

Childcare Terminology & Definitions

Child Care: NC General Statutes define "[child care](#)" as: "A program or arrangement where 3 or more children less than 13 years old, who do not reside where the care is provided, receive care on a regular basis of at least once per week for more than 4 hours but less than 24 hours per day from persons other than their guardians or full-time custodians, or from persons not related to them by birth, marriage, or adoption."

- **Center:** [Child care arrangement](#) where, at any one time, there are 3 or more preschool-age children or 9 or more school-age children receiving child care.
- **Center in Residence:** Child care center located in a residence, where the licensed capacity is 6-12 children, or up to 15 school-age children. **NOTE:** Local (town/city) ordinances may prohibit centers in residence.
- **FCCH (Family Child Care Home):** [Child care located in a residence](#) where, at any one time, more than 2 children, but less than 9 children, receive child care. Of the children present at any one time in a family child care home, [no more than 5 children shall be preschool-aged](#), including the owner/operator's own preschool-age children.
- **G.S. 110-106 (Religious-sponsored):** Any child care facility or summer day camp [operated by a church, synagogue or school of religious charter](#). These programs are regulated differently than licensed child care (corporal punishment is not banned and they do not have to meet staff education or activity requirements).

Infants: Children 0-12 months old = 1/5 minimum [staff-child ratio; max group size 10](#)

Toddlers: Children 12-36 months old

- 12-24 months = 1/6 minimum [staff-child ratio; max group size 12](#)
- 24-36 months (2-3 years old) = 1/10 minimum [staff-child ratio; max group size 20](#)

Preschool-age children: Children ages 3-5 years old

- 3-4 years old = 1/15 minimum [staff-child ratio; max group size 25](#)
- 4-5 years old = 1/20 minimum [staff-child ratio; max group size 25](#)

School-age children: Children age 5-13 years old = 1/25 minimum [staff-child ratio; max group size 25](#)

License (Child Care): Caring for more than two children who aren't related for more than four hours a day in NC requires a state [license](#) and licensed programs are regulated by DCDEE. **Exceptions (unregulated child care programs) include:**

- Programs operating for fewer than four consecutive months (summer camps)
- Specialized activities/instruction, such as athletics, dance/art/music lessons and organized clubs
- Vacation Bible School(s)
- Drop-in/short-term care where parents are on-site, but not engaged in child caregiving (health spas, gyms, etc.)
- Public schools
- Nationally accredited private schools that operate child care programs for fewer than 6.5 hours per day on- or off-site, or more than 6.5 hours per day if they do not receive funding for subsidized child care or NC Pre-K
- Any child care program or arrangement consisting of two or more separate components, each of which operates for four hours or fewer per day with different children attending each component

QRIS/Star-Rated License: [Quality Rating Improvement System](#) (QRIS) is a system that helps parents and other stakeholders understand the level of quality in child care programs – NC's QRIS is the "[Star-Rated License](#)."

- While NC's system is "voluntary" for licensed programs, any that do not volunteer receive a "One-Star" Rating.
- Star Ratings determine:
 - Whether a licensed child care program can serve low-income families, who qualify for subsidized child care vouchers (only Three-, Four- and Five-Star-Rated programs)

- Whether a licensed child care program can provide NC Pre-K (Four- and Five-Star-Rated programs)
- Reimbursement rates for programs that serve families eligible for subsidies

NC Early Childhood Credential (NCECC): Minimum education requirement for “Lead Teacher” in licensed child care = EDU 119 (community college course), or Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential.

DHHS: [Department of Health and Human Services](#), Secretary [Kody Kinsley](#) (appointed by governor)

- In charge of child care:
 - [Susan G. Perry](#), Chief Deputy Secretary for Opportunity and Well-Being
 - [Ariel Ford](#), Director, Division of Child Development and Early Education

DCDEE (in DHHS): [Division of Child Development and Early Education](#)

- [Licenses, monitors](#) and provides technical assistance to child care programs
- Conducts [criminal background checks with SBI](#) on all who work in licensed/regulated child care
- Administers [Subsidized Child Care Assistance Program](#) for low-income *working* families
- Administers [NC Pre-K program](#) for “at-risk” four-year-olds through contracts with Local Education Agencies (school systems) or local Smart Start Partnerships, who sub-contract with private child care and public schools.
- Staffs/supports the [NC Child Care Commission](#), which creates, amends or repeals child care [Rules](#) (193 pages)
- Reviews education transcripts of child care employees to [determine whether they qualify](#) for different positions
- Funds [Child Care Resource & Referral Council \(CCR&R\)](#), which provides technical assistance (TA), professional development (PD) and behavioral health supports for child care employees and referral services for families.
- Provides and manages a web-based tool to allow families/others to [search for licensed child care](#)
- Administers NC’s federal [Child Care and Development Fund block grant](#) (CCDF/CCDBG)

Environmental Rating Scales (ERS): Part of NC’s QRIS/Star-Rated License, ERS assessments are a tool designed to [assess process quality in licensed child care](#). Process quality is assessed primarily through observation and has been found to be more predictive of child outcomes than staff-child ratio, group size, cost of care, and type of care.

NC Rated License Assessment Project (NCRLAP): NC DHHS-DCDEE contracts with the [NCRLAP at UNC-Greensboro](#) to manage the Environment Rating Scale (ERS) assessment portion of the Star-Rated License process. NCRLAP assessors spend time in licensed child care centers and homes assessing and scoring the care environment.

Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)/Child Care Development Fund (CCDF): Provides [federal funding to states for child care subsidies](#) for low-income families with children under age 13. [Allows for flexibility to pair state and federal funds](#) to improve the overall quality of child care available to families within existing state and local systems.

Market Rate: Reimbursement rate for licensed child care programs serving children whose families are eligible for child care subsidies that is determined by a [statistically valid and reliable market rate survey \(MRS\)](#) reflecting variations in the price to parents of child care services by geographic area, type of provider, and age of child.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): [Federal grant funds to states](#) and territories to provide families with financial assistance and related support services. State-administered programs may include childcare assistance. NC [spends TANF funds on](#) NC Pre-K, Head Start and child care subsidies, as well as child welfare, such as child protective services, foster care and adoption.

ARP/ARPA Child Care “Stabilization” Funds: \$805 million in one-time federal funding in the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) for NC DHHS-DCDEE to [stabilize child care](#). NC used ARPA [stabilization funding for two types of grants for child care](#): 1) Fixed Costs and Families Grants and 2) Compensation Grants (Bonuses and Base Pay/Benefits).

WAGE\$ and Infant-Toddler Award\$ Programs: Provides [education-based salary supplements](#) for licensed child care employees; administered by Child Care Services Association (CCSA).

T.E.A.C.H.: Provides [education scholarships](#) to child care employees