



Tri-County  
Community Action Agency

Head Start  
Early Head Start  
State Pre-K

# Family Handbook

2025-2026



**Tri-County Community Action Agency Main Office**  
1126 Hartford Avenue, Johnston, RI 02919  
Main: 401-351-2750

**Head Start and State Pre-K Site Locations**

<b><u>Northern Region</u></b>			
<b><u>North Providence</u></b>		<b><u>Burrillville</u></b>	<b><u>Johnston</u></b>
7 Rockwell Ave. North Providence, RI 02911	79 Waterman Ave. North Providence, RI 02911	185 Main St. Pascoag, RI 02859	7 Waveland St. Johnston, RI 02919
<i>8:30 AM – 4:30 PM</i>	<i>8:00 AM – 5:30 PM</i>	<i>8:00 AM – 4:30 PM</i>	<i>8:00 AM – 4:30 PM</i>
P: 401-223-2085 F: 401-270-5118	P: 401-232-5444 F: 401-232-7364	P: 401-568-8320 F: 401-567-7979	P: 401-626-3469 F: 401-351-6609

<b><u>Southern Region</u></b>		
<b><u>North Kingstown</u></b>	<b><u>South Kingstown</u></b>	<b><u>Westerly</u></b>
415 Tower Hill Road North Kingstown, RI 02852	1935 Kingstown Road Wakefield, RI 02879	34 Pond Street Westerly, RI 02891
<i>8:30 AM – 4:30 PM</i>	<i>8:30 AM – 4:30 PM</i>	<i>8:00 AM – 4:30 PM</i>
P: 401-667-7151 F: 401-667-7152	P: 401-789-3016 F: 401-515-0036	P: 401-596-3794 F: 401-596-7285

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## A LITTLE ABOUT TRI-COUNTY

We welcome you to Tri-County's early learning programs and hope you have a good year with us. Here is some information we hope you will find useful.

Our vision is to facilitate the development of early care and education environments that recognize, treat and respect all learners as valuable individuals and members of our community.

Tri-County Community Action Agency's Mission Statement is *to empower and create opportunities for vulnerable individuals and families in our community to become socially and economically self-sufficient through integrated social, educational, health, prevention, and other basic needs services.*

It is our philosophy that early childhood education is the foundation for lifelong learning and that child development theory and research drive our beliefs, which include:

- In order for children to thrive, their basic needs must be met.
- Families are the child's first teacher, and that working collaboratively with families to support their child is critical to children's optimal development.
- Children are unique individuals; they move through expectable stages at their own rates and that their interests, learning goals and learning styles are valued and incorporated into daily programming.
- Children can have the opportunity to develop an excess of skills in exploration, self-discovery, self-regulation, social interactions and problem solving among others to set them up for success.
- Children learn through play and active learning experiences; they learn best from personal exploration of their environment through curiosity and discovery.
- The Rhode Island Early Learning Development Standards (RIELDS) and Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (HSELOF), which incorporate the latest research on what children should know and be able to do along a developmental continuum, are at the core of our work with children and families.
- The family is critical to the development of each child and to the program.
- Open communication between family and staff enhances the development of the child.
- We recognize, encourage and appreciate cultural values, differences and traditions.
- We believe in the importance of the child's first language and support a family's use of their home language.
- Ongoing assessment of what children know and are able to do inform curriculum planning and individual instruction.
- Children with different abilities and special needs, including mental health diagnoses and behavioral challenges, can learn alongside their peers when adaptations are made to the environment, curriculum and teaching practices.
- Partnerships with the local community evokes a sense of belonging and awareness for children and their families.
- A well-prepared, professional staff is the key to guiding a child's development and required to continue to develop and refine their professional practice.
- Data from child assessments, internal and external classroom observations and family surveys shall inform program improvement efforts.

Tri-County's early learning programs include Head Start, Early Head Start, RIDE State Pre-K and Extended Day Child Care. These programs receive funds from multiple sources including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, State of RI Head Start Supplemental funds, RIDE State Pre-K funds, and through CCAP or private pay tuition (Extended Day).

Tri-County provides early learning programs to children living in North Providence, Johnston, Smithfield, North Smithfield, Scituate, Foster, Glocester, Burrillville, North Kingstown, South Kingstown, Charlestown, Richmond, Hopkinton, Exeter, Narragansett, Westerly and New Shoreham.

Tri-County's early learning programs attempt to meet the educational, social, health and nutritional needs of children ages birth to 5 years while providing parent education and opportunities for involvement to the child's family.

***Head Start and State Pre-K are free for families.***

- Families interested in **Head Start** qualify based on meeting federal eligibility guidelines including families experiencing homelessness, children residing in foster care, being at or below the Federal Poverty Level, or receiving public assistance. Extended Day services are tuition based.
- Families interested in the **RIDE State Pre-K** program qualify based on having a child who is 4 by September 1st and be a North Providence or a Westerly resident. Enrollment is done through the lottery process. Each year the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) opens up the application process in April. The application may be completed by families on-line through the RIDE website or by hard copy. Applications are available at 79 Waterman Avenue, North Providence or 34 Pond Street, Westerly. The RIDE Pre-K Administrator or designee will enter all paper applications returned to a Pre-K site on the on-line system. Once the lottery is held, the Pre-K Administrator or designee informs families of their initial acceptance. Families are required to meet with staff for the verification/eligibility and enrollment process. At that time verification of income, residency and age occurs. Families are required to provide a bill with name and address to verify residency, a copy of one month's worth of pay stubs, W-2 tax form, a benefit letter and a copy of child's birth certificate or passport. Extended Day services (as available) are tuition based.

Tri-County is committed to building relationships with families and community partners that support family well-being and strong parent-child relationships resulting in children who are healthy and ready for school.

We respect and acknowledge you as your child's primary teacher. We need you to help us learn more about your child and we will share with you some of the ways that we support children in their learning. We are happy to sit down and talk about your interests and how involved you would like to be.

**WHO'S WHO IN OUR PROGRAM**

The **Chief Executive Officer** is responsible for the operation of the entire Community Action Agency.

The **Board of Directors** is comprised of 15 men and women who volunteer their time to the Agency. Tri-County Board members are representative of the communities we serve, and are dedicated to the mission

and values of the organization. Per the Head Start Program Performance Standards, a past or current parent/guardian of a child enrolled in Head Start participates as a member of the Board of Directors.

The **Head Start Director** and **Deputy Head Start Director** are responsible for the overall program operation including program leadership, the Policy Council, and staff supervision.

The **Parents** are their child's first teacher and are considered full partners with the staff in ensuring the best experience possible for the children.

The **Education** and **EHS Coordinators** oversee the education staff, education curriculum, child assessments, and the work that occurs with families and staff to ensure a high-quality early education program.

The **Disabilities Coordinators** help staff and families find resources for children and families with diverse learning needs.

The **Family Development and Support Coordinator** supervises case management staff and provides oversight to the enrollment and mental health components of the program.

The **ERSEA Specialists** are responsible to ensure that recruitment and enrollment of children and families takes place accurately and in a timely fashion.

The **Health Coordinator** and **Health Assistant** are responsible for the health requirements and needs of the clients enrolled in the program.

The **Nutrition Coordinators** are responsible for the nutrition education and the food service operation of the program.

The **Case Managers** are an available resource for each family. They can direct you to helpful resources in the community. They assist each family to establish their family goals and work toward self-sufficiency.

The **Home Visitors** provide child development and advocacy services to pregnant women and families with infants and toddlers who are enrolled in the Early Head Start home-based option of the program.

The **Teaching Teams** provide quality educational and school readiness experiences focusing on the intellectual and emotional wellbeing of children and families.

The **Program Support Coordinator/Specialists** calculate daily attendance and monthly In-Kind, submits reports to USDA regarding meals served, monitors monthly attendance, and supports families in program engagement.

The **Education Coach** works collaboratively with the education staff to develop individualized goals and plans to enhance their environments and teaching practices that supports children's growth and development; improve overall quality of the program.

### **VOLUNTEERING**

Families are the most important people in a child's life. Sharing your interests, time and talents with the program shows your child that you value his/her experiences at Head Start. Your volunteer efforts support Head Start in the form of In-Kind. In-Kind is the cash equivalent to your volunteer time. Every minute that you volunteer counts towards assisting us in reaching a 20% "match" for our federal grant total. Contact your Case Manager/Home Visitor/Teacher if you are interested in doing any kind of volunteer work.

### **CLASSROOM SUBSTITUTE**

If you are interested in becoming a paid substitute, please contact an Education Coordinator or your Case Manager for details.

### **ONE CALL NOW SYSTEM**

Tri-County uses an automated calling system known as One Call Now to notify families of school cancellations, family events and important reminders. It is important that we have all current contact information for your family. This includes home phone numbers and cell phone numbers. Each family can have multiple numbers contacted. Please inform your Case Manager if you need to update your contact information.

### **CLASS DOJO**

ClassDojo is the digital school communication platform used by Tri-County's early learning programs that works to connect staff, students and families in and out of the physical classroom. ClassDojo is used for regular communication between the program and families. Staff share information and activities about curriculum topics, family engagement ideas, community happenings and much more. Families can share activities happening in their home environment that extend the curriculum. Information shared may include photos, videos, and messages. Each family receives instructions on how to create a unique login for their child's ClassDojo account. All families are strongly encouraged to set up their ClassDojo account.

### **EXTENDED DAY SERVICES**

Families requiring extended day services should speak with their case manager. Tri-County offers extended day options on-site and through referral using the Exceed RI website (<https://exceed.ri.gov/>). Extended day services are tuition-based according to the number of hours of care required by the family.

## SNOW POLICY/CLOSINGS

Tri-County is committed to providing consistent services to our children and families. We make every effort to be available to you on inclement weather days. Each of the early learning sites follows the weather advisory for the town in which it is located.

If the public school in your SITE AREA announces a ***delay of one hour***, the Head Start and State Pre-K classrooms are **OPEN** regular hours. If the public school in your SITE AREA announces a ***delay of more than one hour, the part-day Head Start classrooms are closed*** and the ***6-hour classrooms open at 9:00 AM***. If the public school in your SITE AREA announces a ***cancellation***, Head Start and Pre-K are ***CLOSED***. If the public school in your SITE AREA announces an ***early dismissal***, the morning Head Start classrooms complete their session and the six-hour classrooms may close early.

<u>Local School District</u>	<u>Head Start/State Pre-K</u>
1 Hour Delay	Open Regular Hours
1.5 Hour or More Delay	Part-Day Closed   6-Hour Day Open at 9:00 AM
Early Dismissal	Morning Open   6-Hour Day Determined by Site
Closed	Closed

***Extended Day:*** For those families utilizing the extended-day option, Tri-County will use the One-Call-Now system to keep you informed of program delays and closures.

### **PARENT, FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COMPONENT**

Our vision for you is to create an environment of partnership and mutual respect that engages your whole family in all aspects of our program.

We are committed to:

- Support families as the lifelong educators of their child,
- Honor all efforts as families pursue goals,
- Encourage families as advocates and leaders in the community,
- Plan together so that all participants have the opportunity for significant and meaningful involvement in our program,
- Respect your position in making decisions and policies about the nature and operation of our program,
- Support families as learners and offer you an opportunity to participate in parent trainings and receive information about child growth and development,
- Offer you an opportunity to become a paid substitute within the program,
- Develop a comfortable home/school partnership with a focus on school readiness goals,
- Welcome you, at your convenience, to volunteer within the program, and
- Support family engagement in transitions.



We ask you to:

- Work with program staff to engage in necessary referrals for you or your child (ex: other Agency departments/services, Early Intervention, Local School Department, etc.).
- Complete all paperwork requirements mandated by the federal and/or state governments, and
- Help us build an effective family partnership by participating in goal setting, education related activities including: ClassDojo, Parent Meetings, joining Policy Council and attending family events.

### **FAMILY ORIENTATION/OPEN HOUSE**

At Family Orientation and/or Open House, parents will receive written information concerning curriculum, assessment, school year calendar, extended day services, attendance, family conferences and family engagement. Families are provided with a copy of the Family Handbook during Family Orientation, in the mail or during their first home visit.

In addition to the Family Orientation, the program holds an Open House for children and families prior to the first day of school. This will give you and your child the opportunity to visit and explore the classroom and meet the classroom teachers.

### **OPEN DOOR POLICY**

We believe in and practice an “open door” policy. Our program includes a strong emphasis on family engagement and education in all phases of the curriculum. Parents and guardians are encouraged to visit the program. Parents and guardians who plan on visiting on a regular basis must adhere to our volunteer policy.

### **FAMILY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES**

We offer a variety of ways for families to be engaged in their child’s educational experiences. For example: each month a Family/Child Play Date is planned by the classroom staff. Families are invited to join their child in a learning experience that is aligned with one of the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards. Other on-site and community activities are announced with advanced notice, including frequent family training opportunities on topics of interest and a parenting series.

### **STAFF ORIENTATION**

The Staff Handbook is an introduction to policies and procedures of the Tri-County Community Action Agency. Staff is required to read and become familiar with the contents of the Staff Handbook. The program holds a staff orientation as new staff come on board and on an annual basis. During this orientation, staff members participate in the planning and preparation for the upcoming school year. This planning and preparation include: discussion of individual children, IEPs, family relationships, classroom environment, curriculum planning, program protocols, school department collaboration, health and safety, ethical conduct, licensing, and the child abuse and neglect reporting policy among other topics.

## **POLICY COUNCIL**

The Policy Council is a group of parents/guardians and community members who gather each month to make important decisions about the program. The Policy Council works in cooperation and conjunction with the Board of Directors, Chief Executive Officer and Head Start Director. Members are elected annually in November by parents/guardians of currently enrolled children. Members serve one year as part of this decision-making group, but can serve for a maximum of five (5) years. Policy Council members help to keep the early learning programs sensitive to the needs of the families enrolled.

## **PARENT COMMITTEE**

Every parent/guardian is considered a member of the Parent Committee at their Site. The Parent Committee meetings are held monthly and include the Family/Child Playdate. Participants receive information based on a monthly topic related to early learning and development. Staff may participate in Parent Committee meetings to give additional information to parents. Policy Council Members are encouraged to bring general program information from the Policy Council meeting back to the Parent Committee Meeting.

## **Father Engagement**

Tri-County Community Action Agency recognizes each father's needs and interests and supports the National and State Fatherhood Initiatives. These initiatives improve linkages between fathers and the resources they may need. Tri-County offers a variety of activities for children and fathers/father figures in their lives.

## **CELL PHONE USAGE**

Families are asked to refrain from all cell phone use when in the presence of Head Start staff, including drop-off and pick-up time, during home visits, during meetings and/or family events. Parent/child or parent/staff interactions are everyone's priority.

## **PROGRAM EVALUATION**

Each year we ask parents/guardians to help us evaluate our programs in order to improve our services to both you and your children. Participants are encouraged to complete the Program Evaluation survey online as well as participate in the annual Program Self-Assessment.

## **HEALTH COMPONENT**

Tri-County's early learning programs are committed to the health and wellness of each client. In order to assess the health status of each child and determine if any child needs additional health-related treatments and/or services, the Health Coordinator reviews each completed health history, well-child physical exam, dental examination and lab results of each participant. It is essential for all children to remain up-to-date with their medical and dental needs. According to the Rhode Island Early and Periodic

- According to the RI EPSDT Schedule, children must have **hemoglobin lab tests** (ordered by their primary care provider) at the following age:

\*It may be necessary for these tests to be completed more frequently in order to monitor treatment for any abnormal lab results as recommended by your child's primary care provider.

\*It may be necessary for these tests to be completed more frequently in order to monitor treatment for any abnormal lab results as recommended by your child's primary care provider.

***The Health Coordinator and staff ask that families take the primary responsibility in obtaining all required health record documentation.*** Physical and dental forms are available for families to take with them to their provider's office to be completed following their child's exam. These documents can be given to either their child's Teacher, Case Manager or directly to the Health Coordinator/Assistant. Releases of Information are completed for every provider that each child sees in the event that documentation needs to be requested or staff need to communicate with your child's health care provider(s).

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## EMERGENCY MEDICAL PROCEDURES

In the event of a medical emergency, 9-1-1 is called to transport your child and an accompanying staff member to the nearest hospital. In accordance with RI DHS Child Care Licensing Regulations, all staff are certified in CPR and First Aid to support a child until emergency medical responders arrive. The parent/guardian is informed of the emergency immediately after the emergency medical response call is made and instructed to meet the child at the hospital emergency room. If the parent/guardian cannot be contacted, emergency numbers are called. If a child has to be transported to a hospital, all of his/her medical information on file at Tri-County will be released as necessary. Tri-County, in arranging for transfer of a child to the nearest appropriate medical facility for emergency care, is acting as a medium of mercy and is not thereby assuming responsibility.

## EMERGENCY CONTACT/DESIGNATED PICK-UP INFORMATION

During recruitment/enrollment, you will share important contact information that Tri-County needs if an emergency arises. If there are changes in any of your contact information, please contact your Case Manager/Home Visitor immediately.

**PLEASE REMEMBER:** We need accurate emergency telephone numbers for your family and/or neighbors who have permission to take your child home with them when you cannot be reached. Therefore, it is the policy of this program to assist families in updating this information as needed.

In the event that the parent/guardian is the child's sole Emergency Contact, it is the policy of this program to contact RI DCYF in an emergency if the parent is unable to be reached. Parents are strongly encouraged to indicate at least two Emergency Contact names and phone numbers.

## ILLNESS EXCLUSION

The health and well-being of you and your child is important to us! While attendance is very important, PLEASE DO NOT SEND A SICK CHILD TO SCHOOL. If your child presents with signs/symptoms of any illness during the school session, you will be contacted to pick him/her up within 30 minutes between the time of phone contact and the time of your child's pick-up. Your child will be provided with a supervised place to rest away from other children and stay comfortable in the classroom until you arrive to pick-up. Please use the following guidelines to determine when to keep your child home:

- **Fever:** A child should remain home if they have a fever of 100.4° or greater. They can return to school once they have been fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications, such as Tylenol or Motrin.
- **Vomiting:** A child should remain home if they have one or more episodes of vomiting within a 24-hour period. They can return to school once they have been vomit-free for 24 hours without the use of anti-nausea/anti-vomiting medication.
- **Diarrhea:** A child should remain home if they have one or more episodes of diarrhea within a 24-hour period. They can return to school once they have been diarrhea-free for 24 hours without the use of anti-diarrheal medication.

- **Strep Throat:** A child may return to school 24 hours after start of antibiotic treatment AND fever has passed without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- **Respiratory Virus** (diagnosed **COVID-19, Influenza, RSV** or like illness) - A child may return to school 24 hours after symptoms have begun to improve **and** are fever, vomit, and/or diarrhea-free for 24 hours without the use of symptom-relieving medications.
  - The program **recommends** utilizing additional strategies (such as masking) to prevent the spread of the respiratory virus for 5 days after meeting the above criteria.
- **Conjunctivitis/“Pink Eye”:** A child may return to school 24 hours after the treatment has begun.
- **Scabies:** A child may return to school 24 hours after the treatment has begun.
- **Impetigo:** A child may return to school 24 hours after treatment has begun.
- **Ringworm:** A child may return to school 24 hours after treatment has begun.
- **Head Lice:** A child may return to school after an initial medically-approved treatment has been completed.
- Any illness that prevents your child from participating comfortably in classroom activities.
- Any illness that results in a need for care that is greater than the staff can provide without compromising the health and safety of other children.

\*\*\* Tri-County Head Start & State Pre-K reserves the right to request a doctor’s note or additional medical documentation related to illness.\*\*\*

#### ***Statement of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases:***

Children are required to be vaccinated (as age appropriate) according to the Centers for Disease Control’s Schedule of Recommended Immunizations for the diseases listed below. The only exception to this requirement is if a doctor provides a signed medical exemption document (meaning the child will not be immunized for a medical reason) or the parent/guardian meets with the Health Coordinator/Assistant or designee to sign a religious exemption document (meaning the child will not be immunized for a medical reason). In accordance with RI Department of Health (RIDOH) regulations, identification of all illnesses of public health significance, including vaccine-preventable illnesses, are reportable to RIDOH. Exempt students will be immediately excluded from school if there is a risk for vaccine-preventable disease spread present that is traceable to the school environment until either the risk has resolved or those who are able are vaccinated. If an exempt child is diagnosed with one of the diseases listed below, they along with any other unvaccinated individuals will be excluded from school according to the collaborative recommendations of their pediatrician and the RI Department of Health.

- |                                |                             |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ○ Diphtheria                   | ○ Varicella (“Chicken Pox”) |
| ○ Tetanus                      | ○ Rotavirus                 |
| ○ Pertussis (“Whooping Cough”) | ○ Measles                   |
| ○ Polio                        | ○ Mumps                     |
| ○ Hepatitis A                  | ○ Rubella                   |
| ○ Hepatitis B                  | ○ Influenza (annually)      |

## MEDICATION POLICY

It is recommended that when your child is prescribed medication that you ask your child's physician to arrange a dose schedule that does not involve the hours that your child is in class. However, medication will be administered to children during class hours when absolutely necessary. In order to dispense medication, the following guidelines must be met:

- The physician prescribing the medication must complete and provide a signed letter documenting the medication name and dose, instructions for administration and indications for use (reasons why your child needs the medication).
- You must provide a container of the medication that remains at the program, which must be clearly labeled as follows:
  - Child's name
  - The name of the medication
  - The written order from the prescribing physician, outlining the dose, route, and frequency of administration.
  - The name of the prescribing physician
  - The date the prescription was filled
  - The medication's expiration date
- You must review and sign the medication plan completed by the Health Coordinator.
- Staff maintains a medication administration log to document if/when medication is administered.
- Unless otherwise indicated by the prescribing physician, the orders and medication plan expires yearly and must be renewed on an annual basis.
- Medication is kept out of the reach of children at all times.
- Staff will return the medication to you when it is expired, discontinued or at the end of enrollment/program year. It is up to you to appropriately dispose of any unused medication. It is recommended that you contact your pharmacy for those instructions.

## TOOTHBRUSHING POLICY

If your child is enrolled in the Head Start or Early Head Start program option, oral hygiene is part of the daily classroom routine. Classrooms are supplied with child-sized toothbrushes that are replaced monthly and ADA-approved fluoridated toothpaste. Staff facilitate this routine and provide assistance as needed. Children younger than 3 are provided with a grain-of-rice sized amount of toothpaste, and those 3 and older are provided with a pea-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste. In-class oral hygiene will be temporarily suspended in classrooms during times of identified illness outbreaks.

## TOILET TRAINING POLICY

***No child is excluded from the early learning programs due to the fact that they are not toilet trained.*** Diapers, training pants, diaper ointment and wipes are provided by the program. If a child has an allergy or sensitivity to the provided provisions and needs a particular brand, these items will also be provided by the program as long as their need is supported by medical documentation. If your child is not toilet trained when he or she enters the program, a toilet training plan is created cooperatively between teachers and the parent/guardian(s). Formal plans are not developed for children under two years of

age. The purpose of the toilet training plan is to ensure consistency for the child in terms of the toilet-training procedures being used at home and at school (language, reminders, etc.). A meeting takes place with the parent/guardian(s) and the classroom teacher to review and agree on the plan. Program staff provide families with information regarding suggestions for successful toilet training. Staff review the toilet training plan with the parent/guardian(s) on a regular basis.

Children may use the bathroom at any time. A staff member is present whenever a child is in the bathroom. Toileting accidents can and do happen. Staff handle these situations calmly and tactfully. Your child is reassured that “accidents” happen and that it is “not a problem”. Proper facilities for toileting and changing your child are available and are in adherence to RI DHS Child Care Licensing regulations and Caring for Our Children best practices. Staff assist with changing or toileting in a manner that considers a child’s development, self-esteem and autonomy.

### **SMOKE-FREE ENVIRONMENT**

All Tri-County programs and services will be conducted in a smoke-free/vape-free environment in order to promote wellness and maintain a safe, healthy and efficient work and learning environment for its staff, children and families. Smoke-free refers to all forms of tobacco, nicotine and cannabis products consumed by smoking or non-smoking means such as cigarettes, cigars, pipes, e-cigarettes, vapes, snuff, chewing tobacco, edibles, etc. No use of such products is permitted within the facilities or on Tri-County Community Action Agency property at any time. This includes classrooms, staff offices, kitchens, restrooms, parent/staff meeting rooms, hallways, cars/vans, parking lots, outdoor play spaces and adjacent sidewalks. This policy applies to all employees, parents, contractors, volunteers, and visitors.

There is to be no use of tobacco products by staff or parent/guardian(s) on virtual or in-person encounters with staff, such as on home visits, meetings, program sponsored family activities, etc.

Copies of this policy are distributed to all employees at staff orientation and will be posted in all early learning facilities. “No Smoking/Vaping” signs are posted at all building entrances and throughout the buildings.

The success of this policy depends upon the thoughtfulness, consideration, and cooperation of smokers and non-smokers. All employees shall share in the responsibility for adhering to and enforcing the policy. Anyone who smokes, and would like to participate in smoking-cessation programs, should contact the Health Coordinator.

### **NUTRITION COMPONENT**

Breakfast, lunch and snack are provided daily to enrolled children ages 18 months to 5 years depending on their program option. The Nutrition Coordinator monitors the nutritional health of every child and conducts trainings focusing on providing nutritious meals and snacks.

Tri-County participates in the CACFP program. The foods provided to the children follow the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Guidelines. These USDA guidelines limit the amount of sugar,

salt and fat while providing plenty of fruits, vegetables, grains and fiber. Children are encouraged to try all foods, but are never forced to eat.

Children with dietary modifications are accommodated according to their special dietary needs. If the dietary modification is medical in nature (such as with a food allergy or sensitivity), supporting medical documentation must be obtained. If the parent/guardian does not have a medical statement completed by the Primary Care Provider, the program will not be able to make the appropriate menu substitutions. Religious or philosophical dietary modifications do not require supporting documentation.

Meals are prepared and delivered to each location by a licensed caterer under safe food handling procedures. Meals are served by staff trained in Food Safety procedures. Teachers use mealtime as a time to learn and socialize. All meals are “family style”, meaning that children participate in setting up, serving themselves and cleaning up. Staff sit and eat with the children during meal times. Families receive a monthly menu.

The Nutrition Coordinator reviews the children’s height, weight, hemoglobin and lead levels. In addition, the Nutrition Coordinator reviews the Nutrition Questionnaire that parents have completed during the family orientation process. In the case of pregnant women, the Nutrition Questionnaire is reviewed to ensure appropriate nutritional intake for the mother and developing fetus. Based on the above information, a Nutrition Assessment is completed on a yearly basis (within 90 days of enrollment). The results of the Nutrition Assessment are shared with parents.

### **FOOD POLICY SUMMARY**

- Tri-County Community Action Agency’s early learning classrooms are ***nut-free environments***.
- **No food (commercially packaged or “home-cooked”) may be brought into school from the home setting.**
- No food may be cooked on-site by any staff person unless that staff person is certified in food safety and handling.
- Staff members are aware of all reported food allergies and dietary modifications in the classroom.
- Documentation of food allergies and dietary modifications must be posted in the classrooms and medical documentation readily available.

### **EDUCATION COMPONENT**

There are two program options in the Head Start program. In the center-based option, children attend the center in a part-day setting (3 ½ hours) or a full-day setting (6 hours). Extended Day services are available until 5:30p.m. at the Waterman Avenue site in North Providence. There are two program options in the Early Head Start program. Parents may select a center-based or home-based option. In the center-based option, children attend the center 5 days per week for 6 hours each day. The State Pre-K program is in session 5 days per week for 6 hours per day.

In the Early Head Start home-based option, a Home Visitor provides weekly home visits. The Home Visitor shares developmentally appropriate activities for you and your child to enjoy together using the



Parents as Teachers curriculum. Prenatal clients receive information on their developing child and upcoming delivery using the same curriculum. In addition, parents and children are required to participate in group socialization experiences as scheduled. These activities are planned cooperatively with you and are held at your local Head Start site or locations within the community.

Toys/Personal belongings: The early learning programs have a variety of materials for children to play and explore with at school. To prevent personal belongings and toys from being lost or broken, please leave all toys/personal belongings at home.

### **FIRST SIX WEEKS**

The first six weeks of school set the foundation for a successful year by establishing a positive and supportive learning environment. During these weeks and throughout the year, teachers will implement effective practices and practical strategies using Conscious Discipline's The First Six Weeks curriculum, along with the beginning of the year studies from Creative Curriculum and Boston Public Schools. Teachers will teach the children skills they will need to be successful-from sitting in a circle, to resolving conflicts, to washing their hands. During this time, teachers set high expectations, believe that every child can reach them and works with every child to be successful!

### **CLASSROOM CURRICULUM**

The curriculum used in the Head Start program for preschool children is the Creative Curriculum. This research-based curriculum emphasizes that children's individual goals are based on a developmental continuum of 38 learning objectives. These objectives are aligned with the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (HSELOF) and the Rhode Island Early Learning Development Standards (RIELDS). You can visit [www.rields.com](http://www.rields.com) for a copy of the RIELDS and the Family Fun Activities. The overall Framework was designed to address how children develop and learn. It emphasizes the significance of the environment in the process of learning and the role of the teachers and family. The Creative Curriculum places a high priority on creating a classroom environment where children experiment, explore, and pursue their own interests through studies and investigations, commonly known as active learning. The curriculum is aligned with the child assessment tool, Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG), and is inclusive of all learners. The curriculum also supports English language development for dual language learners.

The curriculum used in the Early Head Start program is the Creative Curriculum for Infants, Toddlers and Twos: Third Edition. In the infant/toddler option, the curriculum is based on five domains of learning including cognitive, fine motor, gross motor, language and personal-social development. The curriculum focuses on responsive care while incorporating objectives that enable teachers to focus on what matters most for each individual child in their care. Each volume helps teachers plan and implement various aspects of caring for and teaching children from birth to 3.

The primary curriculum used in the State Pre-K classrooms is the Boston Public School (BPS): Focus on 4's. BPS: Focus on 4's is a comprehensive, integrated curriculum that supports children's development across all 9 domains of the RI Early Learning and Development Standards (RIELDS) through child-driven

and teacher-guided learning experiences. Additionally, the classrooms use the supplemental curriculums, Heggerty for literacy and Building Blocks for math.

### **CHILD ASSESSMENT**

Developmental assessments utilizing Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG), are conducted throughout the program year for children enrolled in the early learning programs. TSG is a research based, formative assessment tool that is based on widely held expectations for children birth through third grade. Child assessment data is gathered through classroom observations and also includes input from families about their child's strengths, interests and learning style. Ongoing assessment is used to establish children's individual goals for school readiness, guides curriculum and contributes to instruction. The data gathered through assessment is shared with families during Family Conferences. These meetings occur three times during the year (fall, winter and spring) at Early Head Start home visits and twice per year (winter and spring in Head Start. Staff receive annual training on the use of the tool. Additionally, staff are required to complete the TSG on-line reliability modules. Staff discuss quality, quantity and accuracy of data, as well as how assessment information is used to support children's learning during ongoing supervision meetings.

In the RIDE State Pre-K program, the program, staff also conduct summative assessments twice per year using the RIDE required Cognitive ToyBox tool and will include your child's assessment data as part of the RI Department of Education Data Outcomes for the purposes of federal reporting and to document progress of children participating in the program.

### **CONSCIOUS DISCIPLINE**

Conscious Discipline is an innovative social-emotional learning and classroom management program based on brain research. Conscious Discipline gives children a voice and empowers them with the ability to achieve behavioral goals. To learn more about Conscious Discipline, visit <https://www.consciousdiscipline.com>.

### **ACTIVE LEARNING**

In order for active learning to take place, the following must be present:

- Family engagement in the curriculum through the completion of monthly Home Sweet Homework pages, Curriculum Activity pages, Home Links pages, and Family Curriculum Input sheets,
- Time for children to choose their own activities,
- Support from adults and friends to help the child to think about his/her actions, and
- An environment that is conducive to all types of learning.

Our ultimate goal for children is the development of a positive self-concept, social skills and school readiness. Children learn to get along cooperatively in the world with others as they explore and complete activities they have developed in partnership with their Teachers and parents.

## **CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT**

The program provides for learning experiences that promote the growth of the whole child. The classroom consists of materials that are carefully selected to promote “hands-on” learning. The classroom is organized into a number of learning centers. In each center, materials are chosen to meet the interest and developmental needs of the children enrolled. Children can access the materials in the centers easily and put them away independently. Young children need an environment that allows them a variety of opportunities to make choices and direct their own learning. Children need time to explore and experiment as a foundation to organize and understand concepts.

## **USE OF TECHNOLOGY**

Tri-County’s early learning programs limit screen time to 30 minutes a week per child. Technology is used to extend learning in the classroom and to integrate and enrich the curriculum.

## **FAMILY CONFERENCES & HOME VISITS**

Parents/Guardians are provided a variety of opportunities to meet with their child’s teachers to discuss progress and concerns. Families enrolled in the RIDE State Pre-K program receive one home visit at the beginning of the school year. In Early Head Start, teachers visit with families at least three (3) times per year to share information about each child’s classroom experiences, discuss assessment data, and set goals for ongoing success. In Head Start, at least two home visits and two family conferences are scheduled and held each year to discuss your child’s academic progress. We encourage parents/guardians to communicate with staff as needed, whenever you have questions or information to share. You can reach the teachers before the children arrive or after the children have left for the day.

## **SCHEDULE OF DAILY ACTIVITIES (Example)**

8:30- 12:00	Arrival/Greeting, Breakfast, Large Group, Small Group, Choice Time, Read Aloud
12:00-2:30	Lunch, Rest, Choice Time and Dismissal (6 hour day or longer)

A detailed copy of the Daily Schedule can be found in each classroom and on ClassDojo.

## **SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN**

Children enrolled in the program are properly supervised at all times by sight and by sound. The staff to child ratio takes into consideration the appropriate supervision of children to ensure their overall safety and well-being. Each classroom and playground space will have a minimum of two (2) paid staff members present at all times.

## REST TIME

Children attending the full day, 6-hour classroom or the Extended Day program have a scheduled rest time. Each child's resting cot is labeled with his/her name. The program provides sheets and blankets that are stored in a child's individual plastic tote. The blankets, sheets and cots are laundered at least once per week or when soiled. Children are never forced to sleep or stay on their cot. If a child does not fall asleep after 15-20 minutes, staff offer a quiet activity.

## PLAYGROUND USE/WEATHER SAFETY

Outdoor play is an important part of our daily curriculum. Children go outside everyday unless there is active precipitation or a weather/air quality advisory is in place. Please send your child to school each day with the appropriate type of clothing (boots, snowsuits, hats and mittens in winter; breathable fabrics, sun hats and closed toe/heel shoes in summer). Sunscreen should be applied to children at home, prior to their school day. **If children are well enough to come to school, they are well enough to participate in outside play.** Teachers will ask parents/guardians to send an extra change of clothes to keep in the classroom.

## CLEANING & SANITIZING

There is a cleaning and sanitizing schedule posted in the each classroom that is consistent with the recommendations from Caring for Our Children. The classroom, bathrooms, common areas and outdoor space are maintained daily.

## CELEBRATIONS

It is the policy of Tri-County's early learning programs to refrain from celebrating holidays (Halloween, Christmas, Valentine, St. Patrick's Day and Easter). As the holidays approach, we ask that you do not send in cards, food or gifts in the classrooms or building. Instead of holiday celebrations, staff focus on celebrating child/family achievements. It is of equal importance to celebrate a first tooth, a favorite story, the birth of a sibling, moving to a new house, or the first snowflake of the season. Birthdays are acknowledged in the classroom setting in different ways by the classroom community.

We believe that the specific teaching of a cultural or religious belief is a parent's responsibility. We encourage families to share their cultural traditions in our diverse community in many ways including classroom volunteer efforts, sharing a book or a song, or sharing cultural clothing and artifacts.

## NEWSLETTERS/CALENDARS

We publish a monthly newsletter and calendar. The calendar includes the dates of current happenings such as Parent/Child Play Dates, Parent Meetings, Policy Council, dates that the program is closed and much more. The newsletter includes a note from your child's teachers, information on community events, health, safety and nutrition ideas, and favorite books. The calendar and newsletter is posted on the parent board in your child's classroom and on ClassDojo.

## **SCHOOL READINESS**

It is the goal of the program to ensure that children transition to Kindergarten prepared and ready to learn. The early learning programs have developed a School Readiness Plan, with family input, for all children enrolled in Early Head Start, Head Start, and State Pre-K. School Readiness goals are part of this plan and are updated annually to ensure proper planning for children and families as they transition from Early Head Start to Head Start and from Head Start/State Pre-K to Kindergarten.

## **HOME LINKS**

RIDE State Pre-K classrooms participate in Home Links, a tool to connect families to classroom curriculum, school and activities. These interactive activities are easy to do and are based on what the children are learning in their classroom. A Home Links activity sheet is sent home each week. Families and children are encouraged to read each night and to choose 3 activities over the course of the week. Children return their sheet to school and talk to their peers and teaches about what they worked on during the week with their family.

## **PHOTOGRAPHS**

Parents may take photographs of their own child/children on Tri-County property but are strictly prohibited from photographing other children. Photographs or videos of groups of children or staff may not be posted on social media sites. Parents should not send staff photos/videos of their children in a potentially medically compromised condition.

## **BILINGUAL POLICY**

Every effort is made to assess a participant's and their family's primary language upon intake. This information is obtained from the application and/or home visit interview. Program staff use interpreting services when needed and/or requested by the family.

Every effort is made to place children needing assistance with English translations in classrooms with bilingual staff. The child's Teacher tailors the classroom curriculum to meet the needs of each child. It is not the Teacher's goal to "teach the child English". It is however, the Teacher's goal to validate the language the child is currently using and to extend/add English to it wherever and whenever possible.

## **ARRIVAL/DISMISSAL POLICY**

It is the goal of Tri-County Community Action Agency to ensure the safety and well-being of each child and family served. In order to accomplish this, we find it necessary to adhere to certain program rules that encourage safe and responsible actions.

Your child's classroom session begins and ends at specific times. Teachers plan many exciting educational experiences for the children and arriving late takes away from your child receiving the most out of their day. Late dismissal prohibits staff from accomplishing their job responsibilities once the children leave.

You will bring your child to the drop-off checkpoint where a staff member will transition them to the classroom. At the end of the day, your child must be signed out and a staff member must be made aware that your child is leaving.

**In accordance with RI DHS Child Care Licensing Regulations, it is required that you sign your child in each day using the classroom sign-in system. It is required that all people dropping off/picking up a child that are not the parent/guardian must be 18 years or older. If the person transporting from Tri-County's facility is not 18 years old or older, we will not release the child. In addition, the following policies/procedures must be followed:**

- **The person signing your child in must provide their FIRST and LAST name.**
- **A pick-up person must also be indicated with their FIRST and LAST name.**
- **All individuals participating in the drop-off or pick-up of a child MUST appear on the child's emergency information sheet, located in the child's file and first aid emergency backpack.**
- **The person MUST show a photo ID when picking the child up.**

In the event that an emergency call-in by the parent/guardian takes place, the identity of the parent/guardian is verified using a security code chosen by the parent/guardian at enrollment. No child is released based on a phone call alone unless the security code is verbalized. If the parent/guardian is calling to report a change in pick up and that said parent is under duress, it is strongly recommended that the parent/guardian give the wrong security code. Staff will utilize predetermined questions for the parent/guardian to verify the security code. If the security code is stated incorrectly a second time, the staff member will alert the proper authorities. The child is not released until the police arrive at the school and give consent for the release. If these policies/procedures are not followed, the child IS NOT released.

In the event that the parent is the child's sole Emergency Contact, it is the policy of this program to contact RI DCYF in an emergency if the parent is unreachable. Parents are strongly encouraged to indicate at least two Emergency Contact names.

**PLEASE REMEMBER:** We need accurate emergency contact information at all times. Therefore, it is the policy of this program to assist families in updating this information on an annual basis. If there are changes in any information including custody or restraining orders, please contact your Case Manager/Home Visitor immediately.

### **ATTENDANCE/ABSENTEEISM PROTOCOL**

Your child's daily attendance is very important. Please make sure that your child attends their assigned schedule, unless they are experiencing signs/symptoms of illness.

If your child is going to be absent, please contact your child's classroom site within 1 hour of class time to alert staff of any absences along with the reason for the absence. In accordance with Head Start Program Performance Standards, a staff member will complete a wellness check at your home if you have not confirmed your child's absence for two consecutive days.

Chronic absenteeism or missed visits in the home-based option will result in a letter being sent to your family inquiring about your continued program interest and may result in a family meeting and/or your child's slot being considered vacant. Families who are chronically absent or tardy for school are required to complete an Attendance/Tardiness Success Goal Plan.

**RIDE State Pre-K:** Enrolled children are required to regularly attend the full school day for the RIDE State Pre-Kindergarten program in order to maintain their enrollment slot. Once a child is absent, late (20 minutes from the start of the school day) or leaves early (20 minutes before the end of the school day) for more than 5 days due to unexcused absences, an identified staff member will follow up with the family to discuss the absences. Staff will continue to monitor the child's attendance and if the child appears to be chronically absent, a staff member will work with the family to determine a solution. If a solution cannot be attained, the staff member will tell the family that the State Pre-K program policy states that a child must regularly attend Pre-K in order to maintain their enrollment slot. State policy further delineates that if the child continues to miss school for unexcused reasons, and has been out for 20 or more school days, the child will lose his/her State Pre-K slot and another child's family will be offered the slot.

Excused absences are:

- Illness\*
- Quarantine under the direction of federal, state, municipal or program health professional,
- Appointments for Health Maintenance (ex: medical, dental, optometric or chiropractic),
- Funeral services for a member of the immediate family, or
- Observance of a religious holiday or ceremony.

\*Tri-County Head Start & State Pre-K reserves the right to request a doctor's note or additional medical documentation related to illness.

All other reasons for absence (i.e. overslept, family vacation, travel plans, lack of transportation) are deemed unexcused.

## **SAFETY/SECURITY POLICIES**

Tri-County has implemented a security system at all sites to ensure the safety of children, families, and staff. Systems may involve the use of a security "chip" or a coded keypad system. In the case of the security "chip", each family is expected to place a refundable deposit for a security chip at the beginning of the program year to gain access into the centers. It is imperative that this security chip is utilized to enter the center. In order to ensure the safety of all children and staff, access to the building is gained only by using your chip. At the end of the program year, participants will receive a refund of their deposit when the security chip is returned. It is a requirement of the program that parents/guardians do not open the doors for anyone. Staff members will respond to identify visitors and provide entrance to buildings as appropriate.

## **TRANSPORTATION POLICY**

Tri-County does not provide transportation to the early learning programs. We work with families who lack transportation to explore their options. Staff encourage families to abide by RI laws concerning vehicle safety for all children.

It is against all safety guidelines to leave any child unattended in a car. If Tri-County is aware of this practice by any Parent/Guardian, we talk with the Parent/Guardian individually and immediately. We are mandated to report this act to the local police and the child welfare agency (DCYF). In addition, RI general law states that all children under the age of 8, are less than 4 feet 9 inches and less than 80 pounds must use a federally approved child restraint system (Car Seat or Booster Seat) in the back seat of the vehicle. All infants and toddlers under the age of two or weighing less than thirty pounds must be restrained in a rear-facing car seat. In addition, it is a Rhode Island Law that all persons riding in a motor vehicle wear seat belts at all times. If you are in need of a car/booster seat, see your Case Manager/Home Visitor for available resources.

## **PEDESTRIAN AND CAR SEAT SAFETY INFORMATION**

Parents receive information about Pedestrian and Car Seat Safety. This information encourages healthy practices that prevent injury. The Car Seat Safety information includes the State of RI Child Restraint Law (RIGL 31-22-22). Parents receive assistance if necessary to ensure that their vehicle has the appropriate child restraint system. Some tips to follow when teaching children about pedestrian safety are:

- Young children are not able to recognize a dangerous situation. Be sure to hold their hand in parking lots and when crossing the street.
- Understand and obey traffic signals and signs.
- Cross the street at corners, using traffic signals and crosswalks.
- Before crossing the street, look left-right and left again. Cross when the street is clear, and keep looking both ways while crossing.
- Walk, don't run, across the street.
- Walk facing traffic, on sidewalks or paths.

Some tips to follow about Car Seat Safety are:

- Air bags can save your life, but they can seriously hurt or kill infants and children. Your lap is never a safe place for children of any age to ride.
- Birth-2 years: Your child under age 2 should always ride in a rear-facing car seat. There are different types of rear-facing car seats:
  - Infant-only seats can only be used rear-facing (birth – age 1),
  - Convertible and all-in-one car seats typically have higher height and weight limits for the rear-facing position, allowing you to keep your child rear-facing for a longer period of time (birth – age 2).
- Keep your child rear-facing as long as possible. It's the best way to keep him or her safe. Your child should remain in a rear-facing car seat until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit



allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the rear-facing car seat, your child is ready to travel in a forward-facing car seat with a harness and tether.

- 3-8 years: Keep your child in a forward-facing car seat with a harness and tether until he or she reaches the top height or weight limit allowed by your car seat's manufacturer. Once your child outgrows the forward-facing car seat with a harness, it's time to travel in a booster seat, but still in the back seat.

## **DIVERSE LEARNERS**

The Disabilities component focuses on assisting parents/guardians and staff in finding the best way for each child to learn through his/her strengths. An initial developmental and behavioral screening is completed on every child. In the preschool options, the Disabilities Coordinator works with local Child Outreach programs to schedule an on-site developmental screening for each child. All screenings are conducted within the first 45 days of the child's start date. Screening is a "quick look" at the child's skills. Hearing, vision, speech and language, large and small muscle development, cognitive reasoning, social/emotional development and self-help skills are part of the screening process. In the birth-3 option, the Disabilities Coordinator, teachers, case managers, and home visitors work with parents/guardians, Early Intervention program and specialists (if relevant). The ASQ-3 is used as a developmental screening for Early Head Start. The DECA tool is used for the Social/Emotional screening in Early Head Start.

Each child's individual needs are addressed through their natural play experiences inside and outside of the classroom. Should you and/or your child's Teacher suspect that your child may need special services through Early Intervention or the local school department, the staff is available to support you throughout the referral process on behalf of your child. If you have any questions and/or concerns, please contact your child's Teacher, Home Visitor or Case Manager, the Education or Disabilities Coordinator.

## **TRANSITIONING INTO EARLY HEAD START**

When a child begins their placement in the Early Head Start home-based option, the assigned Home Visitor will place an introductory phone call to the family to set-up their first home visit.

Children entering the Early Head Start center-based option receive one home visit prior to their start date along with an opportunity to visit the classroom. These preliminary interactions allow each toddler, their family and classroom Teachers the time to meet one another and facilitate a smoother transition into the classroom.

## **TRANSITIONING TO PRE-SCHOOL**

For those children enrolled in our Early Head Start program, transition planning begins with the Teaching Team, Home Visitor, Case Manager, parents/ guardians, and the child at least six (6) months prior to that child turning three. During those 6 months, activities designed to make each child's transition as successful as possible are planned. Activities may include sharing developmental

information, visiting the new classroom, and having a joint home visit with current and new teachers. RI DHS Child Care Licensing Regulations require that children leave the infant/toddler classroom setting when they turn three. Eligibility for the Head Start is determined at this time. If the Head Start program is at full capacity, the child may be placed on a waiting list until an opening is available in the appropriate eligibility category.

For many children, their Pre-K experience may be their first time away from home. To assist families in making this transition as smooth as possible, the following activities are planned: parent/guardians are invited to Open House, children receive a post card from their teacher, teachers assist parents in establishing a routine such as waving good-bye at the window or “buddying” them up with a peer. Parents/guardians are encouraged to call the site to find out about their child’s progress.

Throughout the day a number of transitions occur. To prepare children for these transition teachers have ongoing conversations where they provide verbal and nonverbal cues before the transition and teach children the expectations for the routine. After the transition they provide positive attention or feedback to the children following a smooth transition.

### **TRANSITIONING TO KINDERGARTEN**

Conversations for children who will be transitioning to kindergarten are ongoing throughout the year. Parents/guardians receive information about the required documents for the kindergarten registration process. Staff distribute information about kindergarten registration dates and times for each community. Parents/guardians receive information from the Health Coordinator that contains health needs (physical/dental exams, lab work, immunizations, screenings) that may be due prior to entering kindergarten, a list of immunizations required to enter kindergarten and an immunization schedule chart. Transitioning children to kindergarten includes discussions, sharing Kindergarten registration information, a visit to the school to complete registration papers, and attendance at your local school’s Kindergarten orientation and Open House. Please let us know if you have any questions about going to kindergarten.

### **MAINTENANCE**

A contracted cleaning company cleans the classroom and buildings each day. Maintenance staff are available as needed to assist with general maintenance and repairs of the classroom, playground, and facility.

### **RESTRAINING ORDER POLICY**

A copy of any current restraining or custody order is kept in your child’s file at all times. Therefore, it is imperative that you supply Tri-County with the appropriate copies. If we do not possess a copy of these, and the party listed on the order comes to the Center, legally, he/she may have the right to have contact

with your child. PLEASE be sure to supply us with all appropriate documentation to ensure the safety of your child/children.

### USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

Parents are encouraged to use social media sites sensitively. These sites should not provide an opportunity to discuss issues about children and families enrolled in the program. Photographs of groups of children or staff may not be posted on social media sites. You are strongly encouraged to communicate verbally with program staff any time you have a question or concern.

### POSITIVE GUIDANCE

Children in our program are to be treated in a positive and reassuring manner. Staff encourages appropriate behaviors through positive recognition. When staff address children, it is done in a quiet voice and on the children's level. Staff use positive approaches to help children feel respected and heard.

Teachers plan ahead to avoid challenging behaviors. The rules and limits are clear and consistent for children. Redirecting children is encouraged. Teachers may consult with a child's parent/guardian, Case Manager, and/or appropriate Coordinators if challenging behaviors persists or escalates.

Assurance to parents: At no time does a staff member use extreme punishment.

Staff is prohibited from:

- Using corporal punishment,
- Subjecting a child to severe or cruel punishment, humiliation or verbal abuse,
- Denying food as a form of punishment,
- Punishing a child for soiling or wetting themselves, or
- Isolating the child as a method of discipline.

### CHILD ABUSE POLICY

The State of Rhode Island requires that suspected cases of child abuse and/or neglect be reported to the Department for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). Failure to do so will result in a hearing, a fine for the staff person and/or possible loss of license for Tri-County Community Action Agency.

***Rhode Island Law states that it is the responsibility of all persons to report suspicions of abuse and neglect.*** It is not the responsibility of the staff to determine if abuse or neglect has occurred. Tri-County's Head Start component staff does not undertake the responsibility, on their own, to treat cases of a child's abuse and/or neglect.

Abuse is defined in four basic ways:

- \* Physical Abuse is when bruises, burns, broken bones, etc. appearing on the child presents substantial risk of harm to the child.
- \* Emotional Abuse is repeated name-calling, scapegoating, and put-downs.

- \* Neglect: the lack of basic adequate attention to the home, food, clothing, health care and personal hygiene of the child.
- \* Sexual Abuse is the penetration, inappropriate touching and/or exploitation of a minor. This also includes exposure to sexual imagery.

All staff members are considered Mandated Reporters and are provided with training on Child Abuse and Neglect policies. Staff are responsible for carefully documenting and monitoring any cases of suspected child abuse and/or neglect. All suspected cases are reported to the child's case manager, staff member's direct supervisor, the Family Development & Support Coordinator and the Head Start Director and/or Deputy Director immediately. Parents are notified about calls to DCYF at the discretion of the program or by directive from DCYF. The purpose of this protocol is to protect children and to prevent further neglect or abuse. Parent awareness of abuse and/or neglect policies is introduced at recruitment and is reviewed throughout the year.

- \* Note: DCYF has the authority to interview any child without the parent's consent or presence. Staff makes every effort to be with the child during this interview for support; but it cannot be guaranteed due to DCYF policy and RI State Laws.

The Sexual Offenders Registration and Notification Act (Megan's Law) requires Tri-County CAA to provide a list of children enrolled in the Head Start program as well as their addresses to the local Police Department. This list enables the police to provide your family with notifications if a Sexual Offender were to move into the vicinity of your child's Head Start center.

### **FAMILY DEVELOPMENT COMPONENT**

The Family Development component serves as a link between the family, the program, and the community.

Each family enrolled in one of the early learning programs has a Case Manager/Home Visitor that provides support and assistance as needed. Case Managers/Home Visitors provide guidance and resources necessary to assist families in reaching or maintaining their goals. In Head Start, Case Managers conduct at least three home visits per year. These visits are scheduled with the family at a time that is most convenient. Home Visitors complete weekly home visits with families enrolled in the Early Head Start home-based option.

Case Managers/Home Visitors are on Site daily and serve as a link to other members of the program such as Administrators, Teachers, and Coordinators. If you need any type of assistance, please contact your Case Manager/Home Visitor. If he/she is unavailable, please contact the Family Development and Support Coordinator.

### **FAMILY SUPPORT COMPONENT**

Our goal for family support services is to emphasize the importance of good self-esteem and positive attitudes in order to promote overall social competence. The major focus of this effort is to assist families

in working through issues they may be struggling with and to provide the appropriate family support services.

These services focus on the following:

- Promoting positive self-esteem in children, as well as parents and staff,
- Teaching individuals about how a child grows and develops emotionally,
- Assisting individuals in dealing with stress,
- Assisting individuals with any personal issues they may be having (relationship problems, a death in the family, divorce, illness, child discipline issues, substance use and recovery), and
- Assisting individuals in finding the community support services and mental health services they need.

### **FAMILY RESOURCES AVAILABLE**

Tri County offers programs to assist with all aspects of life including, health, behavioral health, dental/oral health, employment and training, adult, youth and early childhood education, emergency services, nutrition, energy and conservation, youth opportunity and prevention programs and senior services. See Case Manager for additional resource information and/or visit our website at [www.tricountyri.org](http://www.tricountyri.org).

### **NOTICE OF PRIVACY PRACTICES**

Federal law requires that Tri-County Community Action Agency provide clients with a copy of the Agency's Notice of Privacy Practices policy. This law mandates that we protect the privacy of health information that identifies, or can be used to identify, a client. This information is called "Protected Health Information" ("PHI"). The Notice of Privacy Practices describes your rights as our client, and our obligations regarding the use and disclosure of your protected health information.

Tri-County Community Action Agency reserves the right to make changes to this Notice and to make such changes effective for all protected health information we may already have about you. If and when this Notice is changed, a copy will be posted at each Site in a prominent location and this document was mailed to each family at the time of recruitment.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Information concerning individuals or families is considered confidential and is not discussed or otherwise passed on to any individuals who are not authorized to release or obtain such information. This includes verbal (facsimiles/fax, written messages, computer related activities (email, screen visibility, billing reports).

Any breach of confidentiality is investigated and may result in suspension, dismissal, termination of contract, and/or legal action.

Furthermore, we may be required by State Law to report that an individual and/or family is, or could be, at risk. This information is treated with great caution and will be reported to the appropriate agency.

Information contained in a child's record shall be privileged and confidential. Tri-County does not distribute or release information in a participant's record to anyone not directly related to implementing the program plan for the child without written consent of the child's parent/guardian. Tri-County notifies the individual or his/her parent/guardian if a record is subpoenaed.

The participant and/or child's parent/guardian has, upon written request to the Head Start Director, access to theirs or their child's record at reasonable times. Tri-County has established procedures governing access to, duplication of, and dissemination of such information, and maintains a permanent, written log in each record indicating any persons to whom information contained in a record has been released. However, if information is obtained by Tri-County that an individual and/or family is in danger or at risk, this information is released to the proper authorities, without the participant's or parent's/guardian's written consent.

### **PARENTS' RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Mutual respect between staff and families is the primary goal of program relations. Through on-going communication, Tri-County attempts to work closely with each participant to provide the best possible program for them and their families.

### **ADULT CODE OF CONDUCT**

While participating in the Tri-County early learning programs, all parents/guardians, volunteers and visitors are expected to obey the following guidelines:

- Use language appropriate for young children to hear and refrain from discussing topics that are inappropriate for young children.
- Address challenging behaviors of their own children in a positive way.
- Direct all behavioral concerns regarding other children to staff immediately.
- Any disagreements or problems with other parents/guardians, visitors, volunteers or a staff member will be addressed in private and with respect and follow agency policy regarding disagreements or concerns.

We recognize that parents are a child's first teacher and we encourage family engagement at all levels. Tri-County staff have the right to exclude any persons (family, friends, and community members) at any event who are non-compliant with program policies or protocols.

## **REPORTS TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS**

Staff regularly report to parents/guardians about their child's progress and participation. For children with diverse learning needs, staff actively participates in collaborative planning for a child. This may involve the parent/guardian and other service providers. Program staff bring information pertaining to a child's challenges or significant developments to the parent/guardian's attention as soon as they arise.

## **TRANSFER/RELEASE OF RECORDS**

Upon written request from the parents/guardians, Tri-County transfers/releases the child's record to the parents/guardians, or any other person the parent/guardian identifies, when the child is no longer in our care. However, we will only release the information that is ours to release. Tri-County cannot re-release information obtained from other Agencies regardless of participant or parental/guardian written permission. The program requires a minimum of 48 hours to comply with this request. Conversations pertaining to custodial arrangements are dealt with on an individual basis.

## **COMMUNICATING WITH STAFF**

Communicating with staff is important. Program staff are available at the centers during drop-off and pick-up, by telephone, Class Dojo and through scheduled meeting times. Staff have access to Agency supported email and have voicemail on which messages can be left throughout the day. Email and voicemail are checked periodically throughout the work day as time allows. Staff communicate information regarding a child to the primary client only. Communication occurs during normal business hours.

## **SHARING INFORMATION**

Notwithstanding 102CMR 7.05(19), upon request of an employee, authorized by the Director and involved in the regulatory process, Tri-County makes available to the Office of Head Start or State of Rhode Island any information required to be kept and maintained under these regulations and any other information reasonably related to the requirements of these regulations. Authorized employees of the Office of Head Start or State of Rhode Island will maintain the confidentiality of individual records.

## **COPIES OF REGULATIONS**

Program regulations are available on the internet by searching:

- Head Start Program Performance Standards
- Rhode Island Department of Education
- Rhode Island Department of Human Services Child Care Licensing Regulation

*We are a Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) CECE Approved State Pre-K in North Providence and Westerly.*

*We participate in the Rhode Island Bright Stars Quality Rating System (QRS).*

*We are an early learning program licensed by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services.*