

What is a Child Care Management System and How Do I Choose One?



DECAL
Thriving Child Care
Business Academy

Selecting the best automation for your business

While many providers have heard about Child Care Management Systems (CCMS), they often aren't clear on what these systems are or how they can help them with their child care business. Using a CCMS can help to free up resources, save money, reduce stress, and collect useful data. In this tool, we'll review what Child Care Management Systems are, how they can help, and how you can select and implement one for your child care business.

What is a Child Care Management System?

A Child Care Management System (CCMS) is a software application designed to help child care providers manage their operations more efficiently. It typically includes a range of useful features for business owners, all in one place.

The system allows child care providers to easily manage their day-to-day tasks, such as tracking children's attendance and enrollment, managing children's files such as due dates for immunizations and health checks, managing billing and payments, and scheduling staff. It also can be a centralized platform for communication with parents, allowing for easy sharing of important information such as schedules, activities, and updates on their child's progress. For directors, owners, and community leaders, many child care management systems provide reporting and analytics capabilities, enabling providers to track key performance metrics and make data-driven decisions to improve their operations. Some of the more well-known Child Care Management Systems are Alliance CORE by Early Learning Ventures, Brightwheel, Curacubby, HiMama, Kangaroo Time, Playground, Procure, Smartcare, and Wonderschool.

Please note that you must make sure that all records are readily available to state employees during inspections.

Overall, a child care management system can help providers streamline their operations and provide better care for children. Since the system centralizes many resources, functions, and data tracking tools, using a CCMS can help providers save time, money, and energy while helping them learn more about their business needs.

How can a child care management system cut costs?

According to industry benchmarks, child care providers should aim to spend no more than 10-20% of their time on administrative tasks. By implementing a child care management system that automates many of these administrative tasks, providers can reduce the amount of time spent on these tasks and increase the time available for providing quality care for children.

Some typical benefits of a CCMS on operations are:

1. **Improving efficiency:** By automating tasks and providing tools for communication and scheduling, a child care management system can improve efficiency, allowing you to focus on providing quality care for children.
2. **Increased fee collection:** By issuing invoices, reducing outstanding debt, and automatically adding late fees, a CCMS ensures you are paid the money owed to you.
3. **Reducing errors:** A child care management system can help reduce errors in billing, invoicing, and record-keeping, which can save you money by avoiding costly mistakes.
4. **Increasing parent satisfaction:** By providing a user-friendly online portal and communication tools, a child care management system can improve parent satisfaction and reduce the need for someone in the program to handle phone calls and emails, which can save time and labor costs.
5. **Reducing paper usage:** A child care management system can help reduce paper usage by storing records and other important documents electronically, which can save on printing and storage costs.

To envision how it may be most helpful for cutting costs in your own business, you could start by looking at **activities that are particularly time-consuming, repetitive, or require high levels of accuracy**. Some ideas of the types of activities to consider include billing and invoicing; parent communication; organizing children's files including immunization due dates and health checks; compliance with regulations; staff scheduling; tracking and managing enrollment, and reporting and record-keeping.

If you are unsure about the types of administrative tasks you are spending your time on, it can help to do a simple time study - that is you track your time for a week or two on paper or a spreadsheet to see how much time you are spending on common tasks. This can be done for one position (like a family care provider) or a whole team (such as the leadership team at a large center). Doing a time study will not only help you identify potential efficiencies, but it can also help illuminate the type of tasks you want to work on first. For example, if timely billing and payment is an issue, you may want to work on that module of your CCMS first.

How can I select a CCMS?

There are a variety of CCMS options out there, so when selecting a child care management system, it's important to consider a range of factors to ensure that the software meets the specific needs of your child care business.

Here are some key considerations:

1. **Features:** Look for a system that includes the features you need to manage your business effectively. Some key features to consider include enrollment, attendance tracking, personnel management, billing and payment processing, accounting, parent communications, organizing children's records, and reporting. For family child care providers, tracking your time would be a beneficial feature.
2. **Ease of use:** The system should be user-friendly and easy to navigate, for you, your staff, and your families.
3. **Customer support:** Look for a system that offers robust customer support, including technical assistance and training resources in the languages spoken by the different groups of people who will be using this tool.
4. **Compatibility:** Ensure that the system is compatible with your existing hardware and software, including any computers or mobile devices used by staff or parents and key programs like QuickBooks for accounting or Gusto for payroll, if you use it.
5. **Cost:** Consider the cost of the system and whether it fits within your budget. Make sure to ask about one-time set-up and ongoing fees, as well as payment processing fees for credit card and ACH transactions.
6. **Pricing:** Some systems may charge a flat rate, while others may charge based on the number of children or staff members. All charge payment processing fees.
7. **Payment Processing Time:** Systems differ in how quickly parent and other payments will be deposited into your business bank account.
8. **Reviews and recommendations:** Read reviews from other child care providers and seek recommendations from colleagues to help inform your decision.

You will also want to check online reviews using sites such as [Capterra](#) and ask other providers about their experiences. CCMS vendors will provide demos for you and your team. In order to best prepare for demos, bring a set of specific questions that you want to be answered. Rather than asking, "Can the system do XYZ", ask "Please show me how the system does XYZ" so that you leave each demo with a clear sense of how your most urgent business issues could be addressed with the benefit of automation. Further, you should ask how many providers license a CCMS in your state – to get a better idea of their familiarity with your specific regulatory needs and your ability to find peer providers to assist in troubleshooting and advanced learning of the system.

You can easily create a simple scorecard to track how each CCMS stacks up based on your needs. We have adapted one in Attachment A from [Opportunities Exchange](#) – a national organization that studies and advances the use of CCMSs in child care and overall business efficacy.

What is the best way to start implementing a CCMS?

Implementing a child care management system can be a complex process, but there are steps you can take to ensure a successful implementation after you have selected a vendor:

1. **Plan the implementation:** Work with the vendor to develop an implementation plan. This plan should include realistic timelines, milestones, and responsibilities for the vendor, your staff, and your families.
2. **Train yourself/your staff:** Training is crucial to the success of the implementation. Develop a training plan that includes both initial training and ongoing support. It's important to provide training to **all** staff members who will be using the system, not just administrators. Also, let staff know how they can interact with technical support if they have questions.
3. **Test the system:** Before fully implementing the system, conduct a test using real data and involving staff members who will be using the system to identify any issues or concerns early.
4. **Roll out the system:** Once testing is complete, roll out the system gradually to avoid overwhelming yourself, staff, and parents. Begin with a small group of users and gradually expand the rollout as everyone becomes more comfortable with the system. You will also want to communicate with parents about the new system and how they can use it. Giving the “why” for this transition can help parents see this change as a program strength, not a complication.
5. **Evaluate and adjust:** After the system has been in place for three to six months, you should check in with your team for feedback on implementation. You may find that you want to make changes to the system, provide additional training or support, or adjust processes and procedures to improve the experience for your staff, parents, and yourself.

It does take some effort, but implementing a CCMS can bring many benefits to child care providers, including increased efficiency, improved communication with parents, and reduced administrative costs. By carefully planning the implementation process and addressing potential challenges upfront, providers can successfully implement a Child Care Management System and enjoy the benefits it brings.

Attachment A: CCMS Checklist

Platform	
	Mobile First - works well on a smartphone or tablet (Android/iOS)
	Supports the primary languages used by you, your families, and any staff members
Marketing and Enrollment	
	Families can apply and enroll children online
	Supports providers in developing a website and helping parents find it in internet searches
	Waitlist management - Keeps track of who is interested; supports regular communication with prospects
Child and Family Information	
	Tracking Health Data - Vaccination deadlines, allergies, etc.
	Required documents stored electronically and tagged to child/family record

Staff Management (if you have staff)	
	Tracks education, credentials, professional development requirements
	Required documents/deadlines - clearances, health/vaccine, etc.
	Time clock (for tracking hours worked)
	Supports Payroll Reporting
Scheduling	
	Room/staff scheduling
	Transportation schedules
	Children's scheduling, including full and part-time slots, afterschool, or school holiday
Attendance	
	Timestamped check-in/out of enrolled children through unique identifier (QR code/biometrics, etc.)
	Staff-child ratio management - (notification when under/over ratio in a specific classroom or family child care home)
	Absences - reports by child/room/program
	Withdrawals - tracks reasons
	"Bulk" attendance records - when program is closed, all enrolled children are marked absent
Billing/Collections	
	Billing allocation - allows each child to have multiple sources of funding (parents, family members, subsidy, PreK, etc.)
	Automated billing - set up billing rules for each account, automatically sent each billing cycle
	Flexible billing runs - weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, etc.
	Automatic adjustment for late fees (connected to timestamp) that also allows program override/waive; allows billing for additional program fees
	Payment History/Aging reports for past-due accounts
	Integrated Electronic payments - payment posted to individual family accounts
	Annual tax statement/Account status that families can access for tracking child care expenses
Accounting	
	Export to Accounting Software (revenue flows into correct account) -OR-
	Embedded Accounting Software (CCMS tracks expenses as well as revenue)
	Capacity to note shared personal/business expenses and/or use Time-Space calculation for home-based providers
CACFP- Child and Adult Care Food Program	
	Menu planning
	Attendance and meal counts
	Generates reports for billing
Education Tracking	
	Lesson Plan Management

Tracks State Early Learning Standards
Child Assessment/Tracking Developmental Progress
Individual Education Plans/Service Referrals
Head Start Performance Standards
Parent Communication
Parent Portal - for account status, payment, records management, etc.
Parent Communication Tools - Text, send photos/videos through the app
Onboarding/support
Phone Support
Online chat
Videos/manuals
Individualized provider support for onboarding

Additional Resources

If you have questions or need help, assistance is available.

[GaPDS Website](#)

[DECAL Thriving Child Care Business Academy Website](#)

[Georgia Licensing Rules and Regulations](#)

To Find Other Study Guides: Click on [Resources](#) on the Academy home page

To Find Training: Click on [Trainings](#) on the Academy home page

To Register for Training: Click on [Schedules & Registration](#) on the Academy home page

To Sign Up for Study Groups: Fill out the [Intake Assessment](#)

For questions about coaching or study groups: Email GAcoaching@civstrat.com

To Find Other ECE Resources: Visit the [DECAL Website](#)

For General Questions about the Academy: Email thriving@decals.ga.gov

For More Information:

[Family Child Care Learning Home Rules and Regulations](#)

[Child Care Learning Center Rules and Regulations](#)