.

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9. I will not determine Head Start eligibility for friends or relatives.
10. I understand I am to immediately report known conduct violations to my supervisor or the appropriate director.
11. I understand that I will maintain professional boundaries with families, volunteers, and other Tri-County Head Start staff members at all times and follow the Tri-County Head Start Adult Behavior Expectation Policy 101.1. 12.
12. I understand I am to report known conduct violations to the Health Services Director, cthomas@tricountyhs.org.

Child Abuse and Neglect

All Tri-County Head Start staff are mandated by the Child Protection Law of Michigan to report to the Department of Human Services any suspected cases of abuse, neglect, child sexual abuse, or sexual exploitation.

Any staff member that suspects the abuse/neglect of a child will immediately make a verbal report to Children's Protective Services at 1 (855) 444-3911. Within 72 hours, a written report will be submitted to Children's Protective Services. This can be reported using Form 3200 located in the indicated RED folder in each classroom and on the Department's website.

The State of Michigan Child Protection Law provides for the protection of children from child abuse and neglect. Child abuse and neglect of children is against the law.

In addition, Licensing Rules for Child Care Centers require a written statement by staff and volunteers at the time of hiring or before volunteering to indicate all of the following information:

- The individual is aware that abuse and neglect of children is against the law.
- The individual has been informed of the school's policies on child abuse and neglect.
- The individual knows that all staff and volunteers are required by law to immediately report suspected abuse and neglect to children's protective services.

Staff and volunteers receive the required child abuse and neglect information at the time of hiring and before volunteering. In addition, all returning staff receive annual training at pre-service and new staff receive training during the new staff training plan.

Licensing and Safety

The safety and security of our students and staff is our main priority. Each staff member has an identification badge that they wear while at school locations. Our schools are always locked. Each school location creates a process for allowing guests and staff members into their building. The process includes determining who the guest is and why they are seeking access. If there is any suspicion about any guest coming into the school, they will not be allowed into the building until their identity can be confirmed. (NAEYC 10B.19 bullet 1)

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Students are only released to the people listed by the parent or guardian on the Child Information Card. Staff will require identification at the school and bus stop if they do not know the person listed on the card. Bus staff checks the Child Information Card for each child at each bus stop before releasing the child. School staff checks the Child Information Card for each child who is picked up from the school before releasing the child. Students' arrival and departure times are documented. Caregivers are required to hold children's hands in our parking lots and at bus stops.

We frequently count students, and we ask that volunteers count with us. No volunteer is ever alone with students. We have two paid staff in every classroom and encourage family and community volunteers to visit at any time. Staff actively supervise children and volunteers at all times.

For the safety of our children and staff, each of our classrooms is equipped with a camera. This allows us to view classroom footage when needed.

Center Licensing

Center/Program Directors: Center/Program Directors have either a BA or AA in Early Childhood Education. In addition, all Program Directors have at least 2 semester hours in childcare administration. Program Directors have current certification in infant, child, and adult CPR, first aid, and blood-borne pathogen training. Program Directors exceed the minimum training requirements annually.

Inspections: Before a school is licensed the following inspections take place

- **Fire Safety:** A Fire Safety Inspection is completed by a qualified fire safety inspector. After the initial license is issued, fire safety inspections occur every 4 years.
- **Environmental Health Inspections:** An environmental health inspection is completed by the local Health Department. After the initial license is issued, environmental health inspections occur every 2 years for schools that do not have public water/sewer or prepare food.
- **Lead Hazard Risk Assessment:** A Lead Hazard Risk Assessment is completed on all structures built before 1978. Any lead hazards identified are addressed as noted in the report.
- **Fuel-fired furnaces/water heaters:** Furnaces and water heaters are inspected by a licensed contractor. After the initial license is issued, they are inspected Every two years.
- **Boilers:** Boilers are inspected by a licensed contractor. After the initial license is issued, they are inspected as required by the State of Michigan parameters. These inspections are done at the state level and occur every 3 years. They schedule them as required by law.
- **Playground:** Playgrounds are inspected and approved by a National Playground Safety Institute Certified Playground Safety Inspector before use by children.
- **Lead Water Testing:** A Lead water test is completed at each TCHS property.

Licensing Notebook Notification

Licensing regulations require that we inform families:

- The school maintains a licensing notebook of all licensing inspection reports, special investigation reports, and all related corrective action plans.

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- The notebook is out and accessible to families for review during regular business hours.
- Licensing inspection and special investigation reports from the past 5 years are available on the Bureau of Children and Adult Licensing website at www.michigan.gov/michildcare.

Quality of Our Schools

Our classrooms are inspected and licensed by the State of Michigan's Licensing and Regulatory Affairs every two years. We consistently meet all regulations for Child Care Centers and the Head Start Performance Standards. We are also required to have Environmental Health and Fire Safety inspections. Staff working in our schools meet the educational requirements and have the experience required by the State of Michigan and Head Start Performance Standards. Our playgrounds have been inspected by a Certified Playground Safety Inspector.

We monitor the quality of our schools with regular visits and inspections throughout the year. We look at the buildings, equipment, activities, and interactions among children, staff, and family members. Children's safety and health are of primary concern and are monitored closely. Be assured that we are providing children and families with a high-quality preschool program.

Air Quality

To maintain good air quality in and around our schools, all Tri-County Head Start grounds are a smoke/vape-free zone. All schools are also No Idling Zones. We ask families and staff to turn off vehicles that are not moving because idling vehicles still create exhaust. The exhaust contributes to the formation of ozone smog and harmful particulate matter that can negatively affect lung growth and development in children. On occasion, a bus may need to idle to warm for a short time before school is dismissed to make it more comfortable for children. This is done with caution and away from buildings and school exits when possible. (NAEYC 5A.25)

Emergency Preparedness Plans

Every Head Start classroom has an Emergency Preparedness Plan and a Crisis Kit. The purpose of the plan is to assist staff in responding to an emergency. Staff are responsible for ensuring the immediate safety of children and will coordinate with local public safety personnel. The Crisis Kit includes items staff may need in the event of a Crisis.

Fire and Tornado Drills

Classroom fire and tornado drills are practiced regularly. Staff, volunteers, and students participate in drills. Students are counted at the beginning of the drill, attendance is taken at the designated evacuation/safe location, and students are counted upon return to the classroom. Fire and tornado drills are also practiced from the bus.

Integrated Pest Management Program

The Tri-County Head Start Integrated Pest Management program ensures that our school locations are routinely inspected and monitored for possible infestations of pests/rodents.

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Locations are inspected monthly when students are not in attendance. Each location has a Rose Pest Management book that documents communication between staff and the technician, including what methods, if any, were used to treat any infestations. (NAEYC 9D.4)

If staff notice a problem, they submit a request using School Dude. The Head Start Administrative Office contacts the pest management company or the person responsible at public school/church locations. Non-chemical methods are used for infestations whenever possible. If pesticides are needed, they are applied when students, staff, and volunteers are not present.

Families are notified in advance through the One Call Now system and a note is sent home. The advance notice includes the target pest or purpose, approximate location, date of the application, school contact information, and the toll-free number for the National Pesticide Information Center. Information is also available on our website: tricountyhs.org

For additional pesticide information, call the National Pesticide Information Center: 1-800-858-7378.

Participant Protection

At no time is any individual permitted to possess any type of weapon, firearm, drug, drug paraphernalia, alcohol, or be under the influence of an illegal substance or alcoholic beverage on any Head Start property. Threatening behavior or swearing will not be tolerated.

Playground Procedures & Outdoor Play

Outdoor activities are planned daily, weather permitting. If the temperature is below 20 degrees or above 90 degrees, we do not go outside. We stay inside and engage students in indoor gross motor activities. Be sure your child dresses for outdoor play.

Pictures, Video, and Cell Phone Policy

The staff at Tri-County Head Start respects every individual's and family's right to privacy. In our commitment to ensure your privacy, we do not allow families or volunteers to photograph/video children. Families may photograph their own children. We obtain parent/guardian permission for Head Start staff to photograph/video students in the classroom for our program materials and staff training.

We require cell phones to be off or the ringer set to vibrate in Head Start classrooms when students are present. If you need to make or return a call, we ask that you leave the classroom.

Sharing of Data and Protections for the Privacy of Child Records in Head Start and Early Head Start

Tri-County Head Start maintains the privacy and confidentiality of records concerning children in our Head Start and Early Head Start programs. TCHS also ensures the availability, usability, integrity, and security of data as per 45 C.F.R. §1302.101(b)(4) and Licensing R400.8143.

These protections cover information recorded in any way, such as print, electronic, or digital means, including media, video, image, or audio format.

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Consistent with our “Need to Know” basis, Tri-County Head Start maintains Child Records in a manner that ensures only parents/guardians, and officials within TCHS or acting on behalf of TCHS have access to Child Records. Accordingly, we keep any paper records containing Personally Identifiable Information (PII) of children under lock and key, and any electronic or online records containing PII are password protected in our data management system. Users of the data management system have unique usernames and passwords, with access to PII of children according to job duties and necessity only.

Annual Notice

Tri-County Head Start requires that all families be notified of their rights about their child’s records, in writing, on an annual basis. This information is signed at the time of the application or re-enrollment and families receive a copy of their PII rights.

If a parent/guardian requests, Tri-County Head Start will allow the parent/guardian to come on-site and review the information in their child’s file. This must occur on-site, and the parent/guardian is not to take any documents, nor can they make copies of anything without completing a request for records.

Storing Files

Tri-County Head Start keeps Child Records in the following places to maintain security: locked paper files in the Child Records File Room, in locked files in the classroom, and a password-protected data management system.

Requests for Files

Any requests made to access Child Information or Child Records are verified and authenticated as necessary before being disclosed to the requesting party. Tri-County Head Start keeps a record of all requests and items being requested from Child Files.

All efforts are made to notify families any time that a request has been made regarding their child’s records if the request was not initiated by the family. In rare circumstances, child records may be shared with entities without the guardian’s consent first. For example, court-ordered sharing, Child Protective Services requests, or during emergencies. Even in these rare circumstances, documentation is kept of the request and all procedures must be followed.

Revoking Privacy Disclosure

Parents/guardians may revoke their consent for Tri-County Head Start to share PII as necessary, at any time. If a parent/guardian revokes consent, revocation is not retroactive. Therefore, it does not apply to any action that occurred before the consent was revoked.