

	GEORGIA DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES CHILD WELFARE POLICY MANUAL			
	Chapter:	(10) Foster Care	Effective Date:	September 2020
	Policy Title:	Childcare and Early Education		
Policy Number:	10.16	Previous Policy #:	N/A	

CODES/REFERENCES

N/A

REQUIREMENTS

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) shall:

1. Enroll children in DFCS custody (under five years of age) in an early care and education program licensed by the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) and participating in Quality Rated, Georgia’s tiered quality rating and improvement system (www.QualityRated.org). This includes childcare programs, Head Start and Early Head Start programs and Pre-K programs. Program selection should be based on the individualized needs of the child and caregiver.

NOTE: Children in DFCS custody are categorically eligible for Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS), Head Start and Early Head Start education programs.

2. Evaluate the need for childcare services (less than 24 hours per day) for school aged children in an active foster care case.
3. Determine if childcare needs are regular (ongoing and predictable) or irregular (short term or temporary).
4. Complete the required fields in Georgia SHINES to transmit a referral for the CAPS program **immediately** but no later than one business day of discovering regular childcare is needed.

NOTE: CAPS cannot reimburse for childcare expenses prior to the date DECAL receives the referral.

5. Update the necessary fields in Georgia SHINES to reflect any changes involving a child or caregiver receiving childcare services within five business days of the change to trigger a change request to DECAL.
6. Use state or local funding (i.e. county funds) to pay for irregular childcare when CAPS eligibility criteria are not met. A waiver from the Early Childhood Collaboration Director is required to use state funds to pay childcare expenses for any purpose other than foster parent training.

PROCEDURES

Childcare (Regular)

The Social Services Case Manager (SSCM) will:

1. Discuss the need for childcare services (less than 24 hours a day) and the benefits of early education with caregivers prior to placement.
2. Complete the required fields in Georgia SHINES to transmit a referral for the CAPS program immediately, but no later than one business day after discovering regular

childcare is needed.

3. Provide guidance to the caregivers regarding what to expect while the referral is being processed:
 - a. Advise caregivers that it may take five business days or more to process the childcare referral and discuss the plan for childcare during that period of time.
 - b. Advise caregivers that if they are approved for CAPS, childcare expenses may be covered back to the date the childcare referral was received by DECAL.
 - c. Advise caregivers not to pay for childcare expenses out-of-pocket prior to approval of the referral.
4. Update Georgia SHINES as indicated below:
 - a. Whenever a child is transferred to another placement;
 - b. Whenever a child enrolls in a different childcare program;
 - c. Within five business days of any other changes involving a child or caregiver receiving CAPS, Early Head Start, Head Start, or Pre-K services.

Childcare (Irregular)

To reimburse a regular or kinship foster parent for childcare services (irregular or temporary) using state or local funding when CAPS eligibility criteria is not met, the SSCM will:

1. Request a waiver from the Early Childhood Collaboration Director to use state funds to pay childcare expenses for any purpose other than foster parent training.
2. Review the Foster Care Invoice for accuracy, coding and original receipts.
3. Submit the Foster Care Invoice to the approving authority for signature.
4. Forward the approved Foster Care Invoice to the Regional Accounting Office for payment.
5. Request written approval from the County Director/Designee for a cash advance if the reimbursement method of payment places an undue hardship on the foster parent or kinship caregiver.

Head Start and Early Head Start

The SSCM will:

1. Identify children birth to five years old.
2. Discuss the importance of early childhood education with the caregivers and the benefits of Early Head Start or Head Start services (see Practice Guidance: Georgia Head Start and Early Head Start Programs).
3. Complete and submit the DFCS Head Start/Pre-K Referral Form electronically to dfcs.headstart@dhs.ga.gov.
 - a. The DFCS Early Childhood Collaboration Unit will then determine if the child needs Early Head Start or Head Start services.
 - b. The applicable Head Start agency will contact the child's caregiver to begin the application process. If the child is unable to be enrolled at the time services are requested, the Head Start agency will contact the child's caregiver with additional follow-up.
4. Direct inquiries related to Head Start and Early Head Start programs to the DFCS Early Childhood Collaboration Unit in the Well-Being Services Section at dfcs.headstart@dhs.ga.gov.

Pre-K Program

The SSCM will:

1. Discuss the importance and benefits of early childhood education with the caregivers.
2. In conjunction with caregivers, make every effort to enroll children who are four years old in a Pre-K program. (See Practice Guidance: Georgia's Pre-K Program for additional information).
3. Complete and submit the DFCS Head Start/Pre-K Referral Form electronically to dfcs.headstart@dhs.ga.gov.
4. The DFCS Early Childhood Collaboration Unit will then help identify available Pre-K programs in the area.

The Social Services Supervisor will:

1. Provide oversight of case management activities needed to ensure referrals for childcare and early education services are submitted timely.
2. Maintain regular communication with the SSCM to assess the appropriateness of childcare and early education providers (see policy [19.6 Case Management: Supervisor Staffing](#)).
3. Regularly review the child's case record in Georgia SHINES to ensure all appropriate pages have been updated and all case activities have been documented.

PRACTICE GUIDANCE

Childcare and Early Education

Access to early education supports the achievement of developmental milestones and increases school readiness for young children (birth to five years of age) in foster care. Child safety and well-being should be the primary considerations when selecting a childcare provider or early education program. Therefore, select the highest Quality Rated program (www.QualityRated.org) available in the area of the child's foster care placement. If possible, choose a provider familiar to the child to minimize trauma associated with foster care placement. Timely communication is important. Any changes in a case should be reported to the appropriate DECAL or DFCS personnel as soon as possible to avoid undesirable outcomes. For instance, changes in circumstances may affect the eligibility for childcare and may create an overpayment if not reported timely.

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning is responsible for meeting the childcare and early education needs of Georgia's children and their families. It administers the nationally recognized Georgia's Pre-K Program, licenses childcare centers and home-based childcare, administers Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, implements federal nutrition programs, and manages Quality Rated, Georgia's community powered childcare rating system. The department also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, distributes federal funding to enhance the quality and availability of childcare, and works collaboratively with Georgia childcare resource and referral agencies and organizations throughout the state to enhance early care and education. For more information, go to www.decals.ga.gov.

Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS)

CAPS is available for all children in DFCS custody and is paid out of federal funds. CPA foster

parents are entitled to the same DFCS services that DFCS approved foster parents receive. A CPA foster parent may only receive CAPS for children in DFCS custody. Therefore, all communication regarding CAPS must come through the SSCM for verification that any children receiving CAPS are in Georgia DFCS custody. According to the CAPS policy manual, children in DFCS custody are to receive priority services and are not to be denied due to a lack of funding. Rates must not exceed the amount that the provider charges other customers who do not receive subsidies. Below are some examples of different types of childcare:

1. Full-time;
2. Night-time;
3. Weekend;
4. Before/after school;
5. Full-day service for school-age;
6. Part-time.

The childcare need may be full-time, part-time, before/after school, etc. as long as it is needed on a regular, ongoing basis. CAPS eligibility criteria/guidelines apply. As long as a child is in DFCS custody, the caregiver's activity is "protecting the child," which eliminates the need to verify employment. See the CAPS Manual for guidelines. Below are some basic CAPS eligibility criteria:

1. Child must be a resident of Georgia;
NOTE: DECAL will only pay for childcare services provided within the state of Georgia. For exceptions please contact the Early Childhood Collaboration Unit.
2. Child must be a citizen or legal resident of the U.S.;
3. Child must have current immunizations;
4. Child must be placed in a DFCS or CPA approved Family Foster Home or with kinship caregivers who are not foster parents; Children placed in other settings (i.e. intermediate treatment centers, etc.) are not eligible;
5. Child must be under 13 years of age.
NOTE: Children with special needs (evidenced by documentation from a licensed medical/mental health professional) and children with court-ordered supervision may be eligible to receive childcare services up to age 18.

Formal Childcare Providers

Formal providers are regulated and licensed by DECAL. Below are the major categories of formal childcare providers:

Family Child Care Learning Home: This is a program that operates in a private residential home less than 24 hours per day. The operator receives pay for providing care for three to six children under 13 years of age or 18 years of age if the child meets the criteria for CAPS special needs or court-ordered supervision.

Child Care Learning Center: This is a program operated by an individual or business entity recognized under Georgia law that receives pay for group care. It cares for seven or more children under 18 years of age for less than 24 hours per day.

Licensed-exempt Programs:

1. Programs owned and operated by any department or agency of state, county or municipal government (i.e. afterschool programs in public schools operated by public

school systems, and programs operated by city or county park and recreation departments); and

2. Day camp programs for children five years of age and older operated between school terms, whose primary purpose is to provide organized recreational, religious or instructional activities.

Informal Childcare Providers

Childcare services may be purchased from informal providers only in the following situations

1. No other licensed care is available within a reasonable geographic area;
2. The need for care is during non-traditional hours when licensed care is not available; or
3. The child in care is determined to meet the CAPS program definition of special needs.

To qualify for CAPS reimbursement, informal providers must be at least 21 years of age and may provide care for no more than two unrelated or six related children for payment. Regardless of relationship, the total number of children may not exceed six. Informal providers are required to enroll with the CAPS program. Informal providers may be eligible to receive CAPS reimbursement for childcare services provided in their own home or in the child's placement. However, informal providers who provide childcare in the child's placement may not receive CAPS reimbursement unless they are related to the child (i.e. grandparent, aunt, uncle, adult sibling) and live outside of the placement.

Irregular or Temporary Childcare

Irregular or temporary childcare is not eligible for (federal) CAPS reimbursement and is paid out of state funds. Consequently, no referral for childcare is sent to CAPS. State funds may be used to reimburse foster parents for childcare expenses associated with their training. Foster parent training is considered irregular childcare because it does not occur on a regular, routine basis (i.e. every month for a certain period of time). Use of state funds for anything other than foster parent training requires an approved waiver from the Early Childhood Collaboration Director.

When state funds are used, the childcare expenses are paid out of the same program as a child's foster care per diem (i.e. UAS Code 501(IV-E) Family Foster Care, 502 (IV-B/State) Family Foster Care, 503 Initial (TANF) Family Foster Care, etc.). See the COSTAR manual on the Field Fiscal Services website for a full description of UAS codes. Caregivers are reimbursed via the foster parent invoice process for payments made directly to the childcare provider. Caregivers must attach original receipts to their monthly Foster Care Invoice (Pre-bill for CPAs) and reimbursement may not exceed Georgia's maximum reimbursement rate.

Georgia Head Start and Early Head Start Programs

DFCS is partnering with the Office of Head Start and local Head Start/Early Head Start agencies. Georgia Head Start and Early Head Start programs provide comprehensive early childhood and family development services to children from birth to five years of age. Early Head Start serves infants, toddlers (under 3 years of age) and pregnant women and their families who have incomes below the federal poverty level. Head Start is a child-focused program and has the overall goal of increasing school readiness of young children 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 agencies provide a range of individualized services in the areas of education and early childhood development;

medical, dental and mental health; nutrition; parent involvement and family support.

There are numerous organizations, including school systems, community action agencies and universities that operate Head Start and Early Head Start programs in Georgia. All Head Start and Early Head Start programs must adhere to rigorous and comprehensive federal Program Performance Standards. To participate in Head Start and Early Head Start programs, families must meet the Head Start Family Income Eligibility Guidelines. However, children in foster care, homeless children, and children from families receiving public assistance (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or Supplemental Security Income) are categorically eligible for Head Start and Early Head Start services regardless of income.

Every effort should be made to enroll children who are four years of age or younger in a Head Start (3-4 years of age) or Early Head Start (0-2 years of age) program. If the Head Start program does not operate during the summer, children should be enrolled in a licensed childcare facility during the summer months. Using these resources helps to promote early brain development in children and prepare them for entry into kindergarten, promotes safety by ensuring the children are in the view of mandated reporters, and provides regular respite for foster parents. Questions or inquiries related to Early Head Start and Head Start programs should be directed to the DFCS Early Childhood Collaboration Unit within the Well-Being Services Section at the state office.

Georgia's Pre-K Program

Research confirms that students in Georgia's Pre-K Program, a nationally recognized, lottery funded pre-kindergarten program continue to exhibit positive outcomes through the end of kindergarten across all domains of learning. Georgia's Pre-K program is available in all 159 counties of the state. Children who are Georgia residents and are four years of age on September 1 of the current school year are eligible to attend Georgia's Pre-K Program during this school year. Pre-K programs usually operate on the regular school system calendar for the length of a typical school day. Pre-K Programs may be offered at local public schools or through private providers of preschool services. Every effort should be made to enroll children who are four years of age in Georgia's Pre-K program. For additional information about eligibility and enrolling a child in Georgia's Pre-K Program please visit the [Enrolling in Georgia's Pre-K Program](#) webpage.

Receiving childcare payments for children placed in the home of the childcare provider

Caregivers who may benefit financially from the ownership or operation of a childcare facility cannot be reimbursed for childcare provided to children placed in their home. This practice is based on the need for responsible stewardship of the state's financial resources. Since foster parents already receive a per diem for the supervision of children placed in their home, they may not receive additional payment for providing childcare to those same children. Likewise, kinship caregivers may not claim childcare payments for providing childcare for a related child placed in their home while providing childcare for other children.

FORMS AND TOOLS

[Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning \(DECAL\) Childcare and Parent Services \(CAPS\) Maximum Reimbursement Rates](#)
[Childcare and Parent Services \(CAPS\) Provider Published Rate Form \(CAPS Form 61\)](#)

CAPS Referral - Georgia SHINES Job Aid
DFCS Head Start/Pre-K Referral Form