

SECTION IV SUITABLE AND AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE FACILITIES

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AVAILABILITY OF QUALITY CHILD CARE FACILITIES

Camden County and KBNSB residents enjoy access to ample number of quality child care providers both on-base and off-base. While there are always some unlicensed child care providers and family providers that care for children, the majority of Camden child care providers are licensed by the state.

Camden County (off-base) child care consists of eight childcare centers, four group childcare homes and thirty-four family child care providers. Each of these facilities is licensed by the State of Georgia. Also licensed in Camden are sixteen home providers registered and certified for infant care. None of these sixteen are caring for infants at the time of this report. There are twelve licensed business providers of infant care services, four of which are caring for infants. Rates range from an average of \$82 a week for week-day infant care to \$71 a week for week-day five-year-old care. The average waiting list indicates nine families waiting between one week and one month before services are available.

PRE KINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS

Pre-Kindergarten programs are available in Camden County to provide four-year-old children with high-quality preschool experiences. This unique program, funded by the local school system and the Georgia Lottery for Education, serves 200 students each school year. The school readiness goals of the Pre-Kindergarten Program are to provide a developmentally appropriate preschool program emphasizing growth in language and literacy, math concepts, science, arts, physical development, and personal and social competence. Pre-Kindergarten classrooms provide four year olds with the learning experiences they need to prepare for kindergarten. The program impacts early childhood education by successfully preparing children for school through school readiness skills in an environment encouraging children to have fun while learning. The Camden County School system believes participation in a high-quality preschool program helps children develop social and pre academic skills to help them succeed in kindergarten and throughout their educational experiences.

All children four years of age on September 1 of the current school year, whose parents are Camden County residents, are eligible to attend the Pre-Kindergarten Program during the school year. The Program is voluntary for both families and

communities. Because participation is voluntary, there may not be enough spaces in every community to allow all four year olds to participate. Camden County places a Prekindergarten program in every elementary school to provide as many opportunities to participate as possible. Pre-Kindergarten programs in Camden County operate on the regular school system calendar for the length of a typical school day.

In addition, the Georgia Office of School Readiness lists fifteen Pre-Kindergarten sites offering twenty-four classes, and one Head Start provider operating two sites, offering five classes. There are no Early Head Start classes.

Extended Care – services beyond the instructional day (after-school care) are also provided in every Camden County elementary school to ensure parents have access to affordable, professionally staffed daycare after the normal school day is concluded. This service is provided by Camden County Schools in response to parent's irregular work schedules and time constraints of double income families. Five private providers offer before and after-school care for children up to twelve years old. Each of these five is licensed.

LOCAL CATALYSTS AFFECTING CHILD CARE

At least two issues affect local child care accessibility, and one issue pointing to local suitability. First, Camden's rate of children in poverty is consistently below the state rate; however, Camden rate of female head-of-household families in poverty is consistently higher than Georgia's, which may in part be attributed to a population with many young military families. Child care costs may be a barrier to some families, especially families of young enlisted men and women of the military. Second, none of the providers interviewed for this report participated in free, state-wide programming to increase school-readiness by subsidizing tuitions for child care providers in areas of study from general education diplomas to Master's degrees. In fact, none were aware of the five-year old program. The lack of an industry forum may contribute to missed opportunities for improvement. Finally, compared to state and national data, Camden has very high indicators of youth and adult alcohol, tobacco, and other drug abuse. None of the providers could answer whether science-based prevention programs were in place for pre-school or school-aged children. Science-based prevention programs include curriculum approved by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Centers for Disease Control, and the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.

CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

Child Care Providers include learning opportunities in nurturing environments to children from birth to age twelve. Child care facilities *on base* provide for an infant program for ages from birth to twelve months. The infant program has a capacity of 16 and always has a long waiting list. As this report was written, there are 35 children yet to be born on the waiting list, and 25 children already born on the waiting list. Those numbers are typical. Pre-toddler care is available on base for 20 children aged 12 – 18 months. Currently there are 34 on the waiting list. The average wait for infant and pre-toddler care services is approximately two to three months.

The base offers care for toddlers aged 18 months to 3 years old and fully potty-trained. The capacity for toddlers is 70 and there are 15 on the waiting list. For pre-school aged children (3 to 5 years of age) there is currently a capacity of 64 with the potential capacity of 85. One classroom that had been used for pre-school is closed at this time. The waiting list for pre-school is 29.

The Navy Fleet and Family Support Center has certified 10 child development homes – 2 of which are on base. Each child development home is dual certified: they have state certification and they are certified by the National Association for Education of Young Children. Three of the child development homes are approved for infant care. None of these infant care homes are on base. These three homes may have three children each. The other homes are approved for six children each, including two children under the age of two. So, the additional capacity for infant care on base is four infants; and the additional capacity for children other than infants on base is a maximum of twelve (assuming none are infants). The average waiting list for infant care in certified child development homes parallels the waiting list of the base child care centers, which is 2 to 3 months.

CONCLUSION

While, there appears to be adequate child care capacity in Camden County, deeper studies of affordability and strategies to implement models of excellence could be valuable. We understand the need and challenges to implement “models of excellence” and are evaluating methods and opportunities to achieve this goal.