



Childcare and Parent Services Family Support Guide



**Georgia Dept
of Early Care
and Learning**
BRIGHT FROM THE START

Table of Contents

Purpose	2
What is the CAPS Program?	2
To Be Eligible for the CAPS Program.....	2
Applying for the CAPS Program.....	4
Organization of the CAPS Program.....	4
CAPS Scholarship	4
CAPS and Voter Registration	5
Searching for Child Care.....	6
Types of Licensed Child Care Providers in Georgia.....	6
Choosing Quality Child Care.....	6
Health and Safety in Child Care	10
Child Care Programs to Consider.....	11
Quality Rated Child Care	11
Other DECAL Programs	14
Government Benefit Programs	15
Other Family Resources	16
CAPS Maximum Income Limits.....	17
Family (Parent) Rights and Responsibilities:	17

Purpose

This *Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Family Support Guide* provides families and other interested parties information about:

- The CAPS program
- Ways to find high quality child care
- Other resources to benefit children and families

What is the CAPS Program?

Every state receives funding from the federal government to help offset child care costs for low income families and to help raise the quality of out-of-home child care. In Georgia the program for subsidized child care is called the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Program and is administered by the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). CAPS works with other programs administered by DECAL to:

- Increase the opportunities for at risk children to participate in high quality education programs
- Help families become more self-sufficient by obtaining and maintaining employment

In Georgia, DECAL administers the CAPS program as an important part of the early education system. CAPS provides scholarships to families who need financial assistance with paying for the cost of child care. The program also offers financial incentives to early care and education programs that provide high quality care to CAPS children.

Because DECAL administers other early childhood care and education programs, such as Georgia's Pre-K Program, child nutrition, Quality Rated (Georgia's tiered quality rating and improvement system), child care licensing, the Head Start State Collaboration, AND CAPS, the state is able to provide a more comprehensive approach to early child care and education.

To Be Eligible for the CAPS Program

To be eligible to benefit from the CAPS Program, a family must meet the following criteria and provide verifying documentation:

- Be a resident of Georgia
- Be able to verify its identity
- Meet income requirements
- Be involved in a CAPS-approved activity

A child for whom CAPS funding is requested must meet the following requirements:

- Age
- U.S. Citizenship or established status as a qualified alien

Immunizations The following documents are acceptable to verify a child's proof of age:

- Birth certificate
- U.S. passport

- Hospital certificate
- Immigration card
- Homeland security documents, etc.

A child's citizenship may be verified by:

- Copy of the birth certificate
- Vital records
- U.S. passport
- Consoler's report of birth
- Religious record of birth recorded in the United States or its territories within three months of birth, etc.

The child must need child care for a portion of the day and reside with the applicant/family applying for services. Children may receive CAPS assistance if they are under 13 years of age; or up to age 18 if the child has medically documented special needs or is under court-ordered supervision.

Families (parents) must be residents of Georgia. Proof of identity and residency are required. Identity may be verified by one of the following documents:

- U.S. passport
- Voter registration card
- Military issued identification card
- Federal or state issued identification card
- Current school identification card
- Declaration of citizenship
- Naturalization Certificate
- Work or school Visa

Residency may be verified by two of the following documents:

- Current Georgia driver's license/I.D. card
- Current lease or mortgage statement
- Utility bills
- Voter registration card
- Wage stubs with residence address, etc.

Families can access the complete CAPS policy manual by going to www.CAPS.DECAL.ga.gov.

Applying for the CAPS Program

Families can apply for CAPS:

- Online
- By mail
- In person

Families requesting assistance with child care costs may apply online through Georgia Gateway at www.Gateway.ga.gov. After creating an account in Georgia Gateway, families can also check the status of their application, report changes, and renew their benefits online.

To apply for CAPS by mail, families can request an application or go online to www.caps.dec.state.ga.us to download a paper application. The paper application can be mailed or emailed.

Organization of the CAPS Program

- *Scholarship Administration*: This unit is composed of DECAL personnel who determine eligibility for CAPS funding. CAPS funds for eligible families are referred to as *scholarships* communicated to families through certificates.
- *Program Administration*: This unit ensures that the CAPS program operates according to policy and maintains fiscal integrity.
- *Family Support*: This unit helps families participating in CAPS navigate their children's early years. Family support field staff with specialized training provides information, resources, guidance, and support to CAPS families.

CAPS Scholarship

Once a family (parent) has been approved for CAPS, DECAL will issue a scholarship to the eligible family.

The scholarship will include the following information:

- Date scholarship is printed
- **Box I** – Name of child receiving care, type of care provided, start date of care and end date of care
- **Box II** – Family information and recertification date
- **Box III** – Selected provider information and the amount CAPS will pay towards the registration cost
- **Box IV** – The maximum amount CAPS will pay per week, family fee (family's shared assessed child care cost using the family's annual gross income) and the weekly responsibility fee (the difference from what the provider is charging and the maximum amount CAPS will pay).

The CAPS Scholarship looks like this:

Ms. SYSTEM OVERRIDE & TESTING
 34 PEACHTREE ST
 SUITE 2400
 ATLANTA, GA 30303-

March 22, 2010

← Print Date

DFCS has approved child care as shown below. We will only pay for child care authorized with this certificate. Clients must report to their case manager at the county DFCS office any changes in their situation. The changes must be reported to DFCS within (10) calendar days of the change. Examples of changes include income, work hours, home address, household members, the cost of care or as stated in policy.

Providers should notify the case manager at the DFCS office if a child in the CAPS program is absent for three or more days in a row. Providers must notify MAXIMUS of any changes in their information immediately. This includes changes in the cost of care, ownership, license, location, etc. Payments will be made in accordance with the child's attendance and the care approved by this certificate.

This Certificate may be terminated for any reason stated in CAPS policy which include, but are not limited to the following:

- . The Provider fails to comply with its responsibilities as stated in the provider handbook
- . The County department has inadequate revenues to sustain the arrangements listed on this certificate
- . The child(ren) no longer participate in the provider's program
- . Mutual Consent
- . If the family is no longer eligible

Child Info



I. Child Care information Case: 30028 Certificate: 1800998
 Child's name BOBBY TEST DOB: 02/02/2001 Authorized: 08/03/2007
 Type of Care Day Care Care Begin: 07/02/2007
 # of days per week 5 Care End: 09/30/2007

Variations

Parent Info



II. Family information *** Recertification Date ***
 Child's Parent/Guardian OVERRIDE & TESTING SYSTEM 05/09/2010
 Address 34 PEACHTREE ST SUITE 2400
 ATLANTA, GA, 30303-
 Telephone (home) (work)

Provider Info



III. Provider # 17898 Type: Center
 Name SYSTEM TESTING, DO NOT USE UAS: 544
 Address 34 PEACHTREE ST SUITE 2400 Relation to Child: OU
 ATLANTA, GA 30303- In Child's Home: No
 Phone (404) 601-3222 Registration Fee: 50

Payment Info



IV. CAPS payment and assigned Family Fees						
	Actual Provider Weekly charge	CAPS Weekly Rate	Child Fee	CAPS Weekly Amt to Prov	Parent Weekly Responsibility	Authorized Registration Fee
Day Care	110	110	0	110	0	0

PROVIDERS: Please note that CAPS payment(s) may be less if there is an outstanding claim balance due to CAPS from you. The parent is not responsible for this outstanding claim balance. Information packets are issued upon initial enrollment. Additional copies are available upon request. Please call MAXIMUS @ 1-877-755-6522 if you need further assistance.

ATTENTION: This certificate is effective from 07/02/2007 to 09/30/2007, unless there are changes in the family situation. The Parent and the Provider will receive written notification from DFCS if this certificate is changed. If you are not recertified prior to 05/09/2010, you will no longer be eligible to receive CAPS child care.

V. Case Manager - Romaniello, Mike (404) 444-4444

REV 07/28/05 15:50

CAPS and Voter Registration

When applying for, or receiving CAPS assistance, families (parents) will be given the option to register to vote. This option is available whenever all applicants and recipients apply for services, renew services, or submit a change of address, whether in person, electronically, or by telephone, fax, or mail.

To register to vote, the applicant can register online or complete a paper [State of Georgia Application for Voter Registration](#). Online registration and forms can be found at http://sos.ga.gov/index.php/Elections/register_to_vote.

Searching for Child Care



Types of Licensed Child Care Providers in Georgia

Georgia recognizes two types of licensed child care settings, and CAPS offers scholarships to both types.

- Child Care Learning Centers
- Family Child Care Learning Homes

Families are free to select the type of child care setting that is best for their children; the type that will keep children safe, healthy, and learning; the type that best fits the children's and the family's needs.



Choosing Quality Child Care

DECAL understands that finding a child care provider that is convenient, open when needed, and within budget is important to families. Most importantly, however, is finding a program that ensures children are safe, healthy, and learning.

Below are steps to help a family choose a quality child care program (from Child Care Aware¹, a national hub of child care information for families and child care providers).

1. **Start Early:** Start looking as far in advance as you can. No matter what type of care you are considering – a child care center or care in someone else's home – finding the right child care option can take some time.
2. **Make a Call:** Begin your search by contacting your local experts – your Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency. CCR&Rs can give you the facts about child care and a list of child care options in your area that meets your needs. In Georgia, you can contact Quality Care for Children at 1-877-ALL-GA-KIDS or www.ALLGAKIDS.org. Ask the CCR&R:
 - What are the [licensing requirements](#) in my area?
 - How can I get information about [complaints and licensing violations](#)²?
3. **Visit and Ask Questions:** Visit the child care options you are considering. Find out about these key indicators of quality:
 - **Adult to Child Ratio:** Ask how many children there are for each adult. The fewer the children for each adult, the better for your child. You want your child to get plenty of attention. The younger your child, the more important this is. Ideally, babies need

¹ For more information on Child Care Aware, please visit childcareaware.org.

² A visit to www.DECAL.ga.gov can also provide current information on a specific child care provider's compliance with health and safety regulations, including monitoring visits and substantiated complaints.

an adult to child ratio of no more than 1:4 (one adult for four infants), while four-year olds can do well with a ratio of 1:10 (one adult for 10 children).

- **Group Size:** Find out how many children are in the group. The smaller the group, the better. Imagine a group of 25 two-year olds with five adults, compared to a group of 10 with two adults. Both groups have the same adult to child ratio. Which would be calmer and safer? Which would be more like a family?
- **Caregiver Qualifications:** Ask about the caregivers' training and education. Caregivers with degrees and/or special training in working with children will be better able to help your child learn. Are the caregivers involved in activities to improve their skills? Do they attend classes and workshops?
- **Turnover:** Check how long caregivers have been at the center or providing care in their homes. It's best if children stay with the same caregiver at least one year. Caregivers who come and go make it hard on your child. Getting used to new caregivers takes time and energy that could be spent learning new things.
- **Accreditation:** Find out if the child care provider has been accredited by a national organization. Providers that are accredited have met voluntary standards for child care that are higher than most state licensing requirements. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) are the two largest organizations that accredit child care programs.³

4. **Make a Choice:** Think about what you saw at each visit, and make the best choice for your child and family.
5. **Stay Involved:** The work isn't over when you find good care for your child. You and your child's caregiver are partners now. Here are some ways to be involved:
 - Have parent-caregiver meetings regularly, and ask questions.
 - Offer to volunteer time when needed, like participating in clean-up days or fixing broken toys.
 - Be there for your child's birthday party.
 - Visit your child at child care and read a book aloud.
 - Join in special events, like field trips, Career Day, Black History Month, or other holidays.

Even if you can't get time off from work during the day, you can still check in at drop-off and pick-up times. Ask the caregiver how things are going and how your child is doing.

Visiting and participating in events at your child's program sends a strong message. It tells your child and your child's caregiver that you think what your child is doing and learning is important.

6. **Supervision**
 - Are children supervised at all times, even when they are sleeping?
 - How do the caregivers discipline children? (Hint: Discipline should be positive, clear, consistent, and fair.)

³ In Georgia, there is a quality rating and improvement system for child care programs called Quality Rated. Please see additional information about Quality Rated and finding a Quality Rated child care provider beginning on page 13 of this guide.

7. Hand Washing and Diapering

- Do all caregivers and children wash their hands often, especially before eating and after using the bathroom or changing diapers?
- Is the place where diapers are changed clean?
- Do caregivers always keep a hand on the child while diapering?
- Do caregivers remove the soiled diaper without dirtying any surface not already in contact with stool or urine?
- Do caregivers clean and sanitize the surface after finishing the changing process? (Hands should be scrubbed with soap and warm running water for at least 20 seconds and then rinsed and dried. The water faucet should be turned off with a paper towel.)

8. Director Qualifications

- Does the director of a child care center have a bachelor's degree in a child-related field?
- Has the director worked in child care for at least two years?
- Does the director understand what children need to grow and learn?

9. Lead Teacher Qualifications

- Does the lead teacher in a child care center have a bachelor's degree in a child-related field?
- Has the teacher worked in child care for at least one year?
- Does the teacher give children lessons and toys that are right for their ages?

10. Immunizations

- Is your child up-to-date on all of the required immunizations?
- Does the child care program have records proving that the other children in care are up-to-date on all their required immunizations?

11. Toxic Substances

- Are toxic substances like cleaning supplies and pest killers kept away from children?
- Has the building been checked for dangerous substances like radon, lead, and asbestos?
- Is poison control information posted?

12. Emergency Plan

- Does the child care program have an emergency plan if a child is injured, sick, or lost?
- Does the child care program have first-aid kits?
- Does the child care program have information about who to contact in an emergency?

13. Fire/Emergency Drills

- Does the child care program have a plan in case of a disaster like a fire, tornado, flood, blizzard, or earthquake?
- Does the child care program do practice drills once every month?

14. Child Abuse

- Can caregivers be seen by others at all times so a child is never alone with one caregiver?
- Have all caregivers undergone comprehensive background checks?
- Have the caregivers been trained on how to prevent child abuse, how to recognize signs of child abuse, and how to report suspected child abuse?

15. Medications

- Does the child care program keep medication out of the reach of children?
- Are the caregivers trained and the medications labeled to make sure the right child gets the right amount of the right medication at the right time?

16. Staff Training/First Aid

- Have caregivers been trained on how to keep children healthy and safe from injury and illness?
- Do they know how to do first aid and rescue breathing?
- Have they been trained to understand and meet the needs of children of different ages?
- Are all child care staff, volunteers, and substitutes trained on and implementing infant back sleeping and safe sleep policies to reduce the risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, crib death)? (When infants are sleeping, are they on their backs with no pillows, quilts, stuffed toys, or other soft bedding in the crib with them?)

17. Playgrounds

- Is the playground regularly inspected for safety?
- Is the playground surrounded by a fence?
- If there is a sandbox, is it clean?
- Are the soil and playground surfaces checked often for dangerous substances and hazards?
- Is equipment the right size and type for the age of children who use it?

18. Caregivers/Teachers

- Do the caregivers/teachers seem to really like children?
- Do the caregivers/teachers get down on each child's level to speak with the child?
- Are children greeted when they arrive?
- Are children's needs quickly met even when things get busy?
- Are the caregivers/teachers involved in continuing education programs?
- Does the program keep up with children's changing interests?
- Will the caregivers/teachers always be ready to answer your questions?
- Will the caregivers/teachers tell you what your child is doing every day?
- Are parents' ideas welcomed? Are there ways for you to get involved?
- Do the caregivers/teachers and children enjoy being together?
- Have the caregivers participated in early childhood development classes?

19. Setting

- Is the atmosphere bright and pleasant?

- Is there a fenced-in outdoor play area with a variety of safe equipment? Can the caregivers/teachers see the entire playground at all times?
- Are there different areas for resting, quiet play, and active play? Is there enough space for the children in all of these areas?

20. Activities

- Is there a daily balance of play time, story time, activity time, and nap time?
- Are the activities right for each age group?
- Are there enough toys and learning materials for the number of children?
- Are toys clean, safe, and within reach of the children?

21. In General

- Do you agree with the discipline practices?
- Do you hear the sounds of happy children?
- Are children comforted when needed?
- Is the program licensed or regulated?
- Are surprise visits by parents encouraged?
- Will your child be happy there?



Health and Safety in Child Care

When you're choosing a child care provider, it is important to look for evidence that your child's health and safety will be a priority. While there is more to quality child care than having a state license, selecting a licensed program is one step that you can take towards choosing a safe place for your child.

Who should have a comprehensive background check?

- All adults living in a Family Child Care home,
- Each child care center staff member, including directors, teachers, caregivers, bus drivers, janitors, kitchen staff and administrative employees, and
- Every adult volunteering in the program that will have access to your child

What does a comprehensive background check include?

Background checks should be done using the following records for each state that the adult has lived in for the past five years:

- State and federal criminal history check using the individual's name
- State and federal criminal history check using the individual's fingerprints
- Child abuse registry check (this may also be known as the Child Protection Index)
- Sex offender registry check

How do I know if the adults in my child's child care program have had a comprehensive criminal history check?

If your child's caregiver does not have a license, ask for proof of a completed criminal history check. If they do not have documentation, ask the caregiver to complete a check, or conduct a criminal history check yourself.

Ask your provider if they have completed training in the following key areas:

1. Pediatric First Aid and CPR

2. Prevention and control of infectious diseases (including immunizations)
3. Safe sleep practices and Prevention of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)
4. Prevention of Shaken Baby Syndrome, abusive head trauma, and child maltreatment
5. Recognition and prevention of child abuse and neglect
6. Medication administration
7. Prevention and response to emergencies due to food allergic reactions
8. Emergency preparedness and response for natural disasters or man-caused events
9. Handling, storage, and disposal of hazardous materials
10. Indoor and outdoor safety (including identifying and protecting children from hazards, bodies of water, traffic, etc.)
11. Safety measures in transporting children (if applicable)

Providers should also receive training in child development, physical activity and nutrition. Additionally, if you are the family of a child with special needs, be sure that your provider is able to meet your child's needs. Ask about their training and experience caring for children with special needs.



Child Care Programs to Consider

Why choose a licensed child care program?

Licensed child care facilities follow state licensing rules to ensure children are in a safe and healthy environment. Licensed child care programs in Georgia:

- Receive a minimum of two unannounced inspections per year to ensure the program is following health and safety guidelines.
- Are required to comply with state health and safety guidelines for child care.
- Have child care program staff who are trained in CPR and First Aid, and have someone on premises with this training whenever children are present.
- Have employees who have a satisfactory criminal background check.
- Have routine cleaning and sanitation of indoor and outdoor play areas and equipment.
- Prohibit smoking on premises during hours of operation.
- Have teachers and directors who have a minimum of 10 hours of professional child care and child development training a year.

Quality Rated Child Care



In 2015, based on recommendations from the Early Childhood Education Subcommittee (part of the Governors Education Reform Commission) now known as the DECAL Advisory Committee, DECAL identified the CAPS/Quality Rated goal that all providers who participate in the CAPS program be quality rated by December 31, 2020. The Advisory Committee is a stakeholder group of child care providers, advocates, and family representatives convened by DECAL to study ongoing policy issues. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this goal was extended to December 31, 2021.

Quality Rated is what parents and families want

Finding the right child care, preschool, before and after school, or pre-K program is so important, and families want useful, reliable tools that help them make the best choices for

their child. Parents and families need an independent, trustworthy resource to help them find high-quality child care, preschool and pre-K programs. That’s where Georgia’s Quality Rated comes in.

- Quality Rated is a tool that helps families find child care programs in their area that have been evaluated by credentialed early childhood experts and identified as high quality.
- A quality child care, preschool or pre-K program provides children with a nurturing and educational environment to help them learn and develop their social skills so they have a strong foundation as they grow.
- Families want to make the best choices for their child’s growth and development so that they have a bright start in life.
- Parents and families who use Quality Rated can have peace of mind knowing they have a tool to identify high-quality programs, so that when they search for child care, they can focus on the details that matter most to their family.

Quality Rated is user-friendly, helpful, and credible

Quality Rated has an online database where Georgia parents and families can find information on quality early care programs in their area—regardless of what type of provider they prefer, whether at a home, a preschool at a center or a program at a school.

- All child care providers that participate in Quality Rated – whether they have one, two or three stars – *have gone above and beyond state health and safety requirements* to provide a high-quality experience to the children in their programs.
- Parents and families can use Quality Rated to cross-check child care referrals they receive from families and friends or through other research they’ve done. They can make sure that the program they are considering is evaluated by the State of Georgia and committed to providing children an environment and experience that is best for their development.
- Like rating systems for restaurants and hotels, Quality Rated is easy for parents and families to understand and use.
- Quality Rated gives families greater confidence in their child care choice because they know that independent early education experts assess whether programs apply research-based best practices such as:
 - Employing qualified and well-trained teachers
 - Providing a safe, healthy and caring environment
 - Implementing individualized instruction
 - Offering a curriculum that prepares kids for kindergarten
 - Including focuses on both active learning and social-emotional development
 - Engaging families
 - Providing a low teacher-student ratio
- Quality Rated helps parents and families make the most informed choice for their child and provide them a bright start to their future.
- To check out this great resource for you and your child, visit www.QualityRated.org.

Have Questions About Quality Rated?

Below are some of the most frequently asked questions about Quality Rated.

What is Quality Rated?

Parents and families need an independent, trustworthy resource to help them find high-quality child care, preschool, and pre-K programs. Georgia's Quality Rated tool helps families find child care programs in their area that have been evaluated by credentialed early childhood experts and identified as high-quality.

What is a "quality" program?

A quality child care, preschool, or pre-K program provides children with a nurturing and educational environment to help them learn and develop their social skills, so they have a strong foundation as they grow.

Why should I use the Quality Rated tool?

Many parents and families don't know where to start in their search for a quality child care program. Quite often, their search is guided by referrals from friends or family. The Quality Rated tool helps parents and families compare child care referrals they receive or those they have gathered through their own research or visits. They can make sure that the program they are considering has been thoroughly reviewed by the State of Georgia and that their ultimate choice of provider is committed to providing their children an environment and experience that is best for their development.

What type of information can be found through the Quality Rated tool?

Quality Rated has a star rating system that evaluate the level of quality a child care program provides. Child care programs that participate in Quality Rated can be rated as 1, 2, or 3 stars. This rating system allow families to easily identify high-quality child care and early education programs that are using research-based best practices to prepare children for kindergarten.

When searching for a program for their child, parents and families can explore the different facilities located in their area. Through the Quality Rated tool's search function, they will have access to specific information on each program, such as:

- safety and inspection reports
- teacher-student ratio
- hours of operation and
- Transportation options, among many other details

Quality Rated gives families greater confidence in their child care choice because they know that independent early education experts assess whether programs apply research-based best practices.

What do the different star ratings mean?

All programs that participate in Quality Rated are committed to improving quality care and education by going above and beyond Georgia's licensing standards. In fact, regardless of their star rating, all Quality Rated programs are meeting or exceeding Georgia's child care licensing health and safety standards. Whether these programs receive a one, two, or three star rating, they have all demonstrated dedication to providing a high-quality experience to the children in their programs and the families they serve.

For a more in-depth overview on the specific actions that programs at the various star ratings have put in place to serve the children, parents and families they serve, visit www.QualityRated.org.

If my child's program does not participate in Quality Rated, does that mean they are low quality?

Just because your child's program isn't participating in Quality Rated, that does not mean their program is failing to meet or exceed high standards. It is up to a child care provider whether or not they choose to be rated under the Quality Rated tool.

We do, however, encourage parents to ask their child's program why they are not participating and to explore all of the financial incentives and other assistance Quality Rated programs receive. Given that all Quality Rated programs are meeting or exceeding high standards, or are on course to meet or exceed those standards, we believe that all child care programs can benefit from participation.

Effective December 31, 2021, licensed child care programs must participate in Quality Rated to receive CAPS funding. To ensure the CAPS/QR goal is achieved and maintained, two (2) new statuses were created: CAPS/QR Probationary Status and CAPS/QR Provisional Status for programs that are unrated. The creation of these statuses will help minimize disruptions to children and families with a CAPS scholarship. For additional information on the CAPS/QR goal guidelines and requirements, refer to the [CAPS Quality Rated Guidelines and Requirements \(Appendix II\)](#) on the CAPS website at www.caps.decal.ga.gov.

Can I use the tool to compare programs in my area to make the best decision?

Yes. Through our online Quality Rated tool, parents and families can search for providers near them and see the ratings of the various providers.

How can families find a Quality Rated program near them?

Visit www.QualityRated.org to find a Quality Rated program near you.

Other DECAL Programs

- **Georgia's Pre-K Program**

Georgia's Pre-K Program is a lottery funded educational program for Georgia's four year olds to prepare children for Kindergarten. Children four years of age on September 1 of the current school year who are Georgia residents are eligible to attend Georgia's Pre-K Program. Georgia's Pre-K Program is free for families and is a voluntary program. Pre-K programs usually operate on the regular school system calendar for the length of a typical school day. Programs may be offered at local public schools or through private providers of preschool services.

Visit <http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/EnrollingInPreK.aspx> to find a Georgia Pre-K location near you, additional eligibility requirements and enrollment information.

- **Pre-K Summer Transition Program (STP)**

DECAL administers the Summer Transition Program (STP) during June and July. This is a six-week intensive academic program for rising kindergarteners who meet the follow criteria:

- ❖ Did not attend a Georgia's Pre K or Head Start program or attended Georgia's Pre-K or Head Start but need additional academic support before entering kindergarten.
- ❖ Families meet income eligibility requirements for CAPS, i.e., income does not exceed 85% of the state median income.

The goal of the STP experience is to reduce the achievement gap by providing additional family support and resources to targeted high needs populations.

- **Early Head Start (EHS)/Head Start**

The triple mission of Early Head Start (EHS) is to promote healthy prenatal outcomes, enhance the development of infants and toddlers, and promote healthy family functioning.

The goal of Head Start is to foster healthy development in low-income children. Head Start is a federal program that promotes the school readiness of children from birth to age five from low-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Head Start programs provide a learning environment that supports children's growth in many areas such as language, literacy, and social and emotional development. Head Start emphasizes the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher. Program grantees and delegate agencies deliver a range of appropriate services in response to each child's and each family's heritage and experience, that encompass all aspects of a child's development and learning. For more information about Head Start and Early Head Start visit <https://www.dec.state.ga.us/HeadStart/>.

- **Inclusion Services**

Research supports that inclusion of children with disabilities in supportive early childhood settings benefits the child with disabilities, the other children in the classroom, families, and the community. For more information about Inclusion Services visit <http://www.dec.state.ga.us/InstructionalSupports/InclusionServices.aspx>.

- **Nutrition Services**

DECAL's Nutrition Services Division administers the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) in Georgia. These federal nutrition programs funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) ensure that children and adults throughout Georgia have access to nutritious meals while they are in a day care setting and during the summer when school is not in session. These programs help alleviate hunger and malnutrition and address the negative effects that hunger and malnutrition have on an individual's health, educational development, and growth. The CACFP and the SFSP help

improve the overall nutritional status of many of Georgia's most vulnerable citizens. For more information about Nutrition Services, visit <https://www.dec.state.ga.us/Nutrition/>.

Government Benefit Programs

The Department of Human Services administers several programs and provides resources to benefit families.

TANF – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, commonly known as “welfare,” is a monthly case assistance program for families with no or low income that meet eligibility requirements.

SNAP (Food Stamps) – The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides a monthly benefit to low-income households to help pay for the cost of food.

Medicaid – A medical assistance program that provides health care services to individuals that meet the requirements for income, resources and citizenship.

Child Support – Child Support Services is designed to help ensure the custodial parent receives financial support from the non-custodial parent. Through this process paternity can be established, and financial support services can be enforced.

For additional information on these programs, visit www.dhs.georgia.gov/public-assistance.

Other Family Resources

Peach Care for Kids – Peach Care for Kids offers free or low-cost health insurance to uninsured, eligible children living in Georgia.

WIC (Women, Infant and Children) - WIC is a federally-funded program that provides the following to low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and infants and children up to age five who are determined to be at nutritional risk:

- Special checks/vouchers to buy healthy foods from WIC-authorized vendors – milk, eggs, bread, cereal, juice, peanut butter, and much more;
- Information about nutrition and health to help families eat well and be healthy
- Support and information about breastfeeding
- Help in finding health care and other community services

Babies Can't Wait – Babies Can't Wait enhances the capacity of families to meet the special needs of their child to ensure that each young child with significant developmental delays achieves his or her maximum developmental potential.

Georgia Energy Assistance Program - The Georgia Energy Assistance Program (EAP), known nationally as the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), is a federally-funded program that helps low-income households with their home energy bills. The Georgia EAP program may offer one or more of the following types of assistance: bill payment assistance, energy crisis assistance, and/or weatherization and energy-related home repairs.

Georgia School Breakfast and Lunch Program - The School Breakfast Program (SBP) provides cash assistance to states to operate nonprofit breakfast programs in schools and residential child care institutions. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition service administers the SBP at the federal level. State education agencies administer the SBP at the state level, and local school food authorities operate the program in schools.

Georgia Special Milk Program - The Special Milk Program provides milk to children in schools and child care institutions that do not participate in other federal meal service programs. The program reimburses schools for the milk they serve.

For more details on the above and more Georgia government benefit programs, visit www.benefits.gov.

Military Child Care Assistance Programs - Members of the United States military may be eligible for Department of Defense child care fee assistance. Members of the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps may receive help paying for off-base child care providers if they are unable to access on-base care. These military child care fee assistance programs are administered by Child Care Aware of America. Military families interested in learning more about the programs can visit the Child Care Aware of America website that includes details about eligibility, the application process, and program requirements.

All GA Kids is Georgia's source for parents looking for quality child care throughout Georgia that is managed by Quality Care for Children and funded by DECAL. Families can locate quality child care near them by visiting www.allgakids.org or calling 877-ALL-GA-KIDS (877-255-4254).

CAPS Maximum Income Limits

The chart listed below provides the limits effective October 1, 2021, for income eligibility in the CAPS program.⁴ The CAPS maximum income limit for initial entry is set at 50% of the current State Median Income (SMI). Once deemed eligible, a family may have an increase in their annual income as long as the income does not consistently exceed the federal limit (85% SMI). Any family whose income consistently exceeds this limit (85% SMI) will no longer be eligible for CAPS scholarships.

This is the maximum income for families to be considered as part of the Very Low Income priority group.

This is the maximum income for families to be considered eligible for initial entry into the CAPS program.

CAPS Maximum Income Limits

Family Unit Size	Very Low Income Priority Group ¹	Initial Eligibility ²	Ongoing Eligibility and Redetermination ³
1	\$20,385	\$37,505	\$37,505
2	\$27,465	\$49,044	\$49,044
3	\$34,545	\$60,584	\$60,584
4	\$41,625	\$72,124	\$72,124
5	\$48,705	\$83,664	\$83,664
6	\$55,785	\$95,203	\$95,203
7	\$62,865	\$97,367	\$97,367
8	\$69,945	\$99,531	\$99,531
9	\$77,025	\$101,694	\$101,694
10	\$84,105	\$103,858	\$103,858
11	\$91,185	\$106,022	\$106,022
12	\$98,265	\$108,186	\$108,186

Family size is the total number of people that are included in the family.

85% SMI is the federal limit (as set by the Administration for Children and Families) for child care eligibility. **Any income above 85% SMI must be reported to the CAPS program.**

¹Effective July 1, 2019, the threshold for families in the very low-income priority group is 50% of the federal poverty guidelines, as updated periodically in the Federal Register by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. **Effective November 1, 2021, this threshold is set at 150% of the federal poverty guidelines due to funding from the ARP Act and is time limited.** The federal poverty guidelines in this chart are effective for CAPS as of March 1, 2022. This threshold is established by CAPS and is subject to change. ²The threshold for initial eligibility is 50% of the state median income (SMI). SMI is updated by the federal government before the beginning of each federal fiscal year (October 1). The SMI data in this chart are effective October 1, 2021. **Effective November 1, 2021, this threshold is set at 85% of the SMI due to funding from the ARP Act and is time limited.** This threshold is established by CAPS and is subject to change. ³The threshold for ongoing eligibility is 85% of the state median income (SMI). SMI is updated by the federal government before the beginning of each federal fiscal year (October 1). The SMI data in this chart are effective October 1, 2021. This threshold is established by CAPS within federal guidelines and is subject to change.

Family (Parent) Rights and Responsibilities:

- The parent has the right to apply for child care assistance, withdraw the application, request termination of assistance, or reapply for assistance at any time.

⁴ Families must meet income and other requirements as outlined in CAPS policy. Income, other eligibility factors, and reporting requirements can be found in the CAPS policy manual at www.CAPS.DECAL.ga.gov.

- The parent is authorized to receive child care services as long as funds are available, and the parent remains eligible and has complied with all CAPS program requirements.
- The parent has the right to choose any eligible child care provider within the limits prescribed in CAPS Participating Provider Policy (CAPS/00-11) and CAPS Provider Rights and Responsibilities Policy (CAPS/00-12).
- The parent has the right to enroll their school age child in any educational program of their choosing. However, CAPS may only reimburse a provider for before and after school care for school age children attending a public or private school while school is in session.
- The parent has the right to make decisions about the choice of child care provider that suits the needs of his/her family, as long as the provider is approved by DECAL and meets the requirements of the CAPS program.
- Parents who state that they or their children have been victims of domestic violence or who state that they are at risk of further domestic violence will be informed of the available community services that assist victims of domestic violence and how to voluntarily and confidentially access such services.
- The parent has the right to have access to his/her child during all times the child is in child care.
- Information that is provided by the parent and placed in a database used by the CAPS program will remain confidential in accordance with any applicable state or federal regulations.
- The parent has the right to see his or her case file unless this is prohibited by state or federal laws or regulations.
- The parent has the right to request a grievance mediation and/or file an appeal when the department imposes an adverse action that is appealable, such as a denial and/or termination of CAPS services and the parent does not agree with the action taken by the department. For additional information appeal or grievance requests, please visit CAPS policy at www.caps.dec.state.ga.us
- Parents who speak Spanish have the right to request and receive forms and notices in Spanish and request CAPS to provide an interpreter when contacting the CAPS program. Other non-English speaking individuals or persons with limited English proficiency shall have the right to request an interpreter provided by the CAPS program. These services can be requested by contacting the CAPS program at CAPS.support@dec.state.ga.us.
- Parents with vision or hearing impairments have the right to request auxiliary aids or other accommodations. These services can be requested by contacting the CAPS program at CAPS.support@dec.state.ga.us.
- The parent has the right to be treated fairly without regard to race, color, religion, sex or sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, ancestry, age, political beliefs, or disability.

- The parent has the right to appeal to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights (HHS OCR) if they feel DECAL or the CAPS program staff have violated their civil rights.
- The parent has the right to request suspension or termination of services.
- The parent is responsible for providing true and accurate information to the CAPS program.
- The parent is responsible for supplying all requested forms, information, and verification needed to determine eligibility and amount of benefits. If all information cannot be submitted within the thirty (30) calendar days' time frame for application processing, this may result in the inability to determine eligibility and the application being denied.
- The parent must permit DECAL to verify all information/statements on the application and during the interview.
- The parent must cooperate in taking any actions necessary to establish eligibility. The parent must cooperate with any CAPS, Audits and Compliance, and Office of Inspector General (OIG) fraud investigation by completing any required forms, responding to scheduled interview appointments, and by making requested records or information available. Parents who do not cooperate may be determined to be ineligible for CAPS services until they cooperate.
- The parent is responsible for reporting any changes in his or her circumstances to the CAPS program within ten (10) calendar days of becoming aware of the change. Some changes, while not required to be reported, may result in an increased benefit to the family.
 - The following list of changes may (but is not required to) be reported to the CAPS program:
 - Change in family income at or below 85% of the current State Median Income (SMI)
 - Child birth, adoption, or addition of a new child
 - Marriage
 - Change in required activity that is temporary and the activity may resume
 - The following is a list of changes that the parent is required to report within ten calendar days of the change:
 - Change in family income where the income exceeds 85% SMI for four (4) or more consecutive weeks
 - Change in activity that is not temporary (e.g., loss of employment, graduation from school or training activity)
 - Request for change in child care provider
 - Any change in child care arrangements (including child care provider's location, the relationship of the provider and the child, cost, or need for care).
 - Change in state of residence
 - Updated contact information (address, phone number, or email address) to allow ongoing communication
 - Child is no longer enrolled in child care or moves out of the home.

- The parent is responsible for paying any amounts above the CAPS reimbursement to the provider, if the provider charges a higher amount.
- The parent is responsible for paying the provider if child care is received during a period in which he or she is ineligible or for any child care that CAPS did not authorize.
- The parent is responsible for repaying any overpayments assessed against him/her by the CAPS program after all appeal processes have been exhausted. Any violations of responsibility for non-payment may result in additional adverse actions or sanctions.