



Tonya Dean

Owner-operator of [Inspired Achievement Academy](#) in Houston

📍 TEXAS

Making the "Business" of Childcare Sustainable

I am a lifelong learner and a lifelong teacher. Owning my own preschool has been my dream since my early 20s when I started as a teaching assistant in kindergarten and then worked in the elementary school where my kids attended. After I finished my bachelor's degree in early childhood education, I worked at Head Start for seven years and then started teaching 6th

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grade language arts. During that time I had another child.

Then, in 2020, the pandemic hit and I was trying to teach my own children at home, teaching other people's kids online, and also taking care of my 3-year-old. It was impossible! So, starting a family child care home was really an invention of necessity. I got all of my permissions and upgraded my home so that I was ready to open in spring 2021.

Then we had nothing but rain in Houston. It rained more than 40 inches that year. In October, my house flooded and the child care space was really unlivable. So I had to go through the licensing process again. I had to replace the drywall and the flooring. [The repairs cost almost \\$20,000.](#) There were [state regulations](#) and there were also city regulations on top of that. I knew I had to have everything turnkey ready when the inspectors arrived; otherwise I would have to wait three years before I could reapply.

In April 2022, I welcomed my first family and started taking care of their little girl. It wasn't enough income to sustain my business, and I thought I might need to close again. But God works in mysterious ways. A second family showed up. The mom said to me, "I need you just like you need me," because she was trying to find a job. I took care of her 3- and 4-year-olds, and I also picked up her 6- and 9-year-old after school.

When I look back, I realize that even though I had the educational training to open a child care business, I didn't have the business training. This is not just a babysitting job; it is actually a business and I am accountable to the state and to my community. I participate in the federal food program (CACFP), so I'm also accountable to the country. What we need in order to do our best for the state and the community are the kinds of support that city and state employees have. We need a substitute pool, health insurance, paid time off, and a retirement system.

To make things a little more sustainable for me financially, I am also a licensed notary. I do that and I also train other child care providers who are working on their CDA. At the same time, I am also working toward my master's degree. What I want new providers to know is that just like for the children we care for, being a good provider is all about learning. We teach social and emotional skills, we teach language, we teach math and manners and how to be a good friend. To do that, we have to be just as earnest about learning ourselves, both how to care for kids and how to take care of business.