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Guidance Regarding Early Learning Providers and COVID-19

The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) is committed to supporting early learning providers during the COVID-19 public health emergency. DECAL recognizes the vital role that providers, including their teaching staff, play in the support of Georgia's children and families, especially during a public health crisis. DECAL also recognizes the important role of the early learning industry in the economic stability of the state.

During this public health emergency, DECAL recognizes that providers are making decisions about whether to close or remain open. As of this writing, Governor Kemp has not mandated a statewide closure of early learning providers but has rather specified that these decisions are best made at the local level and in consultation with local departments of public health.

The following document provides guidance to providers that are choosing to remain open. DECAL is committed to supporting all providers during this emergency and is working to identify different resources along with possible policy and temporary rule changes. DECAL has also identified several "best practice" suggestions that can help providers remain open during this time.

In addition to the following, DECAL has set up a webpage that includes an F.A.Q. with additional resources and information: <http://www.decals.ga.gov/BFTS/Covid19.aspx>

Suggestions for Programs

DECAL's Child Care Services Staff have identified the following "best practices" that can help programs during this public health emergency remain open and continue to serve children and families:

- **Limit group sizes to a maximum of 10 people per room.** This is based on a recommendation from the Center for Disease Control (CDC). While programs should always maintain the Staff:Child Ratios and Supervision Rules (CCLC 591-1-1-.32)', it is recommended that group size be limited to 10 people per room, so additional spacing between people can be implemented.
- **Cease transporting children.** CCLC Rule 591-1-1-.36 (Transportation) and FCCLH Rule 293-2-3-.11 (Health, Safety, Discipline) provide transportation regulation, but due to the close confinement that results from transporting children DECAL is recommending that providers cease transportation for at least 30 days.

- **Meals served in classrooms instead of congregate/communal settings.** Based on the recommendations for group settings, meals should be provided in classrooms rather than a congregate/communal setting.
- **Health Screenings upon arrival (temperature check).** Providers should have the necessary equipment to provide temperature checks for children and staff on arrival. Specific procedures related to temperature checks will be posted at <http://www.decal.ga.gov/BFTS/Covid19.aspx>.
- **Consider allowing staff from vulnerable populations the option to take extended leave.** Providers should follow the guidelines provided by the CDC and DPH in determining staff who may represent characteristics of vulnerable populations. As detailed below, DECAL is providing financial supports to programs that can help providers continue to financially support staff at this time.

Rule Suspension

DECAL is suspending the following rules in part in accordance with O.C.G.A. 38-3-51(d)(1). The suspension of the specified rules will apply until the Governor lifts the Public Health State of Emergency.

- **Restricting Access** – This suspension will give programs the option for restricting families’ access to parts of the program. Specifically, families may be restricted to the front door of the facility or the door of the classroom. The current rules are stated as follows:
 - CCLC-591-1-1.22 - The custodial parent(s) of the child in attendance be permitted access to all child care areas of the Center and shall make his or her presence known to Center Staff prior to removing the child from the Center.
 - FCCLH-290-2-3-.06 - The Parent(s) of a Child shall be permitted access to all child care areas of the Home at all times a Child is in attendance, unless otherwise ordered by a court of proper jurisdiction.
- **Immunization Records** – Knowing that some families may have difficulties in obtaining immunizations due to the capacity of the health care system, DECAL is suspending the requirement of families providing immunization records within 30 days to 60 days. Where possible, families should try and obtain appropriate records within 30 days. The current rules are stated as follows:
 - CCLC-591-1-1-.08(2) - The file shall also contain of age-appropriate immunizations or a signed affidavit against such immunizations. The items shall be maintained for each child enrolled in the Center on a form approved by the Department, and no child shall continue enrollment in the Center for more than thirty (30) days without such evidence.
 - FCCLH – 290-2-3-.08(2) - Such records shall include of age appropriate immunizations, or a signed affidavit certifying that the required immunizations conflict with the religious believe of the Parent or a physician statement that immunization is contraindicated. Evidence of immunizations or required documentation shall be on file for each Child upon admission to the Home or within 30 days thereafter.
- **First Aid/CPR** – Knowing that it may be difficult to obtain the required training to meet the 50% rule, DECAL is suspending the 50% rule to one administrator and one staff member at all times being certified in First Aid/CPR. The current rules are stated as follows:
 - CCLC-591-1-1-.14(1) - The Center Director must successfully complete a biennial training program in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and a triennial training program in first aid and shall have current evidence of the successful completion of such training. The training must be done by certified or licensed health care professionals or trainers and must deal with the provision of emergency care to infants and children. In addition, at any given time, at least fifty percent (50%) of the caregiver Staff shall have completed such training and shall have current evidence of the completion of such training.

- FCCLH-290-2-3-.07(8) - Every Provider, Provisional Employee and Employee with direct care responsibilities shall have current evidence of successful completion of a biennial training program in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and a triennial training program in first aid which have been offered by certified or licensed health care professionals or trainers and which dealt with emergency care for infants and children. Such training must be completed by the Provider prior to initial licensure. Training must be completed within 90 days from date of hire for Provisional Employee and Employees. The Provider, a Provisional Employee or Employee with current CPR and first aid training must always be on the Home's premises and on any field trips whenever any Child is present.
- **Suspend all field trips.** In order to adhere to guidance related to group sizes and social distancing, DECAL is not permitting field trips at this time and is suspending all rules pertaining to field trips. These rules can be found in Chapter 591-1-1-.13 for Child Care Learning Centers and Rule 290-2-3-.08(7) for Family Child Care Learning Homes.

Financial Resources and Supports for Providers Who Remain Open:

These two financial supports specifically focused on Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) and Georgia's Pre-K listed below impact approximately 40% of children zero to five in licensed child care.

- **Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS):** DECAL will continue to make payments for providers who participate in CAPS or are recipients of a Quality Rated Subsidy Grant, whether children adhere to typical attendance requirements. In addition, all variable schedule scholarships will be converted to "full-time" allowing providers to receive the highest rate possible. Providers can continue to receive CAPS payment for children who choose not to attend.
- **Georgia's Pre-K:** DECAL will continue to make payments to grantees. Lead and Assistant Teachers will continue to be paid. Programs will not be required to make up days due to closure.

Final Guidance:

- In order to monitor access, DECAL is asking programs to report their opening/closing status. Programs should utilize DECAL KOALA to report their status:
 - Log in to DECAL KOALA account at www.decalkoala.com
 - Click the Green Menu Bar and Facility Update
 - Click Operating Details
 - Enter program's COVID-19 info, in the Blue area
- Most importantly, your programs' staff and children are the highest priority. Programs who are unable to clean/disinfect thoroughly due to supply shortages should consider closing until they are able to obtain adequate cleaning products.

591-1-1-.32 Staff:Child Ratios and Supervision.19(1) - Usable Space Per Child. A Center's License capacity is based upon its size. A Center must have thirty-five (35) square feet of usable space per child. Kitchens, bathrooms, closets, halls, storage areas or rooms, offices, rooms designated for Staff use, other single use areas and space occupied by adult size furniture shall be excluded in determining usable space.

FCCLH - .07(15) The total number of Children not Related to the Provider in the Family Child Care Learning Home, for pay or not for pay, cannot exceed six Children, except that a Provider may care for two additional children who are three years of age or older for two designated one hour periods daily upon approval by the Department

FCCLH-.07(16) - Whenever Related Children or Children who reside in the Home are present in the Home, the total number of children present under the age of thirteen years may not exceed twelve, and the space requirement of 35 square feet per each child present must be met.