

Career Development Program

LCHS recognizes the ever increasing needs of our staff to continue their education beyond the high school level. LCHS supports the pursuit of higher education so that each individual can increase their own knowledge and make a better contribution to the program and to the children and families served. Based on training priorities for each fiscal year as well as standards set by the federal and state funding sources, funds are provided to train staff, maintain program quality and to upgrade skills and can be used for either credited undergraduate or graduate courses. Funds should be used for courses related to degree attainment.

1) Employment Eligibility & Coursework Criteria. All full-time and part-time employees are eligible to apply for Career Development funds after the completion of the 90 Day Waiting Period. Substitute staff and temporary workers are not eligible to apply for this benefit.

a) Graduate Coursework for Specialist Staff. For our Specialist Staff, with the responsibility of training others, LCHS will pay eighty (80%) percent of an approved Graduate course, up to 6 credits per fiscal year (January through December). Employees participating in the program must achieve a minimum grade of "B" or better for each course in order to be eligible for funding. Specialist Staff members, who voluntarily resign their positions with LCHS within two (2) years of taking any Graduate course, must pay back any funds previously paid by LCHS.

b) Coursework for Education Staff (Assistant Teachers/Teachers, including Itinerant staff). LCHS limits the use of Career Development funds to coursework specific to Early Childhood and Elementary Education, leading to certification in Early Childhood or a degree in Early Childhood Education.

c) Teacher Credentials/PRAXIS Exams. For the purposes of obtaining a Pennsylvania Professional Certification in Early Childhood (N-3), LCHS will reimburse the cost of the PRAXIS exam upon successful completion (passing). Staff must submit the grade and proof of payment to Human Resources in order to be reimbursed.

2) Application Procedures. In order to participate in the program, an employee must complete a Career Development Application form for each semester enrolled and forward the completed form to the Human Resources Manager for approval. All classes should be scheduled at a time outside of an employee's regular working schedule. Should a conflict arise between scheduled class time and an employee's regular work schedule, the employee must seek immediate written approval from the Executive Director regarding any proposed change to the his/her regular work schedule.

NOTE: All Career Development Application forms must be submitted for approval prior to registration for courses in order to coordinate a payment schedule with the college/university. Timely submission for approval is critical as any delay in processing may affect the employee's ability to register for courses.

3) Tuition Payment. The current tuition payment/reimbursement rate is established annually by LCHS, utilizing the State System of Higher Education Board of Governors as a guide. Effective July 2016, the current state rate is \$302 per credit.

a) Initial Co-Payment. The employee is responsible for making an initial co-payment of \$100, per course, to LCHS, at the time of application. Once the employee has completed the course/semester and has achieved a passing grade of "C" or better, LCHS will reimburse the employee the initial \$100 co-payment that he/she made. It will be the employee's responsibility to submit proof of payment (i.e., canceled check, money order receipt, etc.) as soon as practical to the Human Resources Manager in order to be reimbursed.

b) Deferred Payment Plans. These types of plans are available through most colleges/universities. Under this type of plan, LCHS is billed for its portion of tuition and will pay the institution directly. The Human Resources Manager initially submits a letter to the college/university stating the amount of tuition that LCHS is responsible for and when payment will be made. Any difference between the portion of tuition paid by LCHS and the actual amount of full tuition will be the responsibility of the employee. Late charges, the cost of books and any additional fees (i.e., Distance Learning Fee, Out of County fee) are also the responsibility of the employee. For those individuals not utilizing a Deferred Payment Plan, the employee is billed and responsible for paying the college/university directly. The employee will be reimbursed for the approved amount once he/she submits proof of payment to Human Resources.

c) Maximum Annual Benefit. If approved, an employee may be eligible to receive Career Development Funds up to an annual maximum of \$5,250; no additional amount will be approved beyond this limit. This maximum is set according to IRS regulation, IRC Sect 127(b) 2 through 6, concerning Educational Assistance Plans relating to the maximum annual tax-free financial assistance an employee may receive.

4) Program Specifications:

a) Credits per Semester. An employee may be eligible to receive Career Development Funds for a maximum of six (6) credits per semester, subject to the approval of the Executive Director.

b) Summer Sessions. Upon written request to the Executive Director, special consideration will be given to employee requests to take additional credits beyond the 6-credit maximum during the summer months when center-based programming is not in session.

c) Grade Requirement. A passing grade of C or better is required for reimbursement/payment. No reimbursement/payment will occur if the grade is lower than a C.

d) Evaluation Form. After the coursework is completed, the employee is required to complete a Career Development Evaluation Form and submit a copy of the transcript/course grades as soon as practical to the Human Resources Manager. All evaluation forms must be completed in a timely manner. Failure to complete an evaluation form and/or late submission of an evaluation form may affect future approval and use of Career Development Funds.

e) Failure to Complete a Course. If an employee drops a course in progress, fails to complete the course, or leaves the employment of the organization while taking a course, LCHS will not be responsible for reimbursement or payment of the Career Development Funds. Should an employee drop a course in progress, it is important to obtain a withdrawal slip from the college/university to minimize any subsequent payment obligations. Any fee or billing for course work that occurs once an employee withdraws from a course, drops a course in progress, fails to complete the course, or leaves employment, is the sole responsibility of the employee.

f) Repayment Obligation. [Policy Approved/Revised 10/15/09, Board of Directors/Policy Council]. Per the National Head Start Act of 2007 and effective for staff who took course work paid by LCHS starting, or retroactive to, the Summer 2008 Semester: Should the employee voluntarily leave the organization within three (3) years of the successful completion of approved coursework, all money previously paid by the organization must be paid back to LCHS on a prorated basis. Pay back schedule is as follows: Full repayment if the employee leaves within 1 year of course completion; 2/3 payment if the employee leaves between 1 and 2 years; and 1/3 payment if the employee leaves between 2 and 3 years after course completion. It is the intent of the organization to collect any funds due as repayment by withholding the appropriate share of such costs from the employee's final paycheck. In the event that any funds still remain due and payable, LCHS will bill the employee for such costs.

g) CDA Credential. Any Early Childhood Staff member possessing a Child Development Associate ("CDA") Credential is expected and required to maintain a current CDA credential certificate and renew the certificate in a timely manner so it does not lapse. If an employee allows his/her credential certificate to lapse, he/she places LCHS in jeopardy of being non-compliant with Federal HS Performance Standards and the HS Act. LCHS will pay the cost of the designated renewal fee for the certificate. Staff should follow established rules and timelines in meeting this requirement. If an employee fails to renew a CDA Credential for a position where the certification is a job requirement, he/she may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including, termination of employment.

h) Teacher Stipend. This program is designed to offer an incentive to all teachers who currently hold an Associate's Degree and are actively taking coursework in pursuit of their Bachelor's Degree. An eligible teacher will receive a \$750 stipend each time he/she completes 12 credits, regardless of the use of Career Development Funds. It is the responsibility of the teacher to contact Human Resources, confirm eligibility, and seek approval for payment of the stipend. NOTE – as of 2015, all LCHS Teachers job descriptions will reflect a BS/BA degree as a minimum requirement of the position.