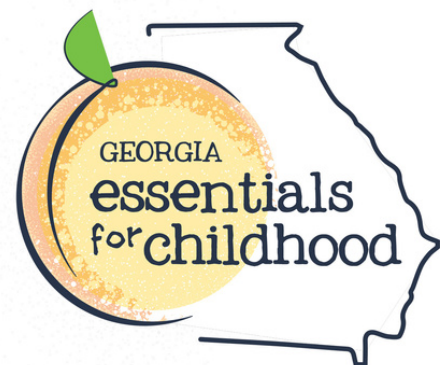




Early Care and Learning

Georgia Child Abuse and Neglect
Prevention Plan

2020-2029



Highlights

Issues

- Inequality and inequity in education attainment for children
- The childcare workforce, half of whom are Black women is underpaid
- Lack of access to early care and education to do limited capacity and financial barriers

Solutions

- Helping Families Understand and Connect with ECE Resources and Quality Care
- Creating and Supporting Family-Friendly Work Environments
- Expand Eligibility for Childcare Scholarships and ECE Centers in Underserved Communities
- Promote Universal Developmental Screenings, Early Intervention Service Access, and Language Nutrition Programs Including Workforce Training
- Utilize and Expand Data Collection and Interagency Data Sharing



The Earliest Experiences Make a Lifelong Difference

Early care and education (ECE) programs play an integral role in the development and well-being of many children and families in Georgia. The earliest years of a child's life are considered a "critical window" for brain development and foundational learning that can drive success or create gaps in school readiness (1, 2). High quality programs such as Head Start offer social, emotional, physical, and mental health, dental, nutritional, and family services along with any special needs requirements to the families that they serve (3,4).

Educational interventions, such as ECE programs, aimed at the earliest years of brain development, are proven to have the highest return on investment. Studies show that for every dollar invested in high quality Pre-K programs the return-on-investment averages \$4 - \$9 because access to quality early education improves future chances of graduating high school, and success in the workforce. Additionally, parents who receive childcare subsidies for ECE programs experience fewer work disruptions, stay employed longer, and enjoy higher family earnings (5,6).

The benefits of early education include, but are not limited to:

Benefits to Individuals/Family

- School readiness through language skills and social and emotional competence
- Health/Nutrition- provide food to children and their families experiencing food insecurity
- Allows caregivers to engage in the workforce
- Reduces parental stress
- Increasing childcare slots by 1% has shown to reduce maltreatment cases by 1.8%⁷

Benefits to Society at Large

- Higher Numbers of High School Graduates
- Fewer Educational Gaps when Starting School
- Greater opportunities in Workforce/Employment



Relation to Child Well-Being

- Studies have shown that a 1% increase in childcare slots reduces child maltreatment cases by 1.8%.¹⁶
- Further analyses have found that eliminating waitlists, combined with policies that facilitate the continuity of child health, can lead to significant decreases in child maltreatment rates overall (18).
- Children enrolled in preschool with parental engagement for one or more years were more likely to have health insurance coverage, and lower rates of depression, juvenile arrests, violent arrests, felony arrests, convictions, and incarcerations. Additionally, these children had a 52% reduction in substantiated reports of child abuse and neglect (19).
- Research conducted in Germany similarly found that if a country were to increase childcare slots to a level above the median, it would correspond to a drop of 21.4% of maltreatment cases from the mean, which highlights how universal public childcare can be an effective method in which to reduce cases of child abuse and neglect (17).



Expanding Access

Gaining access to ECE programs is a major challenge many Georgian families face due to limited capacity and financial assistance, along with the high cost of attendance. Of the 364,000 income eligible children aged 0 to 3 in Georgia, only 180,000 are in funded programs or receive childcare subsidies, leaving 184,000 children and their families with no financial support whatsoever (8). As a result, ECE programs are inaccessible to many working families.

In 2019, the Childcare and Parents Services (CAPS) program provided over 75,000 children with subsidies for childcare. Still, an estimated 48,000 children applied but were not accepted into the CAPS program due to limited funding or ineligibility (9). Those who qualify for CAPS based on income alone must be at or below 50% of the federal poverty level (an income of about \$13,000/year for a family of four). This serious problem leaves a huge gap between families who qualify for support and those who can reasonably afford the average \$8,000 annual cost of childcare (10).

The Annie E. Casey Foundation found that 57% of low-income children aged 3 to 4 were not enrolled in early education, compared to only 43% of their wealthier counterparts (11). Challenges with securing child care lead to an estimated \$1.75 billion loss in state annual economic activity due to employee absences and turnover, and another \$105 million in lost state tax revenue each year as parent income declines (5).



The Impact of Disproportionality on Children

Educational attainment is a major gateway for future income and healthcare access. Investing in children's educational successes early and equitably can work to counteract the disproportionate toll racism and poverty has on overall health and well-being throughout life. When looking at Head Start and Early Head Start programs alone, Georgia ranks within the bottom 10 states for both the eligible percentage of Black Preschoolers (43%) and Hispanic/Latino Preschoolers (15%) who are receiving services (12). Quality childcare and education is especially crucial for low-income parents raising young children, who are six times less likely to be able to work from home than higher-wage workers. It is also true for Black and Hispanic workers, with less than one in five Black and one in six Hispanic workers able to telework. And statistics show that only 34.9 percent of working parents with young children from all income levels can telework (13). Furthermore, the workforce responsible for the nurturing care and education of our state's children, about half of which are Black women, earn about \$25,000 per year on average (14). These are essential and skilled workers that should be compensated accordingly.

Recommendations

Utilize and Expand Data Collection and Interagency Data Sharing

Communities should become familiar with and utilize existing and available ECE data to understand ECE landscape and need in their areas. Publicly available data sources:

- Georgia's Cross Agency Child Data System (GA CACDS): <http://www.gacacds.com/>
- Get Georgia Reading Data Dashboards: <https://getgeorgiareading.org/data/find-data/>
- GEEARS Readiness Radar: https://geears.org/research/readiness_radar/
- Kids Count: <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#GA/2/0/char/0>

Helping Families Understand and Connect with ECE Resources and Quality Care

- Community organizations and family serving professionals (pediatrician offices, WIC clinics, libraries, business' HR department, etc) should promote the 1-877-ALL-GA-KIDS (1-877-255-4254) Helpline to connect parents with available ECE resources and programs. <https://www.qualitycareforchildren.org/find-child-care>
- Promote the benefits of ECE to businesses to foster family friendly policies in the workplace. For example, businesses who support ECE programs can receive a 10% federal tax credit for contracting with Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, like Quality Care for Children, to help families find childcare within their budget. GEEARS' Business Toolkit, GEEARS' ECE One-Pager for Businesses
- Support elementary schools in accessing Pre-K slots in communities with limited infrastructure for early-childhood education, especially within the K-12 infrastructure and physical building. Help families successfully take advantage of Pre-k slots in schools, transport, and community based.
- Support the infant-toddler workforce by maintaining and expanding existing support systems, such as DECAL Scholars and classroom supports (e.g., inclusion, infant-toddler, and behavioral services).
- The Georgia Infant-Toddler Coalition: <https://geears.org/initiatives/georgia-infant-toddler-coalition/>
 - Georgia Association for the Education of Young Children: <https://www.gaeyc.org/>
 - Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) <http://gelds.decal.ga.gov/>

Help decision makers understand ways to increase the number of quality-rated ECE programs by becoming educated yourself!

- [Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students \(GEEARS\)](#)
- [Get Georgia Reading](#)
- [Zero to Three](#)
- [Voices for Georgia's Children](#)
- [Georgia's Boost in Child Care Funding, Georgia Budget and Policy Institute](#)

Creating and Supporting Family-Friendly Work Environments

Parents with children enrolled in early care and education are less likely to miss time at work, more likely to earn a higher income to support the family, and to remain employed at higher rates. The availability of childcare in Georgia supports annual parent earnings of at least \$24 billion, which strengthens family economic security. Furthermore, the ECE industry generates \$4.7 billion of economic activity in the state each year (14).

- Engage with local businesses or chambers of commerce and let them know why and how they can support ECE.
- Paid Parental Leave- Educate and advocate for businesses in your community to follow in the footsteps of federal and state governments to provide paid time off for new parents.
 - Starting in 2020, the Federal Employee Paid Leave Act provides 12 weeks of paid parental leave to certain Federal employees covered by the Family Medical Leave Act.
 - In the 2021 Georgia state legislative session HB 146 passed which provides paid parental leave for eligible state employees up to 120 hours within a 12-month period.
- Business incentives to provide or connect families with ECE are available. Below are a few examples. A more extensive list can be found on [GEEARS' Business Toolkit](#).
 - Businesses that offer on-site child care can receive a federal tax credit equal to 25 percent of expenses for employee child care. The maximum credit allowed per year is capped at \$150,000. The credit is part of the general business credit and can be claimed any time within three years from the due date of the return. (IRS Form 8882).
 - From Georgia, businesses can receive a 100% total state tax credit, 10 percent credit per year for 10 years for land acquisition, improvements, buildings, building improvements, furniture and equipment used for the construction, expansion, improvement or operation of an employer provided child care program.
- Advocacy Tools and Benefits to Business
 - The Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) [Business Toolkit](#)
 - Colorado's Executives Partnering to Invest in Children (EPIC) Family Friendly [Business Toolkit](#)



Project Spotlight: Georgia

Infant-Toddler Mental Health

The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning's (DECAL) Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Director is working to create an Early Childhood System of Care around the mental health needs of young children and their families. This position was supported by the Infant and Toddler Social Emotional Health Legislative Study Committee and is responsible for convening a cross-agency collaborative group representing all state child serving agencies and other key children's mental health partners. This group will explore areas of finance/policy, workforce development and promotion/prevention efforts as related to mental health for infants and children through the age of 5 years. This is a state level position funded by Pre-K lottery funds through the Georgia DECAL.

<https://www.decal.ga.gov/Prek/InfantandEarlyChildhoodMentalHealth.aspx>

Policy Spotlight: Oklahoma

Oklahoma has the oldest universal pre-K program in the country. The program launched in 1980 and was expanded in 1998 to become a universal pre-K program. When the state recognized that it ranked 20th in the country for child poverty, program administrators wanted to ensure that all of the state's children had access to education. The program was created to ensure that every school district in the state would offer a pre-school program to all eligible preschool-age children. The National Institute for Early Education Research found that 99% of school districts offer pre-K across the state and that more than 70% of Oklahoma's 4-year-olds are enrolled. This accessibility means that Oklahoma ranks fourth in the country for access to early childhood learning and pre-K. Additionally, more than 87% of children enrolled in the pre-K programs attend full-day programs. The state's initiative for universal pre-K has improved school readiness and academic performance for the state's youngest children across demographics and has improved the quality of and access to early childhood learning opportunities.

Expand Eligibility for Childcare Scholarships and ECE Centers in Underserved Communities

Additional state and federal funds should be allocated to serving a larger proportion of income-eligible families through Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services Program (CAPS—provides low income families with childcare subsidies), while also ensuring that reimbursement rates support quality care ([GA Infant-Toddler Coalition, 2021](#)).

- Advocate to remove barriers that limit eligibility to CAPS and the ability of caregivers to find work. Currently, initial income eligibility is 50% of state median income (SMI), which is more stringent than many other states. Advocate to expand initial CAPS eligibility to increase access (e.g. to 65% of the state median income).
- Only an estimated 14.8% of eligible children in Georgia currently receive CAPS. To fund all currently income-eligible children aged four and under, it is estimated that an investment of at least \$100 million is needed.
- Increase the marketplace reimbursement rate of the CAPS program to ECE providers.
- To equitably meet the needs of children and families with low incomes—especially those in communities of color—we must ensure center- and home-based providers have the resources to create safe, high-quality spaces for children to learn and grow. These new federal funds will allow them to do so without assuming additional economic burden.

Promote Universal Developmental Screenings, Early Intervention Service Access, and Language Nutrition Programs Including Workforce Training[

- Update Medicaid reimbursement policies to allow payment for services like social-emotional screening for infants and toddlers/therapies .
- Increase access and use of mental health consultants in ECE. Findings suggest that attending to teacher mental health and early childhood mental health consultants may be important in reducing rates of exclusionary discipline in early education settings (15).

- Advocate for an increase of federal funding to programs such as the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV).

- Promote and embed early developmental monitoring programs and materials such as the CDC's Learn the Signs. Act Early. in programs or services provided to parents with children prenatal to 5 years of age. Free materials for early developmental monitoring are readily available online.



- Language, literacy endorsement, and social and emotional competence training for pre-service and in-service workforce.
 - <https://peprogram.gsu.edu/resources/talk-with-me-baby/>
 - <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33555839/>
 - <http://www.dec.state.ga.us/InstructionalSupports/InfantToddlerCare.aspx>
 - <https://www.see-ks.com/>

Conclusion

The holistic approach upheld by ECE centers have led to substantial, long-lasting, and even intergenerational effects, with the strongest impact occurring for children from low-income families. Helping parents engage in the workforce boosts Georgia's economy and the health and well-being of working families. Equitable access to ECE programs is essential to Georgia's workforce and the healthy development of the state's children aged zero to three.

Continue the Conversation

To continue learning and providing input into the discussion of early care and learning access in Georgia, consider attending or hosting an Inclusive Conversation: Early Learning for Lifelong Success. For more information about this guided conversation, or the other five conversations related to the state plan, visit <https://inclusivv.co/ga-family-wellbeing>.



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