

# **Equity, Access and Quality: A Needs Assessment of Atlanta's Birth to Third Grade Continuum**

Report for Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students

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## Equity, Access and Quality: A Needs Assessment of Atlanta's Birth to Third Grade Continuum

*Georgia's children are falling below – or barely meeting – the basic standard in reading by the end of 3rd grade. On the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test, just 34 percent of 4<sup>th</sup> graders scored at or above proficient. Significant gaps in access and quality must be addressed if the state is to excel in preparing children for learning in grades K-12. Children who attend high quality early education are more likely to read at grade level and be on a path to read to learn by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.<sup>1</sup>*

Data from the National Assessment of Educational Programs (NAEP) shows that Atlanta has made some progress in reading and math and is closing some gaps for children in low-income families and Black children. However, a third of fourth graders are unable to reach basic proficiency in math and nearly half of fourth graders do not have basic proficiency in reading.<sup>2</sup>

While Georgia leads the country in providing high quality universal pre-kindergarten to four year olds and evaluations show that the program improves school readiness skills, especially in language, literacy and math,<sup>3</sup> it is clear that there is still significant work to do to help improve outcomes for children, especially those at risk of school failure. To identify opportunities to improve outcomes for children throughout the city, EducationCounsel was asked to complete a needs assessment and strategic plan designed to create a pathway for all families to access high quality services for their children from birth to third grade.

Key findings from the analysis show that there are significant disparities in access to quality birth to five settings throughout the metro Atlanta region, with higher quality providers concentrated in higher income communities. The analysis also found that in many communities, there are simply not enough spaces available in licensed child care or pre-kindergarten programs to serve all families who might want to attend, nor are there enough spaces meeting quality standards to ensure that children are receiving the supports they need from birth through third grade.<sup>4</sup> Specifically:

- There was significant variance in the proportions of state-funded pre-kindergarten slots to the number of low-income four-year-old children across the clusters.
- Child care classrooms are twice as likely as programs with pre-kindergarten classrooms to be of unknown quality. Thirty-eight percent of child care programs are neither accredited nor participating in Quality Rated.
- Clusters with higher percentages of white residents were more likely to contain pre-kindergarten programs that were both accredited and participating in Quality Rated. They were also less likely to contain child care programs of unknown quality.
- Of the approximately 3,200 children enrolled in state funded pre-kindergarten programs in Atlanta, community providers serve two-thirds and Atlanta Public Schools serves one-third.
- Clusters with higher percentages of pre-kindergarten programs that were both accredited and participating in Quality Rated were more likely to have elementary schools where larger

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<sup>1</sup> <http://gears.org/why-ece-matters/for-community/> (unposted revision to website)

<sup>2</sup> <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/districts/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://dec.al.gov/bfts/EvaluationGAPreKProgram.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this report, we use participation in the Quality Rated program or participation in a nationally recognized accreditation program as a proxy for quality. Schools do not participate in QR, nor is there a commonly used measure of quality in k-3 classrooms. Additional research is needed to address these issues.

percentages of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students met or exceeded expectations for reading on GA's 2014 Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT).

The needs assessment process also revealed a lack of coordination between and among the various stakeholders in the Atlanta birth to third grade community, with duplication, overlap, misconceptions, and information gaps between providers, parents, funding partners, and other community leaders.

To address these issues, EducationCounsel recommends that **public and private stakeholders come together to create a permanent collaborative body**, charged with developing a vision and achievable goals for the early childhood community. This body would have adequate funding and staff capacity, would be separate from changes in the political landscape, and would be able to act to implement recommendations and evaluate the impact of investments. The organization would be accountable to the political and philanthropic leadership of the city, and would be required to meet a set of accountability measures, set through a consensus process that identifies an appropriate city wide goal and relevant metrics.

The planning body would be charged with implementing recommendations in support of four core components of a birth to third grade continuum:

1. Identify, implement and support the components of a birth to third grade system;
2. Develop a high quality, well-compensated workforce;
3. Promote health and safety for all children; and
4. Improve information and engagement with families.

We are pleased to present the findings of our work in this report. The report is divided into five sections:

Section 1: A Birth to Third Grade Framework

Section 2: Stakeholder Feedback

Section 3: The Atlanta Context: What We Know

Section 4: The Key to Success: A Permanent Public-Private Planning Body

Section 5: Next Steps

***Recommendation: Public and private stakeholders must come together to create a permanent collaborative body***

The planning body would be charged with implementing recommendations in support of four core components of a birth to third grade continuum:

1. Identify, implement and support the components of a birth to third grade system, including:
  - Create a databank that includes community level information on program quality, school quality family demographics, workforce information, and parent surveys.
  - Expand home visiting, including new initiatives with schools and leverage additional funding sources.
  - Create common understanding and responsibility for transitions between various service providers and for each age group.
  - Encourage and support all providers in the city of Atlanta to participate in Quality Rated and help families access the highest quality care.
  - Expand access and affordability to high quality environments for infants and toddlers through Early Head Start/Child Care (EHS/CC) partnerships, partnering with schools/charters and other innovative approaches.
  - Promote language and literacy instruction for all children.
2. Develop a high quality, well-compensated workforce, including:
  - Invest in joint professional development for all providers and school leaders that is aligned with birth to third grade standards and expectations and is designed to improve teaching and learning for all children.
  - Create incentives to improve stability and decrease turnover including pay parity for teachers and aides in pre-kindergarten and those serving older children.
  - Partner with institutions of higher education to grow degreed/certified workforce, improve content of professional development and develop coaching and mentoring initiatives and create partnerships with institutions of higher education that can also lead to certificates and degrees.
3. Promote health and safety for all children, including:
  - Provide developmental screenings for all children regardless of setting.
  - Expand capacity for referrals and follow-up when physical and mental health needs are identified.
  - Improve coordination with early intervention and promote services in community-based settings.
  - Ensure that all children are in high quality settings meeting standards of Quality Rated.
  - Promote social/emotional development in all settings.
4. Improve information and engagement with families, including:
  - Develop and disseminate information on appropriate development and available services to all families (regardless of setting) in languages and literacy levels that are accessible to all.
  - Expand outreach and services to families using informal settings or caring for their children at home.
  - Create a single coordinated on-line lottery for pre-kindergarten services that includes all providers (schools and community providers).

## Methodology

In the fall of 2015, EducationCounsel was asked by the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) to provide recommendations to create a birth to third grade system across the Atlanta metro area. This request followed on work in Atlanta Public Schools to develop a strategic plan that included a focus on improving early childhood programs through better collaboration and coordination throughout the city.<sup>5</sup> EducationCounsel's recommendations were to be designed to cross various providers, including community based child care programs and Atlanta Public Schools (APS), and were to be designed to create a systematic framework to improve access to high quality programming for all children from infancy, through pre-kindergarten and into early elementary.

In order to assess the needs of children and families in Atlanta and provide a set of actionable recommendations, the team at EducationCounsel reviewed previous efforts to improve the coordination and quality of the early childhood programs in Atlanta, collected information from Atlanta Public Schools, researched the birth to third grade work in other communities to identify models and best practices, and completed an extensive data analysis of the capacity and quality of early childhood programs throughout metro Atlanta. We also spent several months interviewing key stakeholders, including members of the philanthropic community, members of the school board and city council, teachers, principals, superintendents, community based child care providers and parents. A draft set of recommendations was shared with key stakeholders for their feedback and input.<sup>6</sup> The results of these discussions and analyses are woven through this report.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>[http://www.atlanta.k12.ga.us/cms/lib/GA01000924/Centricity/Domain/6922/final\\_12.2014\\_APS%20strategic%20manual.pdf](http://www.atlanta.k12.ga.us/cms/lib/GA01000924/Centricity/Domain/6922/final_12.2014_APS%20strategic%20manual.pdf)

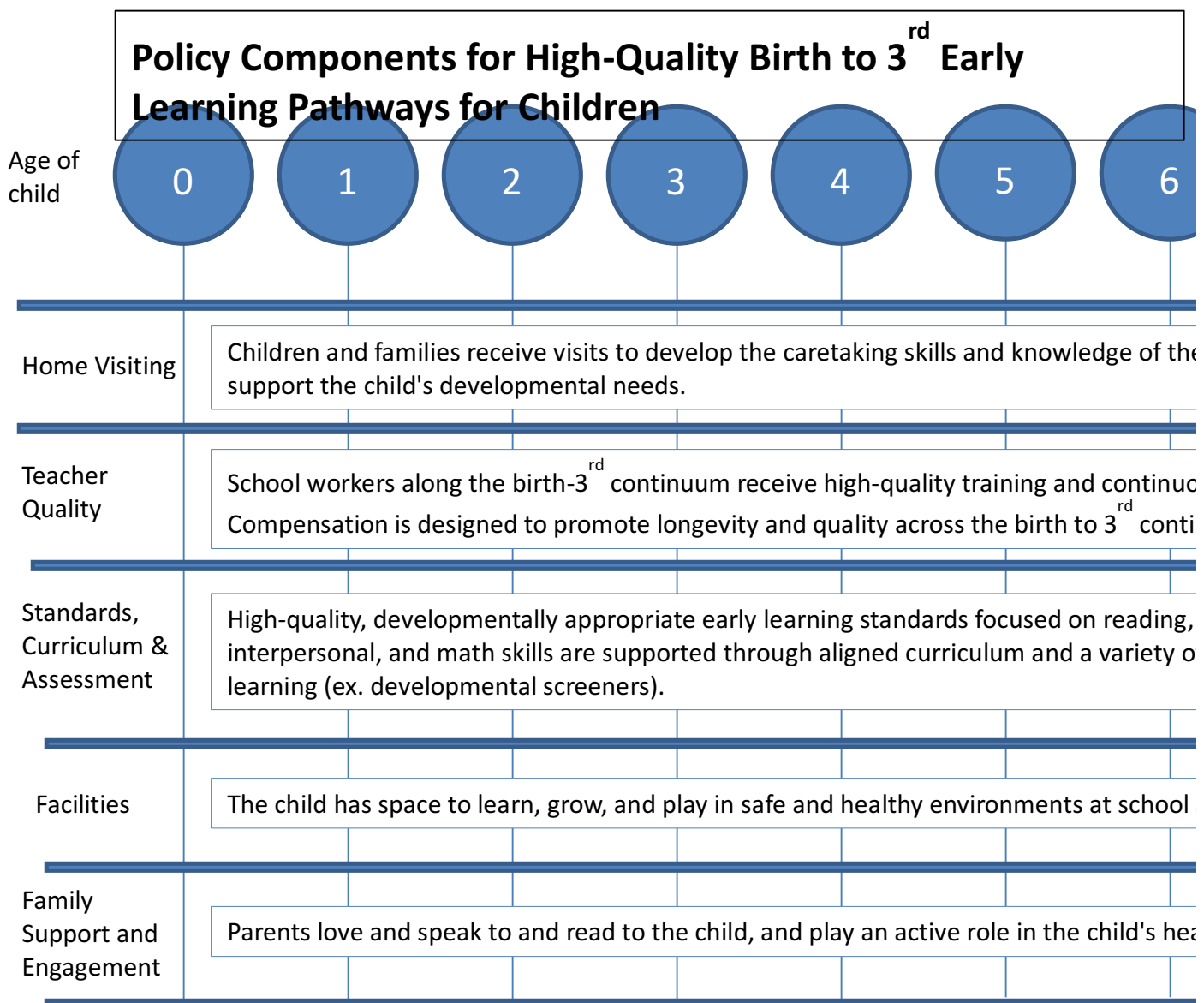
<sup>6</sup> A separate set of recommendations specific to Atlanta Public Schools was also developed and is included as Appendix A.

<sup>7</sup> The authors are grateful for the support of GEEARS staff Mindy Binderman, Elyn Cochran and Hanah Goldberg, as well as APS team members Courtney Jones and Olivine Roberts. All information and analysis is the responsibility of the authors.

## Section 1: A Birth to Third Grade Framework

Research is clear that children need high quality settings from birth through third grade in order to be successful in school and beyond. Early experiences that promote parental engagement, support the full range of developmental domains and ensure that children are safe and healthy are the core components of a system designed to give children the best start in life.

A systems framework that guides decisions across the birth to third grade continuum includes both policy components and process components. The policy initiatives support infants, toddlers, preschoolers and young elementary school students (k-3) and while they may look different or be provided by various agencies at different points in a child's life, they are all needed throughout the early years.

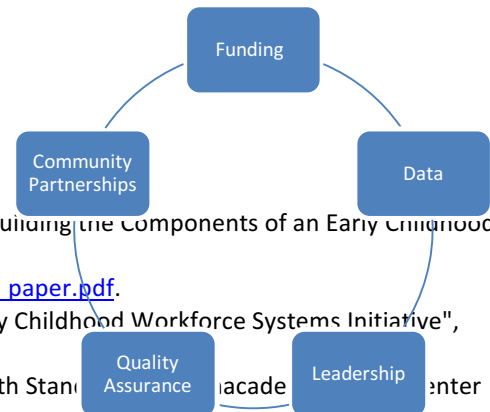


We believe that all children need access to:

- **Home visiting** that is appropriate to the age of a child and reflects the culture, language and values of each family. Home visiting may include a specific curriculum, or may be designed to build relationships between a family and the providers, teachers and other adults supporting children's development.<sup>8</sup>
- **Teachers** who are well trained and compensated with understanding of children's development at each age, reflecting culturally appropriate practice.<sup>9</sup>
- **Aligned Standards, Curriculum and Assessment** that scaffolds learning for children from birth through preschool and into early elementary grades, providing support for children to grow in all domains, including language, literacy, social, emotional, and physical health and development and helps teachers develop individualized learning plans for each child. Standards and curriculum should include what children should know and be able to do at each age, include appropriate expectations for all children, and reflect the culture and language of families.<sup>10</sup> Assessment should also be culturally relevant, may include early screening for delays and provide information that can be shared between and across settings and classrooms.<sup>11</sup>
- **Appropriate Facilities**, designed with the needs of children and adults in mind that include learning spaces suited to the ages and developmental needs of children, allow for small group sizes and teacher: child ratios, and include both indoor and outdoor play spaces, as well as gathering spaces for families and teachers.<sup>12</sup>
- **Family Engagement** and support in all settings, reflecting the language and culture of families, providing information on child development, appropriate expectations for children, and support for families as their children move between various providers and into early elementary schools.<sup>13</sup>

The process components of the framework are equally important, and ensure that the best policies are put into place throughout a community.

- **Funding** is the backbone of every successful long-term initiative. While partnerships and data sharing may improve efficiency and decrease



<sup>8</sup> Bruner, Charles. "A Framework for State Leadership and Action in Building the Components of an Early Childhood System". The BUILD Initiative: Boston, M.A.

[http://buildinitiative.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Four\\_Ovals\\_paper.pdf](http://buildinitiative.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Four_Ovals_paper.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> The National Association for the Education of Young Children. "Early Childhood Workforce Systems Initiative", accessed March 29, 2016 <http://www.naeyc.org/policy/ecwsi>.

<sup>10</sup> Ewen, Danielle and Smith, Leigh Ann. "Fostering School Success with Standards Alignment". Center for American Progress: Washington, D.C., 2015. <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/30051800/StandardsAlignment.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Riley-Ayers, Shannon. "Formative Assessment: Guidance for Early Childhood Policymakers". Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes: New Brunswick, N.J., 2014. [http://ceelo.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/ceelo\\_policy\\_report\\_formative\\_assessment.pdf](http://ceelo.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/ceelo_policy_report_formative_assessment.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Sussman, Carl and Gillman, Amy. "Building Early Childhood Facilities: What States can do to Create Supply and Promote Quality". National Institute for Early Education Research: New Brunswick, N.J., 2007. <http://nieer.org/resources/research/Facilities.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Heidi Rosenburg. (2012). Creating Conditions for Effective and Ongoing Family Engagement. *Harvard Family Research Project Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) Newsletter*, 4(3). <http://www.hfrp.org/early-childhood-education/publications-resources/creating-conditions-for-effective-and-ongoing-family-engagement>.

duplication of services, ultimately adequate funding is required to ensure that every family and their child has access to high quality services from birth to third grade. The components of a quality system come with costs, and finding the necessary resources to create a system for every child requires that leaders come together to adequately and sustainably fund every piece of the system in a coordinated manner.<sup>14</sup>

- **Data** that reflects the demographics of the community and its children and families, includes information about providers serving children from birth through third grade and helps guide decision making toward the goal of increasing access to high quality services for all infants, toddlers, preschoolers and young elementary school students. Data can be used by stakeholders at every level, including practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and families, and can be customized as needed to answer critical questions and implement specific policies.<sup>15</sup>
- **Leadership** is critical to the success of any systems building endeavor and raising the profile of the birth to third grade providers across the community. Leaders need to reflect both public and private stakeholders, and be representative of the community. Clearly identified leaders working together to reach an agreed upon goal will ensure that policy initiatives are implemented appropriately and that resources are available. Leaders can also advocate in a single voice for additional funding, changes to service delivery, and maintain a focus over multiple years toward the long-term goal.<sup>16</sup>

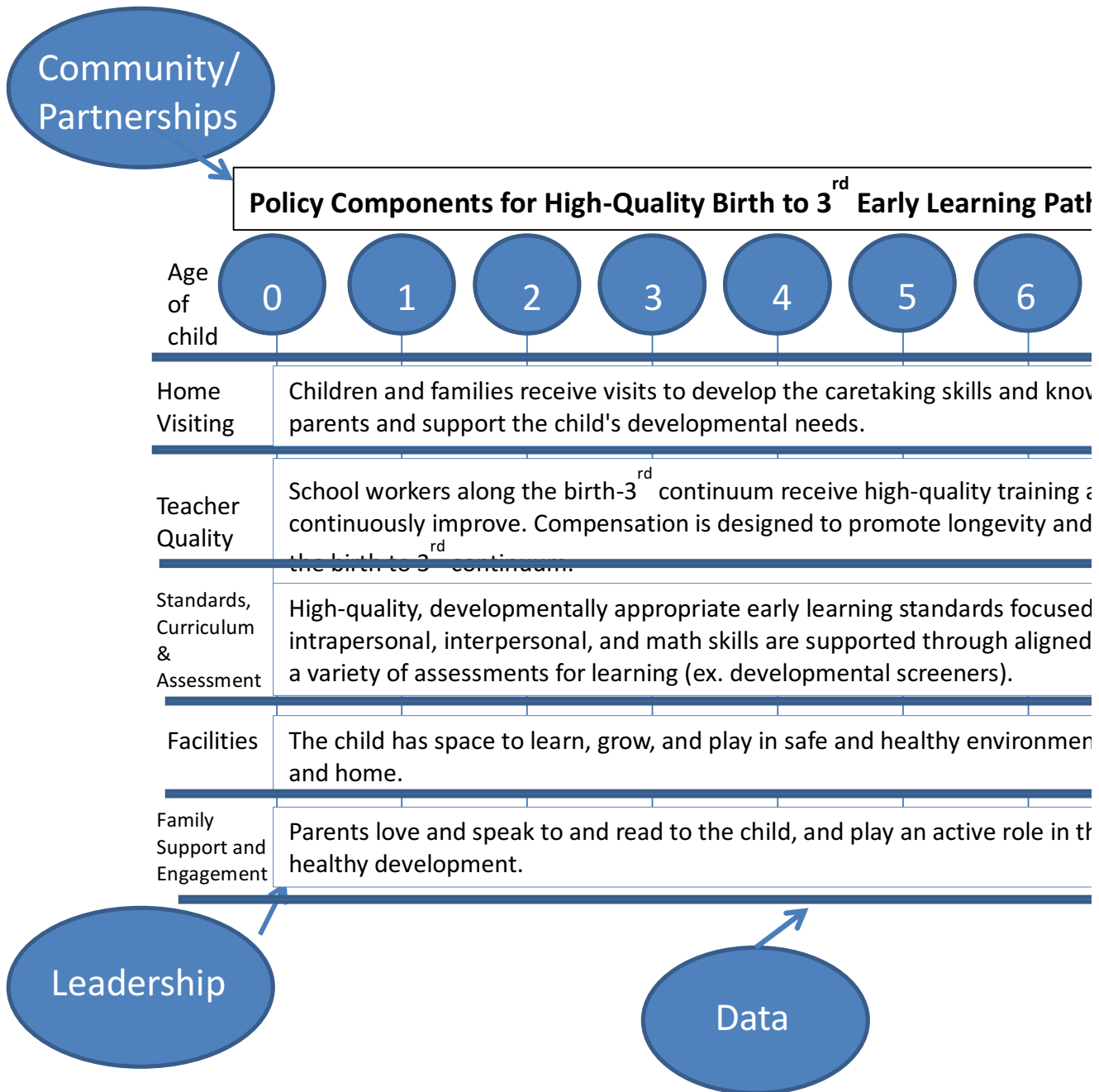
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<sup>14</sup> Frede, Ellen C. and Barnett, W. Steven. "Improving Public Financing for Early Learning Programs". National Institute for Early Education Research: New Brunswick, N.J., 2013. <http://nieer.org/resources/policybriefs/24.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Cochenour, Missy, Porowski, Stephanie, and Regenstein, Elliot. Answering Key Questions with an Early Childhood Data System. *SLDS Issue Brief*, October 2013. [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/slids/pdf/IssueBrief\\_Answering\\_key\\_questions\\_with\\_an\\_early\\_childhood\\_data\\_system.pdf](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/slids/pdf/IssueBrief_Answering_key_questions_with_an_early_childhood_data_system.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Shultz, Thomas and Lynn Kagan, Sharon. "Taking Stock: Assessing and Improving Early Childhood Learning and Program Quality". The National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force, 2013. <http://policyforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Taking-Stock.pdf>.





- **Quality Assurance** criteria and processes should be in place to help create settings that meet the needs of all children across age groups, and include support and resources to help providers meet the quality criteria. Quality assurance processes can provide information to families on appropriate expectations for children, the components of standards and curricula, and provide an objective set of measures for families to compare programs at each age. These practices also help providers, including community based providers and schools, understand the expectations

for every setting and work together in a continuous improvement process to ensure that various agencies have the resources they need to meet the expectations for quality.<sup>17</sup>

- **Community Partnerships** are critical to implementing a plan that can reach all children and building collective impact. No individual agency has the reach, resources or relationships to implement policies as needed. Working together, agencies can understand what is available for families in the community, identify gaps or duplication of services, and target dollars and services to the most underserved areas of the community. Partnerships also help build relationships between stakeholders, creating new champions and increasing access to services across the board.<sup>18</sup>

When combined, these policy and processes components create the foundations for a birth to third grade continuum that ensures all children and families have what they need to be successful, regardless of age, geography, income or race and ethnicity.

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<sup>17</sup> BUILD Initiative. "Quality Rating Improvement Systems".

<http://www.buildinitiative.org/TheIssues/EarlyLearning/QualityQRIS.aspx>.

<sup>18</sup> For an example of the theory of action behind community partnerships, see Strive Together vision and roadmap at <http://www.strivetogether.org/strivetogether-approach/strivetogether-framework>.

## Section 2: Stakeholder Feedback

With the components of the birth to third grade framework in mind, we asked various stakeholders<sup>19</sup> across Atlanta to identify the gaps they saw within the early childhood system, and how they would improve on what is currently available to children and families. A number of issues arose from focus groups and other conversations with various stakeholders representing philanthropy, community providers, public and charter school teachers, school leaders and central office staff, as well as parents and are summarized below:

- **There are deep information gaps about the early childhood system.** There is a general sense from all stakeholders interviewed that there is very limited information about where early childhood programs/pre-kindergarten classrooms are located (both community-based programs and school-based programs), what the quality of programs for all ages is and how parents and other stakeholders can identify quality, and how programs are linked for transition and family support in making choices.
  - Parents talk about the desire for quality programs, but don't always know what it looks like or where it is, and are limited by experience, geography, cost, transportation (can they get to the higher rated program), and other issues.
  - Agency staff are often working from insufficient data (such as waiting lists) to predict demand for new spaces, but few tools exist to identify need and plan more than a few months in advance.
  - Across the board, stakeholders had little knowledge of what data might be available to understand the needs of families, identify successful program models within or outside of APS, and how to use data to plan for expansion and improvement of pre-kindergarten or kindergarten programs.
- **Underserved communities appear to have less access to quality early childhood programs and schools.** A number of interviewees noted that the demographics of Atlanta are changing in many ways (income variation and clustering, increase in Latino families in some communities) and wondered whether there are initiatives designed to meet the needs of these families.
  - Concerns around bilingual outreach and programming as well as the ability to reach families outside of the formal early childhood system were raised frequently by a variety of stakeholders.
  - Overarching concerns about equity and how the early childhood system can promote equity or undermine efforts to improve access to improved programs from birth through 12<sup>th</sup> grade were raised.
  - Stakeholders noted that the economic downturn and other pressures have limited access to services for children from birth to three, and that there is little information about where these children are and the kinds of experiences they have.

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<sup>19</sup> Between August 2015 and January 2016, EducationCounsel interviewed and/or held focus groups with funders (informal focus group and individual interviews), DECAL staff interviews, APS teachers and aides (two focus groups), support staff (focus group), principals (focus group and individual interviews) and Central Office staff (individual interviews), city leaders (interviews), child care staff, including center and family child care providers (focus groups), advocates (interviews), and parents (two focus groups). We also conducted site visits and interviewed staff at child care centers and public and charter schools. Questions for focus group participants are included in Appendix C.

- No single agency tracks children's experiences, and while they may be seeing pediatricians or other health professionals and may be receiving home visiting services, there is no coordination around the service delivery or analysis of the number and needs of children outside of formal settings.
- **Parents and other caregivers lack knowledge about child development.** There are huge variations in what parents expect from their children's early childhood experiences.
  - Families expressed a need for information on what it means to be kindergarten ready, what children should know and be able to do at various developmental ages and stages, and how they can support development.
  - Parents also expressed the need more information about the relationship between cost and quality, how to identify high quality settings and help in accessing resources to support their preferred choices.
- **City and county level leadership for an early childhood system is needed.** There was extensive conversation about the need for a community wide focus on improving access to high quality programs from birth to third grade. In addition to questions around the need for resources across the community-based system, this also led to questions about the need to:
  - coordinate pre-kindergarten expansion and parent choice in pre-kindergarten between and across APS and community providers, and
  - for APS to place much more emphasis and visibility on pre-kindergarten/ kindergarten and early elementary programs (including data sharing, transition, program quality and alignment), including whether APS will continue to raise early childhood as part of the strategic plan, and how will it internally raise the profile of early childhood programming.
- **Choosing a pre-kindergarten program is difficult for families.** The availability of state-funded pre-kindergarten spaces in APS and in the community is widely celebrated for improving the quality of services available to children at four years old. However, the lack of universal access to these state-funded slots has led to significant churn between community providers and APS, which disrupts stability for children, families, teachers and programs.
  - There is little understanding of the degree of duplication in waitlists, nor was there any consolidation of the lists or coordination of information and outreach to families to help them make choices.
  - Community participants in particular talked about the impact of children bouncing between multiple providers as APS worked through its wait list between August and October.
- **The dedication and commitment to a high quality birth to third grade continuum has been missing in Atlanta Public Schools.** APS was applauded for including early childhood improvements and collaboration in its strategic plan, yet stakeholders raised questions about the implementation of that vision. In other school districts that have implemented a pre-kindergarten to third alignment, the role of the Office of Early Childhood has been critical.
  - Expertise in curriculum, standards, professional learning and assessment are needed to build relationships among colleagues in order to help create systems that scaffold learning for children, help teachers understand expectations and instructional practice

at each level, and encourage data sharing between and across grade levels and departments to improve outcomes for children.

- **Schools are not always prepared to serve young children.** Parents and other stakeholders raised concerns about the school climate and whether teachers, principals and other school personnel understand the needs of young children. This included questions around the role of the family liaison in schools, painful experiences parents had during their own APS careers, variations in school quality in all grades across neighborhoods/clusters, and personal experiences with principals and teachers that were unsupportive of the needs of young children.
  - Parents feel welcomed when they come to community-based providers but much less so when entering schools with their pre-kindergarten or kindergarten students.
  - In some cases, parents and teachers believe that early childhood in APS is not seen as part of the larger mission in individual schools.
  - While there were exceptions to this, principals and other school leaders were perceived to have limited understanding of the role of the ECE program, the benefits to the school hosting the program or the experiences of the children and families in the program.
  - Principals and other school leaders often view pre-kindergarten teachers, students, and parents as outside of the school community.
  - Principals have very limited understanding of the program design, appropriate expectations for young children, or their role in building a high quality program.
- **Transitions between community providers, into schools and across grade levels are difficult for families, children, teachers, school leaders and other stakeholders.** Many stakeholders mentioned a hope that APS would help create an initiative to improve work between and across APS schools and community based providers to improve transitions for children and families, increase knowledge and understanding of expectations in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, create opportunities to align curriculum across auspices, and share professional development resources.
  - Participants from various agencies noted that there is little alignment between and across birth to 3 year old experiences, 3-5 year old experiences, and pre-kindergarten to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade experiences.
  - Teachers in schools may not know what children have learned prior to entering an APS pre-kindergarten or kindergarten classroom, while community providers were not always clear on the expectations of pre-kindergarten or kindergarten classrooms.
  - Additionally, teachers and school leaders often did not know what children had learned or were expected to master in pre-kindergarten, and how that created the foundation for success in kindergarten.
  - Finally, pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers were not often integrated with higher grades to ensure that scaffolded learning could occur across grades. A more collaborative approach might also help create high quality early childhood feeder programs for neighborhood schools.
- **Investments to improve the quality, stability and compensation of the workforce are needed.** Workforce issues, especially compensation, create a barrier to quality in community settings and in APS. High rates of teacher turnover, very low pay (for both teachers and aides), costs of benefits, lack of integration into the school community all contribute to a workforce that may

not be of the highest quality or committed to staying within the program long enough to create stability and quality.

- Teachers and others in APS did note that there are many professional learning opportunities for pre-kindergarten teachers, while noting that they need better understanding of the social-emotional and literacy needs of children.
  - Community providers raised the need for more and better professional development for all teachers and caregivers in many settings, with a focus on social-emotional development, understanding best practices in literacy instruction, using observations and other assessments to improve instructional practices, and opportunities for all providers, regardless of setting, to see and experience model programs.
  - This could provide an opportunity for improved alignment across APS and community stakeholders and within and across APS grade levels.
- **Young children are not receiving developmental and health screenings.** Several private funders and providers discussed the need to increase immunization and screening rates for young children.
    - Some participants expressed an interest in expanding the use of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) across various settings.
    - Others suggested that all early childhood settings, including APS programs, could help families identify a medical home and provide vision, hearing and baseline developmental screenings as a core service.
  - **Partnerships across community agencies and APS are needed to support a birth to third grade continuum.** Across the board, stakeholders agree and understand that APS cannot serve all children or provide all needed supports in the birth to third grade space.
    - A variety of stakeholders expressed an interest in using empty school buildings or underutilized buildings to create high quality birth to five spaces that provide health care, screening and evaluation services and family supports in addition to direct services and could facilitate partnerships between community providers and APS.
    - In addition to discussions of basic services for these children, there are also questions about the quality and availability of after care services for children in APS programs from pre-kindergarten to third grade.
    - As a result, there was significant interest in identifying partnerships both between APS and private funders to improve and expand existing services inside and outside of APS and to provide new services within APS through external partners.
    - Stakeholders also questioned whether there are areas where APS can cede primary responsibility to community agencies or funders and where more resources can go to community providers through partnerships with APS or others.

## Section 3: The Atlanta Context: What We Know

Participants in the focus groups and interviews identified a lack of clear data about the Atlanta landscape for early childhood as one of the most significant gaps they face in planning. While data is available, there were limited efforts to analyze access and availability, or to understand the needs of specific communities. To help answer these questions, EducationCounsel and GEEARS analyzed a variety of data sets on children birth to five, designed to provide information on:

- Where are early childhood programs and slots?
- Where are the high and low quality early childhood programs?
- Do certain groups of students and families have less access to early childhood programs?
- Do certain groups of students and families have less access to high quality early childhood programs?

Key findings include:

- Of the approximately 3,200 children enrolled in state funded pre-kindergarten programs in Atlanta, community providers serve two-thirds and Atlanta Public Schools serves one-third.
- There was significant variance in the proportions of state-funded pre-kindergarten slots to the number of low-income four-year-old children across the clusters.
- Clusters with higher percentages of white residents were more likely to contain pre-kindergarten programs that were both accredited and participating in Quality Rated. They were also less likely to contain child care programs of unknown quality.
- Clusters with higher percentages of pre-kindergarten programs that were both accredited and participating in Quality Rated were more likely to have elementary schools where larger percentages of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students met or exceeded expectations for reading on GA's 2014 Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT).

### *Data Sources and Methodology*

Beginning in 2012, Atlanta Public Schools (APS) began organizing their schools into clusters. APS formed nine clusters, each with elementary schools feeding to middle schools and on to high schools. Much of our investigation used the clusters as a lens to categorize data geographically. By examining the data by cluster, we were able to examine it in a way that aligns with the existing geographical structure of APS, which is separated by clusters. A map of the region and the clusters is available as Appendix B.

The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) administers GA's lottery funded pre-kindergarten program as well as licensing and monitoring both center-based and home-based child care facilities across the state. DECAL also operates several quality initiatives, such as Quality Rated (QR), a "system to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early education and school-age care programs."<sup>20</sup> The QR system assigns a one, two, or three star rating to early education and school-age care programs going beyond minimum licensing standards.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://qualityrated.dec.state.ga.us/>

We have made an attempt throughout the report to distinguish between pre-kindergarten and child care programs because state funding for pre-kindergarten (which comes with standards and is universally available) creates a different system from that faced by child care programs serving either private pay families or those receiving assistance paying for care. There was less data readily available on child care programs and providers, especially around enrollment.

*Where are early childhood programs and seats?*

To understand where early childhood programs exist in Atlanta, we mapped all the pre-kindergarten and child care programs and determined total number of funded pre-kindergarten slots (3,182) and the distribution within each cluster. It is critical that children in every neighborhood have space to learn, grow, and play in safe and healthy environments. This is an attempt to examine the degree to which children across Atlanta (defined as the APS service area) and within specific clusters have basic access to pre-kindergarten and child care.

Key findings:

- State funded pre-kindergarten seats are available for approximately 50 percent of the approximately 6,500 children of pre-kindergarten age in Atlanta.
- Community providers serve two-thirds of the pre-kindergarten children while APS serves the remaining one-third. The ratio of community slots to APS slots varies significantly by neighborhood.
- The Douglass and Therrell clusters appear to have serious potential deficits in the availability of both child care and pre-kindergarten seats.
- The Grady cluster has the largest number of allocated state funded pre-kindergarten seats, the highest licensed child care capacity, and the most funded pre-kindergarten seats relative to projected need.
- The Douglass cluster has the largest projected gap in allocation of pre-kindergarten seats, the largest deficit of child care capacity to children, and the highest percentage of in-cluster APS pre-kindergarten students.
- The majority of students in APS pre-kindergarten classrooms (approximately 70 percent) are in-cluster students.

*Access to Pre-Kindergarten*

In order to gain a general understanding of the percentage of students served, using a projection of the number of children living in Atlanta of ages 0-4,<sup>21</sup> we estimated the number of 4-year-old children across Atlanta, assuming equal distribution across ages. In comparing that number (6,473) to the number of total state-funded pre-kindergarten seats (3,182), it appears that approximately 50 percent of four-year-old children in Atlanta could be served by the state-funded pre-kindergarten program.

We then examined the number of funded seats by cluster. Therrell is allocated the fewest slots, at 154, while Grady is allocated the most slots, at 658. However, the key question is whether the number of

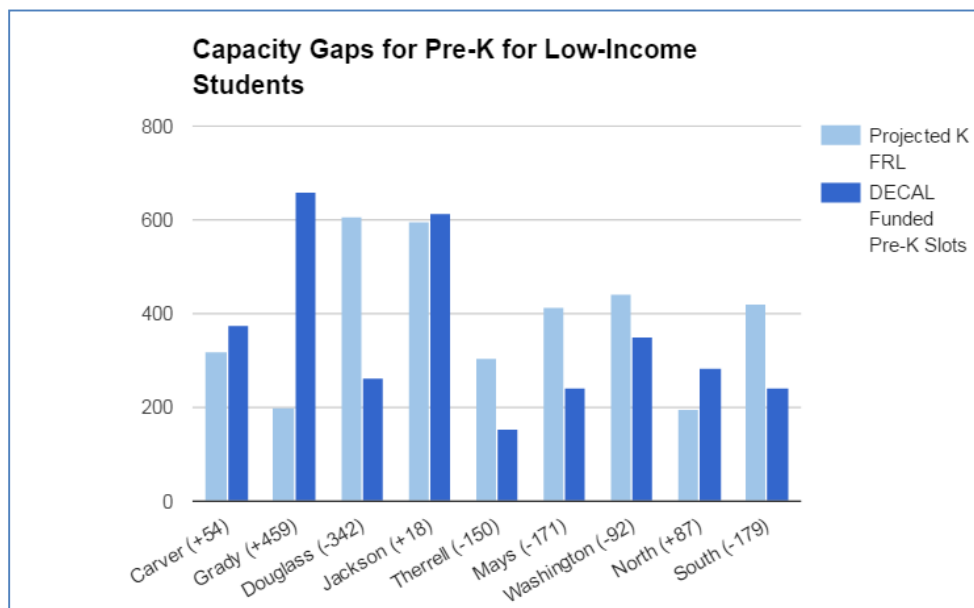
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<sup>21</sup> Projection of children ages 0-4 living in across APS clusters in 2015 based on 2010 Census data, generated by Mike Carnathan at the Atlanta Regional Commission.



seats is adequate to create universal access for each cluster.<sup>22</sup> For the purposes of this report, EducationCounsel performed a basic analysis of the number of children in the cluster versus the number of available seats. Real demand, which is impacted by parent preferences for various types of programs, proximity to home or work, cost, transportation, program hours and other intangibles, cannot be estimated using the resources available for this report.

In an effort to understand the potential capacity gaps for pre-kindergarten for low-income students, we compared a projection of the number of kindergarten students eligible for free or reduced lunch (FRL) to the number of DECAL funded pre-kindergarten slots in each cluster. By using the projection of FRL-eligible kindergarten students as opposed to all kindergarten students, we were able to focus on seat availability for low-income students. This comparison allowed us to identify clusters which appear to be over- or under-served, keeping in mind that it is difficult to predict parent choice regarding child care location.



\*Projected kindergarten free and reduced price lunch (K FRL) = For each elementary school, multiply the number of kindergarten students by the K-12 FRL percent, to estimate the projected K FRL for the elementary, then sum the elementary school counts within each cluster.

\*We also created projections using census data on the number of children ages 0-4 and the percent of households with incomes under \$25k, which created similar relative projections for the clusters. See appendix.

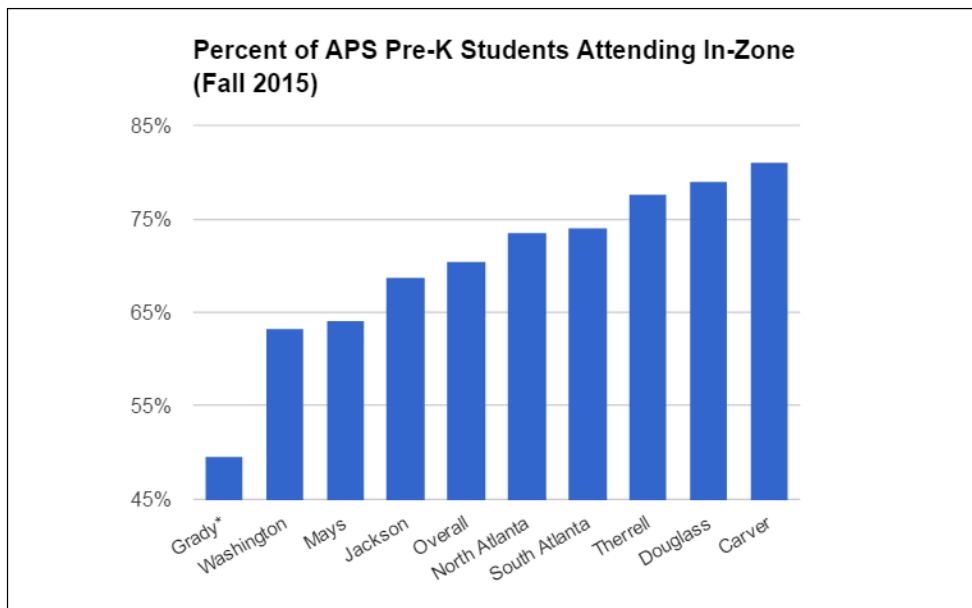
<sup>22</sup> It is important to note that "universal" is generally interpreted to mean a take-up rate of approximately 70-80 percent of the eligible population. See, for example: Anthony Raden and Lisa McCabe (2004) *Researching Universal Prekindergarten: Thoughts on Critical Questions and Research Domains from Policy Makers, Child Advocates and Researchers*. New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development (available at <http://fcd-us.org/sites/default/files/ResearchingUniversalPK.pdf>) and also Clive Belfield (2006) *An Economic Analysis of Pre-K in Arkansas*. Washington DC: Pre-K Now (available at [http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pes\\_assets/2004-2006/pewpknareconanalysisreportnov2006pdf.pdf](http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pes_assets/2004-2006/pewpknareconanalysisreportnov2006pdf.pdf)).

In the comparison chart above, Grady and North Atlanta appear to be overserved relative to their projected need. Douglass, Therrell, South Atlanta and Mays all appear to have significantly fewer slots allocated than the estimated need.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to note that DECAL's allocation process is not based on a projected need developed by looking at APS FRL data for kindergartners. DECAL does not have a targeting formula beyond the county level, nor does it have published criteria for program-level distribution beyond the county level. New classrooms are handled through an annual application process. Requests to move classrooms are handled on an individual basis by the program officer and take into account enrollment data and waiting lists. It is not clear whether DECAL utilizes projections of supply and demand at the neighborhood or cluster level in allocating slots throughout the city.

While DECAL allocates seats to APS, it does not determine the school or neighborhood in which those seats will be located. APS reported that the allocation of these seats is subject to a variety of factors, including building capacity, principal interest, wait lists, school enrollment, and demographic shifts. Staff noted that there is no set of criteria or established process that helps them allocate slots and that priorities shift from year to year.

One question raised by stakeholders was whether families appear to have a preference for programs near their homes, defined in this context as within the cluster. This is important for school staff as they look at the individual need for pre-kindergarten in a given school or cluster, and as they plan for enrollment in kindergarten and beyond.



*\*Grady has only a single pre-kindergarten site which may not be representative of the cluster at large*

Based on data from APS,<sup>24</sup> EducationCounsel was able to calculate the percent of APS pre-kindergarten students who attend a site in their zone, by cluster. Approximately 70 percent of APS pre-kindergarten

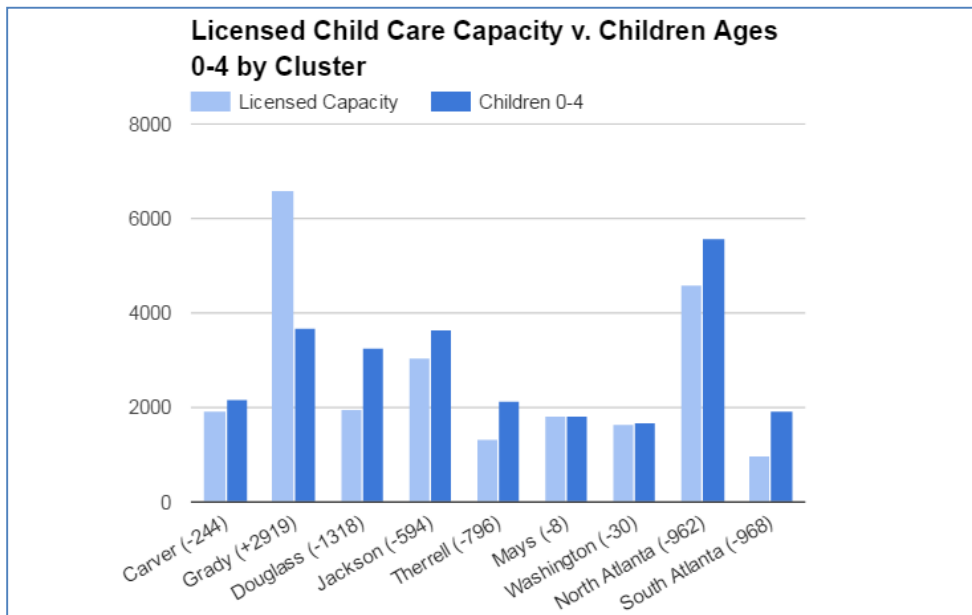
<sup>23</sup> Chart was developed using data accessed from DECAL on 1.26.2016; GA DOE October 6, 2015 ([FTE-2016](#) – enrollment by grade); GA DOE FRL enrollment by grade ([FTE-2016](#)).

students attend sites in their cluster of residence. The clusters with the highest in-zone attendance rates were Douglass and Carver at near 80 percent. The clusters with the lower in-zone attendance rates -- Washington, Mays, and Jackson -- had approximately 65 percent of students attending in-zone. The data here is clear: the majority of students enrolled at APS pre-kindergarten sites are in-cluster students. Also, while this data does not establish whether parents from certain areas would generally prefer options within or outside of their cluster of residence, it does establish that the clusters that are projected to be the most significantly under-allocated (Douglass, Therrell, and South Atlanta) also enroll the highest percentages of in-cluster students. Additionally, the clusters projected to be the most over-allocated appear to enroll the lowest percentages of in-cluster students.

*Access to Child Care*

It is more difficult to understand where children are enrolled in child care than it is for pre-kindergarten, due to different state reporting requirements around enrollment. Enrollment is not reported by DECAL for child care providers. However, information on the licensed capacity of each program is available, although the data provided to EducationCounsel could not be disaggregated by age group.

A comparison of the total licensed capacity of all the programs within a given cluster to the total number of children ages 0-4 within the cluster is below.<sup>25</sup>



\*Child care capacity figures reported by DECAL for providers include both Pre-Kindergarten and child care capacity for programs. Child care capacity is projected based available space and is therefore inseparable from and includes Pre-K capacity of child care programs.

The licensed capacities of the clusters are highly varied and echo much of the data for pre-kindergarten seats. Specifically, Grady has the highest licensed capacity, in addition to having the most funded pre-

<sup>24</sup> In-zone/out-of-zone APS Pre-K enrollment data shared by Courtney Jones January 2016.

<sup>25</sup> The chart was developed from program licensed capacity data accessed from DECAL on 1.26.2016 and Census 2015 projections of the number of children 0-4.

kindergarten slots. Again, the Douglass and South Atlanta clusters appear to have the largest gaps in access to child care.

It is important to note that EducationCounsel did not have access to enrollment data, so it is impossible to know from this data whether clusters with apparent overcapacity are, in fact, serving many more children than other clusters, or if there are high vacancy rates for particular ages or neighborhoods within those clusters. Nor is it known from the data whether families are in their first choice setting, or if they would move to providers in other settings if there was increased capacity.

*Where are the high and low quality early childhood providers?*

In order to create high quality birth to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade pathway for all students, it is crucial to understand whether families have access to quality programs. In Atlanta, some efforts at defining and measuring the quality of community providers are in place as part of the Quality Rated and accreditation structures. While these do not currently apply to pre-kindergarten programs in schools, nor is there a measure of quality for early elementary (k-3) classrooms, we adopted these measures as a proxy for quality across the community.

Key findings:

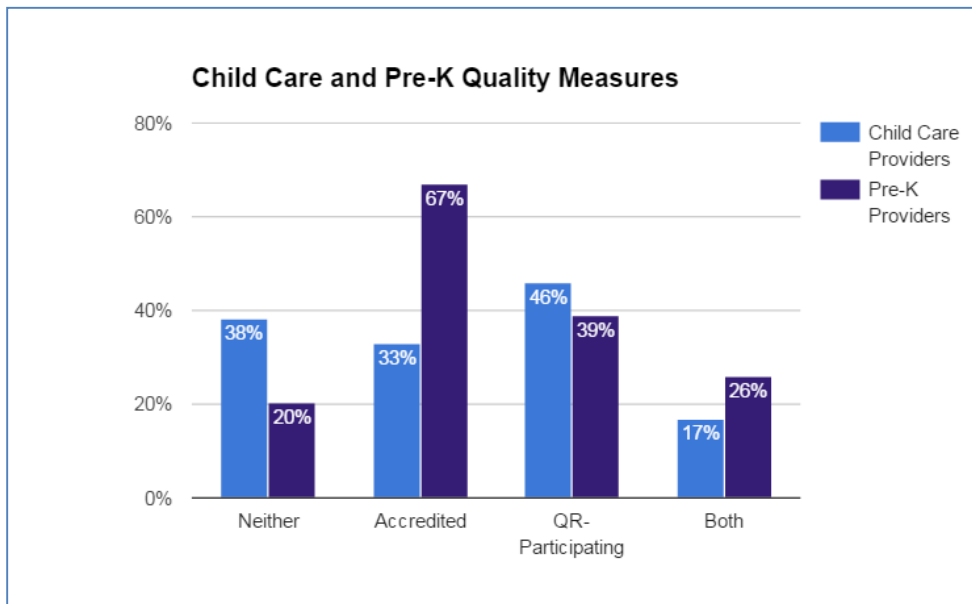
- Programs with pre-kindergarten classrooms are twice as likely to be accredited as child care only programs.
- The Therrell and Douglass clusters have the highest percentages of low-quality programs (neither accredited nor QR-participating).
- The Grady, Washington, and North Atlanta clusters have the highest percentages of high-quality programs (both accredited and QR-participating).

Across Atlanta, the recognized standards of quality are whether a program is participating in Quality Rated (QR) and its current tier of participation, and whether a program is accredited by a nationally recognized body.<sup>26</sup> EducationCounsel identified which programs were either in QR, were accredited or met both standards and mapped them to the individual clusters. APS classrooms are not include in QR and are not currently meeting any accreditation standards. These proxies are designed to give a sense of the availability of quality programs. Additionally, whether and how programs meet the higher tiers of QR, whether programs continue to meet accreditation standards, and the relationship of DECAL pre-kindergarten standards to QR and accreditation standards should be fully examined.

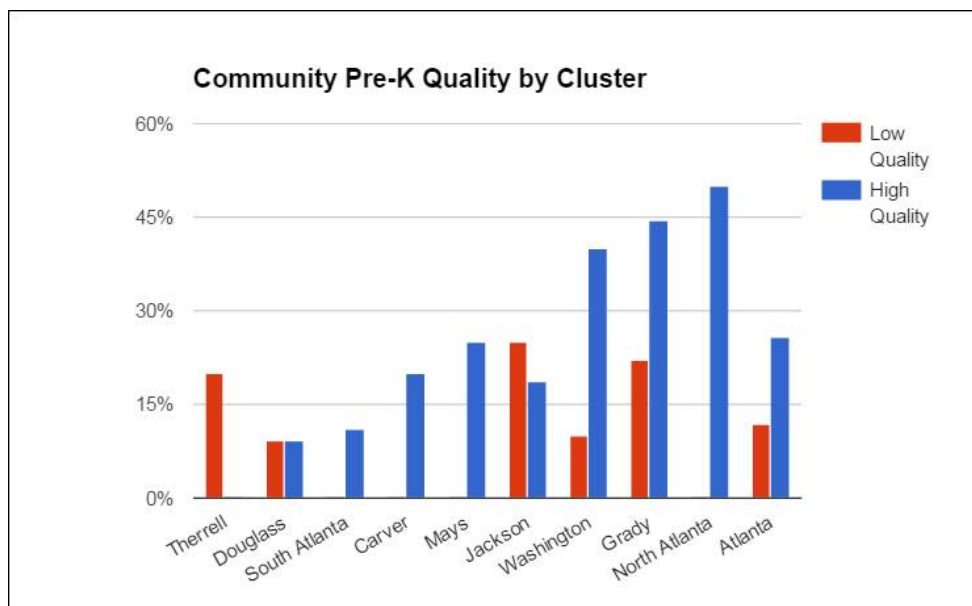
Below we have provided a chart which compares the quality measures (accreditation and QR-participation) across Pre-Kindergarten and Child Care providers. It is critical to note that many providers that operate Pre-Kindergarten classrooms also operate child care classrooms. Quality Rating is a global rating of a provider at a site, so a provider that provides both Pre-Kindergarten and child care for younger children receives a global Quality Rating based on an evaluation that could have taken place in either a child care or Pre-Kindergarten classroom. "Pre-Kindergarten providers" refers to providers that

<sup>26</sup> The chart was developed from data accessed from DECAL on 1.26.2016.

operate DECAL funded Pre-Kindergarten programs and may or may not also operate child care programs (many do). "Child care providers" refers to the entire universe of child care providers (some of which operate Pre-Kindergartners).

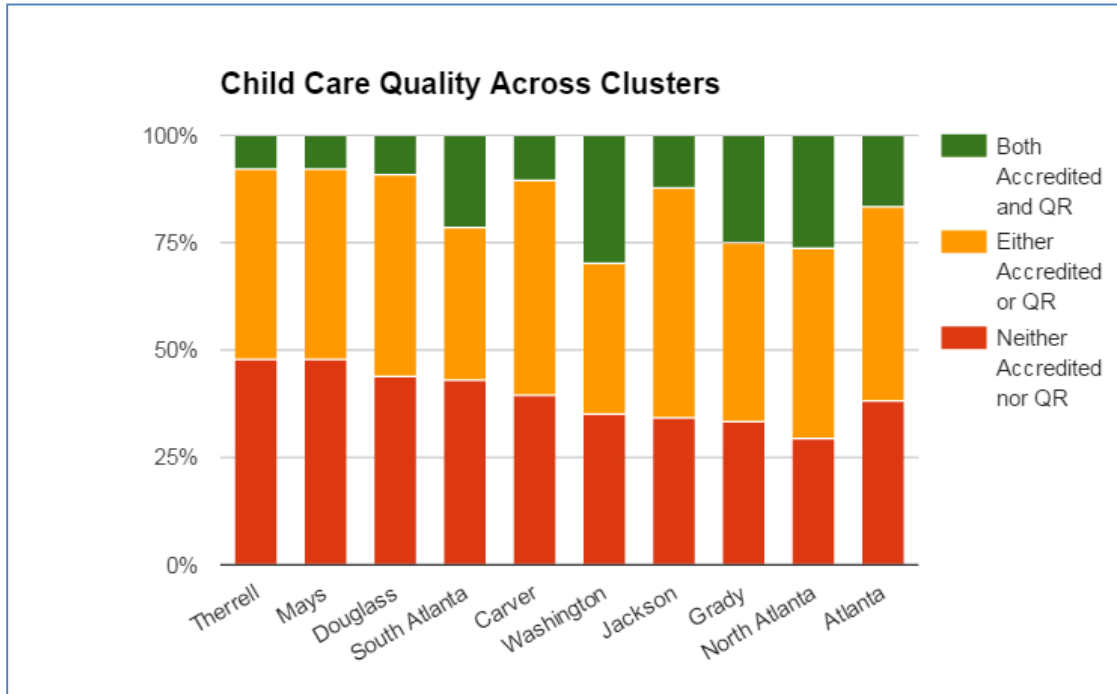


Stakeholders raised numerous questions about whether quality child care and pre-kindergarten programs are equitably distributed throughout the city. The data analysis shows that child care and pre-kindergarten programs in the Grady, Washington and North Atlanta clusters were the most likely to be both accredited and participating in Quality Rated, while the Therrell and Douglass clusters had the largest proportions of programs that were neither accredited nor participating in Quality Rated.<sup>27</sup>

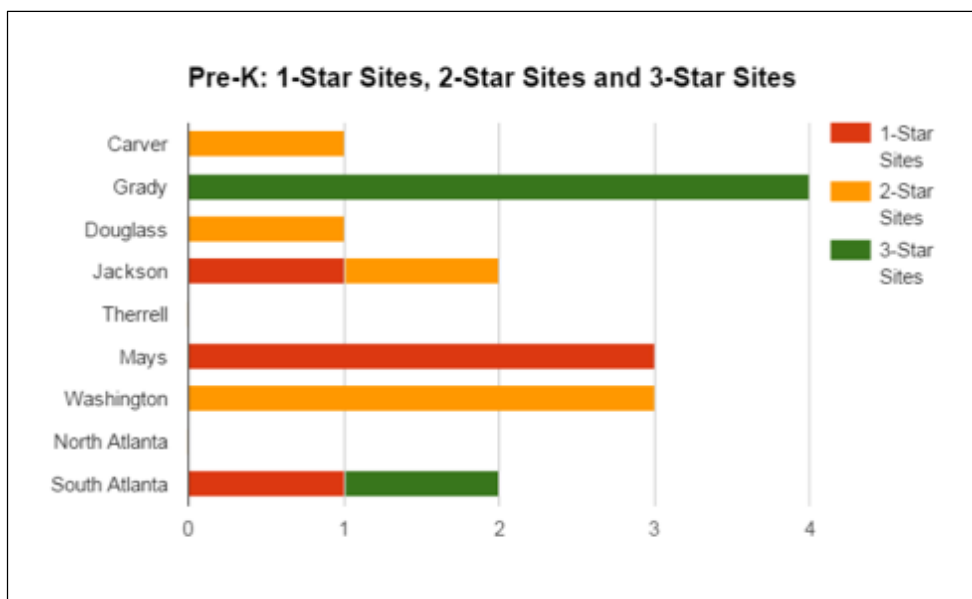


<sup>27</sup> DECAL 1.26.2016.

APS programs do not currently participate in Quality Rated and therefore are not eligible to be both accredited and QR-participating. Given this limitation of the data, APS pre-kindergarten sites are not included in the cluster analysis of pre-kindergarten quality. The number of APS pre-kindergarten sites in each cluster follows – Therrell (3), Douglass (7), South Atlanta (6), Carver (4), Mays (3), Jackson (7), Washington (5), Grady (1), North Atlanta (3).



Only a small number of programs that are participating in the Quality Rated system have actually been through the full process and received a rating (16/36 providers operating pre-kindergarten programs have been rated). Yet, variations by cluster can still be seen.



As more programs receive ratings, it will be interesting to see if significant differences continue to be seen across neighborhoods in Atlanta.

*Do certain groups of students and families have less access to early childhood programs? Do certain groups of students and families have less access to high-quality early childhood programs?*

Participants in focus groups and interviews raised a number of issues of equity and access. To understand whether these concerns were valid, EducationCounsel examined whether populations concentrated by race, income, or third grade reading scores were associated with higher or lower concentrations of quality of pre-kindergarten and child care programs when viewed through the cluster lens. We also examined whether, for pre-kindergarten, there was any correlation between the projected gaps in funded slots and race, income, or elementary performance at the cluster level.

The variables used for analysis included median household income for each cluster, the percentage of individuals who are white/non-white within each cluster and the average percentage of students meeting or exceeding 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading expectations in each cluster.

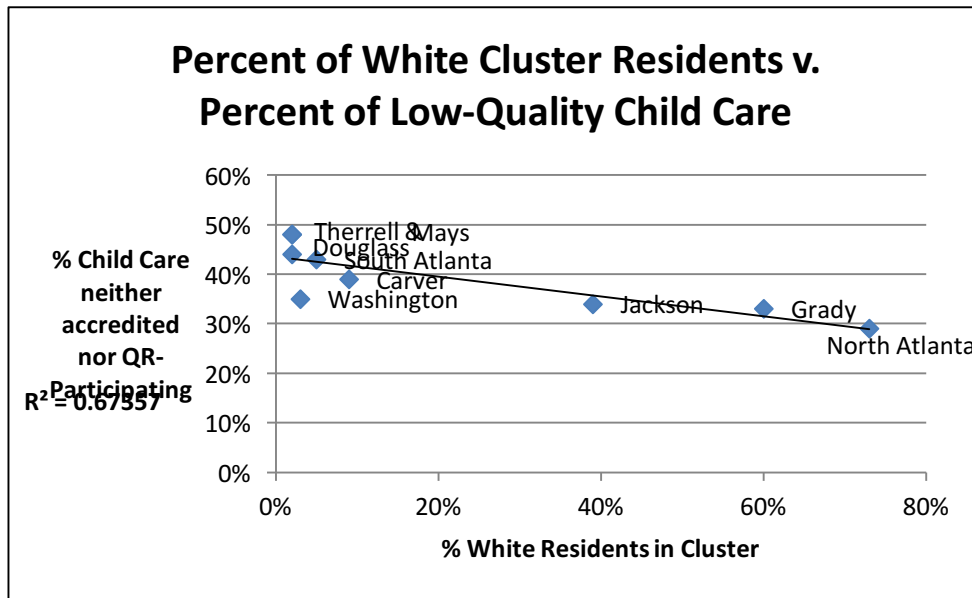
#### Key Findings

- Clusters with higher percentages of white residents were more likely to contain pre-kindergarten programs that were both accredited and participating in Quality Rated; they were also less likely to contain child care programs that were neither accredited nor QR-participating.
- Clusters with higher median household incomes were more likely to contain pre-kindergarten programs that were both accredited and QR-participating; they were also less likely to contain child care programs that were neither accredited nor QR-participating. Clusters with higher percentages of pre-kindergarten programs that are both accredited and QR-participating were more likely home to elementary schools where higher percentages of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students met or exceeded expectations for reading on the 2014 CRCT.

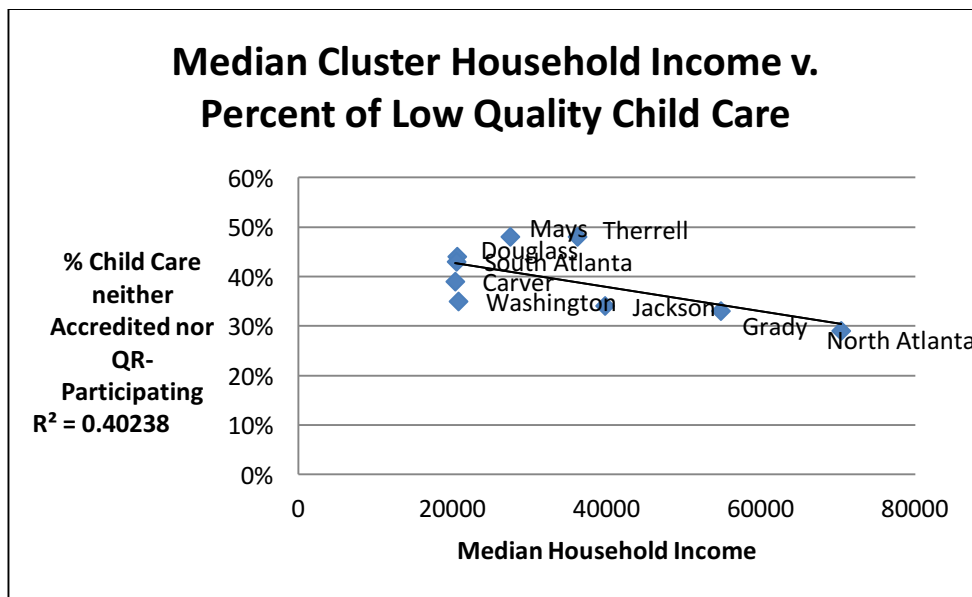
Clusters with higher concentrations of white families and higher incomes generally had greater access to pre-kindergarten and child care programs meeting a measure of quality. Clusters where students had higher than average 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading scores contained more high quality prekindergarten options. The charts below demonstrate this data analysis.

Another way to ask this question is to understand whether high quality programs are located near schools that are falling behind. In late 2015, EducationCounsel identified low-performing schools and whether there are QR participating programs nearby, as well as whether these programs are near other state-funded pre-kindergarten programs. The results, included as Appendix D, demonstrated that most low-performing schools are near high quality child care providers, suggesting opportunities for partnerships.

There was a very strong relationship between the percentage of white residents in a cluster and the quality of child care in the cluster. Clusters with lower percentages of white residents were more likely home to child care programs of unknown quality.



We found that the poorer clusters were more likely home to child care programs of unknown quality (neither accredited nor participating in Quality Rated).





## Section 4: The Key to Success: A Permanent Public-Private Planning Body

Analysis of the available data and input from stakeholders clearly demonstrates that all children and families in Atlanta do not have access to high quality settings from birth to third grade. Many public and private stakeholders, including foundations, government agencies, Atlanta Public Schools, Head Start grantees, and other private providers have created separate initiatives to address these gaps, targeting specific families, geographic areas of the city, or highlighting a particular policy approach such as home visiting. Yet gaps remain, and children are still behind both in kindergarten and as they move into third grade and beyond. It is clear from stakeholder conversations and focus groups that a contributing factor to the ongoing gaps is a lack of coordinated planning and data analysis designed to assess the needs of the Atlanta community and target resources, leverage best practices and advocate for improvements and additional investments as needed.

The APS strategic plan briefly addressed the need for the various partners to work together by setting a goal to "[e]xpand Pre-K seats across the city and establish APS early childhood collaborative with other providers..." This vision has yet to be realized, as there is no established space within Atlanta to have this conversation and to plan for expansion.

Across the country, communities have used a variety of approaches to provide this leadership and coordination. An independent community agency, institutions of higher education and state or locally mandated planning group have taken on this role. For example:

- Starting Points is a resource and referral agency in **Northeast Ohio**. Funded by both public agencies and private philanthropies, Starting Points provides community planning and consultation to improve access and quality of child care. It has built a data bank with information about child care capacity by county, income information on families seeking child care, and a range of additional data.<sup>28</sup>
- Each county in **California** has a local child care and development planning council, designed to plan for child care and development services based on the needs of families in the local community.<sup>29</sup> The planning councils conduct assessments of the child care needs in each county, design plans to leverage public and private resources, prioritize investments with state and federal funding, gather input from parents and other stakeholders, create and support partnerships between public agencies and private providers and funders to address unmet needs, coordinate waiting lists, and expand access to high quality services.
- In **Connecticut**, communities must create a School Readiness Council, jointly convened by the chief elected official of the town and the superintendent for the school district as part of the planning process for implementing the state pre-kindergarten program. The councils are required to foster partnerships between participating agencies, identify areas with unmet needs, promote transitions, evaluate programs and support families.<sup>30</sup>
- In 2015-2016, the superintendents in **metro Omaha** came together to support a "Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan" designed to help the participating districts create a birth to third grade approach in their schools. The plan was developed and implemented with

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.starting-point.org/index.html>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/lpc.asp>

<sup>30</sup> [http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/LIB/sde/pdf/deps/readiness/SR/GP\\_14\\_10.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/LIB/sde/pdf/deps/readiness/SR/GP_14_10.pdf)

the support of the Buffett Institute at the University of Nebraska, and includes professional development and technical assistance for participating schools.<sup>31</sup>

- Participants in the **StriveTogether Network** create a plan for collective action at the community level that drives change for children from birth through college and beyond. Strive communities create an infrastructure, develop joint goals, collect and analyze data and provide reports on progress to the broader community. Strive leadership at the local level has been through new agencies, city and county agencies, public-private partnerships, community action agencies and United Way agencies.<sup>32</sup>
- The **Seattle** Early Education Collaborative is a group of public and private agencies, including the city office of education, Seattle Public Schools, the city human services agency, Head Start and other providers who come together in a joint planning and decision making structure. The Collaborative includes several areas of focus through working groups on professional development, assessment and kindergarten transition.<sup>33</sup>

Based on the data analysis and stakeholder input in the needs assessment, in order to create a high quality birth to third grade continuum for all families, **public and private stakeholders need to come together to create a permanent collaborative body**, charged with developing a vision and achievable goals for the early childhood community. This group would have adequate funding and staff capacity, would be separate from changes in the political landscape, and would be able to act to implement recommendations and evaluate the impact of investments. The organization would be accountable to the political and philanthropic leadership of the city, and would be required to meet a set of accountability measures, set through a consensus process that identifies an appropriate city wide goal and relevant metrics.

The goal of such an organization would be to develop a plan to coordinate the resources and services available to children and families in order to minimize duplication of services, ensure that all children have access to high quality settings from birth to third grade regardless of neighborhood, income or other characteristics, and maximize current and future resources available in Atlanta.

We recommend adopting the vision statement for Atlanta's children promoted by the focus groups and stakeholders: *Every child and their family has access to high quality teaching, services and supports necessary to support the full range of their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional health and development from birth to third grade at home, in early learning settings and in Atlanta public schools.*

Possible short-, medium- and long-term measures to determine the success of the coordinated planning process may include:

- Increased enrollment in programs meeting high quality standards;
- Increased numbers of children receiving developmental screenings;
- Decreased chronic absenteeism for families with children birth to third grade;

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<sup>31</sup> <http://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu/-/media/BECE/Docs/Superintendents-Plan-At-A-Glance-2-23-16.ashx>

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.strivetogether.org/sites/default/files/StriveTogether\\_Network\\_Profile\\_Web\\_3.16.pdf](http://www.strivetogether.org/sites/default/files/StriveTogether_Network_Profile_Web_3.16.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.seattle.gov/education/child-care-and-preschool/seattle-early-education-collaborative>. For more information on efforts in Seattle to coordinate and align, see: *Educational Alignment for Young Children: Profiles of Local Innovation* (2012). Washington, DC: National League of Cities.

- Demonstrated high quality in all early learning settings from birth to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade as demonstrated by increased participation in the highest tiers of Quality Rated and other reported measures of observed quality;
- Improved kindergarten readiness as measured by statewide assessments that cross all domains;
- Decreased teacher turnover for all ages;
- Improved outcomes on college and career readiness measures adopted statewide;
- Measures of school culture and safety through parent and student satisfaction surveys; and/or
- Progress to closing gaps in third grade reading proficiency by subgroup and cluster.

While this work could be done through a new organization modeled on any of the models that use a collective action approach, we believe that an existing organization would be able to begin this work immediately. There are several organizations in Atlanta that might be able to carry out this work. The most appropriate setting would seem to be an advocacy organization that has experience with data analysis, relationships with community based providers, school district personnel at the Central Office and local school level and state agencies, as well as proven fundraising experience.

#### *Governance Structure*

- Permanent charter and ongoing funding;
- Independence from changes in the political leadership;
- Adequate support from both public and private stakeholders to support dedicated full-time staff;
- Representation from public and private funders, schools, community based providers and support services including libraries, health and mental health agencies, and parents across all clusters/neighborhoods;
- Required participation of agency leaders; and
- Formal cooperative arrangements pledging staff support, resources and partnerships through memoranda of agreement with various state and local agencies, including DECAL, the Department of Health, the Mayor's Office, the City Council, Atlanta Public Schools, the Head Start Association and others.<sup>34</sup>

#### *Responsibilities*

- Developing a community plan to maximize resources and leverage funding through partnerships and other cooperative arrangements;
- Identify, collect and analyze data to develop benchmarks to measure progress toward the community goals;
- Analyze federal and state legislation to identify opportunities for collaboration and cooperation through policy and funding;
- Build a databank to provide accessible information on demographics by neighborhood, enrollment and utilization rates, family preferences, and other variables to enhance planning and coordination;

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<sup>34</sup> For an example of an MOU, see:

[http://earlylearningwa.org/images/ForFamilies/PolicyCouncil/2013\\_2014\\_PolicyCouncil/3January/Final%20Draft%20MOU%20Head%20Start%20Grantees%20and%20City%20EL%202013-14\[1\].pdf](http://earlylearningwa.org/images/ForFamilies/PolicyCouncil/2013_2014_PolicyCouncil/3January/Final%20Draft%20MOU%20Head%20Start%20Grantees%20and%20City%20EL%202013-14[1].pdf)

- Create a shared vision of the components needed to ensure all children and families have what they need from birth to third grade;
- Build a consensus definition of school readiness and align resources and services, as well as program metrics, to the definition;
- Regularly convene stakeholders to provide information, develop short-, medium- and long-term action steps and provide information on progress toward outcome measures; and
- Identify and advocate for new sources of funding for the core components of the system with federal, state and local partners.

***Recommendation: public and private stakeholders come together  
to create a permanent collaborative body***

The planning body would be charged with implementing recommendations in support of four core components of a birth to third grade continuum:

2. Identify, implement and support the components of a birth to third grade system, including:
  - Create a databank that includes community level information on program quality, school quality family demographics, workforce information, and parent surveys.
  - Expand home visiting, including new initiatives with schools and leverage additional funding sources.
  - Create common understanding and responsibility for transitions between various service providers and for each age group.
  - Encourage and support all providers in the city of Atlanta to participate in Quality Rated and help families access the highest quality care.
  - Expand access and affordability to high quality environments for infants and toddlers through Early Head Start/Child Care (EHS/CC) partnerships, partnering with schools/charters and other innovative approaches.
  - Promote language and literacy instruction for all children.
3. Develop a high quality, well-compensated workforce, including:
  - Invest in joint professional development for all providers and school leaders that is aligned with birth to third grade standards and expectations and is designed to improve teaching and learning for all children.
  - Create incentives to improve stability and decrease turnover including pay parity for teachers and aides in pre-kindergarten and those serving older children.
  - Partner with institutions of higher education to grow degreed/certified workforce, improve content of professional development and develop coaching and mentoring initiatives and create partnerships with institutions of higher education that can also lead to certificates and degrees.
4. Promote health and safety for all children, including:
  - Provide developmental screenings for all children regardless of setting.
  - Expand capacity for referrals and follow-up when physical and mental health needs are identified.
  - Improve coordination with early intervention and promote services in community-based settings.
  - Ensure that all children are in high quality settings meeting standards of Quality Rated.
  - Promote social/emotional development in all settings.
5. Improve information and engagement with families, including:
  - Develop and disseminate information on appropriate development and available services to all families (regardless of setting) in languages and literacy levels that are accessible to all.
  - Expand outreach and services to families using informal settings or caring for their children at home.
  - Create a single coordinated on-line lottery for pre-kindergarten services that includes all providers (schools and community providers).

## The Work of the Planning Body: Creating the Core Components

The work of the early childhood planning body should focus on the following core components, which are further described below:

1. Identify, implement and support the components of a birth to third grade system;
2. Develop a high quality, well-compensated workforce;
3. Promote health and safety for all children; and
4. Improve information and engagement with families.

The core components are drawn from the policy and process recommendations in the birth to third grade framework and reflect identified needs in the Atlanta context from conversations with stakeholders and the data analysis.

*Core Component 1: Identify, implement and support the components of a birth to third grade system*

Goal: Ensure that every community within metro Atlanta has access to the supports needed to provide high quality early learning environments for all children and their families at each developmental level.

**Create a databank that includes community level information on program quality, school quality family demographics, workforce information, and parent surveys.** Nearly every stakeholder mentioned the lack of understanding of the birth to third grade landscape in Atlanta. There were diverse, and divergent points of view on where quality programs were, which communities had access, and how to compare the quality of various programs. The data analysis highlights the gaps in knowledge and highlights several areas where more information could be used to promote partnerships, track outcomes for children, and improve quality. A databank could also be used to provide data snapshots to participating agencies on progress towards the identified outcome measures, and provide real time input on whether interventions are working in all neighborhoods.

For example, EducationCounsel matched low performing schools (those with failing CCRPI scores between 2012 and 2014) with nearby high quality child care centers (defined as QR participating) (see Appendix D). This data can identify partnering opportunities where schools and community-providers can leverage each others strengths, allocate pre-kindergarten seats based on the highest quality and work together to ensure that standards, curriculum and assessments from birth through third grade are aligned and supportive of effective teaching.

**Expand home visiting, including new initiatives with schools<sup>35</sup> and leverage additional funding sources.** Home visiting has been found to be a successful intervention for families regardless of

<sup>35</sup> A number of school districts have created home visiting programs designed to build relationships between teachers in all grade levels and the families they serve. See, for instance: San Francisco School District: <http://www.healthiersf.org/Forms/parentFamily/A%20Guide%20to%20Team%20Home%20Visits.pdf>; The Flamboyant Foundation model in Washington, DC: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/teachers-increasingly-use-home-visits-to-connect-with-students-families/2011/10/03/gIQAzwVKYL\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/teachers-increasingly-use-home-visits-to-connect-with-students-families/2011/10/03/gIQAzwVKYL_story.html); and the Parent Teacher Home Visit Project in Sacramento USD, Boston Public Schools and others:

socioeconomic group, and has been an important tool for early childhood programs and schools to build relationships with families. Across metro Atlanta, there are a few providers of home visiting targeting various populations, including families participating in Early Head Start, Parents as Teachers, Healthy Start and other models. Funding and support for these programs varies, as do their service areas. Schools do not currently have formal home visiting arrangements outside of a small number of Head Start funded programs.

Expansion of each home visiting model will help reach families not currently served in any formal program, and can also be used to provide information to families about child development, quality early childhood settings, and linkages to developmental screenings and other supports. New home visiting initiatives can also strengthen the relationships between schools and the families they serve. Working with APS to use Title I funds, using Head Start needs assessments to pinpoint areas of unmet need and discussions with the state agency around distribution of Maternal and Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) funding may create or expand funding streams.

**Create common understanding and responsibility for transitions between various service providers and for each age group.** Transitions are a point of concern for families and providers. Families may not know what to expect as children move between classrooms and into new settings, and providers may have little or no information about their children. Too often, transition is an informal process with a visit to a new classroom or school, rather than a comprehensive sharing of information about children and their families that includes curriculum review, observational assessment data, history of children's participation in formal settings, and conversations between teachers, providers, parents and other caregivers to share information and expectations. Ensuring that appropriate transition practices continue into early elementary school will also help teachers plan and individualize instruction.

Transition plans should be included in the position descriptions of center directors as well as school principals. Principals can be encouraged by school leadership to reach out to local child care providers to meet families with children of all ages, hold welcoming events for families with children currently in child care centers and family child care homes, include center directors and others in the early childhood community in school leadership teams and attend joint professional development sessions.

Raising awareness of the value of coordinated and thoughtful transitions and providing guidance and training on the components of successful transitions will enhance the experience of children and families. It will also help to increase the awareness of expectations between sectors and classrooms and promote better relationships across providers and school leaders. Head Start programs have specific requirements around transitions that could be leveraged and shared across other providers. New federal requirements for school districts to coordinate with Head Start and other community providers may also provide new opportunities to improve transitions between programs.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, DECAL support for summer programs for children in the pre-kindergarten program could be leveraged with other funds, including Title I dollars, to maximize learning time during the summer and promote improved transitions for children entering kindergarten.

**Encourage and support all providers in the city of Atlanta to participate in Quality Rated and help families access the highest quality care for families with children from infancy into third grade.** Across Atlanta, there is inequitable access to providers who meet high quality standards through accreditation

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<http://www.pthvp.org/index.php/trainings-a-events/faqs>

<sup>36</sup> Every Student Succeeds Act: Title I, Section 1112, Local Education Agency Plans

or participation in the Quality Rated program. While pre-kindergarten providers must meet state standards, there remains a question about the level of quality in all classrooms and how to compare that quality. Quality Rated is in the early stages of implementation, but across Atlanta few providers are participating at the highest levels. Participation requires time and resources to meet the quality standards, as well as an ongoing commitment to maintaining those standards. Currently the state does not require school based programs to participate in Quality Rated. As a result, families in the metro Atlanta region often have no way to compare programs or to understand whether an individual program will be of high quality.

Either through local policy changes or public and privately funded incentives, all providers serving children from birth to at least kindergarten should participate in the Quality Rated program in order to ensure a common standard of quality. Funding, training, technical assistance and other supports may be needed to help providers and schools understand the quality standards, implement the highest standards, and communicate with parents about their commitment to quality.

As providers improve quality, the cost to families may also increase and create new barriers that make it difficult for families to access the care they need. As the community works to increase quality, stakeholders must also commit to increasing funding available for subsidies and scholarships as well as sliding fee scales that allow low-income families to choose those settings that best support their children.

There is also currently no way to measure the quality of programs serving children in kindergarten, first, second and third grade classrooms. While scores on third grade assessments may provide some insight into whether a school is supporting the learning goals of its students, there is no information available on classroom quality. A recent study of the quality in early elementary classrooms found that very few children were exposed to the higher order skills needed to be successful in reading and math.<sup>37</sup> Some communities have begun to use the CLASS observational assessment of teacher-child interactions in early elementary grades to understand whether a consistent measure of quality is being met and to improve quality.<sup>38</sup> Across public and charter schools, it would be useful to adopt a single measure of classroom quality, aligned with early learning standards and k-5 standards, so that parents and other stakeholders can make informed choices for their children beyond early childhood.

**Expand access and affordability to high quality environments for infants and toddlers through Early Head Start/Child Care (EHS/CC) partnerships, partnering with schools/charters and other innovative approaches.** Stakeholders noted that access to care for infants and toddlers is limited. While available data could not verify this assertion, infant and toddler care is hard to find nationally, due to the higher costs of serving these children, lower staff:child ratios and other issues.<sup>39</sup> Several initiatives have shown promise in increasing access to high quality settings for infants and toddlers, however, including: hubs, where a high quality center provides training, technical assistance and other supports to centers or

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<sup>37</sup> Danielle Ewen and Rachel Hertzfeld-Kamprath (2016) *Examining Quality Across the Preschool-to-Third Grade Continuum*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress (available at <http://educationcounsel.com/?publication=examining-quality-across-preschool-third-grade-continuum>)

<sup>38</sup> <http://curry.virginia.edu/research/centers/castl/class>

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance: <http://nieer.org/resources/policybriefs/21.pdf>



family child care programs to increase the quality of existing programs,<sup>40</sup> such as the District of Columbia's Quality Improvement Network (QIN)<sup>41</sup> and RTT Community Hubs in Maryland<sup>42</sup> and other initiatives through local Early Head Start/Child Care Partnerships.<sup>43</sup>

Current opportunities exist among the various stakeholders in Atlanta provide openings to increase space for infants and toddlers. These include expansion of high quality centers such as Educare through Sheltering Arms, but also the new uses of available APS buildings at Woodson and Venetian Hills. As plans are developed for these spaces, they should be part of a community wide needs assessment that identifies gaps in services, includes plans to work with families currently unserved to access the new spaces and promotes coordinated services through hubs or other partnerships.

Generally the hub or partnership models require additional funding to staff the training and technical assistance needed to improve quality. Funding may be available through expansion of the EHS/Child Care Partnerships, or through quality funds through the state child care agency designed to increase access to high quality services for infants and toddlers.

**Promote language and literacy instruction for all children.** The data on third grade reading scores, as well as anecdotal information from teachers and other school leaders suggests that many children in Atlanta enter kindergarten without vocabulary and a strong foundation in literacy. There are several models already in place in Atlanta to build these skills for young children that are developmentally appropriate, support the full range of development and reflect culture and home language of families, including:

- the Rollins Center,
- DECAL funded pre-kindergarten training,
- Head Start professional development initiatives,
- the APS Kellogg grant,
- the Third Grade Reading Initiative in the Jackson Cluster and others.

All providers and teachers serving children from birth to third grade should have access to training that supports the development of language and literacy skills. For family child care providers and family, friend and neighbor caregivers, the community may wish to investigate online technologies.<sup>44</sup> New federal funding may be available to help support these goals.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> For information about developing hubs, see:

[http://www.buildinitiative.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Estimating%20the%20Cost%20of%20Community%20Hubs%20\(REVISED%20DRAFT%206.26.14\).pdf](http://www.buildinitiative.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Estimating%20the%20Cost%20of%20Community%20Hubs%20(REVISED%20DRAFT%206.26.14).pdf)

<sup>41</sup> <http://osse.dc.gov/release/mayor-bowser-launches-early-learning-quality-improvement-network>

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.marylandfamilynetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/MFN-Newsletter-January-2013.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/early-learning/ehs-cc-partnerships>

<sup>44</sup> See, for example: California Child Care Initiative Project (targeting informal care providers) (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/infcaregiversres.pdf>)

<sup>45</sup> As part of the Every Student Succeeds Act, early childhood agencies can compete for subgrants to build literacy curricula and professional development for providers serving children birth through school entry. (ESSA Title II, Section 2222, Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grants and Title II, 2223 Subgrants To Eligible Entities in Support of Birth Through Kindergarten Entry Literacy).

*Core Component 2: Develop a high quality, well-compensated workforce*

Goal: To create a professional workforce serving children from birth to third grade that has the skills to appropriately support children's development in all domains and is well-compensated.

**Invest in joint professional development for all providers and school leaders that is aligned with birth to third grade standards and expectations and is designed to improve teaching and learning for all children.**

Issues related to the quality of the workforce serving all ages were raised by stakeholders across the Atlanta community. The recent report on the early childhood workforce from the Institute on Medicine noted that for those serving children in a birth to third grade system: "... all educators need to develop core competencies to move children along a continuous trajectory of learning and developmental goals."<sup>46</sup> The APS Strategic Plan also recognized the value of a high quality workforce, and establishes improved professional learning as a core component to improving school quality.

Intentional professional development for family- and center-based teachers and directors, as well as school-based teachers and aides, principals, and other school leaders that is aligned with appropriate expectations, best practice, early learning and k-3 standards and curriculum and paired with coaches and mentors is needed throughout the city. Joint professional development that brings together community providers with teachers in APS and charters provides opportunities to share information about children, expectations and each environment and to build relationships between and among the various settings for children that can ease transitions and improve quality. Every provider serving children birth to third grade currently invests in professional development; a coordinated approach to teacher training can eliminate duplication, leverage new training opportunities, identify unnecessary investments, limit turnover and promote the professionalization of the early childhood workforce.

**Create incentives to improve stability and decrease turnover including pay parity for teachers and aides in pre-kindergarten and those serving older children.**

In a recent national study, 85 percent of respondents recognized the importance of well-compensated teachers to the quality of an early childhood program.<sup>47</sup> Yet national data also show that providers serving young children are poorly compensated, with the average hourly rate for those serving children birth to five just under \$11/hour.<sup>48</sup> According to one analysis of statewide data, those working in child care in Georgia earn less than \$19,000/year, while preschool teachers earn nearly \$28,000; meanwhile, kindergarten teachers earn nearly \$52,000/year, a significant difference in pay.<sup>49</sup> Teachers and paraprofessionals interviewed noted that aides earn less than \$15,000/year, a salary level that is below the poverty level for a family of 3. These low salaries make it difficult to recruit the best teachers to these positions, as noted in a recent early childhood workforce study in Fulton County.<sup>50</sup> The Fulton County study also found that nearly half

<sup>46</sup> IOM (Institute of Medicine) and NRC (National Research Council). 2015. *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. (Chapter 8)

<sup>47</sup> *Early Childhood Educators Advancing the Profession: Key Findings from 2015 Opinion Research with Educators, Potential Educators, and American Voters* (2015) National Association for the Education of Young Children ([https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/Key%20Findings%20Presentation.NAEYC\\_.pdf](https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/Key%20Findings%20Presentation.NAEYC_.pdf))

<sup>48</sup> Data from the National Survey of Early Care and Education, as reported in <https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/Denise%20Mauzy%20Workforce%20Data%20Panel%20Final.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.earlychildhoodteacher.org/jobs/georgia/>

<sup>50</sup> The New Teacher Project. *Fulton County Schools Pre-k: Career Pathways and Compensation Diagnostic* (2015). Fulton County, Georgia.

of paraprofessionals and one-third of lead pre-kindergarten teachers planned to leave their positions by the end of SY 2016-17, turnover rates that are reflective of national averages.

While the state is working to increase parity between pre-kindergarten teachers and those in early elementary grades,<sup>51</sup> there is not currently an initiative to increase pay for those working with younger children, nor will aides get a significant increase in pay. Across the nation, a number of states have adopted initiatives that provide scholarships and wage increases for providers who gain additional training or move toward a certificate or degree. Evaluation of these investments shows that they decrease turnover while increasing program quality.<sup>52</sup> States and communities have paid for these investments through child care subsidy funds for quality improvement, state tobacco and lottery funds, tax credits and through United Way and other private philanthropy.<sup>53</sup>

**Partner with institutions of higher education to grow degree/certified workforce, improve content of professional development and develop coaching and mentoring initiatives and create partnerships with institutions of higher education that can also lead to certificates and degrees.**

The Institute of Medicine report notes that: "Preparation pathways for educators vary, as do governance, oversight, standards, and funding structures...Different standards and requirements for qualification to practice as an educator are one of the major drivers of differences in the educational pathways among different professional roles, especially between those who teach in elementary school settings (which can be prekindergarten through third grade or kindergarten through third grade, depending on the school system) and those who teach in settings outside of elementary school systems, such as early education programs or preschools, child care centers, and family child care."<sup>54</sup> Many providers have limited access to higher education programs, and find that the cost and scheduling of classwork makes a degree out of reach for them. Partnership models that link two- and four-year colleges and universities and include learning time in the community and reward those who have experience in the classroom can increase the quality of programs and increase alignment between and across various providers along the birth to third grade continuum. Similarly, targeted scholarship opportunities that encourage those with many years of experience, including family child care providers, to participate in coursework that places them on a pathway to a certificate or degree can benefit providers and the children they serve.

Research has also found that coaches and mentors can help increase the quality of programs by increasing knowledge and skills of providers.<sup>55</sup> Quality Care for Children, Head Start programs and others in the Atlanta community have already begun some of these initiatives.

*Core Component 3: Promote health and safety for all children*

Goal: All children have the supports they need to grow up safe and healthy.

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.ajc.com/news/news/local-education/deals-education-commission-considers-pre-k-teacher/nmLSz/>

<sup>52</sup> [http://teachecnationalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/TEACH\\_Annual\\_eReport\\_2015.pdf](http://teachecnationalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/TEACH_Annual_eReport_2015.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> <http://teachecnationalcenter.org/t-e-a-c-h-early-childhood/funders-and-partners/>

<sup>54</sup> IOM (Institute of Medicine) and NRC (National Research Council). 2015. *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

<sup>55</sup> IOM (Institute of Medicine) and NRC (National Research Council). 2015. *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

**Provide developmental screenings for all children regardless of setting.** According to the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), "[a]s many as one in four children through the age of five are at risk for a developmental delay or disability."<sup>56</sup> In order to ensure that these children are identified and receive the interventions and supports they need to thrive, developmental screenings must be available as widely as possible. The value of these screenings is reflected both in Head Start requirements that screenings are done on all children and in the reauthorized Child Care and Development Block Grant, which requires states to report information on resources available to support screenings in early childhood settings. Medicaid, Head Start and various other federal funding streams can support access to developmental screenings.<sup>57</sup>

In Rhode Island, the Watch Me Grow project uses funds from the Maternal and Child Health Block Grant to distribute developmental screening tools to child care providers and to train providers in their use.<sup>58</sup> In the District of Columbia, the public school system uses early intervention funds to distribute screeners and train providers in child care centers, public and charter schools, family support agencies and medical homes.<sup>59</sup> Developmental screenings are a required component when schools and providers enroll children in the Colorado Preschool Program, and are included in the program cost.<sup>60</sup>

**Expand capacity for referrals and follow-up when physical and mental health needs are identified.** It is not enough to ensure that all children have a developmental screening. In addition, children need to be referred and identified needs must be met. Head Start requires that these referrals happen within 90 days of the child's entry into the program.<sup>61</sup> While the majority of Head Start children receive these referrals, many other children do not get any follow-up services even if a delay or other health issue is identified. Children who are not receiving health care often miss more days of school, suffer longer from childhood illnesses and may have other health related issues in school.<sup>62</sup> Children from immigrant communities and those from language minority households may also face difficulties in accessing health care.

In order to expand access and guarantee that children receive the services they need, Atlanta can engage with pediatricians to ensure that all children are on track for EPSDT screening, and that Medicaid billing reflects these services. There is also an opportunity to replicate successful community health center models such as Whitefoord Elementary in new sites including early childhood centers at Woodson and Venetian Hills and Educare and other expansions.

**Improve coordination with early intervention and promote services in community-based settings.** The Georgia Department of Education has noted in its guidance of IDEA Part B that children should be served in the least restrictive environments. Generally, this has meant that children with special needs are served in state-funded pre-kindergarten classrooms. Stakeholders highlighted the need for APS and

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<sup>56</sup> <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/child-health-development/watch-me-thrive>

<sup>57</sup> For a discussion of various state models to expand development screening and federal funding used to support those efforts, see C. Johnson-Staub. (2014) *First Steps for Early Success: State Strategies to Support Developmental Screenings in Early Childhood Settings*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy at <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/State-Strategies-to-Support-Developmental-Screening-in-Early-Childhood-Settings.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.health.ri.gov/materialbyothers/AMCHPStateProfileRhodeIsland.pdf>

<sup>59</sup> [http://www.earlystagesdc.org/files/EarlyEditionNewsletter\\_Spring%202015.pdf](http://www.earlystagesdc.org/files/EarlyEditionNewsletter_Spring%202015.pdf)

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.cde.state.co.us/cpp/cdedevelopmentalscreeningfactsheet>

<sup>61</sup> Head Start Performance Standards Sec. 1304.20 Child health and developmental services.

<sup>62</sup> Currie, Janet. 2005. Health Disparities and Gaps in School Readiness. *The Future of Children* 15(1): 117-138.

ChildFind to do additional outreach to community providers, raise awareness of eligibility and applications for APS pre-kindergarten programs, and help train community providers to serve younger children as soon as they are identified. Other agencies, such as Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), may also serve as important partners to identify families and children in need of services.

**Ensure that all children are in high quality settings meeting standards of Quality Rated.** Stakeholders identified cost as a significant barrier facing families who would like to access higher quality care. Providers need stable sources of income in order to support the higher costs of quality. In Washington, DC, the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative works together to create initiatives that bring funders together to increase access through permanent targeted scholarship funds and to create increased access to programs that can serve families without a cost such as Head Start. DECAL has created tiered reimbursement rates for programs that meet higher standards and there may be opportunities to identify more programs that could qualify for these funds over time.

Other states and communities have used additional funding mechanisms to provide higher subsidy or scholarship payments to providers participating in the local quality rating system as an incentive to raise quality and to serve low-income families. These subsidy payments can be supported through United Way, city agencies and private investment.

**Promote social/emotional development in all settings.** Social emotional skills have long been a core component of early learning standards and best practice. However, the focus on these skills is often lost as children move into early elementary skills. A recent report noted: While the exact label for social and emotional skills is inconsistent in the later grades, the idea that they should be incorporated more fully beyond the earliest years is not. A growing body of research and evidence shows that students must master a range of deeper learning skills and knowledge to be ready for success in both college and career training, yet school systems generally do not include interpersonal, intrapersonal, and academic skills as vital teaching points in K-12 classes, despite state support of these standards in early learning settings."<sup>63</sup>

Social/emotional skills should be included as part of the common definition of school readiness. Incorporating support for these skills in standards that align across the birth to third grade continuum and in professional development for all teachers and school leaders will be critical to ensuring more children are in settings that value these skills. Current work in the Jackson Cluster with the Rollins Center, as well as other initiatives within APS, may be leveraged to include more staff and the children they serve across Atlanta.

*Core Component 4: Improve information and engagement with families*

Goal: Ensure that families have the information they need to make appropriate early childhood choices for their children.

<sup>63</sup> Danielle Ewen and LeighAnn Smith. (2015) *Fostering School Success with Standards for NonAcademic Skills*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress (available at <http://educationcounsel.com/?publication=fostering-school-success-with-standards-for-nonacademic-skills>)

**Develop and disseminate information on appropriate development and available services to all families (regardless of setting) in languages and literacy levels that are accessible to all.** Stakeholders routinely noted that families have limited information about the early childhood choices in their community, have little knowledge of how to find or differentiate among various providers, and have few opportunities to learn about children's growth and appropriate expectations for learning at each developmental stage. A community outreach strategy that includes public events such as fairs and mobile classrooms, and local service providers such as schools, pediatricians, libraries, grocery stores and direct mail, social media, and other technologies would help families better understand their choices.

It will be important to leverage the knowledge and resources of various providers across the community in order to ensure that resources are culturally appropriate, reflect the language and practices of all families in the community, and are available at literacy levels that are available to all. Several federal agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and other HHS agencies make child development resources available for free, while the American Academy of Pediatrics, home visiting agencies, Head Start and others have also developed materials that can be widely distributed and are accessible to various populations. A number of communities have adopted variations of the "Sing, Talk and Read (STAR)" project, which helps families understand how to build early literacy in ways that promote their culture and language.<sup>64</sup> The Reach Out and Read program in Atlanta works with pediatricians to distribute books to families, encourage reading aloud and support for pediatricians to incorporate literacy into well child visits.<sup>65</sup>

This initiative may also include partnerships with new agencies, including museums and cultural institutions. At the Kohl Children's Museum in Chicago, Illinois, home- and center-based providers can participate in a professional development program, interactive learning experiences for children, an on-site parent/child activity, a family event and family passes to the museum.<sup>66</sup> Priority for participation is given to providers serving children from low-income families who are participating in the child care subsidy system.

**Expand outreach and services to families using informal settings or caring for their children at home.** Data suggests that the universal state pre-kindergarten program is currently only serving about half of the four year old children in Atlanta, and data is not available on the service levels for younger children in family child care or center-based settings. As a result, new initiatives to reach these providers could be adopted, including playgroups, connection to formal settings through hubs, technology, social media, informational texts and targeted information and training opportunities.<sup>67</sup>

**Create a single coordinated on-line lottery for pre-kindergarten services that includes all providers (schools and community providers).** While pre-kindergarten is only one component of the birth to third grade system in Atlanta, it creates enormous stress for families and providers. Many families discussed applying to five or more individual providers while also applying to multiple schools in the separate APS lottery. Staff at community agencies discussed the churn they experienced as families move off of wait

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<sup>64</sup> <http://www.learndc.org/earlychildhood/sing-talk-read>

<sup>65</sup> <http://www.reachoutandread.org/about-us/>

<sup>66</sup> <http://www.kohlchildrensmuseum.org/early-childhood-connections-childcare-1>

<sup>67</sup> For an extensive discussion of how states and local communities are supporting informal providers, see: *A Catalog of Strategies to Support Family, Friend and Neighbor Care*. (2016). Washington, DC: National Women's Law Center available at [http://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/nwlc\\_Catalog.pdf](http://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/nwlc_Catalog.pdf)

lists in the summer and into the school year. School staff highlighted their concerns that many families accept whatever slot is offered to them and may not have a lasting connection to that particular school. Stakeholders at all levels discussed the need for a common lottery that would help allocate seats according to family preferences and priorities established by the community.

Washington, DC adopted a common lottery for public and charter schools. The lottery is for all grades, with access to the universally available early childhood programs (known as PK3 and PK4) serving as a primary entry point to schools. The lottery is designed to "simplify the process for families; maximize the number of students who are matched with a school they choose; and match families with the schools they want most."<sup>68</sup> Parents fill out one application on-line with a common deadline and the wait list is developed centrally. The lottery process is administered through a website known as MySchoolDC under the auspices of the Deputy Mayor for Education.

In communities that do not have universal pre-kindergarten, an online common lottery process has been or will be adopted to help families navigate the child care system. The city of Chicago is implementing an on-line system that will allow families to identify available slots and submit needed paperwork at the time that they need to enroll their children. Families without internet access will be able to apply in person.<sup>69</sup> In San Francisco, the on-line system is designed to help families receiving subsidized care find the setting that best meets the needs of their children from infants through after school services for children up to 13. Families enroll once but have access to multiple programs, and child care programs can identify families that meet their enrollment criteria (age, income, geography) and serve those families much sooner than previously.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> <http://www.myschooldc.org/faq/faqs/>

<sup>69</sup> <http://catalyst-chicago.org/2016/03/mayor-tries-again-to-get-more-kids-into-preschool/>

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.sfccl.org/index.cfm?Menu=Public&Nav=00&formaction=none>



## Section 5: Next Steps

Atlanta has seen numerous needs assessments and community action plans, but has seen few results. For this effort to be different, a number of key steps must be taken quickly.

### *Within 30 days*

1. A neutral agency (United Way, GEEARS, the Woodruff Foundation, etc) must convene city leaders including the mayor's office, the city council and school board, the Superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools and philanthropy to agree on the creation of a planning body.
2. The neutral organization should develop a charter for the planning body, including required membership and responsibilities of participating agencies.
3. One-year funding adequate to cover up to three staff and associated costs (infrastructure, data collection and analysis, etc) should be secured from public and private sources.
4. Civic and school district leadership should hold a public event announcing the creation of the planning body and naming its co-chairs.

### *Within 60 Days:*

1. A launch meeting with a professional facilitator should be held to achieve basic goals:
  - a. Define the governance structure
  - b. Delegate participating agency responsibilities
  - c. Develop common definition of school readiness and metrics
  - d. Create accountability measures for the coordinating body
  - e. Create of workgroups for each core component area
  - f. Develop budget and identify funding sources
  - g. Identify critical areas for investment and intervention
2. Staff begin to collect data to develop benchmarks for defined measures.
3. Meetings of full group (delegates) are held weekly to analyze data and make recommendations for action to specific agencies as needed.
4. Analyze state and federal legislation to identify opportunities to make needed policy change, improve collaboration or leverage new funding, with a focus on new district opportunities within the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).
5. Additional partners identified.

### *By September 2016:*

1. Planning body is fully staffed.
2. Strategic plan is in place with action steps and associated metrics.
3. Data collection plan has been developed.
4. Workgroups have identified action steps, including:
  - a. Metrics
  - b. Actors
  - c. Funding
  - d. Required policy change
5. Consensus plan in place to develop early childhood centers at Venetian Hills and Woodson
  - a. Needed service partners identified



- b. Funding strategy developed
- c. MOUs and other agreements in place

**Appendix A:  
Work Product for Atlanta Public Schools**

**Memorandum**

To: Olivine Roberts  
David Jernigan

cc: Mindy Binderman  
Courtney Jones

From: Danielle Ewen

Date: March 12, 2016

Re: Next steps: Recommendations for APS Early Learning Program

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This memo summarizes the priority recommendations for APS that we discussed at the planning meeting on January 29. EducationCounsel and GEEARS continue to work to develop broad recommendations to help improve access to quality programs for families with children from birth through third grade, and are excited to support these targeted efforts within APS.

The recommendations below reflect the prioritization exercise that was included in the January 29 meeting. At the meeting, EducationCounsel and GEEARS presented a wide variety of proposals across short-, medium- and long-term timelines. The recommendations below reflect both the highest priority assigned by the participants and those deemed achievable in the current climate. We have included detailed suggestions to implement the recommendations and look forward to opportunities to continue to support this work.

**Priority Recommendation #1: Identify a clear goal and set of measurable outcomes for the work of the Early Learning office.**

Action Steps:

1. Through the Office of Accountability/DIG or an external partner organization, identify available data on possible outcome measures and goals for the early learning program and analyze recent trends within the data. Possible measures may include:
  - a. Third grade reading proficiency
  - b. Kindergarten readiness
  - c. Classroom quality across pre-kindergarten to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade using CLASS, ECERS or other measures
  - d. College and career readiness measures
  - e. Attendance
  - f. Behavioral referrals
  - g. Vacancy/fill rate of APS pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms
  - h. School culture/parent satisfaction
  - i. Other

The working group should utilize this data to identify priorities within the early learning work, including:

- a. Cluster focus
- b. Quality and access issues
- c. Expansion

*Timeline: Immediately, to be completed by April 15.*

2. Create a goal statement, including proposed metrics of success and appropriate timeframes for achieving outcomes. Goal statement and metrics should be vetted by representatives from the Office of Accountability/DIG and assessment, Office of the Superintendent, Office of the Chief Academic Officer, including representatives of early learning, curriculum and instruction in the early elementary (k-3) grades, as well as individuals reflecting community and family engagement.

EducationCounsel has reviewed the strategic plans of a number of communities and districts, and proposes that the APS Office of Early Childhood commit to a goal statement such as:

*Every family in the APS community will have access to a high quality pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classroom experience that prepares their children to be successful throughout their school experience.*

Metrics of success (all should be in place and moving toward 100 percent completion by SY 17-18):

- a) *High Quality Teaching and Learning*
  1. Pre-kindergarten teachers have salary parity and lower turnover rates (including classroom aides).
  2. Professional development for all teachers in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten reflects developmentally appropriate practice as well as cultural competence for all children.
  3. Appropriate facilities designed to meet the needs of children and teachers.
  4. Aligned teaching and learning practices are embedded for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers.
  5. Integration of KEA or other indicators at kindergarten entry into professional development and individualized instruction.
- b) *Healthy students.*
  1. All students receive a developmental screening before entering pre-kindergarten (such as ASQ, ASQ-SE, etc).
  2. All students have vision and hearing screening before entering k.
  3. Fewer than 5 percent of students in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten are chronically absent (an individual student misses more than 10 percent of instructional days).
- c) *Parent engagement and support.*
  1. Family liaisons in every Title I school work with all early childhood families.

2. Principals are trained to work with early childhood families, students and community providers.
3. Families are provided information to help choose the best pre-kindergarten setting for their family, either in APS or in the community.
4. APS pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms have less than five percent vacancy rates.

*Timeline: The APS team should begin adoption of the goal and metrics immediately. A baseline analysis for each metric should be in place by May 1, 2016, with strategies to move toward full implementation in place for SY 16-17 and metrics fully met by SY 17-18.*

3. The Office of the Chief Academic officer should formally adopt the goal statement and disseminate to central office staff, school leadership, teachers, external partners, parents, community based child care providers and other stakeholders and create training plans, data analysis rubrics and implementation plans for each outcome measure.

*Timeline: Materials should be developed throughout June, with formal roll out of the new goal and metrics included in training for school opening.*

4. A cross-agency working group should develop an implementation plan with clear benchmarks, roles for central office staff and school staff, and including a process for continuous improvement to achieve the stated goal. Identify needed inputs, including additional staff, data collection and analysis capacity, and other resources as needed.
  - a. The Office of the Chief Academic Officer, Early Learning Office should be identified as the leader on providing regular updates on progress toward the identified metrics (see above).
  - b. A staff person in the Office of Accountability/DIG should be assigned to meet weekly with the EL Office staff to analyze data and identify strengths and weaknesses.
  - c. Superintendents should present data and analysis to principals on a monthly basis and provide information on needed resources and best practices to the Early Learning Office.
  - d. The Chief Academic Officer should include an update to Senior Management/Superintendent on progress on the metrics on a monthly basis.

*Timeline: The implementation plan should be developed as the second half of the working group's activities and completed by April 1. The additional steps should be accomplished weekly and monthly as noted.*

5. Using resources from the demographer's office, the Atlanta Regional Commission and/or Neighborhood Nexus, Quality Care for Children, and DECAL, the Office of Accountability/DIG should be charged with developing a five year plan to identify the predicted demographic changes across APS neighborhoods and make suggestions for pre-kindergarten expansion/constriction at each school and cluster.

*Timeline: To be completed by December 2016.*

**Priority Recommendation #2: Improve governance of the early learning activities within APS.**

**Action Steps:**

1. The Superintendent, working with the Chief Academic Officer, should elevate the Office of Early Childhood within the Office of the Chief Academic Officer, equal to the Office of Elementary Schools, led by a high level director or other senior staff person with decision making authority and staffed with early childhood experts who can participate in conversations about curriculum, assessment and professional development across grade levels and are charged with alignment of standards, curriculum, instruction, assessment, data and professional learning across the assigned grade and age groups.
  - a. The Superintendent and the Chief Academic Officer should discuss whether the new office will include a birth to 3<sup>rd</sup> focus or only include pre-kindergarten and kindergarten and how to include a community component.
  - b. The Chief Academic Officer and the Chief Human Resources Officer will need to develop new job descriptions and responsibilities.

*Timeline: Immediate (for budget purposes); to be implemented (including hiring new staff) by end of SY 15-16.*

2. The Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent should create an organizational map of early learning services (pre-kindergarten to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade) and staff responsible within the district across human resources, finance and budgeting, curriculum, instruction, assessment, data collection and analysis, evaluation and family and community engagement , with clear lines of authority for policy setting, budget and governance.

*Timeline: Immediate (for budget purposes); to be implemented (including hiring new staff) by end of SY 15-16.*

**Priority Recommendation #3: Plan for lottery and expansion in line with early learning goals and policy priorities.**

**Action Steps:**

1. The Office of the Chief Academic Officer should pause or delay lottery revisions to incorporate additional data and family and community engagement efforts.

*Timeline: Immediately, with plans to launch new lottery for SY 17-18.*

2. In partnership with DECAL, the APS demographer and the Office of Accountability/DIG, the new Early Learning Office should identify criteria to establish priority for expansion or reduction of pre-kindergarten seats, such as:
  - a. 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading scores
  - b. Low-income/poverty concentrations
  - c. Priority clusters
  - d. OSD/Turnaround strategy
  - e. Availability of other support services for families
  - f. Parent satisfaction
  - g. Individual wait list data (families that prioritize a given school)

- h. Community data
- i. Demographic growth
- j. Develop strategic plan for Early Learning Centers serving children birth to pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, or birth to third grade, etc, including community partners and other interested stakeholders.
- k. Low-income communities with high vacancy rates in neighborhood schools
- l. OSD communities/schools
- m. Neighborhoods with large wait lists for APS and community pre-kindergarten programs

*Timeline: The Office of Accountability/DIG should be charged with collecting data related to expansion and providing analysis by June 1. The Early Learning Office should then develop a proposal to be presented to the Superintendent, in line with the proposed goal and metrics for Early Learning within APS by September 30, allowing time for community and parent information to be disseminated.*

**Priority Recommendation #4: Improve knowledge of child development and best practice in early childhood across all leaders in APS.**

1. The Office of the Chief Academic Officer should assign a staff person in the new Early Learning Office design a professional development plan that includes teachers and principals serving children from pre-kindergarten to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and includes information about child development, developmentally appropriate practice, the vision for alignment across grades, and best practice in sharing data and information between classes and grades.

*Timeline: to begin in June and July and be completed by the end of SY 16-17.*

2. The Office of the Chief Academic Officer and/or the Director of the Office of Early Learning and the Chief Financial Officer should work together to develop a plan to use Title I funds to create joint professional development opportunities between pre-kindergarten and early elementary teachers and across APS and community providers.

*Timeline: immediately*

3. Improve and expand teacher training using successful models.
  - a. The Director of the Early Learning Office should reach out to DECAL, the Rollins Center and private funders for information and resources on successful professional development models.
  - b. The Office of Partnerships and Development should work with the Early Learning Office to identify opportunities for funding partners to participate in expanding training and promote improved knowledge of implementation of curriculum and quality improvement through coaching or video sharing and feedback.

*Timeline: immediately and through SY 16-17.*

4. The Office of the Chief Academic Officer and/or the Early Learning Office should identify a staff person to design principal education to encourage knowledge and understanding of pre-kindergarten to 3<sup>rd</sup> alignment.
  - a. Information on program quality and best practices as well as developmentally appropriate expectations for students
  - b. Data sharing on components of early childhood students (in/out of bounds, kindergarten entry and other assessment results, CLASS scores, etc)
  - c. Include pre-kindergarten measures in principal accountability (CLASS scores, ECERS scores, teacher turnover rates, etc).

*Timeline: immediately and through SY 16-17.*

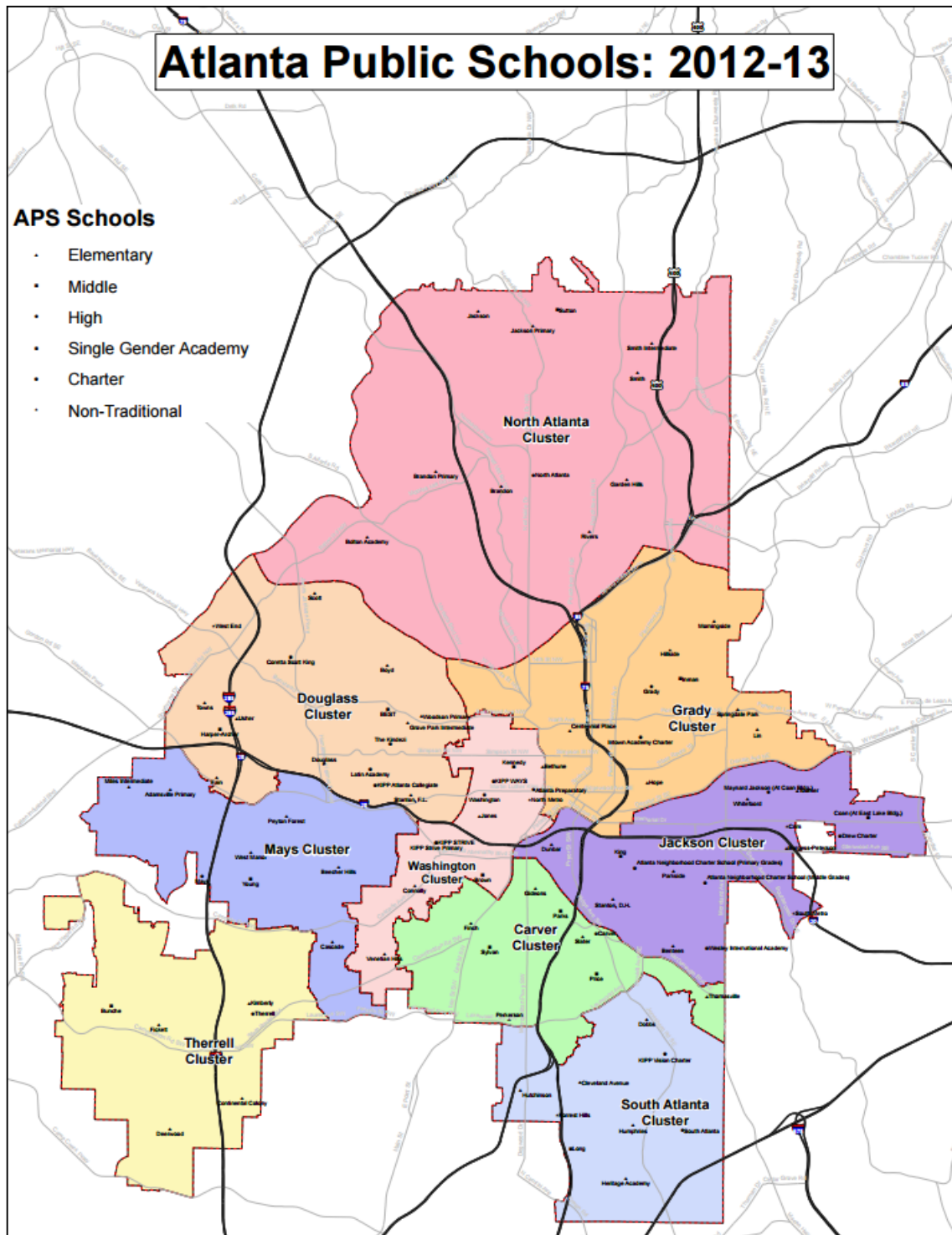
5. The Office of the Chief Academic Officer should work with principals, superintendents and other school leaders to encourage and support peer-to-peer observations between and among pre-kindergarten to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classrooms and across schools.
  - a. The Early Learning Office should identify high quality classrooms in APS and in community based settings.
  - b. The Chief Academic Officer and the Office of Human Resources should work together to identify substitutes or other supports to schools that allow teachers to visit other sites during the school day.

*Timeline: Begin planning and identification of sites in March/April and plan for site visits in January/February 2017.*

6. The Office of Early Childhood coaches should help each teacher in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten develop professional learning plans (similar to those in place for Head Start partner teachers) and analyze the plans for trends, unmet needs and opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and sharing.

*Timeline: Begin training on development of plans during summer training, work with teachers through the early fall, and begin analysis in January 2017, with plans to use the data to make budget recommendations in January/February/March 2017.*

Appendix B: Atlanta Public School Clusters



71

<sup>71</sup> Accessed from [APS website](#) on 3.30.2016.



## **Appendix C: Focus Group Questions**

### **Parent Focus Group Questions**

1. How do you feel that your child's early childhood experience (child care, home with a parent, Head Start, etc.) prepared your child for starting pre-k or kindergarten?
2. How did you choose a place for your infant/toddler? (prompts: close to home, close to child care, after care available, feel welcomed by school, other children at school)
3. What did you value most about your child's care during the infant/toddler years?
4. What was most challenging about your child's care during the infant/toddler years?
5. What concerns did you have as your child entered pre-k or k?
6. Did you interact with your school before your child entered pre-k or k? (prompt: transition activities, open house, meeting with teachers, home visits)
7. As your child enters an Atlanta Public School or charter for pre-k or k, how you would like to be involved with the school?
8. What did you consider most important in identifying the pre-k or k school your child will attend/does attend? (prompts: close to home, close to child care, after care available, feel welcomed by school, other children at school, lottery)
9. What was your experience with the APS pre-k lottery/community provider lists (prompts: how did you hear about it, did you get into the school you wanted, did you get waitlisted, did you change providers/schools after school started?)
10. Does your child/will your child attend your neighborhood school? Did you consider other schools?
11. Do you feel that the pre-k or k environment is a substantial change for your child? Why or why not?
12. How do you interact with teachers in pre-k/k?
13. What do you want your child to learn to do before entering kindergarten? First grade?
14. What do you enjoy most about the pre-k/k experience your child is having? Least?
15. If you were in charge of preparing a parent who has a child starting kindergarten next year, look back on your own experience, and describe the advice you would give them.

### **Provider Focus Group Questions**

1. What curriculum do you use for your 3 and 4 year olds? Infants and toddlers?
2. What kind of assessments do you do for children?
3. Do you administer developmental screenings? If so, what kind of developmental screenings do you do for children?
4. What's going well? What are you proudest about in your program?
5. What kind of professional development do you do with your teachers across all age levels?
6. What kind of professional development would you like to have?
7. What is your biggest struggle in maintaining quality services for your families? What would you do to solve these issues?
8. If you could design the whole early childhood system from scratch, what would you do differently?
9. Do most of your kids stay for pre-K/leave for the school-based program?
10. In your opinion, what drives those decisions?
11. What has your role been in those decisions, both during the decision period and after (i.e. transitions for kids, mentoring families, sending data, parent education and information such as helping parents understand provider curriculum/goals for children, etc)?
12. How has the stay/go percent changed over time?
13. How do you help prepare children for kindergarten in APS? (teaching/learning)
14. How do you know children are prepared for kindergarten? (assessment)
15. What is your relationship with APS?
16. What relationship do the families you serve have with APS?
17. What are your recommendations for early childhood in Atlanta?

**Appendix D:  
APS Elementary Schools Earning F on CCPRI for 2012-2014**

<b>School name (* denotes Head Start site)</b>	<b>DECAL funded pre-k slots</b>	<b>Nearby DECAL funded pre-k (within 1.5 miles, non APS) (number of slots)</b>	<b># of funded pre-k slots nearby</b>	<b>Nearby QR participating community providers (within 1.5miles) (number of slots)</b>
Benteen Elementary*	22	Easter Seals Child Development Center Guice Educare (44), Mt. Nebo Christian Academy (88)	132	Arnold Kawanna L (6), Mt. Nebo Christian Academy (142), REGINA'SDAYCARE (12)
Bethune Elementary*	20	Sheltering Arms - Elaine P. Draeger Model Teaching Center(44), Peachtree Summit Child Care Center (22)	66	Thomas Barbara G (6), The Gate City School of Atlanta (75), Sheltering Arms - Elaine P. Draeger Model Teaching Center (216), Peachtree Summit Child Care Center (78),Atlanta First Day School (127)
Boyd Elementary*(Archer Bldg)	0	0	0	Loving Care Day Care Center (78),Hollywood Day Care Center (70),Fairytails Learning Center II (57),Mother Hubbard's Day Care &Kindergarten #1 (123)
Connally Elementary*	22	Angel's Paradise Academy (44),Samuel L. Jones Child Care Center (44)	88	APEC Learning Center (322), Angel's Paradise Academy (152), Active Learning Academy (49), Samuel L. Jones Child Care Center (108),Stephens Carla (6), Prestige Learning Center (36)
Continental Colony*	44	0	0	A Thru Z Childcare & Learning Center(84), KID'S TIME EARLY LEARNINGCENTER INC. (108)
D. H. Stanton Elementary	20	Elizabeth Burch Early Learning Center (22)	22	Arnold Kawanna L (6), Elizabeth Burch Early Learning Center (58)
Dobbs Elementary	22	0	0	Elite Kindercare (73)
F.L. Stanton	22	Atlanta Job Corps Center	22	Atlanta Job Corps Center

		(22)		(75), Precious Jewels Learning Academy(41)
Gideons Elementary*	22	KIDazzle Child Care and Learning Center (66), Sheltering Arms - Dunbar (22), Sheltering Arms - Educare Atlanta (66)	154	Haynes Day Care Center Inc (73), Genesis Early Learning and Child Development Center (97), KIDazzle Child Care and Learning Center(110), Sheltering Arms Educare Atlanta (251)
Kimberly Elementary*(Temporarily at Cont. Colony)	not found	not found	not found	not found
Perkerson Elementary*	22	Easter Seals Child Development Center-Sylvan (66), Visionary Learning Academy (22), Atlanta Technical College Early Education Center (22)	110	Sylvan Hills Day Nursery-Gdch (13), Visionary Learning Academy (99), Atlanta Technical College Early Education Center (84)
Peyton Forest Elementary*	22	0	0	Doleman Michelle A. (6), Jay Paula M(6)