

§ 110-91. Mandatory standards for a license.

All child care facilities shall comply with all State laws and federal laws and local ordinances that pertain to child health, safety, and welfare. Except as otherwise provided in this Article, the standards in this section shall be complied with by all child care facilities. However, none of the standards in this section apply to the school-age children of the operator of a child care facility but do apply to the preschool-age children of the operator. Children 13 years of age or older may receive child care on a voluntary basis provided all applicable required standards are met. The standards in this section, along with any other applicable State laws and federal laws or local ordinances, shall be the required standards for the issuance of a license by the Secretary under the policies and procedures of the Commission except that the Commission may, in its discretion, adopt less stringent standards for the licensing of facilities which provide care on a temporary, part-time, drop-in, seasonal, after-school or other than a full-time basis.

- (1) Medical Care and Sanitation. – The Commission for Public Health shall adopt rules which establish minimum sanitation standards for child care centers and their personnel. The sanitation rules adopted by the Commission for Public Health shall cover such matters as the cleanliness of floors, walls, ceilings, storage spaces, utensils, and other facilities; adequacy of ventilation; sanitation of water supply, lavatory facilities, toilet facilities, sewage disposal, food protection facilities, bactericidal treatment of eating and drinking utensils, and solid-waste storage and disposal; methods of food preparation and serving; infectious disease control; sleeping facilities; and other items and facilities as are necessary in the interest of the public health. The Commission for Public Health shall allow child care centers to use domestic kitchen equipment, provided appropriate temperature levels for heating, cooling, and storing are maintained. Child care centers that fry foods shall use commercial hoods. These rules shall be developed in consultation with the Department.

The Commission shall adopt rules for child care facilities to establish minimum requirements for child and staff health assessments and medical care procedures. These rules shall be developed in consultation with the Department. Each child shall have a health assessment before being admitted or within 30 days following admission to a child care facility. The assessment shall be done by: (i) a licensed physician, (ii) the physician's authorized agent who is currently approved by the North Carolina Medical Board, or comparable certifying board in any state contiguous to North Carolina, (iii) a certified nurse practitioner, or (iv) a public health nurse meeting the Departments Standards for Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment Program. However, no health assessment shall be required of any staff or child who is and has been in normal health when the staff, or the child's parent, guardian, or full-time custodian objects in writing to a health assessment on religious grounds which conform to the teachings and practice of any recognized church or religious denomination.

Organizations that provide prepared meals to child care centers only are considered child care centers for purposes of compliance with appropriate sanitation standards.

- (2) Health-Related Activities. –
 - a. through f. Repealed by Session Laws 2012-142, s. 10.1(c1), effective July 1, 2012.
 - g. Nutrition standards. – The Commission shall adopt rules for child care facilities to ensure that food and beverages provided by a child care facility are nutritious and align with children's developmental needs.

The Commission shall consult with the Division of Child Development and Early Education of the Department of Health and Human Services to develop nutrition standards to provide for requirements appropriate for children of different ages. In developing nutrition standards, the Commission shall consider the following recommendations:

1. Limiting or prohibiting the serving of sweetened beverages, other than one hundred percent (100%) fruit juice to children of any age.
 2. Limiting or prohibiting the serving of whole milk to children two years of age or older or flavored milk to children of any age.
 3. Limiting or prohibiting the serving of more than six ounces of juice per day to children of any age.
 4. Limiting or prohibiting the serving of juice from a bottle.
- h. Parental exceptions. –
1. Parents or guardians of a child enrolled in a child care facility may (i) provide food and beverages to their child that may not meet the nutrition standards adopted by the Commission and (ii) opt out of any supplemental food program provided by the child care facility. The child care facility shall not provide food or beverages to a child whose parent or guardian has opted out of any supplemental food program provided by the child care facility and whose parent or guardian is providing food and beverages for the child.
 2. The Commission, the Division of Child Development and Early Education of the Department of Health and Human Services, or any State agency or contracting entity with a State agency shall not evaluate the nutritional value or adequacy of the components of food and beverages provided by a parent or guardian to his or her child enrolled in a child care facility as an indicator of environmental quality ratings.
- i. Rest time. – Each child care facility shall have a rest period for each child in care after lunch or at some other appropriate time and arrange for each child in care to be out-of-doors each day if weather conditions permit.
- (3) Location. – Each child care facility shall be located in an area which is free from conditions which are considered hazardous to the physical and moral welfare of the children in care in the opinion of the Secretary.
- (4) Building. – Each child care facility shall be located in a building which meets the appropriate requirements of the North Carolina Building Code under standards which shall be developed by the Building Code Council, subject to adoption by the Commission specifically for child care facilities, including facilities operated in a private residence. These standards shall be consistent with the provisions of this Article. A local building code enforcement officer shall approve any proposed alternate material, design, or method of construction, provided the building code enforcement officer finds that the alternate, for the purpose intended, is at least the equivalent of that prescribed in the technical building codes in quality, strength, effectiveness, fire resistance, durability, or safety. A local building code enforcement officer

shall require that sufficient evidence or proof be submitted to substantiate any claim made regarding the alternate. The Child Care Commission may request changes to the Building Code to suit the special needs of preschool children. Satisfactorily written reports from representatives of building inspection agencies shall be required prior to the issuance of a license and whenever renovations are made to a child care center, or when the operator requests licensure of space not previously approved for child care.

- (5) Fire Prevention. – Each child care facility shall be located in a building that meets appropriate requirements for fire prevention and safe evacuation that apply to child care facilities as established by the Department of Insurance in consultation with the Department. Except for child care centers located on State property, each child care center shall be inspected at least annually by a local fire department or volunteer fire department for compliance with these requirements. Child care centers located on State property shall be inspected at least annually by an official designated by the Department of Insurance.
- (6) Space and Equipment Requirements. – There shall be no less than 25 square feet of indoor space for each child for which a child care center is licensed, exclusive of closets, passageways, kitchens, and bathrooms, and this floor space shall provide during rest periods 200 cubic feet of airspace per child for which the center is licensed. There shall be adequate outdoor play area for each child under rules adopted by the Commission which shall be related to the size of center and the availability and location of outside land area. In no event shall the minimum required exceed 75 square feet per child. The outdoor area shall be protected to assure the safety of the children receiving child care by an adequate fence or other protection. A center operated in a public school shall be deemed to have adequate fencing protection. A center operating exclusively during the evening and early morning hours, between 6:00 P.M. and 6:00 A.M., need not meet the outdoor play area requirements mandated by this subdivision.

Each child care facility shall provide indoor area equipment and furnishings that are child size, sturdy, safe, and in good repair. Each child care facility that provides outdoor area equipment and furnishings shall provide outdoor area equipment and furnishings that are child size, sturdy, free of hazards that pose a threat of serious injury to children while engaged in normal play activities, and in good repair. The Commission shall adopt standards to establish minimum requirements for equipment appropriate for the size of child care facility. Space shall be available for proper storage of beds, cribs, mats, cots, sleeping garments, and linens as well as designated space for each child's personal belongings.

The Division of Child Development of the Department of Health and Human Services shall establish and implement a policy that defines any building which is currently approved for school occupancy and which houses a public or private elementary school to include the playgrounds and athletic fields as part of the school building when that building is used to serve school-age children in after-school child care programs. Playgrounds and athletic fields referenced in this section that do not meet licensure standards promulgated by the North Carolina Child Care Commission shall be noted on the program's licensure and rating information.

- (7) **Staff-Child Ratio and Capacity for Child Care Facilities.** – In determining the staff-child ratio in child care facilities, all children younger than 13 years old shall be counted.

a. The Commission shall adopt rules for child care centers regarding staff-child ratios, group sizes and multi-age groupings other than for infants and toddlers, provided that these rules shall be no less stringent than those currently required for staff-child ratios as enacted in Section 156(e) of Chapter 757 of the 1985 Session Laws.

1. Except as otherwise provided in this subdivision, the staff-child ratios and group sizes for infants and toddlers in child care centers shall be no less stringent than as follows:

Age	Ratio Staff/Children	Group Size
0 to 12 months	1/5	10
12 to 24 months	1/6	12
2 to 3 years	1/10	20.

No child care center shall care for more than 25 children in one group. Child care centers providing care for 26 or more children shall provide for two or more groups according to the ages of children and shall provide separate supervisory personnel and separate identifiable space for each group.

2. When any preschool-aged child is enrolled in a child care center and the licensed capacity of the center is six through 12 children, the staff-child ratios shall be no less stringent than as follows:

Age	Ratio Staff/Children
0 to 12 months	1/5 preschool children plus 3 additional school-aged children
12 to 24 months	1/6 preschool children plus 2 additional school-aged children.

The following shall also apply:

- I. There is no specific group size.
- II. When only one caregiver is required to meet the staff-child ratio, the operator shall make available to parents the name, address, and phone number of an adult who is nearby and available for emergency relief.
- III. Children shall be supervised at all times. All children who are not asleep or resting shall be visually supervised. Children may sleep or rest in another room as long as a caregiver can hear them and respond immediately.

b. **Family Child Care Home Capacity.** – A family child care home is allowed to provide care for one of the following groups of children, including the operator's own preschool-age children and excluding the operator's own school-age children up to 13 years of age:

1. A maximum of eight children, with no more than five children who are from birth to 5 years of age, plus three school-age children.
2. A maximum of three children from birth to 24 months of age, plus three children from 2 to 5 years of age and three

school-age children up to 13 years of age, for a total of nine children.

3. A maximum of 10 children if all children are older than 24 months of age.

- (8) Qualifications for Staff. – All child care center administrators shall be at least 21 years of age. All child care center administrators shall have the North Carolina Early Childhood Administration Credential or its equivalent as determined by the Department. All child care administrators performing administrative duties as of the date this act becomes law and child care administrators who assume administrative duties at any time after this act becomes law and until September 1, 1998, shall obtain the required credential by September 1, 2000. Child care administrators who assume administrative duties after September 1, 1998, shall begin working toward the completion of the North Carolina Early Childhood Administration Credential or its equivalent within six months after assuming administrative duties and shall complete the credential or its equivalent within two years after beginning work to complete the credential. Each child care center shall be under the direction or supervision of a person meeting these requirements. All staff counted toward meeting the required staff-child ratio shall be at least 16 years of age, provided that persons younger than 18 years of age work under the direct supervision of a credentialed staff person who is at least 21 years of age. All lead teachers in a child care center shall have at least a North Carolina Early Childhood Credential or its equivalent as determined by the Department. Lead teachers shall be enrolled in the North Carolina Early Childhood Credential coursework or its equivalent as determined by the Department within six months after becoming employed as a lead teacher or within six months after this act becomes law, whichever is later, and shall complete the credential or its equivalent within 18 months after enrollment.

For child care centers licensed to care for 200 or more children, the Department, in collaboration with the North Carolina Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development, shall establish categories to recognize the levels of education achieved by child care center administrators and teachers who perform administrative functions. The Department shall use these categories to establish appropriate staffing based on the size of the center and the individual staff responsibilities.

Effective January 1, 1998, an operator of a licensed family child care home shall be at least 21 years old and have a high school diploma or its equivalent. Operators of a family child care home licensed prior to January 1, 1998, shall be at least 18 years of age and literate. Literate is defined as understanding licensing requirements and having the ability to communicate with the family and relevant emergency personnel. Any operator of a licensed family child care home shall be the person on-site providing child care.

The Commission shall adopt standards to establish appropriate qualifications for all staff in child care centers. These standards shall reflect training, experience, education and credentialing and shall be appropriate for the size center and the level of individual staff responsibilities. It is the intent of this provision to guarantee that all children in child care are cared for by qualified people. Pursuant to G.S. 110-106, no requirements may interfere with the teachings or doctrine of any established religious organization. The

staff qualification requirements of this subdivision do not apply to religious-sponsored child care facilities pursuant to G.S. 110-106.

(8a) Expired pursuant to Session Laws 2010-178, s. 2, as amended by Session Laws 2011-145, s. 10.4A, effective July 1, 2011.

(9) Records. – Each child care facility shall keep accurate records on each child receiving care in the child care facility and on each staff member or other person delegated responsibility for the care of children in accordance with a form furnished or approved by the Commission, and shall submit records as required by the Department.

All records of any child care facility, except financial records, shall be available for review by the Secretary or by duly authorized representatives of the Department or a cooperating agency who shall be designated by the Secretary and shall be submitted as required by the Department.

(10) Each operator or staff member shall attend to any child in a nurturing and appropriate manner, and in keeping with the child's developmental needs.

Each child care facility shall have a written policy on discipline, describing the methods and practices used to discipline children enrolled in that facility. This written policy shall be discussed with, and a copy given to, each child's parent prior to the first time the child attends the facility. Subsequently, any change in discipline methods or practices shall be communicated in writing to the parents prior to the effective date of the change.

The use of corporal punishment as a form of discipline is prohibited in child care facilities and may not be used by any operator or staff member of any child care facility, except that corporal punishment may be used in religious sponsored child care facilities as defined in G.S. 110-106, only if (i) the religious sponsored child care facility files with the Department a notice stating that corporal punishment is part of the religious training of its program, and (ii) the religious sponsored child care facility clearly states in its written policy of discipline that corporal punishment is part of the religious training of its program. The written policy on discipline of nonreligious sponsored child care facilities shall clearly state the prohibition on corporal punishment.

(11) Staff Development. – The Commission shall adopt minimum standards for ongoing staff development for facilities but limited to the following topic areas:

- a. Planning a safe, healthy learning environment;
- b. Steps to advance children's physical and intellectual development;
- c. Positive ways to support children's social and emotional development;
- d. Strategies to establish productive relationships with families;
- e. Strategies to manage an effective program operation;
- f. Maintaining a commitment to professionalism;
- g. Observing and recording children's behavior;
- h. Principles of child growth and development; and
- i. Learning activities that promote inclusion of children with special needs.

These standards shall include annual requirements for ongoing staff development appropriate to job responsibilities. A person may carry forward in-service training hours that are in excess of the previous year's requirement to meet up to one-half of the current year's required in-service training hours.

- (12) **Developmentally Appropriate Activities.** – Each facility shall have developmentally appropriate activities and play materials. The Commission shall establish minimum standards for developmentally appropriate activities for child care facilities. Each child care facility shall have a planned schedule of developmentally appropriate activities displayed in a prominent place for parents to review and the appropriate materials and equipment available to implement the scheduled activities. Each child care center shall make four of the following activity areas available daily: art and other creative play, children's books, blocks and block building, manipulatives, and family living and dramatic play.
- (13) **Transportation.** – When a child care facility staff person or a volunteer of a child care facility transports children in a vehicle, each adult and child shall be restrained by an appropriate seat safety belt or restraint device when the vehicle is in motion. Children may never be left unattended in a vehicle.
- The ratio of adults to children in child care vehicles may not be less than the staff/child ratios prescribed by G.S. 110-91(7). The Commission shall adopt standards for transporting children under the age of two, including standards addressing this particular age's staff/child ratio during transportation.
- (14) Any effort to falsify information provided to the Department shall be considered by the Secretary to be evidence of violation of this Article on the part of the operator or sponsor of the child care facility and shall constitute a cause for revoking or denying a license to such child care facility.
- (15) **Safe Sleep Policy.** – Operators of child care facilities that care for children ages 12 months or younger shall develop and maintain a written safe sleep policy, in accordance with rules adopted by the Commission. The safe sleep policy shall address maintaining a safe sleep environment and shall include the following requirements:
- a. A caregiver in a child care facility shall place a child age 12 months or younger on the child's back for sleeping, unless: (i) for a child age 6 months or younger, the operator of the child care facility obtains a written waiver of this requirement from a health care professional, as defined in rules adopted by the Commission; or (ii) for a child older than 6 months, the operator of the child care facility obtains a written waiver of this requirement from a health care professional, as defined in rules adopted by the Commission, a parent, or a legal guardian.
 - b. The operator of the child care facility shall discuss the safe sleep policy with the child's parent or guardian before the child is enrolled in the child care facility. The child's parent or guardian shall sign a statement attesting that the parent or guardian received a copy of the safe sleep policy and that the policy was discussed with the parent or guardian before the child's enrollment.
 - c. Any caregiver responsible for the care of children ages 12 months or younger shall receive training in safe sleep practices. (1971, c. 803, s. 1; 1973, c. 476, s. 128; 1975, c. 879, s. 15; 1977, c. 1011, s. 4; c. 1104; 1979, c. 9, ss. 1, 2; 1981 (Reg. Sess., 1982), c. 1382, ss. 1, 2; 1983, c. 46, s. 2; cc. 62, 277, 612; 1985, c. 757, ss. 155(h), (i), 156(c)-(h); 1987, c. 543, s. 3; c. 788, s. 6; c. 827, s. 234; 1989 (Reg. Sess., 1990), c. 1004, s. 56; 1991, c. 273, s. 5; c. 640, s. 1; 1993, c. 185, s. 3; c. 321, s. 254(c); c. 513, s. 9; c. 553, s. 32; 1995, c. 94, s. 32; 1997-443, s. 11A.44;

1997-456, s. 43.1(a); 1997-506, s. 8(a); 1998-217, s. 11; 1999-130, s. 2; 2003-407, s. 1; 2007-182, s. 2; 2009-64, s. 1; 2009-244, s. 1; 2010-117, s. 1; 2010-178, s. 1; 2011-145, s. 10.4A; 2012-142, 10.1(c1); 2012-160, s. 2; 2023-134, s. 9D.10(b).)