

## **FIRST Program news release**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning Launches Financial Program for Early Childhood Educators**

**ATLANTA, Ga., (October 19, 2009)** – Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning launched a new program that will provide financial support to eligible early childhood professionals. The First-time Incentive to Raise Standards for Teachers (FIRST) Program will aid those working in early child care and education to obtain a Child Development Associate credential or higher.

Bright from the Start, the state agency that licenses all child care facilities and registers family day care homes, is allocating funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). This is a \$1,200 incentive to 3,400 eligible early care and education professionals who earn their first early care and education credential between September 1, 2009 and February 28, 2011.

“The FIRST program will help ensure a stronger education foundation for thousands of professionals in the early care and education field who are entrusted with more than 700,000 children in Georgia,” said Bright from the Start Commissioner Holly A. Robinson. “It’s all about quality. This program is dedicated to raising the bar in achieving and maintaining higher standards for the children we serve.”

To be eligible, participants must:

- be a teacher/lead caregiver, assistant teacher, director or assistant director;
- work in a child care learning center or group day care home licensed by Bright from the Start or by the Department of Defense; or work in a registered family day care home; or work in a public or private Georgia Pre-K program;
- work with children ages 12 or younger (early childhood or school age care);
- work at least 25 hours per week if a teacher/lead caregiver or teacher assistant in an early care and education program, or at least 20 hours a week in a school-age care program. If a director or assistant director, work 40 hours per week;

- have been employed with the same employer for at least 3 consecutive months in teaching or administrative position; and
- complete a pre-application for the program, which allows the state to "pre-qualify" and track participants and anticipate funding needs.

Care Solutions, Inc. will manage the FIRST Program. For additional details, please visit [www.caresolutions.com](http://www.caresolutions.com) or call 800-227-3410.

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Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia's children and their families. It administers the nationally recognized Georgia's Pre-K Program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, administers federal nutrition programs, and manages voluntary quality enhancement programs.

The department also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, distributes federal funding to enhance the quality and availability of child care, and works collaboratively with Georgia child care resource and referral agencies and organizations throughout the state to enhance early care and education. For more information, go to [www.dec.state.ga.us](http://www.dec.state.ga.us).