

School Year Family Handbook

MLBCC CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

SCHOOL YEAR 2026-27 FAMILY HANDBOOK

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Section 1. ABOUT THE MARIA L. BALDWIN COMMUNITY CENTER (MLBCC)

1A. Our Mission

The mission of the Maria L. Baldwin Community Center is to be a place that nurtures lifelong creativity and learning and serves as a forum for civic advocacy and engagement through dynamic, community-based programs for all ages.

We believe in:

- **Welcoming:** Fostering an equitable environment where everyone feels valued, by adopting intersectional* anti-racist practices in all that we do.
- **Empowering:** Building confidence and a sense of belonging in everyone we serve.
- **Collaborating:** Uniting different voices and perspectives across all ages and backgrounds.
- **Creating Joy:** Embracing the joy that comes from being free to explore, create, and connect.

**Intersectionality: The overlapping and interdependent systems of oppression across, for example, race, gender, ability, and social status. Intersectionality encourages us to embrace and celebrate individuals' multiple social identities. It also highlights the complex and cumulative effects of different forms of structural inequity that can arise for members of multiple marginalized groups. (Source: [NAEYC](#))*

1B. Statement of Purpose

Our goal in Maria L. Baldwin Community Center's Children's Programs is to develop a community, build social and emotional skills, and provide opportunities for children to learn, explore, and try new endeavors. We work diligently to help children develop the abilities necessary to accomplish this. We recognize that it is of critical importance that each child feels safe physically and emotionally. Only when this has been established can other goals be achieved.

Our teachers are trained to deal sensitively and creatively with children's social challenges. The staff assists the children in developing a social consciousness and a care for others as well as for themselves.

The MLBCC Children's Program is proud of its diverse population and holds firm in its goal to provide a space that is welcoming and inclusive for children of all backgrounds and beliefs. The MLBCC Children's Program does not discriminate in providing services to children and their families on the basis of race, religion, cultural heritage, political beliefs, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation or disability.

1C. Administrative Organization

Maria L. Baldwin Community Center is a not-for-profit organization. The agency is a neighborhood-based organization headed by two Co-Executive Directors. A Director of Children's Programs and Registration Coordinator administer the Children's Programs. The programs run with the help of a strong staff of Site Directors, Teachers, a Social Worker, and support from Mayor's Youth, Counselors-in-Training (CITs) and Teachers-in-Training (TNTs), and interns and/or volunteers.

1D. Staff

The Director of Children's Programs (DCP) oversees the afterschool, summer, and teen employment programs. The DCP works closely with other local groups to foster community development as well as with education programs to augment the current programs. The Children's Programs Registration Coordinator will handle all registration and waitlists, student permissions and files, billing and financial aid with the support of the Children's Programs Leadership Team. The Children's Programs Social Worker supports the

social emotional development of children in all programs and partners with families to navigate challenges such as housing, financial stability, immigration, etc.

Our licensed adult to child ratio is 1:13. Teachers' credentials vary, but there is always a mix of teacher certification, experience with school-age children, and activity specialization to help maintain a fun yet safe environment.

We are licensed by the State of Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC). Many of our guidelines and policies reflect the EEC regulations.

Section 2. PROGRAM DESIGN AND SERVICES

2A. Program Concept

Our afterschool programs are designed to provide a safe, enriching, fun experience for children in Kindergarten through 5th grade (6th grade in summer). We serve middle school-age students (6th-8th) through the Youth Employment Program (YEP), and the Middle School Art Afterschool. Children have an opportunity to explore new and existing interests, crafts, and topics. Our talented and diverse group of teachers support children through this process.

The adjustment of Kindergartners to a school-year program often requires special consideration. When Kindergartners first come to the program, they need to adapt to another schedule, more children, more adults, different rules, and a new place. It can be difficult for some children to engage in structured activities for a full day. Frequently, younger children will choose free time or outdoor activities even when specialists are available to them. We take special care to help with this adjustment and we ask that parents stay in close touch with the staff about how their children are doing.

Our staff is aware that some children will be more hesitant to “jump in” and make friends. We take steps each morning or afternoon during check in to greet all students, make them feel welcome and either buddy them up with another student or help them find an activity that they will be interested in.

Similarly, older children often require special attention, but, often, for very different reasons. Upper elementary students who have been in our programs for several years often demonstrate an increasing need to express independence. Our program recognizes this and tries to give this age group the freedom they need within reason, and to provide programming that attracts and sustains their interest.

2B. Schedule and Hours

Outback

- 8:30AM - 5:45PM

Afterschool

- 2 - 5:55 PM (your child's start time may vary depending on when they are dismissed from school)

2C. Pick-Up Policy/Late Fees

Please pick up your child promptly and no later than:

- Outback: 3 PM (Regular Day) 5:45 PM (Extended Day)
- Afterschool: 5:55 PM

After these times, the late fee policy is in effect as stated below.

Late fees:

- Please call the program to let us know if you are running late. We will call parents/guardians if someone is not there to pick up a child at the designated pick up time.
- We will charge a late fee of \$10 for the first five minutes of a late pickup, and \$5 for each additional five minutes thereafter
- If we have not heard from you by 15 minutes after pick-up time, your emergency contacts will be called. In any case, a late fee will be assessed — no exceptions — and you will be billed. After an excess of five late pick-ups, your fee will increase to double the original amount. Ten late pick-ups may result in dismissal of your child from the program.

2D. Social Emotional & Behavioral Support for Students

A key element of our programming is supporting the social emotional development and behavioral needs of students attending our programs. This includes offering the following services through our Social Worker and CP Leadership Team, in partnership with families and caregivers:

- 1:1 and group therapeutic support for children and youth during program hours
- Behavioral observations as needed
- Individualized Student Support Plans, created in collaboration with families, to accommodate students' needs in programming and promote their socioemotional growth
- Crisis level support for behavioral challenges
- Referrals to long-term mental health services

If you have any concerns about your child's social emotional and behavioral needs at afterschool, please reach out to the Social Worker, Site Directors, or Director of Children's Programs.

2E. Family Support & Caregiver Engagement

Maria L. Baldwin Community Center aims to engage and support not only the children and youth who attend our programs, but the whole family. Our support for families is guided by the evidence-based [Strengthening Families framework](#) and tailored to each families' unique and individual needs. The approach focuses on engaging families, programs, and communities in building five key protective factors:

- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Social and emotional competence of children

Our social worker partners with families to provide therapeutic case management services, which may include support with the following:

- Housing search assistance and eviction prevention
- Employment and professional development
- Mental health support and referrals for long-term care
- Financial security, including social service benefits screening/application assistance and assistance with food and clothing
- Navigating legal issues
- Immigration support
- Advocacy and referrals to external community organizations
- Resources

The Children's Programs Team is also eager to work together with parents and caregivers to support children in the program. For children who are new to the program, staff appreciate any updates or insights about ways to best support before they begin the program—especially if there are any special needs or considerations. Please email updates to the Social Worker and Director of Children's Programs.

2F. Confidentiality

Information contained in a child or staff record is confidential. Children will not participate in any activities unrelated to the direct care of the program (i.e. fundraisers, research) without written parent or guardian permission.

Section 3. TUITION PAYMENTS, WITHDRAWAL, AND WAITLISTS

Families may pay tuition online with a check, automatic (ACH) withdrawals, or a credit card. Currently we are offering discounts when paying with a check or ACH to help us offset burdensome credit card fees.

3A. Check Payments

While we are in the process of changing our organization name, families should still write checks out to Maria L. Baldwin Community Center and deliver to our main office at 20 Sacramento St. Cambridge, MA 02138. For your convenience, you may also drop off a check in our parent/caregiver mailbox, located by our front door at 20 Sacramento St. This is locked at all times and checked daily.

3B. Withdrawal and Waitlists

If you wish to withdraw your child from the program, please contact Registration at your earliest convenience. Please note that tuition is non-refundable. See more in our tuition policies linked below.

If your child is currently on a waitlist, you will be contacted if and when a spot opens up and you are next on the waitlist. Because openings often depend on current families withdrawing, we cannot predict the likelihood of your child being offered a spot.

3C. Refund Policy

Once you accept your space in the program, you will not be able to get a refund if you withdraw. If a child has to miss program days due to illness, illness of a family member, or contact with someone who had COVID or COVID symptoms, the child will not be permitted to attend the program and no refunds will be issued. See our complete tuition and refund policies for up to date information.

3D. Receipts

Our Tax Identification Number is: 04-2862401. When requesting a receipt for childcare expenses, please contact registration@mlbcc.org and allow at least one week for us to process your request. Receipts are manually generated and can be mailed, emailed or faxed, so please specify your preference.

3E. Questions

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your family account please contact registration@mlbcc.org

Section 4. HEALTH AND SAFETY

4A. Nutrition

- For Outback, families provide a snack, lunch and drinks/water for their child each day. Snacks and meals are available for youth that need it. The program will provide a snack for afterschool.
- We are a NUT-FREE program. We do not serve any food that contains peanuts or tree nuts. Children may not bring food that contains peanuts or tree nuts. If families pack a nut-free alternative, like sun butter or soy butter, please label it.
- Parents should inform and discuss with the Director of Children's Programs, prior to the start of Outback, any food allergies or restrictions. This information also needs to be listed on the child's emergency form, and an Individualized Health Care Plan and Medication Consent submitted with any allergy-related medications will be required.

- Children are very active during their days. We encourage families to pack “growing foods” that can be eaten in any order. Please send your child with their labeled and refillable water bottle

4B. Accidents and Emergency Procedures

- Teachers are trained in First Aid and CPR. In the event of minor accidents, a teacher will administer first aid and notify the child’s parent at pick up. Any injury that requires first aid requires an injury report to be filled out and signed by a parent/guardian.
- If an illness or injury requires medical attention, parents will be contacted immediately. If a parent cannot be reached, the designated emergency contact person will be called. In an emergency situation requiring immediate medical attention, a teacher will call 911 and a staff member will go with the child by ambulance to the nearest hospital. Parents will be contacted to meet them at the hospital. An accident report will be filled out on any incident and one copy of the report will be given to the parent and a second copy will be kept in the child’s file.

4C. Contingency Plans

- The EEC requires all childcare centers to have contingency plans in place in the event of situations such as fire; loss of water, heat or electricity; natural disaster or other situations necessitating evacuation. The staff, under the instruction of the Director, will remove children immediately from the premises at 20 Sacramento Street or the Baldwin School.
- Children will be allowed to gather their belongings only in situations that are not life-threatening. It will be explained to the children that they need to leave the space temporarily while a problem is fixed, and will be taken to a safe place with their teachers until they are picked up by their parents (or other persons designated by parents).
- Children’s emergency contact forms will be brought to the site, and parents will be emailed/phoned by staff and informed of the situation. Depending upon the severity of the circumstances, parents may be asked to pick up children as soon as possible.
- Children will be walked by their teachers to either the Baldwin School, Maud Morgan Arts, 20 Sacramento Street, or Graham & Parks Elementary School / Dragonfly Afterschool (44 Linnaean Street)
- Parents are informed of these contingency plans only as a precautionary measure. They are designed to put you at ease that our staff will be able to keep children safe and calm in the event of unusual circumstances.

4D. Lice

Head lice are nothing to panic or be embarrassed about. There are 6–12 million cases of head lice in our country each year. The presence of head lice is in no way indicative of a lack of cleanliness. In fact, if treatment directions are carefully followed, you can be confident lice will be eliminated. Our lice policy is in place to help contain an outbreak, should one occur. If a child is found to have head lice, their parent or guardian will be contacted. If families discover lice on their child, please notify the Director of Children’s Programs. All information will be kept confidential. We ask that children be treated for lice before returning to the program. If we are aware of any cases of lice in the community, an email notice will be sent out to all families.

4E. Medication

- Our programs require written parental authorization in order to administer any medication, whether prescription or non-prescription. Medication consent forms are sent to all enrolled families. A parent or guardian must also complete an Individual Health Care Plan for any student with an ongoing health related condition (this includes things such as allergies, asthma, diabetes or other conditions that require a plan to be in place).
- A label or other written order by the physician indicating the child’s name, the name of the drug, and instructions for administration must accompany prescription medication.

- Teachers will complete a medication record indicating the date, time and dosage of each administration, and the name of the teacher and the child. All medications will be kept in their original containers and will be stored in a secure location. Unused medications will be returned to the parents.

4F. Self-Medication

In the case of a child who needs to self-medicate (for example asthma or diabetes), the following steps will be required: a caregiver will meet with the Director of Children's Programs or Registration Coordinator to discuss the medical need and to fill out a medical consent form and Individual Health Care Plan; a letter from the child's doctor will be obtained indicating a child's medical need; and all information will be reviewed by the Director. Upon approval by the Director of Children's Programs, a child will be allowed to self-medicate as required. The child's teacher will record on the medical consent form each time the child self-administers medication. The child's parent is required to indicate any changes in the child's medical situation to the Director.

4G. Illness

- Children attending the programs are expected to be well enough to participate in all activities, including outdoor play for the full day. If a child is not feeling well enough to participate in all activities, parents need to make other childcare arrangements until the child is feeling better.
- If a child becomes ill during the day or is found to have a contagious condition, the parent or emergency contact will be called and is expected to pick up the child as soon as possible. Each site has a quiet resting area where children can lay down and be separated from the other children in the program.
- Children who have a fever must stay home from the program and may return when they have been fever free for 24 hours.
- Children must be free of symptoms for 24 hours before returning to the program. Similarly, children with a condition that requires treatment with antibiotics may not return to the program until they have been treated with the antibiotics for at least 24 hours. Children with a communicable disease may be required by the Director to return with a note from the doctor. Parents will be notified in writing if there is a communicable disease or condition that is of concern.
- If a medical problem persists, staff may recommend referral to the child's doctor or to the Program's health care consultant. A copy of the complete Health Care Policy is available upon request.

4H. Additional COVID19-Related Procedures

The health and safety of our participants and staff is our top priority. We are putting many health and safety procedures in place to minimize risk, but there is no way to offer a program that doesn't have some risk. We encourage families to carefully review our health and safety protocols, and consider your own risk factors when you decide whether you wish to send your child to the program. Our ability to run a safe program will also depend on everyone doing their part, both during the program hours, and outside of program hours. The more you and your family can follow guidance on how to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19, the less likely we are to see any cases in our program. We all have to work together to stay as safe as possible!

Outback and Afterschool will be strictly adhering to, and often going above and beyond, the Department of EEC regulations. Staff will be trained on these regulations, cleaning protocols, and procedures if someone becomes ill during the program. If you want to know more, we encourage you to read through the EEC and Cambridge Public School regulations but there are a few things we would like to ensure you know and understand:

- **Outdoor Programming:** We try to be outdoors as much as possible. Children will of course use the bathrooms indoors, and we still do some activities indoors. If there is thunder and lightning or other extreme weather, we will transition indoors, using space in 20 Sacramento, Maud Morgan Arts, and the Baldwin School. Please send your child with weather appropriate clothing.

- **Cleaning and Handwashing:** Children and staff will need to frequently wash hands according to regulations. Tables and chairs, and any other touch surfaces, and bathrooms will be sanitized before arrival and frequently throughout the day.
- **Masks:** Masks are optional but children and staff are more than welcome to wear them.

4I. Behavior Guidance

- In order to provide a safe, nurturing, enjoyable, and smooth-functioning environment for all children, it is necessary that everyone participating in our programs understand and agree to the same set of expectations and rules. Our staff is trained to set very clear, consistent limits. We articulate expectations and identify what types of behaviors are acceptable and what types are unacceptable within our programming. Children understand the environment and play an important role in helping to shape it and to redefine it as necessary. When possible, children may help to establish group rules.
- With clear expectations established, teachers respond to inappropriate behavior according to the situation and their understanding of the child(ren) involved. Children almost always know when they have exceeded boundaries and are often their own best judge of inappropriate behavior. If children exceed a boundary or break a rule they will be asked to take a “break.” If a child is having ongoing challenges in an activity, they may be redirected to another activity or asked to respond to the situation caused by their behavior.
- A “break” is a short reset and a chance for children to stop an unsafe or disruptive behavior. After a break, children are welcomed back to the activity with a clean slate. Breaks range from 10 seconds to 1 minute—depending on the age of the children. Breaks are not punitive.
- The children’s programs staff practice “[The Nurtured Heart Approach](#),” which is a positive reinforcement approach to behavior guidance. Children are offered many opportunities for positive reinforcement from staff who provide very specific comments when positive behavior is observed.
- The Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) requests that we inform you that no child shall be subjected to abuse or neglect, cruel, unusual, severe, or corporal punishment. Children will not be subject to verbal abuse, ridicule, or humiliation. They will not be denied food, rest, or bathroom facilities, punished for soiling, wetting, or not using the toilet; nor will they be forced to remain in soiled clothing or forced to use the toilet. They will not be punished for eating or not eating, nor forced to eat. The Children’s Programs are mandated reporters for any instances of suspected child abuse or neglect. A copy of the full behavior management policy is available upon request.

4J. Referral for Services

Should any staff member feel that any aspect of a child’s development (social, mental, educational, or medical) requires additional services, that teacher will bring the concerns to the attention of the Director of Children’s Programs. The child will be further observed and observations documented. Staff will meet with parents who will be advised of the nature of the concerns and referral to the appropriate resource agency will be made. Staff will work in a team with parents and resource staff to address the situation, outline goals, and to monitor progress.

The Children’s Program will provide to parents a written statement of the reason for recommending a referral, a summary of the program observations, and efforts the program has made to accommodate the child’s needs. We will help parents in the referral process and will have written parental consent prior to making a referral. The program will maintain written records of all referrals and conference results.

MLBCC Children’s Programs are required by Massachusetts’s law to report any incidents of suspected child abuse or neglect. The Director of Children’s Programs shall immediately report any suspected incidents of child abuse or neglect to the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF). In addition, the EEC will be notified immediately after filing a 51A or learning that one has been filed, alleging abuse or neglect of a child while in care of the program or during a program-related activity.

4K. Suspensions and Expulsions

Suspensions will be invoked in those instances when a child's actions pose a threat to the safety and well being of another child, themselves, or a teacher/staff member. Parents will be informed immediately as to the cause and nature of the suspension. The Director of Children's Programs retains the final authority for suspension decisions. There are instances in which the match between a child and our Program is not a constructive one, both for the individual as well as for the group. The child may have needs that cannot be met by our Program, and the extreme effort involved in trying to keep the two linked may have a detrimental effect on each. In the very rare cases of this nature, a child may be asked to leave the Program. In addition, in exceptional circumstances where the continued enrollment of a child is deemed to be a threat to the safety of other children in the group, the Director of Children's Programs has the authority to discontinue a child's participation in the Program.

Section 5. BABYSITTING, TUTORING, AND PRIVATE INSTRUCTION POLICY

We do not provide services outside our regularly scheduled programming. However, we understand that parents and caregivers sometimes ask staff to babysit, tutor, or instruct their children outside of program hours and this policy has been implemented to clarify some points regarding private arrangements between staff and caregivers.

Maria L. Baldwin Community Center is not responsible for any private arrangements or agreements that are made: such agreements are between the staff member and family. However, we do expect staff members to inform us if they are babysitting, tutoring, or privately instructing a child who is currently enrolled in organizational programming. We require the staff member and caregiver to sign a copy of this policy, which we will keep on file for the child and staff member.

Our organization has suitability processes in place to ensure that we employ competent and professional members of staff and uphold our duty to safeguard children on our premises and in the care of our staff. This procedure includes interviews, references, and background record checks. While in our employment all staff are subject to ongoing supervision, observation, and assessment to ensure that standards of work and behavior are maintained in accordance with our policies. We have no such control over the conduct of staff outside of their position of employment. Caregivers should make their own checks as to the suitability of a member of staff for babysitting.

We will not take responsibility for any health and safety issues, conduct, grievances or any other claims arising out of the staff member's private arrangements outside of organizational programming hours. The member of staff will not be covered by the Maria L. Baldwin Community Center's insurance while fulfilling private arrangements of babysitting, tutoring, private instruction, etc.

Out-of-hours work arrangements must not interfere with the staff member's employment at Maria L. Baldwin Community Center. All staff are bound by contract of the Confidentiality Policy that they are unable to discuss any issues regarding Maria L. Baldwin Community Center, other staff members, caregivers, or other children.

Maria L. Baldwin Community Center has a duty of care to safeguard all children attending organizational programming, so if a staff member has some concerns for a child following a private arrangement, they need to pass these concerns on to supervisors within the setting. It will be the staff member's responsibility to ensure they have the appropriate insurance and child restraints or child safety seats if they are transporting them in a car.

Section 6. ABOUT THE NURTURED HEART APPROACH

The Maria L. Baldwin Community Center Afterschool staff practice the Nurtured Heart Approach, which is a positive reinforcement approach to behavior guidance. This approach is founded on three basic principles that fit together to guide children towards making positive choices and feeling secure and great about themselves.

6A. Energize the Positive!

Children want energy and attention from adults and they will do things that get this energy and attention from teachers, parents or other important adults. They crave engaging and exciting interactions with these adults and seek ways to get these interactions. With this understanding, teachers choose to give students this high level of energy, attention and interaction when they see positive things happening in the program. They make a BIG deal out of all of the millions of little things that are going right at any given moment. Teachers actively look for and create successful moments for children and then explain to the child what they are doing and why it is wonderful. This not only reinforces the rules in a positive way for that child and any others who are listening, but also gives that child a whole new set of positive ways to think about themselves. When teachers give very specific, detailed and vivid praise to children, it helps children understand exactly what they have done to warrant this attention and also builds a wonderful personal understanding of their own greatness. In this way, the Nurtured Heart Approach is not just a behavior guidance tool, but has a beautifully positive impact on how children view themselves and the world around them.

6B. Deflate the Negative

Afterschool is a time where children are learning about themselves, social interactions with peers and adults and boundaries. These are important skills to learn and children need chances to practice and try again when they make a mistake. Children learn by trying things out and seeing what will happen and testing limits. Adults should not try to squash this natural curiosity because it helps children to learn about their world through interacting with it. If children learn that when they break a rule they receive the big, interesting, engaging reaction from adults they are hoping for, they will continue to seek this out by breaking rules. With this in mind, teachers using the Nurtured Heart Approach refuse to energize the negative. They don't raise their voice or make a big deal out of mistakes or broken rules. They reserve the BIG reactions for the positive.

6C. Clear Limits and Resets

Children need clear limits so they can feel safe, know what to expect and can focus on learning and having fun. Setting clear limits allows teachers to use the other two pieces of the Nurtured Heart Approach more effectively. With clear rules and limits in place, teachers can create opportunities of success for a child while teaching all the children about the program rules. If a teacher notices a child who is simply not breaking a rule, the teacher can give that child specific praise for following the rule at that moment and explain to the child why it's such a wonderful thing. This also broadcasts to all the other children where the limit lies, and that they will receive this type of attention for following the rule, not breaking it. For example, if a teacher notices a child walking to the drinking fountain, the teacher can say in an energetic voice, "WOW! Tom, you are following the rule by using walking feet inside. You really care about keeping your friends safe at afterschool. You are really caring." In this way, the Nurtured Heart Approach is constantly reinforcing limits in a positive way without spending a great deal of time on discussing the rules when things have gone wrong or making examples out of the mistakes. Rather, teachers make examples out of positive things. Children are expected to make mistakes, forget the rules or test the boundaries. By using the Nurtured Heart Approach, there is space for these things and it doesn't disrupt or become the focal point for the whole day. Teachers use simple resets called "breaks" to remind children of the rules and help get them quickly back on track and have another chance. The focus is not on punishments or consequences but rather on giving children a chance to reset so they may rejoin the activity and try again for success. As soon as they have been "reset" the situation is forgotten and there is a chance for a fresh start. A break may look very different for different children or different situations but the key is that it gives the child the chance to step away from what they were doing and when they are ready to rejoin they are welcomed back and the infraction is forgotten. Some

examples of resets may be to move to a different activity, take a quick “break” either in the classroom or another space or be redirected to a more positive choice.