



Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning
Bright from the Start
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An important message from Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs

I am writing in response to today's AJC article about serious incidents in child care programs, DECAL's licensing enforcement, and the relationship between licensing and Quality Rated. The article does not accurately portray DECAL's child care licensing and Quality Rated programs.

Although serious injuries in child care are uncommon, they do occur. When they do, DECAL promptly investigates and takes action based on the findings and the program's history. Actions range from required training and fines to suspension or license revocation.

The programs identified by the AJC account for less than five percent of the 7,380 unique child care programs that received regulatory visits during the ten-year review period.

In addition to investigating child care injuries, DECAL monitors every licensed program annually and assigns a compliance standing: Good Standing, Support, or Deficient. This standing reflects the program's monitoring performance over the previous twelve months and its compliance with child care health and safety rules.

Quality Rated was created to strengthen Georgia's early education system by assessing educational quality through classroom environments and curriculum. A program earns a rating only after independent observation and while it remains in Good Standing with licensing. If a Quality Rated program falls out of compliance with licensing rules, its star rating is hidden, and it loses the financial benefits of Quality Rated payments.

If a program received a rating after a serious incident, licensing had determined that it corrected the problems and had moved into or remained in Good Standing.

Since January, AJC reporters have requested ten years of licensing histories for all child care programs, along with Quality Rated histories and payment data. As required by law, we have fulfilled these Open Records Requests, met with the reporters to explain the data, and answered hundreds of follow-up questions. The reporters have also attended several DECAL board meetings and interviewed former DECAL employees, parents, stakeholders, and research organizations. Even so, they have not fully understood the licensing and investigative process.

I assure you that 98% of licensed child care programs are in Good Standing.

Although accidents do occur, they affect only a small percentage of programs. DECAL's highest priority is the health and safety of children in care. Licensing monitors child care programs, and Quality Rated builds on that oversight to help families evaluate both safety and quality when choosing care. We will continue strengthening accountability, so families have the confidence and information needed to make informed decisions.

Thank you for supporting DECAL and Georgia's child care programs.