



2025–2026 Family Handbook

Strengthening families since 1965.



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MISSION:

Our mission is to prepare children and their families for school through collaborative approaches to high-quality education, health, and social services.

VISION:

All children and families will be successful lifelong learners.

VALUES:

Respect • Integrity • Positive Outlook • Responsibility
Equality • Accessibility

STRATEGIES:

- Providing comprehensive, collaborative community-based programs
- Strengthening families by focusing on building resilience through individualized programming
- Serving families in a trusting and welcoming environment
- Working with families to provide lifelong learning and leadership opportunities
- Recognizing the inherent dignity and value of each family and individual
- Being knowledgeable, flexible, compassionate, and leading by example

Program-wide expectations: “Be Your Best”



Message from the Director

Welcome to the 2025–2026 Head Start Program Year!

Dear Families,

We are so excited to welcome you to the new school year! This year is extra special as we celebrate 60 years of Head Start. Our program was one of the original pilot programs, launching in the summer of 1965 as part of Project Head Start. We are proud to carry that legacy forward with you and your children.

What's Ahead This Year

The 2025–2026 year will be filled with exciting growth and meaningful opportunities for our children, families, and staff. Here are just a few things we're looking forward to:

Expanded Infant & Toddler Services

We're growing! This year, we're expanding our care and learning programs for our youngest children, to support early development right from the start.

Conscious Discipline Across Our Program

We're integrating Conscious Discipline in all areas—from classroom strategies, including teacher coaching, to parenting tips at home. This approach fosters emotional intelligence, healthy relationships, and positive behavior through connection and understanding.

Family Involvement: Your Voice Matters!

We believe that strong family partnerships create strong foundations for children's success.

This year, we invite you to get involved in any of the following ways:

- Menu Planning & Farm to School Committee
- Health & Mental Health Services Advisory Committee
- School Readiness Committee

Additionally, each center has its own Center Committee—a welcoming place to meet other families, participate in activities, and help build a positive community.

We'll also host:

- Events for **male caregivers**
- Special "pop-up" **family events**
- **Policy Council**, our family advisory board where families and staff collaborate on program decisions.

Whether you're new or returning, there are many ways to share your voice and make a difference!

Stay Informed and Connected

We're committed to clear and consistent communication with families. Here's how you can stay up-to-date:

- **Sign up for Go Engage** using your cell phone number or email to receive program updates quickly and conveniently
- **Follow us on social media**
 - Facebook (program page and your child's classroom private group)
 - Instagram
 - LinkedIn
- **Download the ReadyRosie app** for quick, practical videos and tips to support your child's learning at home.

We're Here for You

We can't wait to partner with you this year! If you ever have questions or ideas, please don't hesitate to reach out. Thank you for being part of our Head Start family. Here's to a joyful, successful year ahead!

Warmly,

Rebecca Bishop Ware

Director of Early Childhood Services



Bennington County Head Start / Early Head Start Locations

Mailing Address for Program Centers: PO Box 588, Bennington, VT 05201

Bennington & North Bennington Head Start Centers:

Hours: Monday–Thursday 7:30am–4:30pm | Fridays 7:30am–3pm

Please attend only your registered hours of enrollment.

North Bennington Campus:

2 Park Street
North Bennington, VT 05257
(802) 442-3686

Emergency Evacuation Location:

St. John the Baptist Church
3 Houghton Lane, N. Bennington



Park Street Center

Fax (802) 447-3423

Emergency #
(802) 379-0689



West Street Center

Fax (802) 442-0227

Emergency #
(802) 379-2478



Pownal Center

Monday–Thursday 7:30am–4pm
Fridays: 7:30am–3pm
97 Schoolhouse Rd, Pownal 05261
(802) 442-3686 ext. 180
Fax # (802) 823-4031

Emergency #
(802) 823-4031

Emergency Evacuation Location:

Pownal Valley Fire Department
2872 N. Pownal Rd, Pownal



*Spring Center

655 Gage St
Bennington, VT 05201
(802) 442-3686
Fax # (802) 445-4005

Emergency #
(802) 430-9272

Emergency Evacuation Location:

Cora B. Whitney Senior Center
814 Gage Street, Bennington, VT



UCS Infant/Toddler Center

Monday–Thursday 7:30am–4pm
Fridays: 7:30am–3pm
100 Ledge Hill Drive
Bennington, VT 05201
(802) 442-3686 ext. 258
Fax # (802) 442-3363

Emergency #
(802) 442-5491

Emergency Evacuation Location:

Mission Lane
2 Blackberry Lane Bennington, VT

Partnership Locations



Forever Friends Playschool

1735 East Road
Bennington, VT 05201
(802) 447-8843
Fax # (801) 672-7952



Myers Prouty Children's Campus

Monument Center
1 Monument Circle
Bennington, VT 05201
(802) 681-7539
Fax # (802) 447-2412



Oak Hill Children's Center

72 Schoolhouse Road
Pownal, VT 05262
(802) 823-7839
Fax # (802) 823-7837

Community Numbers At-a-Glance

Bennington County Care Assoc. (BCCCA) ..	(802) 447-6936
Bennington County Court House	(802) 447-2700
Bennington Police Department	(802) 442-1030
BROC (Food/Housing/Fuel)	(802) 447-7515
DCF/Economic Services	1-800-479-6151
Family Court	(802) 447-2729
Green Mountain Express	(802) 447-0477
Hospital (SVMC)	(802) 442-6361
Legal Aid	1-800-639-8857
Police, Fire, Ambulance (Emergency)	911
Poison Control	1-800-222-1222
United Counseling Service (UCS)	(802) 442-5491
Vermont State Police	(802) 442-5421
Vermont 211 (Housing)	211
Voc. Rehab	(802) 447-2780
VT Dept. of Child Care Licensing	1-800-649-2624
WIC (Food)	(802) 447-3531

Enrollment and Operations

Bennington County Head Start/Early Head Start

Bennington County Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS) has been serving families in Bennington County since 1965. We offer a comprehensive program that strives to meet the needs of the whole family. HS/EHS must adhere to Federal Standards and the Vermont State Child Care Licensing Regulations, which are posted at each center and can be found online at: <http://www.state.vt.us/srs/childcare/license.htm>. Copies are also available by calling 1-800-649-2624. Any staff member or manager can assist you with questions or concerns as well.

Complaint Procedure:

It is the policy of Bennington County Head Start/Early Head Start to deliver services in a professional and high-quality manner and that services be of sufficient quality to meet the needs of those receiving services. If you have a complaint including, but not limited to, any of the following: denial of services; dissatisfaction with any aspect of services; amount of services; timeliness of services; dissatisfaction with staff, OR accessibility of services, you can obtain a form for this purpose which is available at each Head Start Center or call (802) 442-3686, or UCS at (802) 442-5491.

USDA Nondiscrimination Statement:

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

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

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

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

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

Parent Fees & Policy at all HS/EHS Centers:

- **Head Start hours are 8:30am–12:00pm**
- **Early Head Start hours are 8:30am–3:00pm**

If your child is enrolled in the full day/full year program, please be aware and knowledgeable of the payment and late fee policy.

Payment Policy:

It is essential that childcare fees be paid promptly at the beginning of each week. Payment is due on Monday for the week to follow; never for childcare already received. Checks or money orders should be made out to United Children's Services. ***Credit /debit cards and auto-pay options are also available.*** If fees become more than 5 days past due and you have not spoken with the Family & Community Partnership Manager childcare services may discontinue immediately. Payment is due regardless of actual attendance. If your child does not attend, the program is reserving their slot and program expenses are the same.

Late Fee Policy:

If for any reason (accidents, hospitalizations, sickness) you anticipate being late to pick up your child from childcare, you need to call and let your child's teacher know how late you will be. Our program has a "3 strike" policy, so if your child is picked up past their own scheduled pick-up time, you will first have a verbal warning that there will be a **\$5.00 per 15-minute charge per child**; the second time it happens, you will receive a written letter advising of the policy and a reminder that the third incident will result in the implementation of the late fee. The late fee must be paid by the end of the month to ensure uninterrupted childcare. If there are excessive late pick-ups after closing, your pickup time may be changed to an earlier time. Please be considerate of the teachers and their families and be sure that your child is picked up on time.

Child Care Financial Assistance (Subsidy):

- **Please call Bennington County Child Care Association (BCCCA) at (802) 442-0052 for assistance.**
- **It is your responsibility to keep your certificate current.**
- **You may be billed for childcare hours that you attend that the subsidy does not cover.**

Whenever you receive paperwork from BCCCA, please fill it out and return it immediately so the staff has time to process it ***before*** your certificate expires. The Admissions Assistant or your Family Support Worker is also available to answer any questions about subsidies and paperwork to assist you.

Enrollment & Operations

Enrollment/Classroom Assignment: Children are assigned to classrooms and teachers in accordance with the needs of the children, appropriateness of classroom curriculum and dynamic, available space, and other relevant factors.

- **Children with special needs** enrolled in the program are placed among the classrooms and sites based on individual needs.
- **Before assignment of children to classes**, a component team discusses children's needs for special services. Consideration must be given to the total make-up of the class, determining placement after the initial IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meeting.
- At any time, **program staff will work with parents to evaluate and reassign** a child's classroom placement if necessary, and with the approval of the Director.

Safe Release of Children:

Anyone who picks up children must be on the emergency contact form. This person will be required to have a photo ID to show before your child can be released, and they must be at least 17 years old. If there is an emergency and you must call Head Start/Early Head Start, the alternate person will still need to have ID to pick up your child.

Parking Lots: PLEASE ** DRIVE SLOWLY **

Obey school bus laws. Park only in designated drop-off areas—never in loading zones or handicap spaces unless you have the proper handicap tags or permission to use a load/unload zone. Hold your child's hand while in the parking lot. Always turn off your car when you exit, even if it's only for a minute.

Emergency Closing Policy for Head Start/Early Head Start Centers:

In case of inclement weather, the centers may close, delay opening to 9:30am, or dismiss early. You are responsible for being aware of snow/ emergency closed days. School closings are announced on local radio stations, and television channels 6, 10, and 13, and will also be posted to our Facebook page and sent out to families via GoEngage.

Facilities:

Our buildings are inspected quarterly, with classrooms and playgrounds checked daily for safety. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is also done periodically and as needed by a professional service to eradicate pests safely.

Lead Water Testing:

Vermont schools and childcares are required to lead test water faucets that are used for cooking, drinking, and brushing teeth. Families are notified of post-test results. Results and more information can be found at <https://leadresults.vermont.gov>

Holiday Policy:

Head Start/Early Head Start staff and families strive to include all children and families; to treat individuals equally; and to realize, respect and allow for other people's differences and beliefs. We do not celebrate holidays, including costumes, presents, cards, or food in the classrooms.

How to Obtain a Birth Certificate:

The Bennington Town Clerk, located at 205 South Street, will have a birth certificate on file if:

1. The child was born in Bennington, or
2. The parents resided in Bennington at the time of the birth, but the birth took place elsewhere in Vermont. The cost for each certified copy is \$10.00 and uncertified copies are \$1.00. Just come by the office with the name and date of birth and you'll be able to get the birth certificate immediately. If your child was not born in Bennington and you did not reside in Bennington, contact the Town Clerk in the town and state in which you resided when your child was born to get a copy of the birth certificate.

Attendance / Absenteeism:

Attendance / Absenteeism:

Parents are expected to call the attendance line at (802) 442-3686, ext. 137 directly by 8:30 a.m. if their child will not be attending that day or if the child will be arriving after 9:30 a.m. and provide the reason for the absence or tardiness, including disease diagnosis or symptoms if your child is sick. If we do not hear from you, your child will be marked “absent”, and you will receive a call later in the morning. If a child has been absent for two consecutive days and Head Start has not been able to contact the parent or guardian, we are required to conduct a home visit to make sure everyone is safe.

Attendance is directly related to school success. We are required to maintain at least 85% monthly attendance. If your child is also enrolled in the Pre-K Program, doctors’ notes and excused absence forms are required. Two weeks’ notice is required to terminate enrollment, and if your child does not attend for two weeks without notification, a letter may be sent ending enrollment and returning your child’s status to the waitlist.

Health & Safety

Your child’s health and safety are the most essential building blocks for early learning.

Substance Use Policy:

All Head Start/Early Head Start centers, property (including the busses) and sponsored events, are substance free. This policy applies to staff, families, and visitors, and includes personal vehicles on Head Start/Early Head Start properties. Substances include tobacco products, tobacco substitutes, alcohol, cannabis, and illegal drugs. Staff members who complete home visits will not smoke in children’s homes and will ask parents to refrain from smoking in the room where the child and home visitors are working for the duration of the visit.

DUI Policy:

If a child’s family member or emergency contact comes to pick up a child and appears to be under the influence, we will not immediately release the child.

We will:

- Offer a ride to the person and child.
- Offer to call an emergency contact to come pick them up.
- Call the police if the person refuses a ride and insists on taking the child: the staff member will inform this person that a call will be made informing the police of the condition of the driver and their license plate number.

In accordance with Child Development Division Child Care Licensing Regulation 5.10.1.15, Head Start/Early Head Start does not tolerate any threats or verbal or physical abuse from parents. According to Child Development Division Child Care Licensing Regulation 5.10.1.15, Head Start/Early Head Start does not tolerate any threats or verbal or physical abuse from early learning.

Firearms/Weapons Free Policy:

Head Start/Early Head Start facilities are firearm-and weapon-free. This extends to Head Start/Early Head Start sponsored events and activities held off-site.

Physicals:

Up to date well-care is required by the state because it’s so important! If your child does not have an up-to-date child visit on record within 45 days, your child may be excluded from care until they are brought up to date. Your child needs physical exams on time while they are enrolled to stay as healthy as possible. All health records are kept in a confidential online database.

Dental Care:

An exam in a dental office is required for every child older than 12 months. We brush teeth daily to prevent cavities, and support brushing at home. Children with consent receive dental screenings,

fluoride varnish to strengthen tooth enamel, and SDF to slow decay through our dental hygienist.

Vaccinations:

Vermont childcares report vaccinations to the state. For any child who is missing any required immunizations by December, we notify you in writing of the need to bring your child up to date.

If your child does not have the required vaccinations by the required date, your child can be excluded from care until they do. Head Start also requires that children be up to date for Hepatitis A and influenza to be considered “up to date”.

We ask that all children be fully vaccinated to protect our community from diseases that can potentially result in lasting harm. If there is a case of a vaccine-preventable disease in a center, all children in that center who are unvaccinated may be required to isolate at home for three weeks or longer.

Chronic health issues that impact learning:

Head Start/Early Head Start requires that every child have follow-up care for problems that can make it difficult for that child to learn. These include:

Blood levels: High lead (>3.5), or low hemoglobin (anemia), can cause poor attention span, chronic tiredness, or difficulty learning. These tests are typically completed when a child is one and two years old.

Hearing: If a hearing screening was not completed by your child's doctor our health staff will do this within 45 days of enrollment. If your child does not pass the hearing screening, they will be screened again in 2–4 weeks. If they do not pass the second screening, they should be taken to their doctor to find out if there is an issue with the middle ear, and the doctor's instructions should be followed. After any ear problem is resolved, the child will be screened again or be referred to a specialist.

Vision: If your child's vision is not screened by your child's doctor, our health staff will do this within 45 days of enrollment. If your child does not pass the vision screening, they will be referred to an eye doctor. Currently the closest providers that will see children are Advanced Eye Care (802) 447-8700 in Bennington; or Central Vermont Eye Care (802) 775-0038 in Rutland.

Contagious disease:

Please contact us if your child is kept at home because of illness and provide specific symptoms. For instance, “my child has a fever of 100.4,” not “my child is sick”. Consistent attendance improves academic success, but we are sensitive to the spread of illness in your child's classroom.

If your child arrives at school but later feels sick and needs to go home, we will call you to pick them up. We call emergency contacts if we cannot reach you. We would like your child to be picked up within 30 minutes.

When to Keep Your Child Home from School

For the health and safety of all children and staff, please keep your child home if they are experiencing any of the following:

- **Fever:** Oral temperature over 100.3°F without the use of fever-reducing medications such as Tylenol (acetaminophen) or ibuprofen.
- **Diarrhea:** Watery, frequent, painful, or uncontained diarrhea.
- **Vomiting:** Repeated episodes of vomiting.
- **Drainage or Infection:** Thick or discolored drainage from the ears, eyes, or nose; or any skin infection or rash with discharge.



- **Influenza:** If diagnosed with the flu, your child should remain home for at least 3 days or until fever-free without medication—whichever is longer.
- **Severe Discomfort or Pain:** Headache, body aches, or other pain preventing participation without one-on-one support.
- **Persistent Cough:** A very frequent or disruptive cough that interferes with daily activities.
- **Breathing Difficulties:** Any signs of labored or difficult breathing.
- **Physician-Advised Absence:** Any condition for which a doctor has advised your child remain home.
For example:
- **Strep Throat:** Must be treated with prescribed antibiotics for at least 24 hours before returning.

Injuries, Head Lice, and Medication Guidelines

Injuries

Children are naturally active and curious—especially in a group care setting—so occasional bumps and bruises are expected. If your child is injured while at school, we will inform you as soon as possible and let you know what happened and what care was provided. If you have any questions or concerns about an injury, please speak directly with your child's teacher or the site manager. If your child has a visible injury when arriving at school, **please inform the teacher at drop-off** so we are aware and can provide the best care.

Head Lice

Head lice are a common issue in early childhood programs. Our goal is to prevent the spread while supporting families through the treatment process.

Prevention Tips:

- Keep your child's hair short or securely tied back in a ponytail or braid every day.
- Perform regular lice checks at home, especially if there's been a known case at your site.

If Nits Are Found (Lice Eggs):

- Treat your child's hair using a doctor-approved lice shampoo (such as Nix).
- Carefully remove all visible nits each day under a bright light.
- Dispose of removed eggs in rubbing alcohol or in a sealed container that can be taken out of the house.

If Live Lice are Found at School:

- We will contact you immediately.
- Your child must be treated with a lice-killing shampoo before returning unless your doctor recommends another product.

Pediatrician-Recommended Lice Treatment Plan:

- Ask your child's doctor to prescribe Nix (covered by most insurance plans).
- Before applying Nix:
- Wash your child's hair with shampoo that does not contain conditioner.
- Towel dry so hair is damp—not wet.
- Apply Nix, let it dry, and leave it in overnight (this goes beyond package instructions but may be more effective).
- Rinse in the morning.
- Do not re-wash or condition for at least 24 hours after treatment.
- Clean all bedding, hats, scarves, coats, combs, and hair ties in hot water and dry on high heat.
- Daily nit-picking is essential—spend at least 10 minutes per day.
- Nits farther than the width of your finger from the scalp are likely dead but can be removed to avoid confusion.
- Repeat full treatment every 7 days, for several weeks, with your doctor's guidance.

- Do not use mayonnaise or oils—lice cannot be smothered, and these may interfere with treatment.

If lice persist after 2–3 treatment cycles, ask your doctor about 5% permethrin. Let them know if you've been buying treatments out-of-pocket, as this affects insurance coverage.

Medications

To ensure safety, all medications must be managed by a trained staff member and follow strict policies.

Key Guidelines:

- All medications must be handed directly to the site's medication designee by an adult.
- Children may not carry medicine in their backpack or transport it themselves.
- Medication cannot be administered until it is reviewed and approved by the medication designee.

Required Documentation:

We need written authorization from both the child's parent/guardian and the prescribing provider. When possible, bring a doctor's note with:

- Your child's full name
- Medication name
- Dosage instructions

Reason for use

For children with asthma, seizures, or severe allergies, we prefer a **standardized Action Plan** from your child's provider. Please request one if you don't already have it.

Storage & Transportation:

Whenever possible, request duplicate containers from your child's doctor or pharmacy so one can remain at school.

Medications cannot travel back and forth between home and school unless approved in advance. If you cannot bring medication in person, contact:

- Grace (Health Manager) at (802) 442-3686 ext. 129
- Ally (Health Coordinator) at (802) 442-3686 ext. 462

Medication Packaging Requirements:

- Prescription medications must be in the original pharmacy-labeled container.
- Over-the-counter medications must be in the original packaging.
- We cannot accept expired medications.

Additional Notes:

- New or adjusted medications must be started at home at least 24 hours before being given at school to monitor for side effects or allergic reactions.
- Rescue medications (e.g., for seizures, anaphylaxis, or diabetes) may be required to be on-site. If your child rides the bus, these medications cannot be transported daily.
- We do not administer:
 - » Over-the-counter cold or cough medications
 - » Homemade or herbal remedies
 - » Any medicine that can safely be given at home

Outdoor Play:

Please send children in appropriate footwear (sneakers most of the time; boots for cold or muddy weather) and clothing for playing outdoors!! All Head Start classrooms play outside every day unless it's bad weather, too hot (over 90 with heat index), or too cold (under 15 with wind chill).

May–September, children over six months old wear sunscreen. In the summer, we use bug spray with DEET in it to decrease the chance of children getting Lyme disease or West Nile Virus.

Transportation to Medical Appointments:

If your child has Medicaid or Dr. Dynasaur, transportation via the Green Mountain van to medical or dental appointments is a free service to Medicaid providers, if you have a confirmed need. Call Green Mountain Express at (802)447-0477 at least 48 hours ahead.

In special circumstances, staff can assist with transportation to healthcare appointments.

Meals:

Bennington County Head Start and Early Head Start provide nutritious meals and snacks through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). All meals meet the nutritional needs of young children and are **provided at no cost to families**.

Meal Preparation:

- **North Bennington, Spring Center, and the UCS Infant Toddler Center:** Meals are freshly prepared by our cooks.
- **Pownal Head Start:** Breakfast and lunch are provided by the elementary school; snacks are prepared by classroom staff.
- **For Children Under 18 Months:** We only serve foods your child has already tried at home. Please let us know whenever your child tries a new food so we can update their menu safely.
- **After 18 Months:** Early Head Start children transition to eating the same menu as Head Start children.



Our program emphasizes healthy, balanced meals. We encourage families to share ideas—whether it's a healthy family recipe, a suggestion for new foods, or feedback on the menus. You can share ideas in person, through nutrition surveys, or by sending recipes to your child's teacher.

Head Start follows recommended serving sizes for preschoolers. For example, a quarter of a sandwich provides a full serving of both grain and protein for most children. At each meal or snack—breakfast, lunch, and snack—we serve $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of vegetables and/or fruit.

Children who are used to eating larger portions of bread or protein (such as a whole sandwich, which equals up to four servings of grain and protein) may feel hungry at first. However, our meals include more vegetables and fruits to promote healthy eating habits, and most children adjust to this over time.

Farm to School:

Our Bennington County Head Start and Early Head Start Farm to School Program values local partnership, family and community collaboration, comprehensive education, and healthy living. Look for "Harvest of the Month" on our monthly menus and a special recipe in the newsletter!

Food from Home and Special Diets:

To protect all children's health and safety, parents may not send food into the classroom unless it is medically necessary and approved by the Health Manager. This policy helps prevent allergic reactions, unsafe storage, classroom disruptions, and unhealthy food choices.

- **Breast Milk:** Must be stored in a dated container labeled with your child's name and date of birth.
- **Medical or Dietary Needs:**
 - » If your child requires a special diet for health reasons (such as diagnosed food allergies, celiac disease, or other medical conditions), please contact our health staff to create a **Meal Modification Plan**.
 - » A doctor's note is required and must list the foods to exclude and the appropriate substitutions within the same food group.

- » Meal plans are developed collaboratively between you, the health staff, and your child's healthcare provider.
- » Food allergies are posted in the classroom for safety.
- **Cultural or Religious Diets:** We can accommodate diets such as halal or vegetarian with a written meal modification plan. In some cases, we may request input from your child's doctor or our dietitian to ensure the plan meets your child's nutritional needs.
- **Picky Eaters:** Sometimes children benefit from being in a classroom where they see peers enjoying a variety of foods, which can encourage them to try new things and develop healthy eating habits.

Emergency Policy:

Posted at each Head Start/Early Head Start Center is specific procedures in case of fire or in the event of other evacuations or medical emergencies. Emergency drills are scheduled and practiced regularly throughout the year. All parent emergency phone numbers are kept on the attendance clipboard. **Pursuant to CDD 3.4.4.1 each child is always required to have a minimum of two emergency contacts on file. Let us know immediately if phone numbers change.**

***In case of an emergency evacuation,** staff will guide all students to a nearby evacuation location. If the need to remain out of the building expands, we will go to a secondary site as follows:

- **Pownal:** would evacuate to the tennis court. If the elementary school must be evacuated, we go to the firehouse.
- **North Bennington:** evacuate to the Park McCullough grounds or to St. John the Baptist Catholic church.
- **Spring Center:** evacuation to the basketball court, or we to the Cora Whitney Senior housing on Gage Street.

***For any emergency:**

If you hear that there is a Head Start building emergency, please do not call our buildings directly. Incoming calls tie up phone lines that are needed to cope with the emergency. Our staff will call you as soon as they are able. It is important that you update your emergency contact information as soon as it changes. The main UCS line can be used for urgent messages for your child's teacher during an emergency when our phones are inaccessible: (802) 442-5491.

In case of an emergency, please do not immediately come to get your child. Doing so may place you in danger or could contribute to increased turmoil during the emergency. In an emergency we need to be able to reunite children with parents or guardians safely, so please be sure to bring your photo ID when you pick up your child. Staff handling an emergency may not be the regular staff who are familiar with which parent and child go together, and it is imperative that we know when, and with whom, children leave.

***In case of severe weather:**

Staff receive emergency weather alerts and take precautions. Children are brought indoors to a safe area in each building, where they wait for the weather to pass.

***If your child becomes seriously ill or injured:**

All our staff are certified in First Aid and CPR and there is a first aid kit in every classroom. We will call emergency or medical providers as needed and contact you at the first opportunity. If we cannot reach you, we call emergency contacts. If your child must go to the ER, a staff member will stay with them until a parent arrives. For less serious health concerns you may be notified by phone, text message, or at the end of the day in person or via our injury form.

Mental Health

Bennington County Head Start/Early Head Start embraces a vision of wellness.

We seek to:

- Strengthen relationships among children, families, staff, mental health professionals and the community.
- Promote awareness of the benefits of mental wellness.
- Promote awareness of mental health resources in the community.
- Provide information about these resources to our families.

To meet these goals, we provide:

- Referrals to local mental health agencies.
- Discussion, workshops and training for staff and families.
- Access to our Mental Health Consultant, Dr. Bob Hemmer.
- Consultation with staff and families.

Dr. Bob Hemmer, a licensed psychologist specializing in adolescent and child psychology, works on-site regularly to work with Head Start children and classrooms. He is available to meet with staff and families. If you would like an appointment with Dr. Bob, please contact your child's teacher to connect you with Joselyn Boyd, Mental Health & Disabilities Manager.



The Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA):

The DECA is a nationally normed strength-based assessment and planning tool designed to promote resilience and healthy social and emotional development in children. Our program utilizes the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment for preschoolers aged 3–5 and utilizes the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment for Infants and Toddlers. The DECA is completed by both families and education staff. The DECA assesses child protective factors central to social and emotional health and screens for social and emotional risks in young children.

The three primary purposes of the DECA are:

1. To help individualize support for children in the areas of social and emotional development. Also, to provide strategies in both the school and home environment that can be implemented to strengthen protective factors.
2. To generate classroom profiles indicating the relative strengths of all children so the classroom environment and instructional strategies can build upon these strengths to facilitate the healthy social and emotional growth of all children.
3. To provide an assessment of child protective factors central to social and emotional health and resilience. The program uses DECA to monitor children's strength and needs and to form individualized goal settings.

Behavior Management:

Children in this program are to be treated in a safe, positive, and reassuring manner. Staff encourage appropriate behaviors through positive recognition. When staff address children, it is done in a calm manner and on the child's level with positive approaches to help children feel safe. A child's parent(s)/guardians, and our management team may be consulted if problem behaviors persist or escalate.

Education Program

Providing all children with a safe, nurturing, engaging and enjoyable experience

Philosophy and Goals:

Our goal is to support children in gaining skills to prepare them for school. We work with families to build on the child's strengths and interests. We believe children learn about themselves and the world through their play with other children and their relationships with familiar caregivers. We value that each child is unique, and we work to provide opportunities for your child to learn and develop at his or her own speed.

The goal of the education component is to promote the Head Start/Early Head Start characteristics that most influence how well a child learns in school. These are self-control, confidence, curiosity, the ability to communicate, and cooperation. Head Start/Early Head Start supports parents in their role as primary teachers of their children, based on the understanding that a healthy relationship between parents and children is one of the most important factors in promoting learning. Head Start/Early Head Start helps parents recognize the learning opportunities in their own homes and communities and to appreciate the value of play.

Children learn by being active participants who explore, experiment, and inquire. Play offers children the opportunity to master their environment. When playing, children are in command, using their imaginations, bodies, power of choice, and problem-solving skills. In environments where children can ask questions and discover at their own pace, they will become excited and curious learners.

Our program is committed to providing all children with a safe, nurturing, engaging, enjoyable and secure learning environment, to help them gain the awareness, skills, and confidence necessary to succeed in the present environment and to deal with later responsibilities in school and in life.

Creative Curriculum:

Head Start/Early Head Start provides an individualized developmental curriculum for every child. The curriculum is based on child development principles about how children grow, think and learn. Children learn by doing—experiencing with all their senses; playing and exploring in a variety of settings; experimenting and problem-solving on their own; and feeling successful in learning.

The program provides learning experiences that promote the growth of the whole child. It provides activities and interactions based on the age and developmental stage of each child. There is a wide range of equipment and materials for children of all ages. Some of the experiences include sensory-sand and water tables, block building, dramatic play, doll corner and puppets, puzzles, pegs, and matching/sorting games, play dough, painting, cutting and drawing materials, large motor activities, books and musical experiences, science and math experiences, emergent literacy and numeracy.

Developmental Screenings:

The education component at Head Start/Early Head Start focuses on assisting families and teachers in finding the best way your child learns. This is done by utilizing your child's strengths and assessing where they may need additional support. All children are required to have a developmental screening within the first 45 days of their start date.

The program uses an initial development screener, the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3) completed by families. The developmental screener looks at all areas of development: speech and language, fine and gross motor, cognitive reasoning, social-emotional skills, and self-help skills.



If, after this screening is complete, there are follow up questions around results, options include ongoing monitoring and possible Early Intervention/SVSU Early Ed referrals.

Disabilities Services:

The program is required to make available, at a minimum, ten percent (10%) of its enrollment opportunities to children with disabilities. We work closely with families and local and state education agencies to provide accommodation and individualization according to each child’s needs. We collaborate and partner with families throughout their child’s Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP); or Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process while in our care.

School Readiness:

This committee meets 2–3 times per year under the facilitation of the Head Start and Early Head Start Managers, and includes review of the program school readiness goals, curriculum, and transition topics.

Kindergarten Transition:

The goal of the Head Start kindergarten transition process is to work together with the family, Head Start teachers and elementary school staff to provide information and resources to make the transition from Head Start to kindergarten a positive experience for both parents and children. This goal will be accomplished by notifying parents of Kindercamp and summer kindergarten transition programs; arranging visits to the Head Start classroom by the kindergarten teachers; and providing families with books about going to kindergarten. Staff and families may also work together to obtain services from the UCS division Children, Youth, and Family Services to continue support through the transition and beyond.

Home Visits/Family Conferences:

Two education home visits and two family-teacher conferences are scheduled during the program year. These are required meetings to review children’s progress and set educational goals.

	<p>The HSELOF includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approaches to Learning• Social and Emotional Development• Language and Communication• Mathematics Development• Scientific Reasoning
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Family Support & Community Partnerships

The primary role of family services in Head Start/Early Head Start is to provide support and empower parents to strengthen their family units and improve the quality of their daily lives. This social services component of Head Start serves as a link between the family, the program, and the community. Each family will have a Family Support Worker (FSW) assigned to them during their school experience to guide them in setting and reaching their own goals. Your FSW will work with you to identify helpful community resources, providing referrals and assistance when appropriate.

Each family is different. FSW's will ensure that families have opportunities to build on their unique strengths and to set goals to meet the needs identified in the Family Partnership Agreement (FPA). The FPA defines a family's strengths, needs, and goals as identified by the family at the first family services contacts and is updated throughout the year at subsequent contacts. Each family will have at least 3 contacts per school year, and parents have a choice in home visits, school meetings, or phone calls to complete them.

Evidence-based Parenting Curriculum—ReadyRosie:

Our program uses an online resource called ReadyRosie to provide meaningful activities that you can do at home to support your child's learning.

ReadyRosie is a simple tool for you to:

- Hear what we are doing in the classroom
- Discover activities and games you can play that relate to classroom learning
- Have more fun than ever with your child through meaningful interaction

Family Engagement Matters!

At Bennington County Head Start/Early Head Start, we recognize that families are a child's first and primary teacher. When we enroll your child, we enroll you too!

Creating and maintaining a quality program calls for many people to work together, sharing talents, knowledge, and energy so that your child and family will receive the greatest benefit. As with any school program, the more knowledge and energy you as parents can invest in the program, the better it will be. ***Scientific research tells us that parent engagement in a child's life is a key factor in his or her academic success.*** We have seen how important a parent's influence is in the life of a child. That is why family engagement is one of the foundations of our program and why parents are invited to help make decisions about the Head Start/Early Head Start experiences their children will have for the next few years.

The program provides a variety of leadership opportunities for parents. In addition to home visits, socializations, classroom or center activities, parents can participate in center committee meetings and activities, program governance through Policy Council, program evaluations and assessments, Health Advisory, and other committees. Parent education and training opportunities are planned in response to parents' interests.

Male Engagement:

We encourage men to be equally engaged in their children's education and development. We believe that men want to and do make a difference when they feel they have contributed to their child's wellbeing!

Volunteering:

We believe that parents are the first and most important educators of their child. The relationship a parent and child form with one another shapes the course of a child's learning and growing years. Parents are encouraged to volunteer their services in any way that is comfortable for them.



Volunteering in the program with children and other staff members gives parents an opportunity to share interests, skills, and their commitment to Head Start/Early Head Start.

Volunteering is necessary for the program to run effectively, and it can be a rewarding experience. Any parent can volunteer up to five times without specific training or completing a State Child Development Division background check form. For the continued safety of our children in our care, parents who do plan to volunteer throughout the school year are required to go through an application and background approval process and should start this process as soon as possible.

Volunteering allows parents to make new friends, get to know their child's teacher, and to learn new techniques for working with children. The program also considers volunteer work to be an "in-kind" donation to the program. Volunteers fill out a form documenting the hours that they volunteered and the tasks they completed. Documenting your volunteer work lets the program demonstrate community support to its funding source. Volunteering can build new skills and may even count for college credit.

Some Ideas for Volunteer Activities:

Center Committees: Members plan and participate in special events at their child's center. Volunteering might include meetings, activities, training, group support. The program strives to provide services and educational activities that best support the family's needs. Center Committees are a great way to let your voice be heard. The content and concerns discussed at the meeting are up to you! Ask your Family Support Worker or other center staff for details specific to your center.

Male Involvement: attend special events that help increase the presence of dads or other positive male role models.

Leadership Opportunities: Serve as an officer of your local Parent Committee or as a Policy Council member. An active Policy Council is a requirement of our grant funding. Our goal is to have a Policy Council member for every classroom and every partner site.

Advocacy: Attend IEP meetings, write letters, talk with other parents to enlist their support; join other groups sharing similar interests and concerns.

Newsletters: Write or submit an article to share program or center wide.

Your Child's Classroom: Do an activity with the kids or just help in your child's classroom. Classroom cooking projects are done with children monthly. Be on the lookout for the new monthly Snack at School!

Come up with ideas of your own on how to get and stay involved!

Annual/Family Favorite Events:

Other fun events that families enjoy include our Annual Spring Bash, and our Annual Fishing Clinic at Dailey's Pond. We hold this in the spring when fishing season opens, and this clinic is designed to help children understand the basics about fishing and learn about water safety. Open House and the Harvest Luncheon are some more annual events with opportunities to participate. Be sure to join your classroom's Facebook and Remind groups to keep up-to-date on program events. Also, make sure to read your program newsletter to keep up with upcoming events.

Program Governance & Policy Council

Policy Council is another opportunity to participate and contribute back to the program!

Family members share in the governance of decisions about their local Head Start/ Early Head Start program. Policy Council is an active group made up of family members, the Director, the United Children's Services (UCH) Board President, and community members who oversee the organization and make decisions regarding policies, program assessments, and assist with the financial aspects of the program. **Policy Council meetings are typically scheduled for the second Tuesday of each month**, and a newly seated Policy Council may vote to change the meeting time and date if needed.

The meetings are open to all parents, but only elected representatives (or elected alternates) may vote. All programs and partner sites nominate family members to serve on Policy Council and vote to elect members on or about Election Day in November. **Transportation is provided if needed. Child care is provided for in-person meetings for those who sign up in advance. A meal is provided for each in-person meeting and for those who sign up in advance for Zoom meetings.**

For more information contact the Director, Rebecca Bishop Ware at (802) 442-3686 ext. 185 or Lisa Biddle, Administrative Coordinator, at ext. 121.

Transportation & Pedestrian Safety Training



Head Start Transportation Regulation / Performance Objective:

- **The program has limited bus seating.** Families are required to complete a criteria form to determine eligibility.
- **We do not provide transportation to our Pownal Center or partner locations.**
- **All HS children will utilize our bus for field trips.** The program ensures that children who receive transportation services are taught safe riding practices.

Performance Standard # 1303.70—1303.74

Safety Procedures: (a) The program ensures children who receive transportation services are taught safe riding practices, safety procedures for boarding and leaving the vehicle and for crossing the street to and from the vehicle at stops, recognition of the danger zones around the vehicle, and emergency evacuation procedures, including participating in an emergency evacuation drill conducted on the vehicle the child will be riding.

(b) When the program provides transportation services it ensures at least two bus evacuations drills, in addition to the one required under paragraph (a) above, are conducted for each bus during the school year. (c) Proper car seat installation guidelines are also reviewed.

Summary of Training:

- **Safe procedures for boarding and exiting the bus** which emphasize the importance of parents escorting their child to and from the bus stop and observing and adhering to the danger zones (10 feet around the bus in every direction—see Danger Zone picture on page 19)

- **Safe riding practices should be reinforced at home as well**, including being properly buckled into the appropriate car or booster seat, or in a harness or lap belt, and being cautious of clothing items and backpacks (as loose items can become stuck or tangled). We use a 5-point harness system on our buses—this information is included in our family transportation packet.
- **Participating in an emergency evacuation drill from the bus**—Bennington County Head Start/Early Head Start is mandated to conduct at least two evacuation drills during the year. Teachers will schedule safety field trips for the first drill to happen within the first thirty days of school. Our program schedules a second drill mid-year and a third drill at the end of spring for all children who ride the bus daily.
- **No food should be sent to school**, as this is a choking hazard. Meals are provided at school.

Vermont Child Restraint Law:

Effective July 1, 2024

- **Children under 2 years of age** must be properly secured in a federally approved rear-facing child car seat with a harness and may not ride in front of an active airbag.
- **Children over 2 years of age but under 5 years of age** must be properly secured in a federally approved rear-facing or forward-facing car seat with a harness.
- **Children under 8 years of age** who are not secured in a harnessed car seat must be properly secured in a booster seat.
- **Children under 13 years of age** should ride in the back seat whenever practical.
- **Children under 18 years of age** who are not in a harnessed car seat or booster seat must wear a seat belt.

Pedestrian/School Bus Safety Training:

1. **Teach your children to be extra cautious in the School Bus Danger Zone**—about five giant steps (10 feet) around the bus in every direction.
2. **Remind your children to always watch for traffic when getting on or off a bus**, and to move immediately from the Danger Zone to a safer area after exiting.
3. Instruct your children that if they can't see the bus driver, the bus driver can't see them. If they drop anything near the bus, they should ask the driver before they stop to pick it up.
4. Be aware, it is illegal in every state to pass a school bus stopped to load/unload students. Follow school bus laws when driving.
5. Learn the "flashing signal light system" that school bus drivers use to alert motorists if they are going to stop to load/unload students.

Yellow flashing lights indicate the bus is preparing to stop to load or unload children. **Motorists should slow down and prepare to stop** their vehicles.

Red flashing lights and extended stop arms indicate that the bus has stopped, and that children are getting on or off. **Motorists MUST stop their cars.**

6. Begin moving only when the red flashing lights are turned off, the stop arm is withdrawn, and the bus begins to move.
7. Never pass a bus on the right side, where children board and exit.
8. Slow down. Watch out for children walking in the street, especially if there are no sidewalks in the neighborhood. Watch for children playing and gathering near bus stops.
9. Be alert. Children arriving late for the bus may dart into the street without looking for traffic.
10. Remember—expect the unexpected when driving near a bus, bus stop, school zone, and parking lots.

Slow down and watch for children!

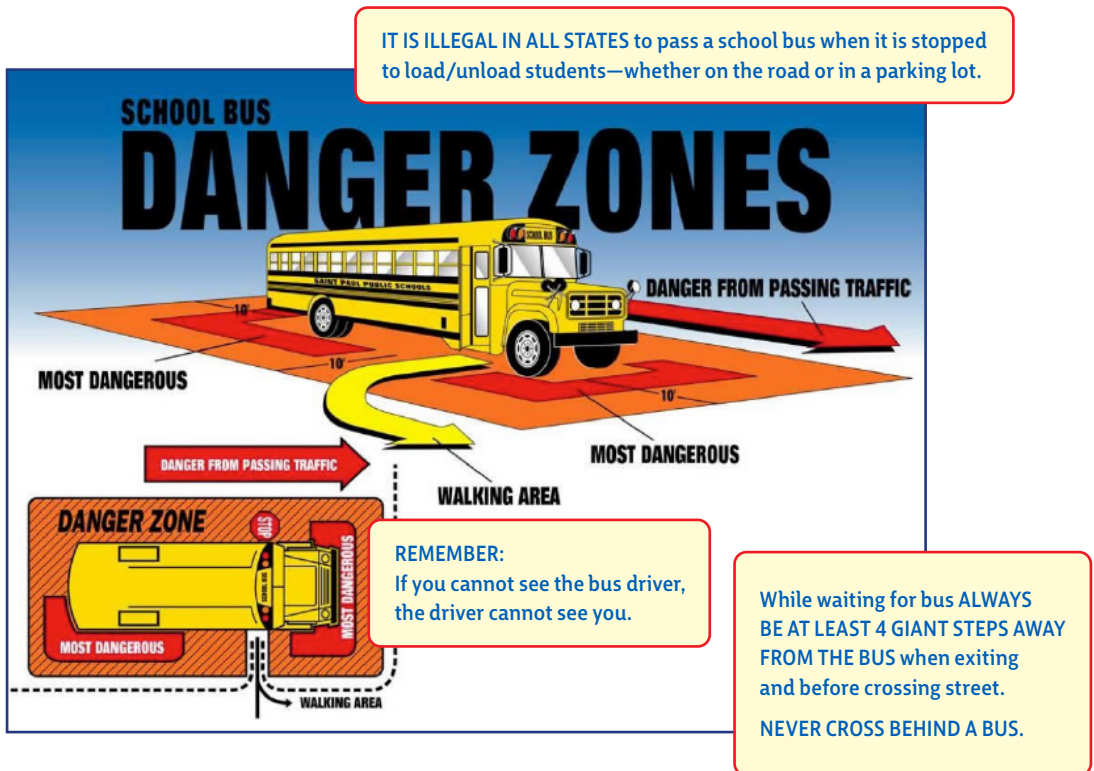
Safety Around the School Bus

- Children should **ALWAYS** stop at the curb and never run into the street.
- Teach children to use crosswalks and only cross streets at corners.
- Children should cross streets with a grown-up until they are at least age 10.
- Remind children to look left, right, and left again before entering or crossing a path, sidewalk, street or driveway. They should continue looking as they cross.
- Children should make eye contact with each driver before they pass in front of them.
- Never cross the street from between parked cars.
- Get to the bus stop at least 10 minutes early. Have children wait four giant steps back from the curb.
- Make sure everything is “tucked in” before children get on or off the bus so nothing can get caught.
- When children get off, they need to immediately walk 10 steps away from the bus.
- If children must cross the street, teach them to be sure they can see the driver’s face; they need to cross in front of the bus, at least 10 steps away from the bus.

Never Cross the Street Behind the Bus.

PER STATE LAW:

- Do not leave your other children in your car while dropping off your child, running errands, etc. Do not leave your car running while unattended.



Pedestrian-related injury is one of the leading causes of death and serious injury for children up to age 14. Be sure to review all provided safety materials with your children.

2025-2026 Bennington County Head Start / Early Head Start

X = Closed Δ = 12 pm Dismissal
Approved by Policy Council: June 10, 2025

12 Policy Council Mtg.

15 Last Class Day for Park & Kindergarten Kids & HS Summer Ends

20 Last Extended Childcare Day

25-29 Staff Training

AUGUST 2025						
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						

1 CLOSED; Labor Day

2-3 Home Visits; Classroom Set-up

4 First Day of School; Close at Noon

5 Half-day; Close at Noon

9 Policy Council Mtg.

SEPTEMBER 2025						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
	X	2	3	Δ	Δ	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				

13 CLOSED; Indigenous People's Day

14 Policy Council Mtg.

22 Half-day; Staff Mtg.

OCTOBER 2025						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	X	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	Δ	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

11 OPEN; Veteran's Day

11 Policy Council Mtg.

19 Half-day; Close at Noon

26-28 CLOSED; Thanksgiving Holiday

NOVEMBER 2025						
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	Δ	20	21	22
23	24	25	X	X	X	29
30						

9 Policy Council Mtg.

12 Half-day; Staff Mtg.

23 Half-day; Close at Noon

24-31 CLOSED; Holiday Break

DECEMBER 2025						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	Δ	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	Δ	X	X	X	27
28	X	X	X			

1-2 CLOSED; Holiday Break

13 Policy Council Mtg.

19 CLOSED; MLK Day

JANUARY 2026						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
				X	X	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	X	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

FEBRUARY 2026						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	Δ	12	13	14
15	X	17	18	19	20	21
22	X	24	25	26	X	28

10 Policy Council Mtg.

11 Half-day; Staff Training

16 CLOSED; President's Day

23 & 27 CLOSED; Staff Work Days

24-26 Winter Break or Childcare: **Must Sign-up**

MARCH 2026						
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	Δ	Δ	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

10 Policy Council Mtg.

19-20 Half-days; Staff & Center Mtgs.

APRIL 2026						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	Δ	18
19	X	21	22	23	X	25
26	27	28	29	30		

14 Policy Council Mtg.

17 Half-day; Close at Noon

20 & 24 Closed; Staff Work Days

21-23 Spring Break or Childcare: **Must Sign-up**

MAY 2026						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
						1
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	Δ	21	22	23
24	X	26	27	28	29	30
31						

12 Policy Council Mtg.

20 Half-day; Staff Mtg.

25 CLOSED; Memorial Day

JUNE 2026						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
	1	2	3	X	X	6
7	X	X	X	11	12	13
14	15	16	Δ	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

3 Last Head Start Class Day; EHS Classes Closed Until 6/11

4-10 CLOSED; Staff Training & HS Summer Prep

9 Policy Council Mtg.

11 HS Summer Program Begins; EHS Classes Resume; Close at Noon

17 11:30 am Closing

19 OPEN; Juneteenth

JULY 2026						
S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
					X	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	Δ	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

3 CLOSED; Independence Day

14 Policy Council Mtg.

17 Half-day; Close at Noon

AUG 2026

7 Half-day; Close at Noon

11 Policy Council Mtg.

14 Last Day for Rising Kindergarteners

19 Last EHS Class Day & HS Summer Program Ends; Family Bash for all @ Spring Center

NOTES

Follow us on social media!

 @BCHS.VT

 @benningtoncountyheadstart

 Bennington County Head Start - Early Head Start



Main Office (802) 442-3686
2 Park Street, North Bennington, VT 05257



ucsvt.org/programs/bennington-head-start-and-early-head-start

Bennington County Head Start/Early Head Start is recognized as a 5-STARS program for high quality early childhood education by the Vermont Agency of Human Services.

Confidentiality

UCS keeps all contacts and records in strict confidence as governed by federal regulations. No acknowledgment or release of information is given without express written permission.

Non-Discrimination

United Children's Services is a division of United Counseling Service (UCS), and complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws. United Children's Services does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, or other legally protected classifications.



United Counseling Service of Bennington County
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