

Child Care

NEWS BRIEF



Greetings from your Partners at the Tennessee Department of Human Services, Child Care Services Team!

The holiday season is upon us and tis the season for joyful celebration, merriment and festive activities. We hope that your holidays are filled with all that brings you joy and peace.

This is also the time of endless activities and events. We encourage you to take time to practice self-care to maintain your overall health and well-being. Wishing you all a very Happy Holiday Season!

This edition of the Child Care Services Newsletter provides new and updated information related to quality resources and supports, revised rules training, a new segment titled "Compliance Corner", and additional changes to the Child Care Reimbursement Rates. We greatly appreciate our child care provider partners and all that you do for the children and families of Tennessee to ensure they are cared for in spaces that are safe, healthy, and developmentally rich.



Happy Holidays

And Have a Wonderful New Year

A Special Message of Appreciation

The Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) recognizes the significant impact our quality partners have contributed throughout the years to bolster services and supports to the child care workforce. These partners offer invaluable expertise, coaching, mentoring and guidance to lift-up and enrich early childhood and education professionals. As you know, due to funding cuts, we made the very difficult decision to end our contracts with the Tennessee Early Childhood Training Alliance (TECTA) managed by Tennessee State University and with the Association of Infant Mental Health in Tennessee.

We wish to extend our deepest gratitude and sincerest thanks to the individuals who made up the TECTA team and to our friends at AIMHiTN for your vast commitment and dedication to the child care workforce. You have made a huge difference and impact on those you served and have forever raised the level of awareness of the importance of this critical work. Thank you for your partnership and service to others.

Quality Resources and Supports

TDHS is committed to supporting licensed child care agencies with ongoing resources and tools through our Quality Partner network. As you know, based on changes in our CCDF budget, it was necessary to reduce some direct supports and partners. Our vision remains to allow opportunities for continuous improvement, and we have worked with our partners to optimize resources and initiatives that will have the greatest impact. These available initiatives are provided by our expert partner agencies, Child Care Resource and Referral network (CCR&R), University of Tennessee, Social Work Office of Planning and Resource Services (UT-SWORPS) and Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee (CFMT). Below are current resources

that are available. We will be sharing additional resources as these are fully developed.

In September, TDHS formed a workgroup to begin exploring options for resources to fill the gaps in the most effective and efficient manner possible. This expanded to include our quality partners for their expertise. Additionally, TDHS has been part of the National ECE Workforce Center's Community for Action Cohort through Child Trends with six other states to explore opportunities to bolster the child care workforce.

To address the immediate need, our workgroup developed an equivalency to replace the TECTA Administrator Orientation for new directors who do not have a four-year degree. We reached out to the Licensing Standards Committee for feedback on this equivalency, which is titled "Administrator Foundations Series". It will be offered beginning January 2026.

Administrator Foundations Series

- Two pathways for Directors without a college degree (with established agency and with new agency)
- Combination of Small Business Academy, New Director Academy and New Director Training - elements of all will bolster what was formerly in place with TECTA Orientation - Provides coaching support on specific topics through a Professional Development plan

Training Frequency: The *Administrator Foundations Series* will be offered over the course of two months, ensuring new directors have at least two chances to attend each session within their first 120 days in the role. Training will be tracked through **TNPAL**.

Currently Available through CCR&R - [Tennessee Child Care Resource & Referral Network](#)

- Small Business Support Specialists
- Infant and Toddler Coaches
- Family Engagement Quality Coaches
- Health Safety Supervision Quality Coaches
- Developmental Support Quality Coaches
- First Aid and CPR
- Early Language and Literacy
- QRIS Coaches
- Family and Group Child Care Coaches
- Emergency Preparedness
- Administrative Specialization (ADS)
 - Pathway for Owners and Directors in preparation for higher education coursework
- Early Language and Literacy Specialization
- Designed for child care staff who have not yet pursued higher education coursework

CCR&R Accreditation Provider Support Process

Deciding which accreditation authority is best for your agency

- The CCR&R CDA & Accreditation Coordinator or Small Business Coach will assist the child care educator or agency with identifying which accrediting body is best for their child care agency. If NAEYC is selected, CCR&R will also assist the agency in determining which tier of accreditation (Recognition, Accreditation, or Accreditation +) is most beneficial to their agency.
- The educator or agency will select the appropriate accreditation based on their agency needs and child care setting.

Support during the accreditation process

- Depending on the pathway chosen, accreditation can take up to 2 years to complete.
- The CDA & Accreditation Coordinator, with assistance from the Small Business Coach, will provide regular support through coaching and technical assistance visits to prepare the child care agency to meet all performance standards for accreditation. This may include, but is not limited to: preparation of classrooms, review of materials, and mock verification visit observations.
- The CDA & Accreditation Coordinator, in collaboration with the Small Business Support team, will provide regularly scheduled check-in communication (virtual office hours and/or Peer Learning Groups) with agencies seeking accreditation to ensure each agency is moving forward with their accrediting process and provide resources, coaching, or support as desired.

Support during the annual report and renewal process

- Depending on the accrediting body, accreditation can be for 1-5 years with annual reports due on the accreditation anniversary each year. The CDA & Accreditation Coordinator will maintain contact with agencies we have assisted to achieve accreditation and provide resources and support with the annual report and renewal process.

Child Care WAGES® Tennessee - [Child Care WAGES® Tennessee](#)

The **WAGES®** program in Tennessee has expanded, raising the qualifying salary cap from \$20/hour to \$30/hour. This is due to a \$7.2 million investment in State dollars to expand the program. For more information, please visit the link above.

Currently Available through UT-SWORPS

Provider Advisory Groups

- Six Groups across the State with 10 to 12 members for each group
- Why Provider Advisory Groups
 - Offer more complete perspective for TDHS and CCDF Partners
 - Facilitate solutions-based conversations and incubate new strategies (ex. *How to Increase Infant Slots*)
 - Establish a formal vehicle for Providers' voice in child care policy
 - Opportunity for providers to share best practices and identify potential for improvements and growth

Tennessee Child Care Help Desk- [Tennessee Child Care Help Desk - Tennessee Child Care Help Desk](#)

Welcome to the Tennessee Child Care Help Desk, the unified help desk for the Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) Child Care Programs. We can help you find answers to questions related to TDHS Child Care partner programs that support child care in Tennessee, including Tennessee's Child Care Programs technology resources, and Child Care Partner technology resources.

Currently Available through CFMT

Childcare Tennessee, an initiative led by the Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee, is a resource for TDHS licensed child care program directors and owners who can share thousands of resources with early childhood educators and child care professionals. Learn more at <http://www.childcaretennessee.com/>

Specifically for new agencies or existing agencies that are expanding the number of children served, TDHS is deploying Child Care Improvement Funds to provide grants for items such as salaries, benefits and recruitment expenses and expenditures related to improvement of physical space in child care agencies through The Community Foundations of Middle Tennessee to increase the number of children

Coming Soon: Child Care Text Messaging

We're excited to announce that we are launching new proactive text messaging to better serve customers and child care providers. This initiative will send timely text messages to customers and child care providers to help them stay informed and engaged.

Types of Text Notifications:

- Training reminders
- Renewal notifications
- Certificate approval/denial updates
- Waitlist acceptance notifications
- Pending Verification Notice (PVN)
- EAV exception notifications, and more

The New Text Messaging Solution Will Help Us:

- Reduce missed appointments and deadlines
- Improve customer satisfaction and compliance
- Enhance efficiency by reducing dependence on phone calls and email communications

Security & Privacy: Text messages will be secure and never include any sensitive information.

Beginning Wednesday, December 10, to opt-in to text messaging, log in to the Provider Portal and select "Text Message Opt In" or text START to 96562 from your phone.



Compliance Corner

with Glenna Jones, Child & Adult Care Licensing Director of Field Operations

We are excited to announce a new addition to our Child Care Newsletter, the "Compliance Corner." In the Compliance Corner we will highlight compliance reminders, trends, and resources. Child Care Licensure Rules compliance is fundamental to providing consistent, safe, high-quality child care. This segment will be dedicated to remaining focused on the cornerstone of compliance.

To begin our new Compliance Corner, we want to address the question, "Why does consistent compliance matter?" Our TDHS Licensure Rules for Child Care Agencies are carefully developed based on Health & Safety Standards and best practices, and approved through a promulgation process to ensure children in TDHS licensed care spaces are safe and healthy in a developmentally rich environment. Every rule, definition, and reference is focused on serving the fundamental needs of a child care agency.

Licensure rules provide the child care agency with the basis for high-quality care for all children. To provide the best care possible for children, rules compliance must always be maintained. We all have a shared goal of supporting children and families. Licensure rules provide the required guidelines of how to meet that goal.

Our TDHS Child and Adult Care Licensing (CACL) team has a duty to ensure consistent compliance with licensure rules. They are an excellent resource and partner for our child care agencies! Your Licensing Consultant (LC) or Program Specialist (PS) can help with all your questions. They are glad to assist you as you work through the new rules revisions. The CACL team can provide agency specific technical assistance that helps to ensure consistent compliance. Consistent compliance will provide the foundation for your child care agency's success.

We look forward to seeing you and working together to provide safe, healthy, developmentally rich high-quality care for all children! Together we can serve our youngest Tennesseans and provide them a firm foundation to meet their full potential.

Update - Rules Revisions Training Opportunities

The newly revised Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) Licensure Rules became effective on November 20, 2025. Based on your feedback, we fully intend to offer in-person sessions to engage with you on the new rules in order to address questions and provide clarification. Therefore, we will be scheduling in-person regional sessions at a later date and will send information with the new dates and times as soon as practical.

In the meantime, we understand the importance of sharing information with you on the content of the revised rules, so you may reach compliance. To be responsive to your requests for information and to remain transparent, the department will be hosting three virtual events the week of December 8, 2025, to present on the revised rules. The information in each session will be consistent, so, if you wish to attend, you need only register for one of the session times. The dates and times of the three sessions are listed below. Based on the session selected, please follow the corresponding link to register. Please note this information was sent to each licensed child care agency from the Child Care Services team on Tuesday, November 25, 2025. This is to provide another opportunity to register.

Please know that we will be allowing a transition period for technical assistance to support you in understanding the new requirements and reaching compliance.

Should you have any questions, please submit to ChildCareRules.DHS@tn.gov. Thank you for all you do for families and children in Tennessee.

WebEx Info	Registration Link
TDHS Child Care Rules Revision Webinar Date: 12/08/25 Time: 5:00 pm to 6:30 pm	Registration Link: https://tn.webex.com/weblink/register/r12b08f5327138083efb9d78ca439e45f
TDHS Child Care Rules Revision Webinar Date: 12/09/25 Time: 1:00 pm to 2:30 pm	Registration Link: https://tn.webex.com/weblink/register/re8c965715f0811148e507a56ff08ac9c
TDHS Child Care Rules Revision Webinar Date: 12/10/25 Time: 5:00 pm to 6:30 pm	Registration Link: https://tn.webex.com/weblink/register/r7df7849e622e94ce27fbb9977dd9df2e

Notice of Rules Changes - Effective 11/20/2025

The Tennessee Department of Human Services has completed revisions to the Child Care Rules and Regulations. A link to the revised rules effective November 20, 2025, is provided below:

<https://publications.tnsosfiles.com/rules/1240/1240-04/1240-04-01.20251120.pdf>

Update - Changes to Reimbursement Rates Effective 1, 2026

Based on the current level of funding, the Department has evaluated how we may continue to support families and children with child care payment assistance with minimum disruption and meet the adjusted CCDF budget levels. Under the current budget, base reimbursement rates remain in effect. Effective January 1, 2026, TDHS will be making additional adjustments to the Child Care Reimbursement Rate structure. We understand the importance of offering high quality spaces that are safe, healthy and developmentally rich and to do so comes at a higher cost. Based on the projected level of funding for Grant Year 2026 and in order to continue to prioritize services for families and children, we will be adjusting the QRIS bonus amounts to a sustainable level. The bonuses will be set at 10% for agencies with a QRIS score of 90 to 100 and 5% for agencies with a QRIS score of 80 to 89. We will continue to offer 15% differentials for infants and children with diagnosed disabilities. Differentials for toddlers, desert and distressed counties and non-traditional hour care were eliminated in October 2025. The updated Child Care Reimbursement Rate Chart effective January 1, 2026, [may be found here](#).

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