

**FALL 2024**



# **EARLY CARE & EDUCATION IN GEORGIA**

**Prepared for the Georgia Senate Study  
Committee on Access to Affordable Child Care**

**Dear Chairman Strickland and Members of the Study Committee:**

On behalf of GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students, **I want to thank you for your leadership** in supporting our youngest learners and their families by serving on the Senate Study Committee on Access to Affordable Child Care (SR 471).

We are reaching out to share specific ways GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students can support you and the work of the Study Committee. Established in 2010, GEEARS is **a nonprofit organization** operating to support high-quality early learning and healthy development for Georgia's youngest children, from birth to five, by championing policies, promoting innovative and evidence-based practices, and building public will.

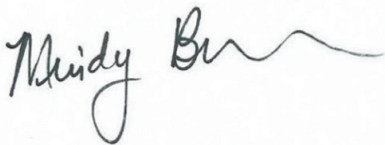
As you have heard, our current child care and early learning system simply **does not meet the needs** of Georgia families, early educators, and child care providers, many of which are small business owners, and this **holds back Georgia's long-term economic growth**. These challenges have been compounded by the end of federal pandemic relief funding, which has been a historic and critical lifeline for Georgia child care providers and families.

The issues facing our child care industry are diverse and complex. We have assembled this packet to provide you with an overview of the current landscape of early care and education here in Georgia. In addition, we are please **to offer six recommendations for the Study Committee's consideration**.

We look forward to supporting your work on this Study Committee **in whatever way you find helpful**. We are happy to put together agendas for meetings, organize site visits to child care providers, share an overview of the early learning landscape, recommend subject matter experts, or provide any other assistance you might find useful.

Please contact Mindy Binderman, Executive Director, at [mbinderman@gears.org](mailto:mbinderman@gears.org) or (678) 689-3482 or Jessica Woltjen, Senior Policy Manager for Early Childhood Education, at [jwoltjen@gears.org](mailto:jwoltjen@gears.org) or (252) 675-0685 if you have any questions or would like more information.

Respect



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# THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EARLY YEARS



**GEEARS**  
GEORGIA EARLY EDUCATION  
ALLIANCE FOR READY STUDENTS

The brain is not fully developed at birth.

While the brain's cells are formed before birth, the connections--the wiring that forms the brain's architecture--develop during infancy and early childhood.



How that wiring is formed, either as a strong or weak foundation for all future learning, depends on that child's interactions with the world around them.<sup>1</sup>

More than

**1 MILLION**

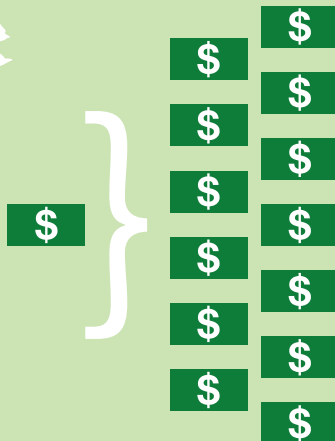
new neural connections are formed every second in the first few years.

Numerous studies have found that children who participate in comprehensive high-quality early childhood education before entering kindergarten later experience fewer special education placements, decreased grade retention, and improved high school graduation rates compared with peers who do not participate.<sup>2</sup>

**EVERY \$1**

invested in early education produces a yearly return of

**\$13**



Research conducted by Dr. James Heckman, a Nobel Prize-winning economist, indicates that investing in early education produces a significant return on investment. Every \$1 invested in high-quality early education saves, on average, \$13 down the road as a result of reduced crime rates, lower demand for social services, and increased tax revenues.<sup>2</sup>

# GEORGIA'S EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION LANDSCAPE



Georgia's young children are educated and cared for in a variety of programs and settings, ranging from child care centers to family child care homes to relative-provided care to nannies or babysitters. **The state's early care and education landscape is diverse and complex, with programs varying widely by type, funding source, nonprofit status, and oversight.** Families sometimes combine different types of part-time and full-time care to meet their needs. **Together, the child care options below support the early learning and healthy development of Georgia's youngest learners.**

## TYPES OF EARLY CARE & LEARNING

### Licensed Child Care Learning Centers

are typically operated in nonresidential facilities where children are often grouped in classrooms by age, with an average licensed capacity of over 100 and a dedicated director and staff members.

### Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care

is a type of home-based child care in which a relative, friend, neighbor, babysitter, or nanny provides care with or without pay.



### Licensed Family Child Care Learning Homes

provide care for small groups of children (at least three and up to six) of varying ages in a professional caregiver's home for pay.

### Public Schools (License-Exempt)

are subject to local oversight and may offer early learning programs, typically serving 4-year-olds through Georgia's Pre-K Program.

### Other License-Exempt Programs

include many part-time or faith-based programs; must apply for exemption and still meet basic health and safety guidelines.

The **Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)** is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia's children and their families, including licensing child care and administering key programs such as Georgia's Pre-K Program, Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, and Quality Rated.

Licensed programs are monitored at least twice a year by DECAL to measure whether they meet over 400 child health and safety rules. Eligible, licensed programs can elect to participate in Georgia's Quality Rated system that assesses program quality. Programs that are **Quality Rated** have demonstrated a commitment to go above and beyond licensure standards and receive a one-, two-, or three-star rating based on the demonstration of best practices (e.g., ratios, staff credentials, curriculum, etc.).



**In many parts of the state, demand for child care, particularly for infants and toddlers, outpaces supply. Roughly 500,000 children under the age of six have all available parents in the workforce.<sup>1</sup>**

# QUALITY RATED

## Georgia's Quality Rating & Improvement System for Child Care



Started in 2012, Quality Rated is Georgia's system **to determine, improve, and communicate** the quality of licensed child care centers and family child care learning homes. Quality Rated assigns **one, two, or three stars to programs** based on standards and best practices, giving families greater confidence in their child care choice. Best practices include:

 <b>Employing qualified and well-trained teachers</b>	 <b>Implementing individualized instruction</b>	 <b>Providing a safe, healthy, and caring environment</b>	 <b>Offering a curriculum that prepares children for kindergarten</b>	 <b>Engaging families</b>	 <b>Providing a low student-teacher ratio</b>
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To become Quality Rated, programs must submit a portfolio with self-reported information and receive an unannounced classroom observation from a trained assessor.

By participating in this program, child care providers make a commitment **to improve the quality of care** they provide to children and families. After receiving a star rating, programs must be re-rated every three years. Any provider with a Quality Rated star rating has achieved levels of quality **above the minimum operating health and safety requirements**. Providers receiving funding through Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, which issues scholarships to some low-income working families, must be Quality Rated.

Families can use the free, online search tool at [www.QualityRated.org](http://www.QualityRated.org) to access information about specific programming, including safety and inspection reports, weekly rates, and ages served.

## QUALITY RATED IN GEORGIA

**Of Georgia's 4,389 eligible child care providers:**



<sup>1</sup>As of August 2024

## FUTURE OF QUALITY RATED

DECAL is currently undergoing a comprehensive review of Quality Rated. This includes:

- **Reviewing** Quality Rated's internal and external processes, supports offered to providers and families, and how quality is communicated
- Provider surveys, family focus groups, stakeholder data dives, community forums, and internal process workgroups

The process **will produce proposed revisions to Quality Rated** to move into the next decade with a strengthened system.

# THE COST OF CHILD CARE IN GEORGIA



Children in the Peach State deserve access to high-quality, affordable child care, and families **depend on this care** so that they can participate in the workforce—but for too many Georgians, **it's out of reach.**



**The average yearly infant tuition in Georgia exceeds in-state tuition at a four-year public college.<sup>1</sup>**



**Child care expenses represent more than one-third of the yearly earnings of a family with low income.<sup>2</sup>**



**Families with two or more children face an even larger burden.**

**“Child care is our largest single expense, more than our mortgage payment.  
- Georgia Parent”**



**\$13,000/year**

Child care rates vary significantly across region and care type. According to the latest market rate survey, the average rate of center-based infant care in “Zone 1” (primarily urban and suburban counties in greater Atlanta) was \$1,052 per month<sup>3</sup>--or close to \$13,000 per year. This figure does not include other fees (e.g., registration) providers may charge.

*What families pay in tuition and fees often doesn't reflect the actual costs that child care providers incur. The “true” cost of providing high-quality, developmentally appropriate care generally exceeds what parents are willing and able to pay, affecting providers' bottom line.*

**“My wife had to stay home with our children because the cost of two children in care was prohibitively expensive based on her salary.  
- Georgia Parent”**

# GEORGIA'S FAMILIES FACE CHILD CARE CHALLENGES

## Summary of 2023 Survey



In late 2023, GEEARS commissioned Hart Research Associates to conduct a poll of Georgia parents with children ages birth to five years old.\* **More than eight in 10 parents** report that child care struggles have directly **affected their financial situation** in some way, most commonly through missed shifts or reduced hours at work. Additionally, nearly half indicated they or their partner had **turned down job opportunities** because of child care challenges. More than a third said they or their spouse had **left the workforce entirely** because of such challenges, with mothers feeling a disproportionate impact.

## IMPACT OF CHILD CARE CHALLENGES

36%

More than one-third indicated child care challenges have led them or their partner to leave the workforce entirely.

65%

65% indicated they or their partner had to miss a shift or reduce hours at work because of problems with child care.

44%

44% indicated they or their partner had to turn down a job opportunity because of problems with child care.

“Child care costs today are not affordable. Any aid to supplement child care costs is paramount to growing the economy.”

-Georgia Mother

“Parents need help paying daycare fees. I want another child, but there’s no way I can afford that. We can’t keep our heads above water financially.”

-Georgia Mother

Only  
**32%**

of families believe the state government is doing a good job of meeting the needs of parents with young children.



Families want state policymakers to prioritize access to food and formula, healthcare, early childhood education, safe and affordable housing, and paid family leave.

\*From November 6 - 30, 2023, Hart Research Associates conducted an online survey on behalf of GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students. Hart Research interviewed 400 Georgia parents of children ages birth to five years old. This online survey has a margin of error of  $\pm 4.9$  percentage points for the full sample of 400, and it is higher for subgroups of the sample. For more details, visit [www.geears.org/polling](http://www.geears.org/polling).



# HOW CHILD CARE CHALLENGES IMPACT GA'S WORKFORCE AND ECONOMY



Child care challenges, whether a result of systemic barriers to access or the cumulative impact of inconsistent or unreliable care, affect parents' participation in the workforce and can have **far-reaching effects** for families, employers, and the state's economy as a whole.

Starting in 2018, **GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students** and **the Metro Atlanta Chamber** set out to better understand the prevalence, nature, and impact of child care challenges through a survey and series of focus groups with parents of young children. **The results are alarming.**

Child care challenges lead to at least **\$1.75 BILLION IN LOSSES** in economic activity annually and an additional **\$105 MILLION** in lost tax revenue.



	Economic Loss Estimate (Millions)	State Income Tax Revenue Loss (Millions)
Absences	\$331.1	\$19.9
Turnover	\$1422.1	\$85.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1753.2</b>	<b>\$105.2<sup>1</sup></b>

Since 2018, child care challenges have only increased.<sup>2</sup> This means that the nearly \$2 billion dollar impact found in 2018 is a floor of what child care challenges are costing Georgia's economy in 2024.

# EXISTING PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT ACCESS



Child care in Georgia is largely privately funded through parent tuition and fees. Some local, state, and federal initiatives exist to support access to early learning programs, including:

	<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>Eligibility</b>	<b>Access</b>	<b>Delivery Model</b>
<b>Georgia's Pre-K</b>	Georgia Lottery	Georgia's four-year-olds regardless of parental income (subject to available seats)	~71,500 (about 55%) of Georgia's 4-year-olds <sup>1</sup>	Utilizes a mixed delivery system, with classrooms in both child care centers and public schools
<b>Childcare &amp; Parent Services (CAPS)</b> <i>Georgia's child care scholarship program for low-income working families</i>	Primarily federally funded through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), which includes a required state match	Family eligibility is set at or below 50% of the state median income based on family size. Parents must also participate in approved work/education activities and be a member of a priority group (e.g., foster children).	DECAL is committed to providing 50,000 children (primarily under 13) with scholarships. <sup>2</sup> Due to limited funding, the program serves only an estimated 14.8% of income-eligible children. <sup>3</sup>	Families make their own decisions about what type of care is best for their child based on their needs and availability at participating programs.
<b>Head Start &amp; Early Head Start</b>	Federal grant program	Head Start serves children ages four and five; Early Head Start serves infants and toddlers as well as pregnant women. Family eligibility is set at or below 100% of the federal poverty level.	~15,200 children are enrolled in Head Start and ~4,600 are enrolled in Early Head Start. <sup>4</sup>	Services include education, health, mental health, and family supports through center-based or family child care programs.
<b>Preschool Special Education</b>	Funded through federal dollars under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B and local school district funding	Georgia's 3- to 5-year-olds who qualify for special education services	~Nearly 10,000 of Georgia's 3- and 4-year-olds receive services through Preschool Special Education. <sup>5</sup>	Program provides special education services to children who have been identified by local school districts as needing early intervention services.

# GEORGIA'S LOTTERY-FUNDED PRE-K PROGRAM

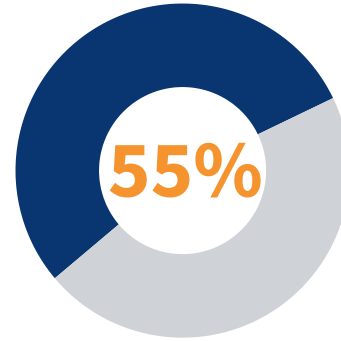
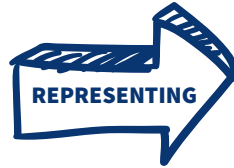
## An Overview



Funded by the Georgia Lottery, Georgia's Pre-K is a **voluntary, free pre-kindergarten program** administered by the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) open to all Georgia four-year-olds, regardless of parental income. Launched in 1992, the program has served over two million children since its inception.

# 71,526 kids

enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K in the 2023-2024 school year



of all four-year-olds in Georgia.<sup>1</sup>

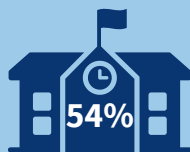
Georgia's Pre-K operates in all of the state's

159 counties **in** 1,892 locations which operate

**3,810 Pre-K Classes<sup>2</sup>** of which



are located in private centers



are located in the public school system<sup>1</sup>

Although many communities have enough slots to meet demand, there were **3,155 children** on the waitlist at the end of the 2024 school year.

## THE BASICS OF PRE-K

- operates 180 days/year for a full day (6.5 hours of instruction)
- has a maximum of 20 children per class
- required to have a lead and assistant teacher who meet credential requirements
- follows the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS)

## FUNDING

Since its inception in 1992, the Georgia Lottery has funded Georgia's Pre-K and the HOPE Scholarship program. Historically, about one-third of this funding is used for Georgia's Pre-K Program and the rest is designated for HOPE.<sup>3</sup>

## EFFECTIVENESS OF GEORGIA'S PRE-K

In 2011, the Georgia General Assembly authorized a longitudinal study of Georgia's Lottery-funded Pre-K Program to examine the short- and long-term outcomes of attending Georgia's Pre-K. Findings from the longitudinal study indicated that students who attended Georgia's Pre-K demonstrated **significant rates of growth—above and beyond what is typical for children their age—during their Pre-K and kindergarten years**, suggesting they entered kindergarten prepared to take advantage of subsequent learning opportunities. A separate 2017 comparison study found that a group of students who had attended Georgia's Pre-K significantly **outperformed their peers** who had not attended Georgia's Pre-K across all subject areas of the **third-grade Georgia Milestones assessments**.<sup>4</sup>

# RECENT CHANGES TO GEORGIA'S PRE-K PROGRAM



During the 2024 legislative session, the Georgia General Assembly allocated almost \$100 million to make critical improvements to our state's Lottery-funded Pre-K program, the largest single-year increase in the program's 32-year history. This figure is essentially the entire amount requested by the [House Working Group on Early Childhood Education](#), chaired by Speaker Pro Tempore Jan Jones.

## The final FY2025 budget included an historic \$97 million increase in Lottery funds for Georgia's Pre-K Program:

- **Improved pay for Pre-K lead and assistant teachers**, aligned with K-12 teachers. Originally proposed by Governor Nathan Deal in 2016, pay parity is a significant win for our Pre-K teachers, who often earn less than their K-12 counterparts even when they have the same education and credentials. This is particularly important for Pre-K assistant teachers who will go from making a base salary of \$20,190 to \$25,741 (total: \$19.4 million).
- An additional \$9.5 million **to restore Pre-K class size to 20 students per class**. In 2011, that number was raised to 22 students/class to cut costs during the recession. This funding is for year one of a four-year phase in of the reduced class size (equivalent to an additional 96 classrooms).
- **Increased start-up grants for new classrooms**, from \$8,000 to \$30,000, the first increase since the program began in 1992. \$15,000 classroom refresh grants will also be implemented every five years (total: \$13.4 million).
- An additional \$4.1 million **to support transportation costs** for Pre-K students (an increase from around \$17 to \$81/child), helping children access this important program.
- An increase of **operations budgets** by \$11.5 million for Pre-K providers in private child care, in line with the support for school-based Pre-K passed through separate legislation.
- An additional \$9 million to maintain current enrollment in the **Summer Transition Program**.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, the language of [HB 941](#), which allows **local school districts to use capital outlay funds for educational facilities for Georgia's Pre-K classrooms**, was included in the unrelated SB 233, which passed both chambers and was signed into law by the Governor.<sup>2</sup>



# GEORGIA'S CHILDCARE AND PARENT SERVICES (CAPS) PROGRAM

## An Overview



Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Program provides scholarships that help some low-income working families in Georgia afford child care.

## THE BASICS OF CAPS

- » provides **scholarships** to *some* income-eligible families (with children up to age 13) to help them afford child care in early learning, afterschool, and summer programs
- » primarily federally funded through the **Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)** and administered by the **Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)**
- » requires eligible participating child care providers to be **Quality Rated**, Georgia's quality rating and improvement system for child care
- » allows **families to make their own decisions** about what type of care is best for their child based on their needs and program availability

Due to limited funding,  
only an estimated

# 15%

of children from  
income-eligible  
working families are  
served by CAPS in  
Georgia.<sup>1</sup>

## INITIAL ELIGIBILITY

- income  $\leq 30\%$  state median income (based on family size) **AND**
- participate in at least 24 hours/week of approved activities (e.g., work, school) **AND**
- be a member of a DECAL-designated priority group, including:
  - Children in DFCS custody
  - Student parents
  - Children in Child Protective Services (CPS) or otherwise needing protection
  - Grandparents raising grandchildren
  - Minor parents
  - Families experiencing domestic violence
  - Children with disabilities
  - Children in Georgia's Pre-K
  - Families participating in TANF
  - Families who have experienced a natural disaster
  - Families who lack fixed, regular, and adequate housing
- Families with very low incomes set at 10% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) (e.g., \$3,120 annual income for a family of four).<sup>2</sup>

## REIMBURSEMENT RATES

DECAL reimburses child care providers according to data from a **market rate survey**, which considers program type and location as well as ages of children served. With recent federal and state increases (including \$9.3 million allocated in the state's FY25 budget),<sup>3</sup> Georgia's reimbursement rate is now set at the 60th percentile of the latest survey. Adequate reimbursement rates are essential to ensure providers can provide high-quality care and recruit and retain skilled staff.<sup>4</sup>

## FUNDING

CAPS is primarily funded through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), a federal program. The state meets the required match and has made targeted investments in recent years.

# GEORGIA FAMILIES SHARE THE IMPACT OF CAPS



GEEARS regularly surveys and conducts focus groups with families with young children, including those who participate in the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Program, to better understand their experiences and how the program has benefited them. **Here is what some have said:**

**Access to CAPS scholarships allowed my children to be in safe and affordable child care while I maintain employment. Access to scholarships made a difference because it was one less choice that I had to make when deciding between clothing, food, shelter, and purchasing necessary medications for them.**

**[Without CAPS], I would not be able to take foster children into my home.**

**I would be out of a job [if I lost access to CAPS] because I have no one to watch my kids. I don't have family, it's just me and my kids. I'm really grateful for assistance with child care, even though I still struggle with paying for child care and bills. I live check to check.**

**I would have to drop out of school [if I lost access to CAPS].**

**[Without CAPS], I would either be in a homeless shelter or on the streets. CAPS has been a major assistance in my children's education and my life in being able to provide for them!**

**I would live under a bridge [if I lost access to CAPS]. I have to pay child care with what I receive from CAPS to be available to [work at] Kroger. Otherwise I would be under a bridge.**

**[If I lost access to CAPS], I would have to resign from my job that I have been employed with for ten years.**

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT CAPS



## What is the primary funding source for CAPS?

CAPS is primarily funded through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), a federal program with a required state match and opportunity for additional state support.

## What is the annual budget for CAPS? How does that break down (on average) per child?

Without temporary federal relief funding expiring September 2024, the CAPS budget (including state and federal funds) is approximately \$280,000,000 annually. Prior to federal relief funding, DECAL paid an average of \$5,600 per child annually. With this relief funding, DECAL has been paying an average of \$8,400 per child.<sup>1</sup>

## What is the state's required contribution? How is that calculated?

The state match is tricky, as CCDBG funds are split into three buckets (discretionary, mandatory, and matching) of which two (discretionary and mandatory) are completely federal. However, the state match for the third, matching bucket is the current FMAP rate for the state (65.89%), which is about \$63 million of the total funding amount. The state meets the required match and has made modest, targeted investments in recent years: \$5.5 million in 2017, \$500,000 in 2019 and 2020, \$3.5 million in 2021, \$3.6 million in 2022, \$1 million in 2023, and \$9.3 million in 2024.

## How much of a child's tuition does the CAPS Program cover?

The CAPS Program typically covers a set reimbursement rate based on the type of care, location, and age of child minus the amount the family is responsible for, known as the family fee, which is capped at 7% of a family's annual income.

Georgia's set reimbursement rates are often significantly lower than the current cost of care due to limited funding. The current rate is set at 60% of market rate for most types of care. Providers often pass on the additional cost to families (i.e., the differential). Low reimbursement rates can make it difficult for families participating in CAPS to afford care and may discourage providers from accepting CAPS scholarships.

## Does every eligible family receive CAPS?

No. CAPS is not an entitlement program meaning that it does not serve everyone who applies and is eligible due to limited funding. Less than 15% of income-eligible children in Georgia actually receive a CAPS scholarship.<sup>2</sup>

## Although CAPS does not fund every eligible family, do other programs (e.g. TANF, Medicaid, WIC) make up the gaps in access to child care?

No. Programs such as TANF, Medicaid, and WIC provide critical supports, such as health care and nutrition, to eligible children and their families – many of whom are also eligible for CAPS. However, these programs do NOT provide child care to Georgia's youngest children.



# RECENT CHANGES TO CAPS



## **THE END OF FEDERAL RELIEF FUNDING**

Federal pandemic-era relief funding has helped to strengthen the CAPS Program—allowing more families to access this critical support and ensuring child care providers, most of whom are small business owners, can keep their doors open. More specifically, federal relief funding has:

- **Increased the number of scholarships** from 50,000 to 72,000;
- Covered **the cost to families** participating in CAPS (including the family fee and the difference between the provider's published and the reimbursement rate paid by DECAL);
- **Increased reimbursement rates** to providers to better cover cost of care; and
- **Expanded eligibility** for initial entry from 50% state median income (SMI) to 85% state median income (SMI) (currently set at 30% SMI) and for the very low income priority group to 150% federal poverty level (FPL) (currently set at 10% FPL).<sup>1</sup>

**All federal relief funding will end in September 2024, leaving a \$173 million gap annually for CAPS specifically.**

## **NEW CCDF STATE PLAN**

CAPS is primarily funded through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), a federal program sometimes also referred to as the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). All states must submit a CCDF state plan **every three years, with all states currently in the process of developing their FFY 2025-27 plans**. The CCDF state plan acts as the primary mechanism to determine state compliance with federal rules and serves as a formal application to receive federal funding. DECAL released a draft Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Plan for FFY 2025-2027 in May for the required public comment period. Draft plans were submitted to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) **by July 1st for their review, and the new plans will go into effect on October 1st, 2024**. The FFY 2025-2027 state plan comes at a critical juncture for Georgia's child care industry and families with the end of federal relief funding that has been a critical lifeline over the last few years.

## **NEW FEDERAL RULE CHANGES**

Additionally, the FY 2025-2027 CCDF Plan incorporates questions aligned to new rules released by ACF earlier this year designed to increase access to and quality of child care subsidies. Although the rules went into effect on May 1st, many states, including Georgia, requested temporary waivers for extensions of up to two years to ensure enough time to execute the steps to comply. States are **required** to implement several new rules, including:

- Paying based on enrollment instead of attendance;
- Paying prospectively;
- Paying some scholarships as grants or contracts; and
- Implementing subsidy eligibility policies and procedures that minimize disruptions to families (e.g., increasing the eligibility period for from 12 months as other states have done).

In addition to the new requirements, ACF **encouraged** states to:

- Waive the family fee for additional populations, including families with income up to 150% of the federal poverty level (currently waived at only 10% of the federal poverty level in Georgia), children who are in foster and kinship care, those experiencing homelessness, those with a child with a disability, and those enrolled in Head Start or Early Head Start; and
- Use a family's enrollment in or verification used for other public benefits programs to confirm eligibility for CCDF, as child care is likely to be one of several systems asking recipients to comply with similar requirements.<sup>2</sup>



# HEAD START & EARLY HEAD START IN GEORGIA



## An Overview

Head Start and Early Head Start, which are federally funded and locally implemented, provide comprehensive services for children from families who meet certain eligibility requirements, including income at or below the federal poverty level. These services include child care; physical, mental, and oral health care; nutrition; early intervention and education; and wraparound support for families.

Early Head Start serves pregnant women, infants, and toddlers up to age three and Head Start serves children ages three to five and their families. **There are currently not enough Head Start or Early Head Start slots to serve all eligible children.**

Since its inception, **Head Start has recognized the impact family well-being has on child development and prioritized support for families, as well as children.** Head Start programs help families:

- access medical and dental homes;
- enroll in public benefit programs (e.g., Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP));
- address social determinants of health (e.g., food and housing insecurity, unemployment);
- and collaborate with medical homes and specialty health care providers to develop and implement individual health care plans for children with special health care needs.

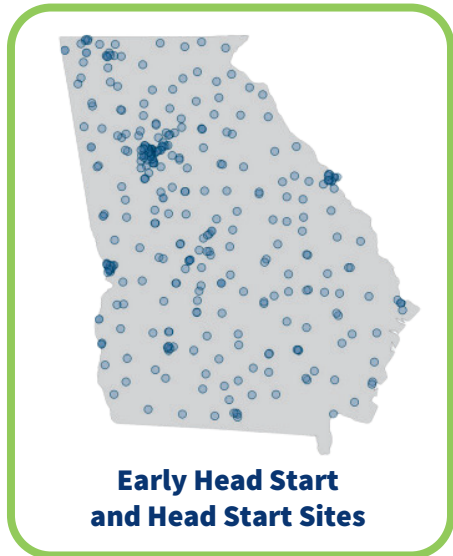


## The Basics of Head Start in Georgia


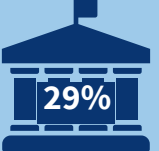
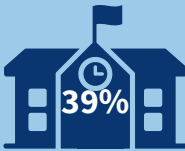
Early Head Start and Head Start complement other components of Georgia’s early learning landscape (e.g., Georgia’s Pre-K), often through braided and blended funding to support young children.

Early Head Start and Head Start provide safe, nurturing environments that help children achieve developmental milestones, school readiness, and physical and social-emotional well-being. In 2023:

- **329 sites operated** across the state;
- **14,553** parents received **job training**;
- **52,724 home visits** were conducted; and
- **13,324** children received a **behavioral health screening**<sup>2</sup>



### Head Start graduates are:

 <b>12%</b> less likely to live in poverty as adults.	 <b>29%</b> less likely to receive public assistance as adults.	 <b>39%</b> more likely to complete college. <sup>3</sup>
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# PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION

## An Overview



The **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** is a federal law that outlines critical services that will **improve the educational experiences of children with disabilities**. The statute includes **four sections: Part A**, which outlines general provisions of the law; **Part B**, which addresses services for school-age children (ages 3-21); **Part C**, which addresses early intervention services for children from birth through 36 months of age; and **Part D**, which improves services for children with disabilities and their families through federal grants.

IDEA Part B, section 619, also known as **Preschool Special Education**, helps ensure that preschool-aged children and their families can access special education and related services. **About 4.6% of Georgia's 3-5 year-olds** participated in Preschool Special Education, which is about 2% lower than the national average.

## The Basics of Preschool Special Education

The federal government funds state initiatives that satisfy Part B of IDEA through allocations to **the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE)**, which oversees its implementation in local school districts across the state. Part B offers children the opportunity to receive special education services in a preschool setting at no cost to the family. To qualify, a child must be age three to five and meet the criteria for at least one of 12 categories, as defined by the state's criteria on eligibility determination, to receive special education services. Some children transition from Babies Can't Wait to Preschool Special Education as they turn three; however, three-year-olds are underrepresented in the total number of children receiving special education services.

If a child is deemed eligible for special education services, school representatives, teachers, and family members form a team to outline an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** to develop goals, determine the best classroom placement, formulate intervention strategies, and identify the special education services that will help the child make progress toward their developmental goals. Additionally, special education teachers utilize the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) to help meet IEP goals and provide developmentally appropriate instruction. This program offers flexibility in the amount and type of support needed to meet the varying needs of children who are eligible for services. Each child's IEP is **unique and designed to meet the specific needs of the child**.

## IDEA at a Glance

- Part A:** General Provisions of the Law
- Part B:** Services for School-Age Children Ages 3-21 which includes Preschool Special Education in Georgia
- Part C:** Early Intervention Services for Children Birth-36 months (Babies Can't Wait in Georgia)
- Part D:** Federal Grants that Improve Services for Children with Disabilities and their Families

**Preschool Special Education served nearly 10,000 of Georgia's 3- and 4- year-old's in 2023.<sup>1</sup>**

**Why It Matters:** Preschool Special Education aims to support children in meeting their **developmental milestones** by targeting and implementing specialized strategies to strengthen speech-language, cognition, fine and gross motor skills, and more. Cultivating developmentally appropriate skills through **early intervention** contributes to the likelihood that children will succeed in the K-12 system, be able to care for themselves, and attain self-sufficiency as an adult.

# GEORGIA'S EARLY CARE & EDUCATION WORKFORCE

## An Overview



Early childhood educators are engaged **in incredibly complex and demanding work** that is critical to children’s learning and healthy development, supportive of family well-being, and foundational to Georgia’s economy. The quality of instruction in early childhood classrooms **depends on committed, well-prepared teachers.**

There has long been a struggle to recruit and retain early childhood educators, but it has reached a crisis level in recent years. High turnover rates in early childhood programs have been linked **to lower program quality** and shown to negatively affect a child’s social and emotional development as well as relationships between teachers, children, and parents.<sup>3</sup> Research indicates that a significant factor in an early childhood teacher’s decision to leave the profession is low pay.

Early educators are among the lowest-paid workers in every state. In Georgia, **the median hourly wage for lead teachers is \$14.50 and for assistant teachers is \$12.60<sup>4</sup>** (note that these wages reflect the impact of pandemic-era federal relief funding). Low wages mean that 53% of the ECE workforce nationally live in families that utilize some sort of public income supports<sup>5</sup> and 29% of child care providers report experiencing hunger.<sup>6</sup> Early care and education professionals make significantly less than their counterparts in similar professions (e.g., K-12 teachers) even with the same education, credentials, and/or experience. Early childhood educators **not teaching in Georgia's Pre-K or Head Start classrooms (a federally funded program) are paid significantly less.**

**The early care and education industry in Georgia employs approximately **71,500** workers.<sup>1</sup>**

**Every 100 jobs in early care generates an additional 26 jobs in other industries.<sup>2</sup>**

Median Hourly Wage Estimates for Georgia’s Early Educators by Teacher and Program Type <sup>4</sup>			
	Georgia’s Pre-K	Excluding Georgia’s Pre-K	All
<b>Lead Teacher</b>	<b>\$22.12</b>	<b>\$14.00</b>	<b>\$14.50</b>
<b>Assistant Teacher</b>	<b>\$15.40</b>	<b>\$11.99</b>	<b>\$12.60</b>

Georgia’s early care and education sector **is comprised almost exclusively of women, with women of color overrepresented among the workforce.**<sup>5</sup> Early childhood educators represent the most racially diverse sector of the teaching workforce in comparison to K-12 and postsecondary education. Black and Hispanic early educators are more likely to serve in positions associated with the lowest wages, including in programs not receiving public funding and those serving infants and toddlers.<sup>6</sup> Even within the same setting and role, early educators of color experience wage gaps relative to their white peers. The early education workforce has a disproportionate number of workers who are themselves parents and caregivers of young children, **with 23.4% of child care workers nationally having a child under the age of five.**<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, **Georgia’s youngest children benefit** from higher quality early learning when their teachers stay longer in their jobs. Beyond educators themselves, the early care and education workforce includes directors, cooks/nutrition staff, administrative support staff, custodian/janitorial staff, bus drivers, family support staff, and curriculum coordinators—all of whom are critical to supporting Georgia’s youngest children and their families.

# OTHER STATES' RECENT INVESTMENTS IN CHILD CARE



In May 2023, **Alabama** lawmakers gave final approval to the largest-ever year-over-year increase in state funding for early care and education, including a **\$30 million** increase in state funding for Alabama Quality Stars Quality Rating and Improvement System for child care.<sup>1</sup>

In June 2024, **Florida** increased its reimbursement rates for the first time in two years, with an investment of \$46.4 million. Florida also included an additional \$23 million to establish its “School Readiness Plus Program,” which allows families earning up to 100% SMI to be eligible for subsidy (total investment: **\$69.4 million**).<sup>2</sup>



In April 2024, **Kentucky** invested \$70 million to maintain changes to its subsidy program that were implemented with federal relief funding, including reimbursing at the 80th percentile of the market rate survey. An additional \$16 million was allocated to allow child care staff to receive a child care subsidy for their own children (total investment: **\$86 million**).<sup>3</sup>

In June 2023, the **Louisiana** legislature passed a budget with an increase of \$44 million for its Child Care Assistance Program during the 2023 legislative session, the single largest investment in the program in over a decade. The Governor further expanded this investment to more than **\$51 million** using his line-item veto.<sup>4</sup>



In May 2024, **Maryland** committed **\$218 million** for FY 2024 and **\$270 million** for FY 2025 for the state’s subsidy program. These increases are the state’s largest single-year allocations ever made to the subsidy program.<sup>5</sup>

In May 2023, **Minnesota** passed **\$750 million** in new revenue for child care and early learning programs that will add thousands of additional child care and Pre-K seats, increase reimbursement rates for early learning providers, reduce copayments for families, and improve wages for the workforce.<sup>6</sup>



In June 2024, **Missouri** invested **\$54.8 million** to increase rates to the 100th percentile of market rate for infants and toddlers and to the 65th percentile for preschoolers and school-aged children.<sup>7</sup>

In November 2022, voters in **New Mexico** overwhelmingly passed a constitutional amendment that increases the percentage of revenue taken out of the Land Grant Permanent Fund every year from 5% to 6.25% and will dedicate approximately **\$150 million** for early childhood education. The fund accrues royalties from oil and gas companies operating on public land and from gains in the stock market and is currently valued around \$26 billion. Ballot measures typically lose support over time as they’re attacked by the opposition; however, in New Mexico Amendment 1 actually gained support and outperformed its polling, securing 70% of the vote.<sup>8</sup>



In April 2023, the **North Dakota** legislature passed a **\$65 million investment** to expand access to child care for low-income families. The new law will expand assistance for families earning less than 75% of the state’s median income (or about \$80,000 a year for a family of four). It also will fund child care slots for an estimated 1,800 children, provide a match of \$5 million to employers who help with their employees’ child care costs, and provide \$15 million to incentivize child care providers to enroll more infants and toddlers. The state will also cover all child care costs for families making less than 30% of the state median income (or about \$32,000 a year for a family of four).<sup>9</sup>

In May 2024, **Virginia** committed historic state general fund investments of **\$170 million** in FY 2025 and **\$266.5 million** in FY 2026 to support its subsidy program.<sup>10</sup>



# GEORGIANS SUPPORT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



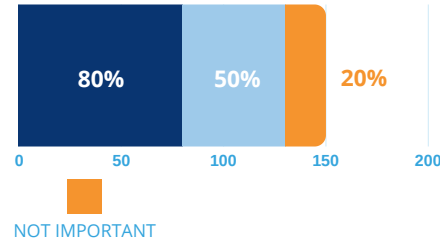
Support for early learning is not a Republican issue or a Democratic issue. In a 2022 GEEARS-commissioned poll of 600 likely Georgia voters, respondents made it clear— early childhood education is a priority for voters across the state.



**600**  
likely Georgia voters\*

Voters continue to place an emphasis on **improving access to child care.**

Making sure that working parents can find quality, affordable child care



**78%**  
agree that expanding access to high-quality child care gives parents the opportunity to participate in the workforce, which is good for Georgia's economy.

**55%**  
are more likely to vote for candidates who support early care & learning.

**65%**  
support state funding to help low-to-moderate income families afford child care.

## Support for Georgia's Pre-K has been Consistently High

Nearly nine in ten (88%) support GA's Lottery-funded, free and voluntary Pre-K

2010: 83%  
2014: 87%  
2018: 80%

**2022: 88%**

84% Republican  
93% Democrat

## VOTERS SUPPORT THE ECE WORKFORCE

**77%**  
total

67% Republican  
88% Democrat

support comparable salaries for early education professionals

**83%**  
total

74% Republican  
95% Democrat

support increasing salaries for child care and preschool teachers

\*Respondents were from across Georgia, and included a broad cross-section of likely voters. Responses were collected via landlines, cellphones, and text messages from Sept. 20-22, 2022. Selection was random and interviews were stratified by county, race/ethnicity, age and gender to correlate with current voter registration statistics and actual voter turnout from previous elections. The poll had an accuracy of +/- 4.0% at 95% confidence interval.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## TO THE SENATE STUDY COMMITTEE ON ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE CHILD CARE



Our current child care and early learning system simply does not meet the needs of Georgia families, early educators, and child care providers, many of which are small business owners, and this negatively impacts Georgia's long-term economic growth. Please find [a list of recommendations for the Study Committee's consideration below](#) and supporting context for each recommendation on the following pages.

We are happy to provide additional information and/or **connect you with subject matter experts to speak about a specific topic as requested.** On behalf of GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students, thank you for your leadership in supporting our youngest learners and their families.

1

Increase state funding for Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Program, which provides scholarships that help some working families with low incomes afford child care, to cover at least 65% of the families who are eligible and apply.

Create a capital fund or grant program for existing and new child care learning centers and family child care learning homes.

2

3

Implement a pilot program for 3-year-olds as a part of Georgia's Lottery-Funded Pre-K Program, prioritizing communities most in need.

Explore creative ways to support the early childhood education workforce, such as:  
a) Provide funding to add the child care workforce as a priority group for CAPS;  
b) Implement a refundable tax credit for early childhood educators; and  
c) Implement bonuses, stipends, or wage supplements.

4

5

Encourage businesses to support their employees in accessing child care through cost sharing and other innovative initiatives.

Enact a state Child Tax Credit to help families manage the high costs of raising young children.

6

## **Recommendation #1: Increase state funding for Georgia’s Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Program, which provides scholarships that help some working families with low incomes afford child care, to cover at least 65% of the families who are eligible and apply.**

Federal relief funding has helped to strengthen the CAPS Program—allowing more families to access this critical support and ensuring child care providers, most of whom are small business owners, can keep their doors open. But that funding ends September 2024, leaving a \$173 million gap for CAPS specifically.

It is estimated that only 14.8% of income-eligible children in Georgia receive a CAPS scholarship.<sup>1</sup> With families increasingly facing economic hardships, additional support in helping families access high-quality child care is desperately needed, and we strongly encourage Georgia to allocate new investments towards restoring access in the future.

Additional investment in CAPS could:

- Allow more families to access this essential scholarship, including those in the child care workforce (See Recommendation 4a for more information);
- Expand income eligibility for the very low income priority group, which is currently set at 10% of the federal poverty level (i.e., if a family of four were to qualify solely based on income, they would have to make an annual income of \$3,120 or less); and
- Ensure child care providers—largely small business owners—receive adequate reimbursement to provide high-quality early care and learning.



Many other states have recently made historic investments in their child care subsidy program. A few examples from this year:

- Virginia’s biennial budget included historic state general fund investments of \$170 million in FY 2025 and \$266.5 million in FY 2026 to support its subsidy program.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2024, Florida increased its reimbursement rates for the first time in two years, with an investment of \$46.4 million. Florida also included an additional \$23 million to establish its “School Readiness Plus Program,” which allows families earning up to 100% SMI to be eligible for subsidy (total investment: \$69.4 million).<sup>3</sup>
- In 2024, Kentucky budgeted close to an additional \$70 million per year to maintain changes to its subsidy program that were implemented in 2021 with federal relief funding. Those changes include reimbursing child care programs at the 80th percentile of the market rate survey.<sup>4</sup>
- Missouri’s FY 2025 budget included \$54.8 million to increase rates to the 100th percentile for infants and toddlers and to the 65th percentile for preschoolers and school-aged children.<sup>5</sup>

Additional, significant investment in CAPS is the best way to address our state’s child care challenges and support Georgia’s child care providers, working families, and young children.

## **Recommendation #2: Implement a capital fund or grant program for existing and new child care learning centers and family child care learning homes.**

It is critical to recognize that high-quality environments lead to better outcomes for young children and investments in early learning infrastructure support their development.<sup>6</sup> The Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF) conducted a statewide child care facilities assessment in 2023. The assessment used a mixed-methods approach with interviews and surveys from family child care, center-based providers, and nearly 1,000 parents, as well as community-level focus groups. Through this assessment, providers specifically noted that they wanted to update or expand facilities to meet the needs of children and families, including upgraded kitchens, HVAC systems, and more nature-based outdoor spaces that also responded to weather and climate events. However, providers noted they lacked funding to do so and that state funds would make a significant difference.<sup>7</sup>

States have explored different mechanisms to address this issue. For example:

- The Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF), Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), Kansas Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM), Kansas Children’s Cabinet, and Child Care Aware of Kansas, and the Department of Commerce collaborated to create the Non-Profit Childcare and Education Facilities Grant Program funded by the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. Grants are made to cities or counties and applicants must meet a 25% match requirement. Communities can receive up to \$650,000 (pop <5,000) and \$750,000 (pop > 5,000).<sup>8</sup>
- The Massachusetts Early Education and Care and Out of School Time Capital Fund provides grants of up to \$1 million to improve child care facilities that support low-income families. There are four different types of grants based on the type, size, and whether the provider is nonprofit or for-profit. Authorized in 2013 by the Massachusetts legislature, the Capital grant program has awarded over \$51.4 million in state funding to help fund over 100 projects.<sup>9</sup>
- In a 2021 special election, Rhode Island residents overwhelmingly voted in support of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Capital Fund. The approved funding provides over \$15 million in grant funding over three years for physical improvements to existing child care spaces and the development of new licensed child care facilities.<sup>10</sup>

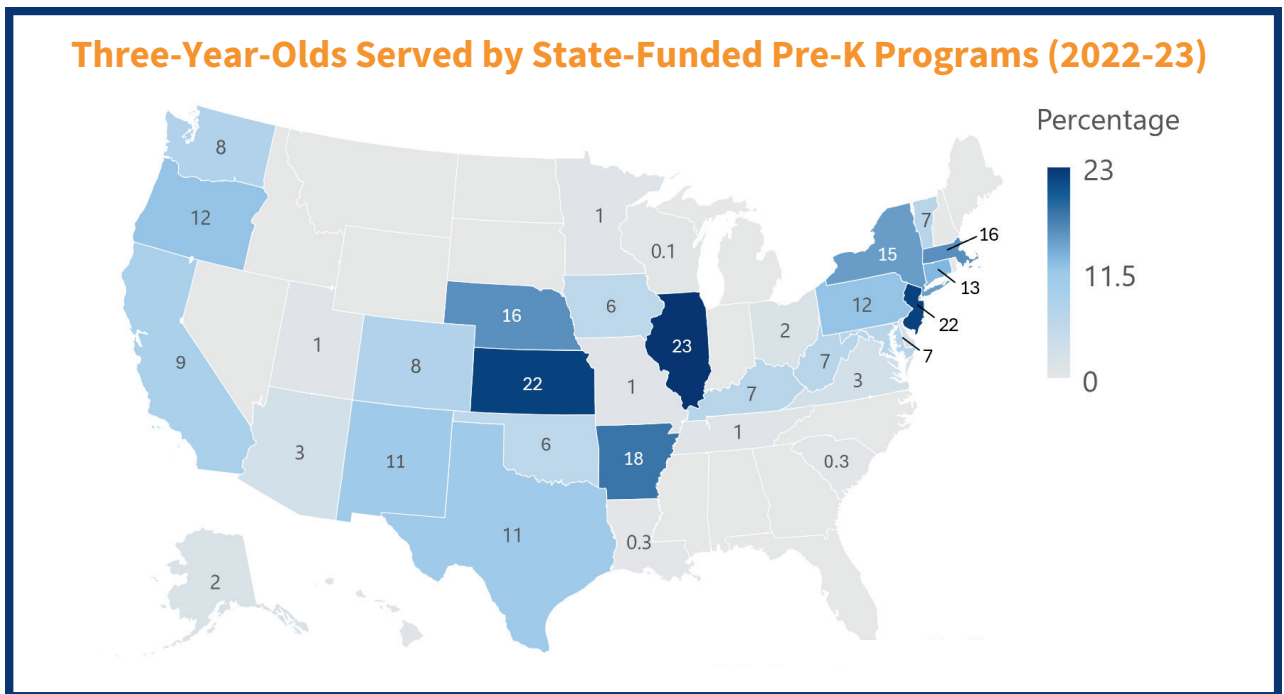
We encourage the Georgia General Assembly to establish a capital fund or grant program to support current and new licensed child care learning centers and family child care learning homes in accessing funding for much-needed improvements to their facilities and/or increasing access to serve more children in underserved areas.





**Recommendation #3: Implement a pilot program for 3-year-olds as a part of Georgia’s Lottery-Funded Pre-K Program, prioritizing communities most in need (e.g., areas with low third grade reading proficiency).**

Georgia serves approximately 55% of four-year-olds through our Lottery-Funded Pre-K Program.<sup>11</sup> Many states, including Kansas, Arkansas, and Nebraska, serve a significant number of three-year-olds through their state-funded prekindergarten program (often called 3K).<sup>12</sup> Research shows two years of high-quality preschool can have much larger impacts in setting children up for success in Kindergarten and beyond.<sup>13</sup>



The Georgia Lottery continues to do well, transmitting \$1.5 billion to the Lottery for Education Account in FY23.<sup>14</sup> Georgia is required by law to have 50% of the prior year's net lottery proceeds saved in case of a shortfall, yet it puts far more than that into reserves. Usable, unrestricted reserves have surged over the last decade. In FY23, \$2.2 billion was in the Lottery reserves, of which around \$1.4 billion sat in an “unrestricted” reserve account. While many of our state’s 127,000 three-year-olds<sup>15</sup> are missing out on high-quality early childhood education that set them up for success and impact their parent’s ability to participate in the workforce, these Lottery reserves remain untouched.



## **Recommendation #4: Explore creative ways to support the early childhood education workforce.**

There has long been a struggle to recruit and retain early childhood educators, but it has reached a crisis level. While comprehensive and sustained investment in early educator compensation is needed to support this critical workforce, the state should explore creative ways to bolster educators' economic security, such as:

### **a) Provide funding to add the child care workforce as a priority group for CAPS.**

The early education workforce has a disproportionate number of workers who are themselves parents and caregivers of young children, with 23.4% of child care workers nationally having a child under the age of five.<sup>16</sup> In Georgia, a typical lead child care teacher would spend 29% of their earnings to put one child in infant care.<sup>17</sup>

Over the last two years, some states have taken steps to recruit and retain child care staff by allowing child care providers to qualify for child care assistance for their own children through their state's subsidy program. In some of these states, providers are eligible for subsidies regardless of income, while in other states, this policy is limited to child care staff under an income threshold.

In 2022, Kentucky became the first state to allow staff working at least 20 hours in a child care program to qualify for subsidy, regardless of income. After one year of implementation, 3,200 early childhood employees and 5,600 children of early childhood employees in Kentucky benefited from child care assistance under this policy. In 2024, Kentucky's biennial budget included \$16 million per year in a combination of state and federal funding to continue the program for two more years.

An additional 11 states have implemented a similar policy to Kentucky's program since 2022 to ensure child care providers can afford care for their own children, including Montana, North Dakota, Arkansas, and Indiana.<sup>18</sup>

In the fall of 2023, the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) announced a pilot program that provides tuition assistance for the children of early childhood educators at 60 child care providers using federal relief funding.<sup>19</sup> This represents a first step towards promoting early childhood educators' economic security.

To ensure all of Georgia's early childhood educators can access child care for their own children, GEEARS urges the Georgia General Assembly and DECAL to add the early childhood education workforce as a priority group for CAPS. As previously mentioned, only approximately 15% of income-eligible children are being served by CAPS and DECAL is currently reducing the number of children served from 72,000 to 50,000 due to the end of federal relief funding. To ensure successful implementation of the new priority group, we urge the Georgia General Assembly to allocate additional funding for CAPS specifically for this purpose. Quite simply, professionals who work hard to provide quality care for others' children should not have to worry about accessing quality care for their own children.



## b) Implement a refundable tax credit for early childhood educators.

Georgia should implement a refundable tax credit for early childhood educators and staff to support their economic security by offsetting their tax liability resulting in a tax refund or lower taxes owed. It is important that the tax credit is refundable to ensure that educators who do not make enough to owe state income taxes can receive the credit. Additionally, we urge that as many types of child care workers as possible are covered by the credit, including family child learning homes.

For example, implemented in 2008, the Louisiana School Readiness Tax Credits is a unique package of five separate tax credits meant to incentivize quality care through Louisiana's version of Quality Rated. One of the tax credits is a fully refundable tax credit for child care staff and directors where the amount is dependent on the credentials and experience held by the employee. The amount ranged from \$2,046 - \$4,090 in 2023 and is adjusted annually for inflation.<sup>20</sup> *In Georgia, the Early Childhood Education Subcommittee of former Governor Nathan Deal's Education Reform Commission recommended implementing a similar tax credit in 2015.*<sup>21</sup> Originally enacted in 2016 and reauthorized in 2023, the Nebraska School Readiness Tax Credit is a refundable tax credit between \$2,300 and \$3,500 based on education and experience to eligible, individual child care staff members or self-employed child care providers.<sup>22</sup>

## c) Implement bonuses, stipends, or wage supplements.

**Stipends:** Stipends include programs that offer cash awards annually or every six months to teachers, typically according to educational level. For example, the DECAL Scholars program offers educational counseling, as well as financial assistance and rewards, to early childhood educators. One component of DECAL Scholars is *Incentives*, which provides annual payments to professionals who've earned an ECE credential within the last five years and have been employed at the same provider for over a year. In 2024, educators can apply to receive \$1,500 annually for the first three years with the same employer and \$2,500 after four years. In 2025, educators can apply to receive an annual payment (with a degree or credential earned in the past 5 years in an early childhood education program of study) in the amount of \$1,000.<sup>23</sup> DECAL Scholars is funded through the federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF). Over the last couple of years, federal relief funding helped to strengthen the program (e.g., amount of incentive). In an evaluation of the DECAL Scholars Program, 67% of respondents said that "receiving Scholars support influenced my decision to stay in the child care workforce."<sup>24</sup>

**Bonuses:** Bonuses are typically a small cash award that is usually provided as a one-off recognition of an event (e.g., POWER supplemental payments). For example, Governor Brian Kemp announced \$1,000 bonuses for K-12 teachers at the end of 2023, as well as those teaching in Georgia's Lottery-Funded Pre-K Program.<sup>25</sup> However, as teachers in non-Pre-K classrooms, the majority of Georgia's early childhood educators were not eligible for these bonuses. In 2022, Maryland allocated \$16 million to distribute one-time bonuses to child care providers. The bonuses are available on a first-come basis. \$10 million will be used for \$1,000 bonuses for existing employees, \$4 million for new hires, and \$2 million for providing \$500 to child care providers to support the costs of hiring new employees.<sup>26</sup>

**Wage Supplements:** Wage supplements are additional payments made to an employee outside of their regular wages. For example, the New Mexico Infant Toddler Pay Parity Program is designed to provide infant and toddler teachers with pay parity comparable to teachers working in a public-school setting. The Pay Parity Program will pay the difference between a set amount based on the teacher's education and experience and their yearly salary divided into monthly payments.<sup>27</sup> This program is currently operating as a pilot program for the next three years with funding from the legislature.<sup>28</sup>

## **Recommendation #5: Encourage businesses to support their employees in accessing child care through cost sharing and other innovative initiatives.**

The “tri-share” financing model is a private-public cost sharing approach that splits the cost of an employee’s child care equally among an employer, the employee, and the state. Michigan was the first state to launch a tri-share program in 2021. Employers report it has helped them retain and attract employees, and it has clearly reduced out-of-pocket child care costs for families juggling multiple expenses on tight budgets.<sup>29</sup>

Since then, public-private cost sharing programs have gained popularity across states.

- In 2022, Kentucky passed legislation that removes the pilot program designation and permanently establishes Kentucky’s Employee Child Care Assistance (ECCAP), which splits the cost of child care between an employee, employer, and the state’s Cabinet for Health and Family Services.<sup>30</sup>
- In 2024, Connecticut passed legislation that establishes a tri-share pilot program in New London County and eligibility criteria for participation in the pilot program. This pilot will run for at least two years, and the state must report on the program metrics after the first year.<sup>31</sup>

In 2024, 10 additional states are exploring proposals to implement some form of cost-sharing models.<sup>32</sup>

Georgia could also explore how to maximize the impact of existing employer tax credits for operating or contracting out child care services for employees. These tax credits are designed to help employers provide child care options to their employees by allowing businesses to claim expenses related to child care operations and reduce corporate tax liability. Two such credits are currently available in Georgia: one provides a credit for purchasing child care property (100% at 10% a year for 10 years); the other supports employers who provide or sponsor child care for employees by providing a credit of up to 75% of the employers’ direct costs.<sup>33</sup>

To-date, relatively few Georgia employers have taken advantage of these tax credits, despite growing interest in child care supports as a recruitment and retention strategy. There may be several reasons employers do not, including difficulties projecting child care needs, challenges navigating regulatory and legal issues related to child care operations, concerns about start-up costs (especially for smaller employers), and lack of awareness of the credits. Georgia should revisit these tax credits and consider how to improve awareness and accessibility. For example, small- and medium-size businesses may wish to apply jointly or pool resources in order to offer child care to their employees collectively.

## **Recommendation #6: Enact a state Child Tax Credit to help families manage the high costs of raising young children.**

Increasingly, state policymakers have looked to child tax credits (CTCs) as a tool to help offset the costs associated with raising young children, including child care expenses. CTCs help families manage costs while providing flexibility in how they access care. A number of states, including Oklahoma and Colorado, recently enacted CTCs.<sup>34</sup>

# Helpful Early Childhood Terminology

**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs):** potentially stressful or traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years) and are strongly related to the development and prevalence of a wide range of health problems throughout the lifespan. Examples of ACEs include experiencing abuse or neglect, witnessing violence in the home or community, and growing up in a household with substance use and mental health challenges.

**CAPS (Childcare and Parent Services):** Georgia's child care subsidy program utilized by parents/ caregivers of children <13 years of age; funded mostly through Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG).

**CDA:** Child Development Associate credential

## **Child Care Providers (types):**

- Child Care Learning Center: program in a center where children are often grouped by age
- Family Child Care Learning Home: program in a provider's home for at least 3 and up to 6 children of varying ages
- Family Friend and Neighbor Care: informal, unlicensed care; also known as "kin & kith" care
- Exempt Programs: exempt from licensing requirements (e.g., ½ day, PMO, DoD, etc.)
- CCR&R: Child Care Resource and Referral; local and statewide services including: (1) guidance and referrals for parents seeking child care; (2) the collection of information about the local supply of child care; and, (3) provider training and support

**The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)** is a federal block grant that goes directly to all states, territories and tribes to help low-income parents afford child care while they are working or attending school. CCDBG is often used interchangeably with the **Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)**, which authorized CCDBG.

**DECAL:** Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning; also known as *Bright from the Start*

**DFCS:** Georgia Division of Family and Children Services

**DLL or ELL:** Dual Language Learner or English Language Learner

**Early Head Start:** established under the 1994 Head Start Reauthorization Act to serve low-income pregnant women and families with infants and toddlers; programs offer the following core services: (1) high-quality early education in and out of the home; (2) family support services, home visits, and parent education; (3) comprehensive health and mental health services, including services for pregnant and post-partum women; (4) nutrition; (5) child care, and (6) ongoing support for parents through case management and peer support. Programs have a broad range of flexibility in how they provide their services.

**Early Intervention:** A range of services designed to enhance the development of children with disabilities or at risk of developmental delay. Early intervention services under public supervision generally must be given by qualified personnel and require the development of an individualized family service plan. In Georgia, our early intervention program is called Babies Can't Wait.



# Helpful Early Childhood Terminology

**ERS: Environment Rating Scales;** assessment instruments (e.g., ECERS, ITERS) used to evaluate early childhood program quality, often in Quality Rating and Improvement Systems

**GaDOE:** Georgia Department of Education

**GELDS:** Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards for children birth through age five.

**Georgia's Pre-K:** Georgia's Lottery-funded, "universal" (i.e., not need-based) pre-kindergarten program for 4-year-olds; Georgia utilizes a mixed-delivery system, with classrooms in both private child care centers and public schools.

**Head Start:** A federal program that provides comprehensive services (including early learning) for low-income children ages 3-5 and their families. Head Start began in 1965 and is administered by the Administration for Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Grants are awarded to local public or private non-profit agencies ("grantees").



**IDEA:** Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is a federal program that provides grants to states and jurisdictions to support the planning of service systems and the delivery of services, including evaluation and assessment, for young children who have or are at risk of developmental delays/disabilities. Parts B and C address infants/toddlers and preschoolers, respectively.

**IECMH or Social-Emotional Health:** Infant and early childhood mental health (often used synonymously with social-emotional health) describes a child's ability to communicate needs, get along with others and make friends, recognize and express feelings, and self soothe when upset. Healthy social-emotional development gives children the ability to form satisfying relationships with others, play, communicate, learn, and face adversity. These skills are essential to children's success throughout life.

**NAEYC:** National Association for the Education of Young Children; has issued accreditation for early childhood education programs since 1985.

**Quality Rated:** Georgia's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS); a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education programs in the state. Similar to rating systems for other service-related industries, Quality Rated assigns a rating (one, two, or three stars) to programs that go above and beyond licensing requirements to meet a set of defined program standards.

**Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF):** a federally funded program that helps low-income families with children achieve economic self-sufficiency. The program provides monthly cash assistance payments and a range of services.

**Two-Generation Approach:** Two-generation approaches address the needs of children and their parents/caregivers through education, economic supports, social capital, and/or health and well-being. Two-generation approaches have a multiplier effect that leads to the educational success and economic stability of the whole family.

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