



This article presents general guidelines for Georgia nonprofit organizations as of the date written and should not be construed as legal advice. Consult an attorney to address your particular situation.

DECAL Requirements for Summer Camps and Other Exempt Childcare Programs

By Deborah Ausburn, Esq.¹

If your organization is gearing up for a summer day program or other childcare program in Georgia, you should be aware of recent changes at the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (“DECAL”). DECAL has recently launched a new online tool to facilitate its review of license exemption requests. This article outlines the new options and process for seeking exemption from DECAL licensing requirements. Any organization that provides childcare is subject to the DECAL process(es) outlined in this article. These processes do not apply to residential programs, such as sleep-away camps, but they do apply to any provider of children’s day camps.

DECAL requires that “all programs providing group care for children” complete [an online assessment](#) (“DECAL Survey”) to see whether the program qualifies for an exemption. Programs that complete the DECAL Survey will either (1) be exempt through self-assessment, (2) need to submit an application for exemption or (3) be determined to be ineligible for an exemption, in which case they need to apply for a childcare license from DECAL. You cannot simply assume that your program is exempt. You must obtain official determination from DECAL, either through the DECAL Survey or an exemption application, both of which are outlined later in this article.

DECAL Survey

DECAL has a [specific list of programs](#) that are eligible for exemption from licensing requirements. Eligible programs include some summer camps, private schools, Parents’ Morning Out or Parent’s Night Out, short-term educational or tutoring programs, and programs that charge no fee. Organizations in these categories will need to get proof of exemption either through the DECAL Survey or the exemption application.

Childcare providers should start by completing an online self-assessment to determine exemption, which you can find through your existing KOALA account or at the [DECAL Survey](#). At the end of the DECAL Survey, you will get a determination whether your organization has been deemed exempt through self-assessment or whether you need to continue to an application. If the DECAL Survey deems your program exempt through self-assessment, hit the “Print Self-Assessment Survey” button and keep a copy of the message in your records.

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If your organization provides childcare programming in multiple locations, a separate DECAL Survey must be completed for each location. An exemption remains in effect only until there is a change in the program, such as a new location or change in ownership.

Exemption Application

If the DECAL Survey does not determine your program is exempt, follow the provided instructions to either complete an online exemption or license application.

Three categories of programs will not be granted an automatic exemption via the DECAL Survey and must continue to the exemption application: (1) government-owned and operated programs (such as after-school programs) that receive Childcare and Parent Services (“CAPS”) funding; (2) accredited faith-based or religious schools; and (3) day camp programs that operate during school breaks and receive CAPS funding. If your program falls into one of these categories, your organization must fill out an online application via the DECAL Survey.

As you proceed through the online application, you will be requested to include copies of certain handouts, agreements, and other documents from your program. You must include a parent statement that (1) notifies parents that your program is not required to be licensed and does not have a license, and (2) includes an acknowledgement to be signed by parents (“Parent Statement”). A sample Parent Statement is available on [DECAL’s website](#).

Guidance for Exempt Childcare Operators

If DECAL approves an exemption via application (not just via self-assessment on the DECAL Survey), it will send you an exemption approval letter and a public notice. Your program must post both the letter and the notice “in a prominent place near the front entrance.”

During the childcare program, you must maintain attendance records and a copy of a signed Parent Statement for each child. DECAL requires that the program keep these records for one year after the child leaves. If your program does not have liability insurance, then DECAL recommends that you notify the parents of that fact (notice can be included in the Parent Statement).

If your program changes locations or operations, such as new operating hours or ages of children, you must retake the DECAL Survey. If you close the program earlier than the application stated, then you need to notify DECAL in writing within five days.

If your childcare program is not registered with DECAL and you do not get the necessary exemption via the DECAL Survey or exemption application, you can end up with fines or even court action for operating an unlicensed facility.

Note that this exemption applies only to DECAL licensing rules. You still must have all the permission necessary from zoning boards, fire marshals, health departments, and any other agency. You also need to follow industry standards such as conducting criminal background and abuse registry checks on all staff, following appropriate staff-student ratios, having safe and well-maintained equipment, including written policies about food allergies and communicable diseases, and requiring training on mandatory reporting responsibilities and CPR.

If you need help with the application or have any questions about operations, DECAL has a team of people who are trained to assist with technical questions. Call Child Care Services at 404-657-5562, and ask for the Exemptions Unit, or email CCSExemptions@decalfga.gov.

Non-Exempt Childcare Programs

If your program is not exempt, then you need to obtain a license. Your program may be a Family Child Care Learning Home (limited to 3-6 children) or a Child Care Learning Center. The list of licensing requirements for Child Care Learning Centers is quite extensive, governing everything from requirements for staff to the number of children allowed in each room of the facility. Family homes have fewer regulations but must have criminal background checks and follow rigorous safety and fire regulations.

If you wish to start a program, begin with the DECAL website at <http://decalfga.gov/CCS/StartingACenter.aspx>. There you can learn the basic requirements and obtain a licensing packet. If you have questions not covered in the licensing packet or on the website, you can call Child Care Services at 404-657-5562.