

ANNUAL REPORT

*GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance
for Ready Students*

2017



GEEARS
GEORGIA EARLY EDUCATION
ALLIANCE FOR READY STUDENTS

www.geears.org

ABOUT US



GEEARS inspires and provides leadership for a statewide movement on quality early learning and healthy development for all children ages birth through five.

In 2010, GEEARS was established to help business, civic and government leaders maximize the economic return on the state's investments in early care and learning.

GEEARS is an independent successor group to the United Way of Greater Atlanta's Early Education Commission chaired by Dennis Lockhart, the Head of the Federal Reserve of Atlanta and Beverly Tatum, the President Emerita of Spelman College.

Our Mission

To support high-quality early learning and healthy development for Georgia's youngest children, from birth to five, by championing policies, promoting innovative and evidence-based practices and building public will.

Our Vision

By 2020, all Georgia students will enter kindergarten prepared to succeed and on a path to read to learn by third grade.



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MESSAGE FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

“Once upon a time...”

In homes and schools around the world, there is nothing a young child looks forward to more than a story that starts with those four words. The stories that we tell our children help to build their vocabulary, imagination, and cultural understanding. Research by Marshall Duke, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Emory University, describes how sharing family stories helps children become more resilient, more self-confident, and happier. To understand where we are going, we must reflect on from where we have come.

Once upon a time, in 2010, a group of forward-thinking community leaders established a vision for a new, statewide organization that would focus on ensuring that Georgia’s youngest learners are prepared to succeed in kindergarten and on a path to read to learn by the end of the third grade. With that vision and a charge to engage in policy change, research, and public engagement efforts, GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students was launched, and we are proud of all that we have accomplished in the last **seven** years.

Our story has been co-authored by our inspiring and dedicated board members and our smart, creative, and energetic team of professionals.

We have been so busy doing the work that we have not stopped to tell the story of how far we have come. In fact, this is our first Annual Report, and it was challenging to fit everything within its pages. We have tried to reflect the essence of GEEARS, the passion that we feel about working to improve outcomes for young children and their families, our deep appreciation for our partners, and some examples of our accomplishments. We look forward to writing many chapters in the years to come and, especially, to the day on which we can confidently say that all children birth to five in Georgia will live **happily ever after**.



MINDY BINDERMAN
Executive Director



STEPHANIE V. BLANK
Founding Board Chair


OUR STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

What it takes

- All of Georgia's children birth to five are in high-quality environments that support learning and development.
- Families have the information, skills and supports needed to create safe, nurturing and language-rich environments that support children's early learning and healthy development.
- Business and community leaders champion and public officials implement equitable public policies and practices that support families with the greatest needs.
- The research community works together to identify and share innovative practices related to early brain development.
- Data systems are accessible and used to inform policies and practices as well as measure progress.
- Public systems are interconnected and aligned to provide effective support for families and children.

What we know


Brain Development



The first three years of life represent the most rapid period of brain development, and experiences during these years critically shape future development.

Effects of High-Quality Early Learning

Children who attend high-quality early learning programs are:

- More likely to graduate high school, have a job and earn higher wages.
 - Less likely to drop out of school, depend on social services or be arrested.
- 

Economic Impact of Early Education

- Every \$1 invested in high-quality early learning yields \$7 in savings.
 - In Georgia, the early care and education industry generates \$4.7 billion in economic activity each year.
 - A conservative estimate of the level of parents' annual earnings supported by the availability of child care in Georgia is \$24 billion.
- 

DRIVE CHANGE » CREATE IMPACT

We are focused on driving positive change through the following three methods.

Communicate, Convene, and Collaborate

We educate, inform and mobilize stakeholders for collective action and impact to ensure all Georgia families achieve the economic, community and health benefits of setting a strong foundation prenatally and in the first five (5) years of a child's life.

Advocate

We advocate for effective policies that support access to high-quality early learning and encourage healthy development.

Research and Innovate

We are a trusted source who brings the most promising innovation and evidence-based practices and research to the state on behalf of Georgia's youngest children.

Our 2017-2019 goals

Identify and communicate gaps in early learning quality and access.

Ensure policy makers and partners have the data and resources needed to improve policy and practice.

Identify and develop a diverse group of business and community leaders across the state to champion early learning.

Increase funding for high-quality and accessible early learning.

In anticipation of upcoming elections, cultivate relationships with emerging state and local leaders.

OUR STRATEGIES





CONVENE

Be a catalyst to ensure stakeholders work together to improve early childhood policy, practice, and research.

EDUCATE

Provide opportunities for business and philanthropic leaders, policy makers, and parents to deepen their understanding of current issues.

ADVOCATE

Advocate for child care quality, accessibility, and affordability.

ANALYZE

Analyze data, conduct research, and champion policies designed to close the opportunity gap and eliminate the disparities in educational outcomes among Georgia's children.

COLLABORATE

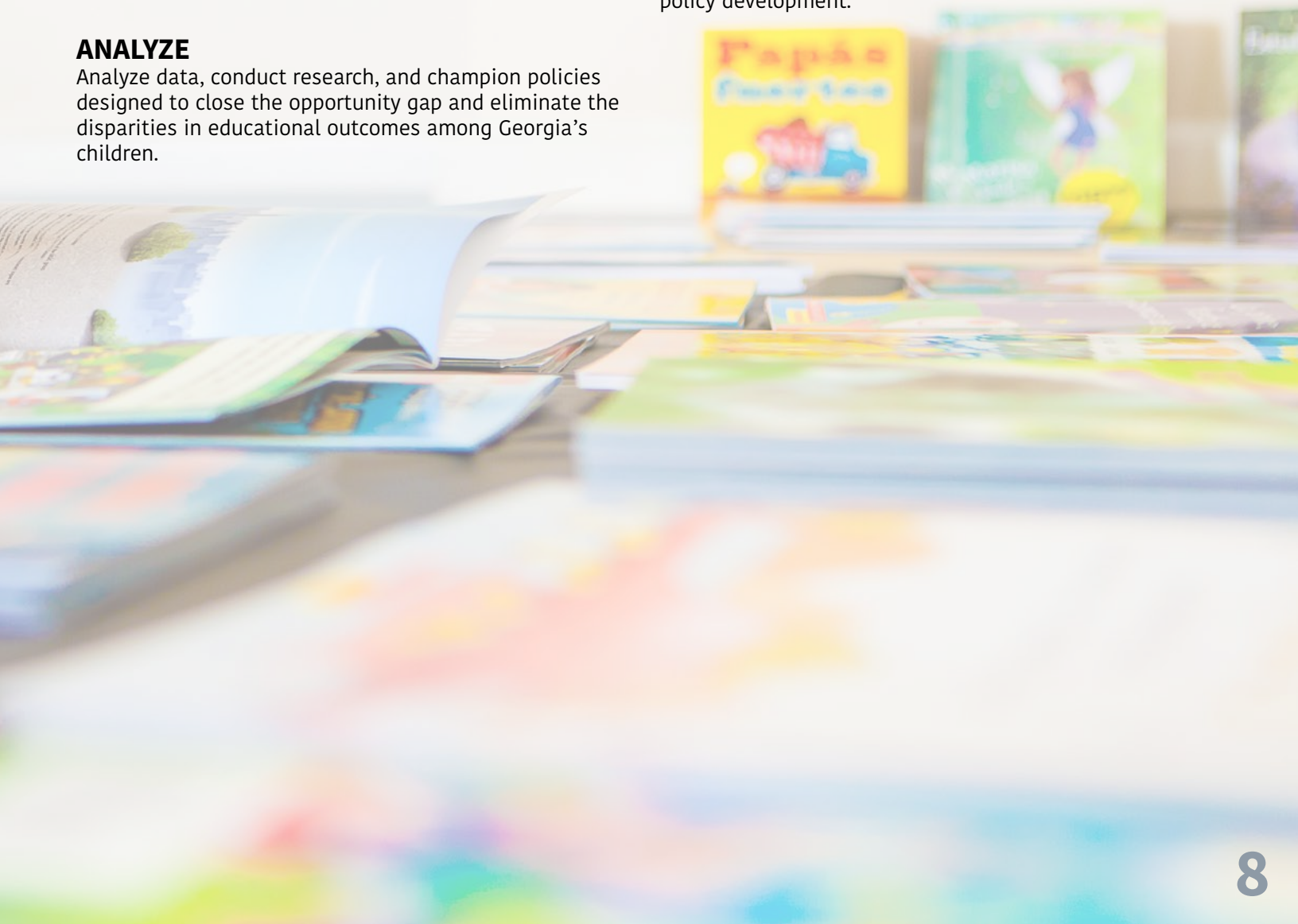
Foster collaboration, joint planning, and alignment between early education providers and public schools.

FACILITATE

Facilitate the development and adoption of a statewide definition of success benchmarks for “kindergarten readiness.”

SUPPORT

Support Georgia-specific research projects to improve social-emotional health for children and influence public policy development.



STATEWIDE & NATIONAL IMPACT

Counties Visited

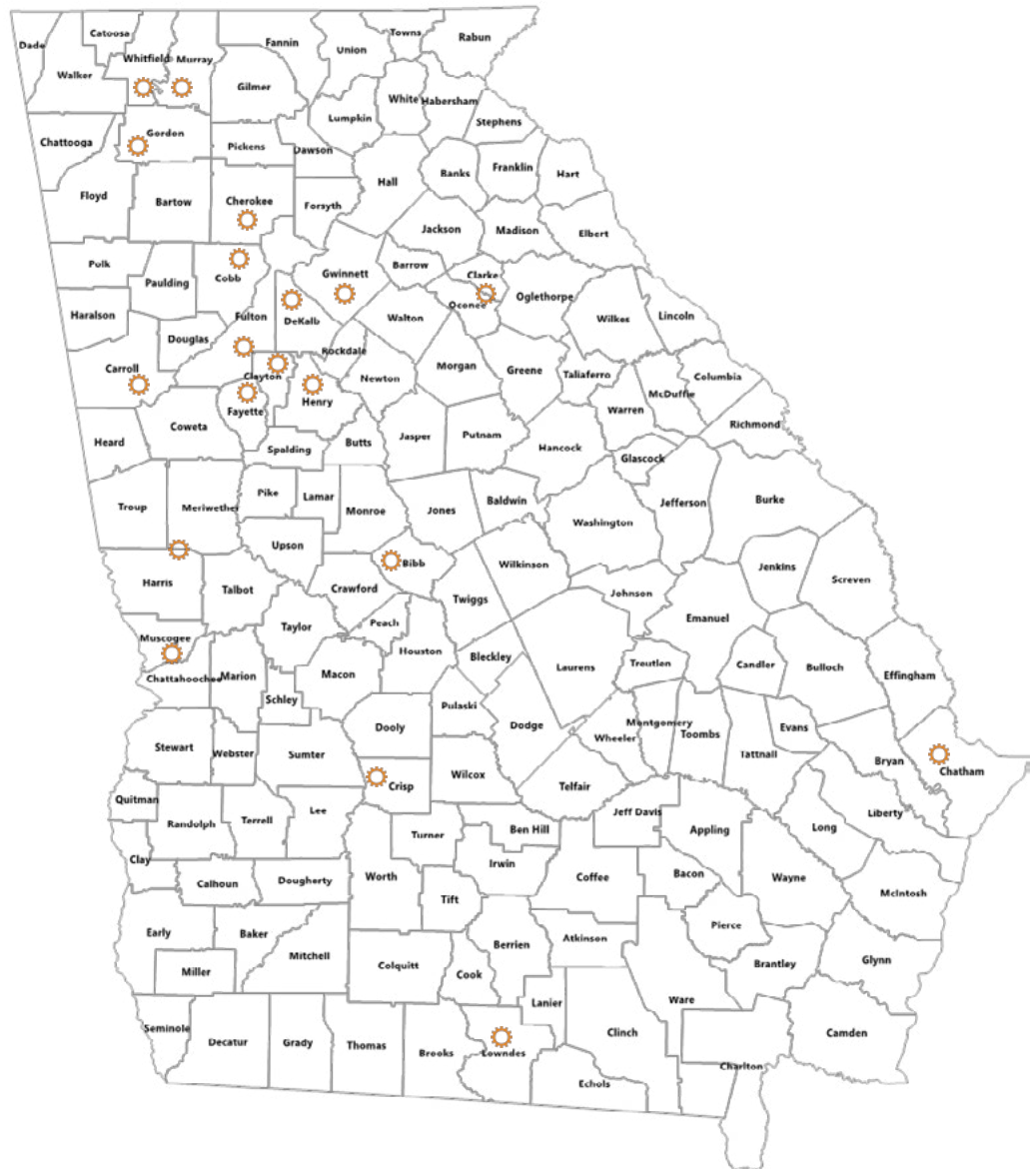
21

Bibb Carroll Chatham Cherokee Clarke Clayton
Cobb Crisp DeKalb Douglas Fayette Fulton
Gordon Gwinnett Harris Henry Lowndes
Meriwether Murray Muscogee Whitfield

30

Cities Visited

Alpharetta
Athens
Atlanta
Baltimore, MD
Boston, MA
Calhoun
Canton
Chicago, IL
Clarkston
Conyers
Cordele
Dallas, TX
Dalton
Decatur
Douglasville
Greensboro, NC
Lagrange
Macon
Marietta
Nashville, TN
Peachtree City
Peoplestown
Phoenix, AZ
Pine Mountain
Roswell
Sandy Springs
Savannah
Tampa, FL
Valdosta
Washington, D.C.





RESEARCH

Readiness Radar

The GEEARS Readiness Radar is a suite of tools that allows users to explore a range of data relevant to early childhood and school readiness in Georgia. In 2017, we added Early Childhood County Profiles and the ATL ACCESS Map to our suite of data tools.



BLUEPRINT

The county-level Blueprint tool uses WEAVE software to simultaneously illustrate multiple readiness indicators and assets across the state.



COMMUNITY COMPASS

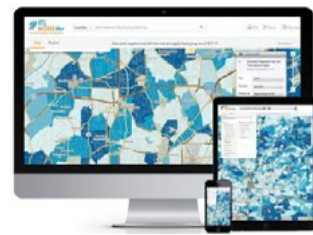
This census-tract-level tool, featuring the GEEARS Early Childhood Index, uses ArcGIS software to provide a more granular look at early childhood data at the community level.

(New in 2017)



EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNTY PROFILES

Early Childhood Profiles are available for all 159 counties and the City of Atlanta. These printable profiles provide a snapshot of child well-being at the county level.



ATL ACCESS (Atlanta Child Care and Early Learning Supply Status) MAP

This map models child care supply, demand, and gaps in Metro Atlanta (including Fulton, DeKalb, Clayton, Cobb, and Gwinnett counties).

(New in 2017)



A Framework for School Readiness in Georgia

SCHOOLS	COMMUNITIES
	
<p>Higher Education, including teacher training, social work, allied health, nursing, and medical programs as well as researchers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt, implement, and promote developmentally appropriate, evidence-based, and culturally and linguistically responsive practices • Promote interdisciplinary training initiatives that encourage alignment and collaboration among early childhood, K-12, health, and social services systems • Communicate and disseminate relevant research findings and translate for policy and practice • Incorporate into coursework resources and tools that promote child- and family-centered practices • Partner with communities and practitioners to support collaboration across child- and family-serving systems 	<p>Community Leaders, including business leaders, family representatives, local governments and elected officials, advocates, faith communities, and community organizations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote equitable access to resources and services that support children, families, and schools • Establish positive, culturally responsive partnerships with families to address the needs of young children • Help create safe and stable communities where children can thrive • Communicate the importance of high-quality early childhood experiences for community well-being • Convene stakeholders within the community to build momentum, foster collaboration, and create alignment in order to address the needs of the whole child • Understand, monitor, and respond to the indicators of child and family well-being in local communities

Over the course of the last several years, agencies and organizations across Georgia have stated commitments to “school readiness,” with a number of initiatives featuring kindergarten readiness as a critical milestone or component of strategic frameworks.

In 2016, GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students, with the support of senior leadership at the Georgia Departments of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), Education (GaDOE), and Public Health (DPH), convened a committee of stakeholders representing early childhood, K-12, families, health, and higher education to develop and adopt a shared school readiness framework. The committee’s work was informed by a survey of nearly 2,000 stakeholders across Georgia—including early childhood educators and administrators, parents and families, elementary educators and principals, school system leadership, health care providers, community organization and family support staff, and others—that assessed respondents’ perceptions of school readiness. Throughout 2017, the committee met to outline priorities, review existing school readiness definitions, consult with national experts, and, ultimately, develop this framework.

The final product—a *framework for school readiness that underscores the responsibility of a range of stakeholders across families, schools, and communities*—was presented in 2017. A digital copy of the framework is available at gears.org and work surrounding school readiness will continue with convenings in regions across the state in 2018.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Georgia First 2000 Days Campaign

In March of 2017, GEEARS launched a statewide public awareness campaign to spread the message about the importance of a child's first 2,000 days of life. By the end of 2017, 50 organizations were involved and 30 individual Champions were involved with the campaign.

Speaker Series: Conversations on Early Childhood

Conversations on Early Childhood is an exciting series providing new and interesting perspectives on early childhood policy issues facing Georgia and the nation. Our goal is to promote the development of policies and practices that will enhance the well-being of Georgia's children.

We hosted three speaker series events in 2017:

- Brigid Schulte - "Lessons from the Care Index" & "Better Work, Better Life" on Feb. 27th
- Rear Admiral (Ret.) Casey Coane - "A Matter of National Security: High-Quality Early Childhood Experiences" on Sept. 20th
- Geoffrey Canada - "What Georgia's Communities Can Do to Save Our Youngest Children" on Nov. 28th

Summer Reading Clubs

The Mayor's Summer Reading Club (MSRC) is a program for children ages birth to eight and their families that takes place in various locations throughout the city of Atlanta each summer. GEEARS convened 40 partner organizations and Atlanta's Office of the Mayor to host book reads and literacy engagement events across Atlanta. This year's book choices were: *A Color of His Own* by Leo Lionni (Birth to 2), *Amari's Big Idea* by The Rollins Center for Language & Literacy at the Atlanta Speech School (Ages 3 to 5), and *Farmer Will Allen and The Growing Table* by Jacqueline Briggs Martin (Ages 6 to 8). In 2017, we convened 40 partners who were instrumental in us providing free books to more than 20,000 children and families.

Frontiers of Innovation

GEEARS serves as the facilitator of the State of Georgia's work with the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University as one of the three states/provinces that are part of the Frontiers of Innovation (FOI) initiative. The goal of this collective impact initiative is to identify how science-based innovation applied to policies and services for the birth-to-five population can advance the Governor's goal of every child being able to read at grade level by third grade.

Quality Rated Child Care Public Awareness Campaign

The Quality Rated Child Care campaign has greatly evolved since its origination in 2013. GEEARS, along with other state partners, has been instrumental in ensuring parents and families across Georgia are more aware of the Quality Rated system and its online search tool. During 2017, we launched a new phase of the campaign that included a rebranding of the logo and website, the creation of a PSA for radio & TV, and local media & community outreach. In 2018, the campaign will focus on engaging with local influencers and utilizing social media to reach even more families across Georgia.



Early Education Bus Journey to Columbus and Cordele



On April 25th and 26th, GEEARS hosted our 2nd Annual Early Childhood Education Bus Tour, a two-day event intended to expose constituents to innovative early childhood education interventions throughout the state of Georgia.

This year, the bus tour traveled to Columbus and Crisp County, GA. Participants saw military childcare options at Fort Benning and heard about exciting innovations in the Columbus area, before heading on to Crisp County (Cordele). In Crisp County, we observed and experienced their innovative Pre-K classrooms, which are effectively bridging the gap between Pre-K and Kindergarten, putting the work of the Atlanta Speech School's Rollins Center into action.

Read a few testimonials from participants below:

“This experience taught me that a school system can think outside the norm and implement a Pre-K program that includes strong community collaboration with the enthusiasm of faculty & staff. As a state we need to know more about the how to implement those programs that are effective.”

“I learned SO much! It was a great opportunity to get outside of Metro Atlanta to see what others are doing in the early learning space!”

“The entire experience was amazing and allowed me to gain new contacts, which will allow our district to improve early learning.”



ADVOCACY

Advocacy and public policy development lie at the core of our work. To ensure that public policies are responsive to the needs of Georgia's youngest children and their families, GEEARS works to develop relationships with elected officials at the federal, state, and local levels as well as with the leaders and staff of state agencies that serve children. Our policy agenda for 2017 included a focus on funding and investments, quality improvements and systems change through innovation, and access and affordability of health care and high-quality programs.

Federal Advocacy

In 2017, GEEARS worked with our state partners to support new funding for subsidized child care and to advance legislation including Senate Bill 201 to allow some employees to use earned sick leave to care for family members and Senate Bill 206, mandating hearing aid coverage for children. At the federal level, GEEARS advocated for funding for child care and reauthorizations of federal programs supporting home visiting (MIECHV) and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

State and Local Advocacy and Collaborations

We were privileged to maintain mutually beneficial relationships with state agencies in Georgia. In 2017, we worked closely with the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) to promote improvements to child care programs through Quality Rated, Georgia's Quality Rating and Improvement System, and served on various state agency committees and work groups including DECAL's Quality Rated Validation and IMPACT project teams, the Department of Public Health's Brain Trust for Babies, and the Division of Family and Children's Services' Blueprint for Change.

We worked with our nonprofit and coalition partners on efforts including Get Georgia Reading, EdQuest, the Georgia Climate Coalition, Learn4Life, Essentials for Childhood, and the Georgia Childcare Affordability Coalition.

Finally, 2017 brought a focus on building relationships with local officials. GEEARS, along with other community partners, hosted two Atlanta mayoral forums in 2017. One forum for all qualifying candidates took place on October 10th and attracted more than 400 attendees and more than 800 live streams. The second forum on December 5th was for the two run-off candidates and more than 500 people attended, while more than one thousand tuned in online. GEEARS encouraged all candidates to consider Atlanta's youngest children and families in their platforms and future public service plans.



Successfully advocating for \$5.5 million in new state investments for high-quality early learning



In 2017, Governor Nathan Deal proposed and the Georgia Legislature approved \$5.5 million to increase reimbursements to high-quality child care providers participating in Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Program. In Georgia, CAPS is administered by the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) and currently subsidizes care for approximately 55,000 of Georgia's children through child care payments made directly to the provider. This was the first increase of state funding for child care in a decade.

The CAPS subsidy program ensures that businesses can rely on a stable workforce and families have access to quality child care. This state investment added to federal funds that help provide low-income families access to high-quality child care while working or in school. The funding was an important and exciting investment in Georgia's children and families. These funds permitted the payments made to child care providers to be based on the quality of their services to children and families (determined by the Quality Rated system). This "tiered reimbursement" model will encourage providers to improve their quality by rewarding them for those enhancements while also encouraging Georgia's families to enroll their children in high-quality child care.

Georgia's budget also included \$2.5 million for behavioral health services for children ages 0 to 4. This expansion of behavioral and mental health coverage is needed to ensure that our youngest children have the strongest start in life and that their mental health needs are identified and appropriately addressed.

GEEARS and other community partners advocated for this funding, and we will continue advocating for necessary funding that will support high-quality early learning and development for children birth to five and their families.



BY THE NUMBERS

46

presentations made
at meetings and
conferences



60%

of eligible providers participating in
Quality Rated



1,548

event attendees



891

people trained through the
Brain Architecture Game



20,000+

children reached through the
Mayor's Summer Reading Club



4

Board of Directors meetings



6

staff members

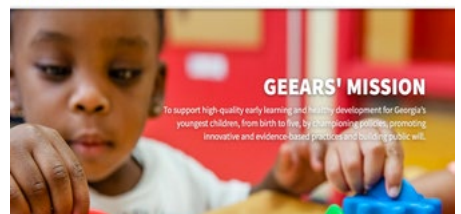


\$2,260.75

donated by individuals on
our first Georgia Gives Day

3

Pre-K Week classroom visits



600k

social media impressions



2017 PARTNERS & SUPPORTERS

Alliance for Early Success
 Alliance Theatre
 Ambitious Initiatives
 Apostles Learning Center
 Atlanta Area School for the Deaf
 Atlanta Children's Shelter
 Atlanta Police Department
 Atlanta Public Schools
 Atlanta Regional Commission
 Atlanta Speech School
 Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System
 Bemiss Academy Preschool
 Black Rose Foundation for Children
 Bulloch County Schools Pre-K
 CC Educational Training Services
 CDF: A Collective Action Initiative
 Center for Civic Innovation
 Center for Working Families
 Centers for Disease Control
 Chestnut Mountain Academy
 Child Trends
 Child Welfare Training Collaborative
 Childcare Network Childcare Center
 Children's Development Academy
 Children's Healthcare of Atlanta
 Children's Museum of Atlanta
 City of Atlanta
 City of Atlanta Police
 Communities in Schools
 Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta
 Creating Connected Communities
 Crisp County Pre-K
 DeKalb County
 DeKalb County Board of Health
 DeKalb County Public Library
 DeKalb County School District
 Diversity in STEM Outreach Project Corporation
 Dream It Forward Foundation
 Druid Hills Development Center
 Early Learning Property Management
 Education Policy Fellowship Program
 Elite Academy

Emmaus House
 Emory University
 Endurance Project Management
 Family Connection - Communities in Schools of Athens
 Father's Incorporated
 Fernbank Museum of Natural History
 Ferst Foundation for Childhood Literacy
 Frazer Center
 Friends of Rev. James Orange Park at Oakland City
 Georgia Association for the Education of Young Children
 Georgia Budget & Policy Institute
 Georgia Center for Nonprofits
 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning
 Georgia Department of Education
 Georgia Department of Public Health
 Georgia Division of Family and Children Services
 Georgia Education Climate Coalition
 Georgia Mental Health Commission
 Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education
 Georgia Public Broadcasting
 Georgia State University
 Get Georgia Reading Campaign
 Grayson UMC Preschool & Pre-K
 Hands on Atlanta
 Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child
 Home Visiting Institute
 Horizons Atlanta
 Institute for Educational Leadership
 Interaction Institute for Social Change
 KPMG Family for Literacy
 Lanier County Family Connection
 Learn4Life
 Lina Lane's Learning Center
 Literacy Alliance
 Literacy For All
 Little Ones Learning Center
 Macedonia Church of Grovetown
 MailChimp
 Metro Atlanta Chamber
 Mission: Readiness
 Nana Grants
 National Association for the Education of Young Children

National Black Child Development Institute
 National Institute for Early Education Research (NIERR)
 NC Early Childhood Foundation
 Neighborhood Nexus
 Newton County Community Partnership
 Odyssey
 Office of Head Start
 Our House
 Page Turners Make Great Learners
 Park Pride
 PNC
 Premier-Academy
 Professional Family Child Care Alliance of GA
 Quality Care for Children
 Reach Out and Read Georgia
 Real Dads Read
 Reinvestment Fund
 Rex Childcare and Early Learning Center
 Sheltering Arms Early Education and Family Centers
 Strengthening Families Georgia
 The Junior League of Atlanta
 The Junior League of DeKalb
 The Learning Tree Center of Georgia, Inc.
 United States Attorney's Office, Northern District of Georgia
 United Way of Greater Atlanta
 University of Georgia
 US Army Fort Benning
 Voices for Georgia's Children
 West Atlanta Watershed Alliance
 WSBTV
 YMCA of Metro Atlanta
 YMCA/Early Childhood Development Co. LLC
 YWCA of Greater Atlanta
 Zero to Three

118+
 partnerships

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Nasarian Foundation

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President & CEO,
Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce

Dr. Jay Berkelhamer

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American Academy of Pediatrics

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Cristo Rey Atlanta Jesuit

Todd Greene

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Milton Little, Jr.

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Sarah-Elizabeth Reed

First Lady,
City of Atlanta

Lovette Russell

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Coxe Curry & Associates

Teya Ryan

President & CEO,
GPB Media

Judge Wendy L. Shoob

Judge,
Superior Court of Fulton County

Dr. Raphael Warnock

Senior Pastor,
Ebenezer Baptist Church

OUR FUNDERS

In 2017, GEEARS was proud to receive funding from national, state and local funders including:



Alliance for Early Success

Annie E. Casey Foundation

Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation

Literacy for All

Nasarian Foundation

PNC Foundation

The Goizueta Foundation

United Way of Greater Atlanta

W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Zeist Foundation

And many other foundations, corporations and individuals





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