

HEART Parent/Guardian Handbook



The HEART program is operating as a program exempt from licensure with basic health and safety requirements but has no direct oversight by the Virginia Department of Education

Updated January 2026

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Staunton Parks and Recreation Mission Statement

To provide a variety of quality leisure opportunities with the purpose of improving Stauntonian's quality of life.

**Main office location:
Montgomery Hall Park
1000 Montgomery Ave
Staunton, VA 24401**



Welcome to HEART!

On behalf of Staunton Parks and Recreation, we would like to welcome you to our program. Thank you for choosing us to care for your child! We aim to provide a safe, well-supervised and nurturing environment with a focus on Recreation.

HEART stands for Healthy Environmental Afterschool Recreation Time

The Staunton Recreation Department operates the HEART program at each of the Staunton City elementary schools. Since children in the HEART Program spend the bulk of their day in school involved in teacher-initiated, fine motor activities with limited mobility, our program focuses on self-initiated, self-directed activities emphasizing physical movement, thus providing a healthy balance. Children will benefit from experiences like participating in groups with age mates and mixed age grouping. There will be organized activities mixed in as well from time to time. The program is offered during after school hours.

GOALS OF THE HEART PROGRAM

To Provide:

1. A safe, healthy, comfortable environment.
2. Caring supervision by mature, qualified adult staff.
3. Guidance by trained staff who assist children in developing their interests, talents, skills, and self-confidence.
4. A consistent group of playmates and staff.
5. Choices from a wide variety of wholesome activities and fun.
6. An environment in which enthusiasm is nurtured and sustained.
7. Mixed age grouping to promote positive behaviors.
8. A balance of quiet and active, large and small groups, teacher-initiated and child-initiated activities.
 - a. Activities include games, music, arts and crafts, homework supervision, indoor and outdoor unstructured free play, movies, snack and special occasion parties.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Eligibility

Children must attend a Staunton City School to be eligible for this program. The official age range for the HEART program is age of eligibility for kindergarten to 12 years old. All children accepted into the HEART program must be at least entering kindergarten this school year. HEART is designed for children of working parents, who, without this program, would return to an empty home.

Participation

This program runs five (5) days a week. HEART is modeled to serve children for the entire month, not on a temporary or part-time basis with a prorated fee. Meaning, parents pay for the entire month for full time care. If your child is participating in out-of-school activities that are scheduled at the same time as HEART, please notify the HEART supervisor so they know where the child is or when he/she needs to be ready to leave. If the child is withdrawn from the program, notification in writing to the administration office is required.

School Vacations/Early-Release Days

HEART will not operate when children are off from school for holidays, breaks, parent conferences and employee work days. HEART will offer extended care on early-release days. Please mark your calendars when your school issues their first list of teacher work days and holidays. If city schools dismiss early for a teacher in-service and the children have been fed lunch while at school, the HEART program will meet. If your child is not attending HEART due to other obligations, contact the HEART program or Recreation Admin and we will contact the appropriate supervisor: 540.332.3945.

Program Hours

The program will begin on the very first day of the city school schedule in the fall.

Bessie Weller, Ware, and McSwain

2:45pm-6pm

Contact Info

Ware.....332.3966.....Cell phone: 540.849.4737

McSwain.....332.3965.....Cell phone: 540.294.3193

Bessie Weller.....332.3967.....Cell phone: 540.849.4736

Cell phones can be used for texting or calls. Please note that cell phones will be accessed by staff 30 minutes prior to the start of the program, Supervisors will NOT have them 24/7.

Recreation Administration.....540.332.3945

For **overall program questions**, contact Steven Taetzsch, Superintendent of Recreation:
taetzschst@ci.staunton.va.us or 332.3706 ext. 4185

For **payment questions**, contact Debbie Gregory, Office Manager:
gregorydr@ci.staunton.va.us or 332.3945

Field Trips

Permission will be granted for children to participate on local field trips when each parent signs that specified section of the registration form. Site supervisors will be responsible for informing parents of planned field trips in writing. Field trips are rare.

Registration and Fees

To Register

1. Complete Registration Forms
 - ✓ Be sure to include two emergency contacts complete with addresses and phone numbers.
 - ✓ Sign all lines on the agreement forms
 - ✓ Doctor's name and phone number
2. \$10.00 per child registration fee

Bring Registration information to the Staunton Recreation Department located in the Irene Givens Recreation Administration building in Montgomery Hall Park, Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm.

Monthly Program Fees

\$150.00

Make checks payable to: Staunton Parks and Recreation, PO Box 58, Staunton, VA 24402

The Recreation Department WILL NOT mail statements for tax purposes. It will be the parents' responsibility to save monthly receipts for tax purposes.

The City's Tax ID number is 54-6001631

Payment Deadlines & Late Fee Charge

Fees for the school year are due in monthly installments to be paid by the **First Friday of the month**. Full payment is due for any partial month participation in the program.

- There is no charge for the month of December
- You can make your monthly payment at your child's HEART site through the FIRST Friday of the month (check or cash only). After the first Friday of the month, we will no longer accept payment at your child's school for that particular month, and your only option is to pay online or at the recreation office in Montgomery Hall Park during normal office hours. We encourage all parents to create an account on our [Parks and Rec activity registration portal](#) and pay online.
- Paying online is convenient and frees our staff up to focus on watching the children.

A \$5.00 **PER DAY** penalty will be assessed for all accounts not paid in 1 week of due date. Payment delinquency will result in the termination of your child's enrollment in the program.

The Staunton Parks and Recreation Department reserves the right to terminate the enrollment of any child based on multiple late payments, as this will be recorded. The Department understands checkbooks are forgotten, bills may be due at inopportune times, and thus we will be as understanding as possible. However, our program is funded by HEART participants and a pattern of late payments may hinder long term operating costs and resources.

If payment is not received by the first Friday of the month, parents have until the following Friday to make payment without a penalty. Then, the following Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, a \$5.00 PER Day fee will be assessed for all accounts. After Wednesday, your child's enrollment will be terminated until full payment has been made. Please note that a continuous pattern of late payments will be recorded which may render a child ineligible to participate in other department childcare programs.

Refunds

The monthly fee is the same each month regardless of the number of program days in each month. There is no charge for the month of December. Refunds are issued on a case-by-case basis and at the discretion of rec administration.

Our Beliefs and Philosophy

What we believe...

The Children

Although each child is unique with different inborn temperaments, personality, and family backgrounds, all children share the need for nurturing and trustworthy adults, for stability, security, for increasing autonomy, for a sense of competence and self-worth. One of the goals of our HEART program is to provide an environment in which enthusiasm is nurtured and sustained. With careful and sensitive understanding of the stages of development, activities will be planned so children can be successful.

Age-Appropriate Activities

In planning activities within the HEART program, developmental appropriateness will be a key consideration. Children develop cognitively, physically, emotionally, and socially at different rates. Even children within the same age group show marked differences in development. Staff will consider attention span, social ability, activity level, muscle control, and cognitive skills of children in kindergarten through sixth grade when developing activities and experiences. Expectations that are too great or not challenging enough result in frustration and misbehavior.

Play

Play is a very important part of our HEART program. Play promotes mastery as children practice skills; it develops cognitive abilities as thinking skills are stretched; it involves language, encouraging new uses; it involves physical activity; it helps children work through emotions; its inventive nature makes it creative; it's often a socializing event; beyond all that, play provides a way for children to assimilate and integrate their life experiences. Play to learn, learn through play.

Creativity

The HEART program provides an environment that encourages creativity. Once homework is over, the children engage in self-selected indoor activities such as art projects, board games, manipulatives, books, building toys and other forms of play and socialization. There is a wide variety of art materials at each site and at times, we may have program enrichment opportunities.

Mixed Age Grouping

Mixed age grouping benefits both older and younger children. Positive behaviors such as sharing, taking turns, and helpfulness are promoted in mixed age grouping. Older children have more opportunities to practice leadership skills and young children become involved in more complex forms of pretend play.

Example Schedule and Activities

A typical day in the HEART Afterschool program:

Upon dismissal from school

2:45-3:00	Welcome children, take roll and verbally cue children about plans for the day.
3:00-4:15	Children may have outdoor free play* Focus on self-selected, gross motor activities. Children will have the opportunity to make choices about activities they will engage in.
4:15-4:25	Restroom and hand washing
4:25-4:50	Snack provided by Recreation Department (Choice given to children). Children are permitted to sit with friends and socialize.
4:50-6:00	Centers are set up for organized structured activities such as board games, play dough, art, music, housekeeping, puzzles, Legos, blocks, etc.** (Children involved in self-selected play)
6:00	End of program –15 minutes after 6:00pm a late fee of \$10 will be charged

*Children who need to do homework will be given the opportunity to do so from 3:00 to 4:00

** Children may resume doing their homework after snack.

***Schedule is subject to change due to art/library days and scheduled school programs/events.

Snacks

Our snacks are generally healthy and vary in selection. Snacks may include granola bars, crackers or tortilla chips, fruit snacks, dips such as hummus/salsa, goldfish, and nutrigrain bars to name a few. Please notify us of any special requests and/or food allergies on your child's registration form.

Policies and Procedures

Inclement Weather Policy

For child and staff safety, there will be no HEART program on days when:

- 1) Staunton City Administration dismisses schools early because of bad weather:
- 2) There is no school due to bad weather, holiday, or teacher work day

Check-In/Out Procedures

Parents should make arrangements for their child as to what to do if school dismisses early due to inclement weather (i.e., ride the bus or someone will pick them up). The Parks and Recreation staff will NOT call to notify parents of school decisions. At the beginning of each semester, we will have parents list their planned method for child pick-up in this instance.

Sign-In and Absences

The Staunton Recreation Department assumes responsibility for children in HEART once each child has been checked off at roll call at their HEART site. Should a child be absent at HEART but present in school, and no previous explanation had been given by the parents, the staff will contact the school office. If there are no messages there, staff will then call the parent.

Children Attending Another Program – Late Arrivals

If a child is not in attendance at roll call because (s)he is in another after school activity that is not within the HEART site assigned, an adult must check the child into the HEART program. For instance, if a child does not come to the HEART specified site by the time the group departs for the playground, a parent, coach, etc. must bring the child to the appropriate site and sign him/her in with the child's staff. This is a precautionary measure in that it is not safe to have a child travel from one part of a public school to another unsupervised. If something were to happen in route to joining the group, the HEART staff would not know the child was missing and could not provide assistance or contact authorities. The HEART staff will ensure that children reporting late to the program will be incorporated into activities and group functions. The staff will ensure that children reporting to the program after scheduled snack have the opportunity to eat.

Sign Out/Release of Children

Parents will need to sign their child(ren) out when they come for pick up. This is very important as these documents have been subpoenaed in the past as well as help us keep track of remaining children. The Staunton Parks & Recreation Department relinquishes responsibility when parents sign out their children on the official sign-out sheet at the end of each day. *If a sibling under the age of 18 will be signing out your child, the site supervisor should receive a letter from you (parents/guardians) with this preference. Letter should indicate acceptable modes of transportation.

The Staunton Recreation HEART Program will only release children to responsible persons for whom the Recreation Department has written authorization. The Staunton Recreation Department will not release any child to ANY person who shows clear signs of being under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Late & Non-Pick-Up Policy

In the event that a child has not been picked up by the end of the program (6pm) the parents and/or emergency contacts specified on each child's registration form will be contacted. Late fees are as follows: \$10 per 15 minutes. All late fees must be paid by cash, check, MasterCard, Visa or at the Recreation Administration building located in Montgomery Hall Park. The Recreation office is open Monday through Friday 8am-5pm. If within fifteen minutes after the program is scheduled to end at 6pm, children have not been picked up and staff has not received any information as to the parent's whereabouts, a plan will be formulated with the Staunton Police Department.

The Staunton Parks and Recreation Department reserves the right to terminate the enrollment of children whose parents regularly arrive late. Parents will be allowed two late arrivals per year across all child care programs as well as being charged the late fee. The Department understands that parents get flat tires, have car trouble or have family emergencies that may prevent parents arriving to pick up their child on-time. For example, if a parent was late 4 times during summer camp, they may not be allowed to sign their child up for HEART during the school year. This policy is to prevent patterns of late arriving parents and prevent exceeding the HEART personnel budget.

Parents Not Permitted to Pick Up Children

A copy of the Divorce Decree or court approved Settlement Agreement shall be required when a parent requests the center not to release the child to the other biological parent. A custodial parent shall be admitted to any HEART site. Such right of admission shall apply when the child is in the HEART program.

Contacting Your Child During Program Hours

If at any time a parent needs to relay a message to their child during the program, they may call their child's HEART site directly. The numbers are listed at the beginning of this document.

Procedure for Medical Emergencies

In preparation for the event of an actual emergency, at least two staff at every site will be trained in First Aid, CPR, and Rescue Breathing. All first aid kits will be stocked according to minimum day care standards. All HEART sites will post emergency 9-911 and Blue Ridge Poison Control phone numbers near the telephone. The first staff on the scene of an accident will check the scene for safety and check the injured child. The appropriately trained staff members will provide needed care. Other staff will control and clear the area of the other children and bystanders. When appropriate, staff will call 9-911 and notify the injured child's parents.

Natural Disasters

In the case of a natural disaster (ie. flood, tornado, etc.) which requires the evacuation of the premises, children in HEART will be transported via Recreation van and bus to another unaffected HEART or Park site. For instance, in the case of high waters, children at Bessie Weller will be transported to Montgomery Hall Park. In the event that children cannot be evacuated from the school site, such as cases involving flash flooding, tornadoes, etc, staff would contact parents and police to inform them that children were trapped on site. To whatever area of the site the children are evacuated to, staff would ensure that the flashlight, radio, batteries, roll book, snack items, as well as the first aid kit are taken.

Man-Made Disasters

In the case of a man-made disaster such as fires, explosions, downed electrical wires, swiftly moving or rapid rising water, presence of poisonous gas or vehicle collisions, 9-911 will be called immediately. If required, children will be transported to another safe HEART site. If telephone contact is possible and appropriate parents will be immediately contacted. If telephones are not accessible, the Staunton Recreation Department will communicate with parents via text and email, as well as Facebook: www.facebook.com/StauntonRecreationParks

Playground Safety Policy

The Playground Safety Policy includes staff training and playground inspections. Appropriate height of resilient surface, elimination of head entrapments and protrusions, and other violations will be the focus of the inspections. The Consumer Product Safety Commission developed the standard of care HEART follows. There is a copy of our Playground Safety Policy at every site.

Behavior and Guidance

Guidance Tools We Utilize

Encouraging leadership
Setting logical consequences for actions
Offering praise and rewards
Discussing behavior
Setting limits
Modeling appropriate behavior

Modifying the environment
Paying attention to prevent problems before they occur
Listening to children
Respecting the needs, desires and feelings of campers
Using short supervised periods of "cool down"
Contacting parents for input on discipline
Taking away activity privileges

Behavior Management Policy

The guidance techniques listed above will be exhausted before employing the following techniques. Discipline of children during HEART includes redirection, cool downs, explanations, oral reprimands, written reprimands, suspension and termination.

Talking and active listening with the child about the problem behavior and motivating children to change the unacceptable behavior shall be used. Redirection will be practiced to provide children with acceptable alternatives in place of an undesired behavior. Cool-downs will be used to remove the child from the stimulus of the group. This guidance will be facilitated by balancing the schedule, age-appropriate activities, and verbal cues for upcoming transition times. Staff will attempt to distinguish misbehavior stemming from factors beyond the child's ability to change, such as allergies or changes in family life. Each site will develop their own discipline plan on the first day of HEART with the children's input.

During the first week of HEART, staff and children develop a list of rules. The staff and children review the rules, the reasons for each rule as well as the consequences of breaking the rules.

1st offense – verbal warning: talking with child and redirecting behavior

2nd offense – cool down and redirecting behavior

3rd offense – cool down and written warning

Parents will be informed anytime a child gets a written warning. Three or more written warnings in one day will result in a one-day suspension. Parents will have a five-day grace period to select the day the child will be suspended from HEART. This grace period is given so that parents have time to locate adequate alternative care. Parents and children will be asked to sign the written warning form(s) as confirmation that staff communicated the problem.

Major discipline problems such as fighting, extreme physical aggressiveness, disrespect to staff in the form of vulgarities or continual disregard for rules and authority will result in:

- a. First time – one day of suspension
- b. Second time – three day suspension
- c. Third time – termination from program

A discipline problem is defined as any child who is hampering the smooth flow of the program by either requiring constant one-on-one attention; is inflicting physical or emotional harm on other children; is physically and/or verbally abusing staff; or is otherwise unable to conform to the expectations outlined in this handbook.

At any time, the Staunton Parks and Recreation Department reserves the right to suspend or terminate the enrollment of any child based on continued misbehavior, or a singular serious offense. This includes harming staff or other children. Additionally, the Staunton Parks and Recreation Department reserves the right to terminate enrollment if they are unable to provide the necessary care needed in order to keep all children and staff safe. Parents will be informed if their child is to be suspended or terminated. Parents will be given a five-day grace period in order to find alternate care in the case of suspension from the program.

HEART participants will never be deprived of food, never placed alone without supervision, interaction or observation; participants will not be subjected to ridicule, threat, corporal punishment, excessive physical exercise or excessive restraint.

Meeting Special Needs

It is the goal of Staunton Parks and Recreation to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all individuals of all abilities who wish to participate in recreational activities and programs. We will accommodate any reasonable request to assist people with disabilities and special needs and support various learning styles.

Youth who exhibit behaviors associated with a disability or disorder are not excluded from participation. We only ask for parental involvement and support to help us create a positive recreation experience. Without parental support and communication, our ability to make accommodations is limited, as we do not have the

resources to provide one-on-one care. In the case of youth with very challenging or aggressive behaviors, hours of participation may be modified. Please feel free to contact the Recreation Manager to discuss any concerns you may have: 540.332.3706 ext. 4185.

Bullying

Although we actively strive to create a socially safe and comfortable environment for your child this does not mean that behind the scenes bullying doesn't happen. Therefore, we are continuing the implementation of our zero-tolerance policy for bullying. In this situation, one warning will be given, a consultation between the staff, child and parent will be conducted and upon the second offense the child will be suspended from the program until further notice. Our staff members will be equipped with the necessary knowledge to effectively notice and address any bullying.

Communication and Staff

Staff Training

Our staff meets and usually exceeds all requirements for Supervisors and Aides in child related employment. Because of staff consistency, most HEART staff also work the summer camp program and have familiarity with the children throughout the whole year. Staff development is crucial in order to accomplish our goal of providing a high-quality recreation program for school-aged children. Development and training have been proven to increase child adult interactions, as well as increasing positive and less punitive guidance and employing a less authoritarian style of interaction with the children. After all, it is the teachers who determine the tone and the character, in effect- the quality of the program.

Child to Staff Ratio

Each school site is limited to 70 participants and applications are accepted on a first paid, first serve basis, with the first seventy children applying and paying the registration fee being enrolled for the school year. A 14 to 1 child to staff ratio will be maintained at every HEART site.

Evaluation

Though we are constantly making changes and improvements as needed, site supervisors and aides are officially evaluated on an annual basis. Staff evaluations conducted by Supervisors and Administration, and concentrate on the program rather than the paperwork. Specific areas of evaluation are: age-appropriateness of activities, engaging the children, communication and attitude toward the children, choices provided to the children, playground supervision, availability of materials and equipment for children, staff interaction, respect, sight and sound supervision, guidance and discipline.

Communication with Parents

Staff will verbally communicate with parents on a daily basis. Should a parent have a concern about their children or the HEART program, they are encouraged to talk to the Site Supervisor and Aides or contact the Recreation Manager at 540.332.3706 ext. 4185. In addition, email will be used to communicate monthly announcements and important date

Established Lines of Authority for Recreation:

Director of Parks and Recreation
Superintendent of Recreation
HEART Site Supervisors
HEART Aides

Injury Reports

Parents will be immediately notified of “serious” injuries to their child (i.e. Unconsciousness; broken bones; deep cuts requiring stitches; concussion; facial injuries, etc.) “Significant” injuries such as lesser head injuries (bumps) and muscle sprains requires staff to inform parents at the end of the day and document the injury. “Minor” injuries such as a small scratch, cut, or scrape will not require parental notification or documentation. Staff will complete appropriate documentation (injury report) for “significant” and “serious” injuries and include when parents were notified. Attending staff will replace all used medical supplies and equipment. All injury reports will be reviewed to prevent future recurrences of such injuries.

Health, Safety and Medication

Medication Administration Policy

Due to the timeframe and the nature of the HEART program, **staff will not administer short or long-term medications.** We will only hold and administer medications for life threatening illnesses and emergencies, such as EpiPens, Albuterol Inhalers, Insulin pump adjustments, if your child is unable to do so. Administration will evaluate life threatening illness and emergency medications on a case-by-case basis.

Communicable Disease

Parents must inform the site within 24 hours or the next business day after their child or any member of the immediate household has developed any reportable communicable disease, as defined by the State Board of Health, except for life threatening disease which must be reported immediately.

Communicable Diseases:

Chicken Pox	Meningitis
Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye)	Mumps
Diarrheal Diseases	Pediculosis (Head Lice)
Fifth Disease (Erythema Infectiosum)	Pertussis (Whooping Cough)
Hepatitis A	Ringworm
Hepatitis B	Rubella
HIV/AIDS	Scabies
Measles	Streptococcal Diseases (Strep Throat, Scarlet Fever, Impetigo)

Responsibility to Protect Children

The HEART staff is mandated by law to report any form of suspected child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities-Child Protective Services.

If you have questions, feel free to give us a call or stop by. We hope to see you and your child soon!

Thank you for choosing

