

## A Progress Report on How Georgia Supports Its Youngest Children & Their Families

The Early Childhood Checkup provides a snapshot of how well our state is meeting the needs of our youngest children—ages birth through five—and their families. The Checkup includes key indicators across three general categories: Early Learning, Health, and Family Supports, reflecting the wide variety of factors that contribute to child and family well-being.

GEEARS will release the Early Childhood Checkup annually to help policymakers, community leaders, and others measure progress, considering both year-over-year changes and general five-year trends.<sup>16</sup>

This inaugural Early Childhood Checkup (2023) shows that while Georgia has a long way to go in its efforts to meet the needs of its young children and families, we have seen improvement, most notably in access to Quality Rated child care and WIC.



### Why Early Childhood?

The most active and critical brain development happens in the first years of a child's life—at a rate of one million new neural connections every second. That makes these early years a critical and irreplaceable opportunity to set a child up for success. If a young child experiences, for instance, nurturing relationships, high-quality education, and healthy nutrition during this time, their neural connections will grow stronger, creating a strong foundation upon which future success is built.

Young children grow up in the context of their families, communities, and broader systems of supports, so we have taken a comprehensive approach to the Checkup, considering indicators related to program access, as well as health and educational outcomes.

### A Guide to the Indicators

The **Early Learning** category includes indicators related to child care, Pre-K, and literacy outcomes, such as the percentage of four-year-olds enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K and 3rd-grade reading assessment results. High-quality early care and learning supports Georgia's youngest learners by increasing school readiness, improving health and well-being, and supporting working families.

The **Health** category includes indicators related to health outcomes as well as access to health care and programs that support the healthy development of young children, such as rates of health insurance coverage and pervasiveness of food insecurity. The physical and mental health of young children and their families set the foundation for future well-being.

The **Family Supports** category includes indicators related to economic security and child welfare, such as the percentage of young children living in poverty and in cost-burdened households, as well as access to programs that support families' needs, like home visiting. Ensuring families with young children have access to the resources and basic necessities they need is critical to early brain development and overall well-being. Furthermore, programs like home visiting support healthy pregnancies, births, and children's first few years of life—lowering the risk of adverse experiences, like maltreatment.

### Looking for more information?

The Early Childhood Checkup is meant to be a high-level summary of the state of Georgia's young children and families. Such a broad view is useful to assess how the state, in general, is performing year-to-year.

We do have a deeper data dive available for those who seek it—our Readiness Radar tool. Please go there to access a wealth of additional information, including data for various geographies (e.g., county, Census tract, etc.) and data disaggregated by race and ethnicity.






#### Sources:

1. Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, 2019-2023.
2. Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (numerator); Census Bureau (denominator), 2017-2021.
3. Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017-2022.
4. Office of Head Start (numerator); American Community Survey Public Use Microdata (denominator), 2016-2021.
5. Administration for Children & Families (numerator); American Community Survey Public Use Microdata (denominator), 2016-2021.
6. Georgia Department of Health, Office of Health Indicators for Planning, 2017-2021.
7. American Community Survey, 2016-2021.
8. National Immunization Survey, Birth Years 2011-2019.
9. KidsCount, 2016-2021.
10. KidsCount (numerator); American Community Survey Public Use Microdata (denominator), 2017-2021.
11. American Community Survey, 2016-2021.
12. National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (numerator); Census Bureau (denominator), 2017-2021.
13. Georgia's Cross Agency Child Data System (numerator); Census Bureau (denominator), 2017-2021.
14. American Community Survey, 2016-2021.
15. KidsCount, 2016-2021.
16. To assess each indicator, we relied upon a wide variety of sources that often have variable update schedules. For each indicator, we have used the most recent year available.






## A Progress Report on How Georgia Supports Its Youngest Children & Their Families

 Improving 
  Flat 
  Worsening





### Early Learning

	Value	Change from previous year	5-Year Trend
<b>% Licensed early learning providers that are Quality Rated<sup>1</sup></b> <i>Quality Rated is Georgia's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for child care.</i>	65.7%	+1.5	
<b>% Children age 4 enrolled in Georgia Pre-K<sup>2</sup></b> <i>All 4-year-olds in the state are eligible to attend Georgia's Lottery-Funded Pre-K.</i>	54.3%	+7.5	
<b>% 3rd graders proficient or higher, ELA Milestones<sup>3</sup></b> <i>The GA Milestones Assessment System ELA is the state's end-of-grade English-Language Arts assessment.</i>	36.5%	+3	
<b>% Children ages 0-2 living below poverty enrolled in Early Head Start<sup>4</sup></b> <i>Early Head Start is a federal program for infants, toddlers, and pregnant women with low incomes.</i>	5.2%	-5	
<b>% Income-eligible children ages 0-12 receiving CAPS (per Federal guidelines)<sup>5</sup></b> <i>CAPS is Georgia's child care subsidy program for working families with low incomes.</i>	6.2%	+2	

### Health & Well-being

	Value	Change from previous year	5-Year Trend
<b>% Low birthweight births<sup>6</sup></b> <i>Children born with a low birthweight (&lt; 5 lbs, 8 oz) are at risk for adverse outcomes.</i>	10.6%	+7	
<b>% Children ages 0-5 without health insurance<sup>7</sup></b> <i>Children need access to reliable, consistent mental and physical health care, whether through private insurance, PeachCare for Kids, or Medicaid.</i>	5.5%	-3	
<b>% Children who received recommended 7-vaccine series by 35 months<sup>8</sup></b> <i>This series helps prevent infectious diseases during early childhood. On-time completion serves as a proxy for regular, up-to-date well-child visits.</i>	64.6%	-5.7	
<b>% Children living in households that were food insecure at some point during the year<sup>9</sup></b> <i>Households were considered food insecure if there was an uncertainty of having, or an inability to acquire, enough food for all household members.</i>	15%	+1	
<b>% Eligible children ages 0-4 receiving WIC<sup>10</sup></b> <i>The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Toddlers (WIC) provides food, resources, and health care referrals to pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women with low incomes and children up to age 5.</i>	83.4%	+11.4	

### Family Supports

	Value	Change from previous year	5-Year Trend
<b>% Children ages 0-5 living below poverty<sup>11</sup></b> <i>For a family of 4, the 2022 Federal Poverty Level (FPL) was \$27,750.</i>	22.3%	+2.3	
<b>Maltreatment cases per 1,000 children ages 0-4<sup>12</sup></b> <i>Maltreatment includes substantiated cases of abuse and neglect.</i>	6.3	+7	
<b>Children ages 0-2 served by Georgia Home Visiting, per 1,000<sup>13</sup></b> <i>Evidence-Based Home Visiting (EBHV) programs are an effective early-intervention strategy to improve the health and well-being of children and families.</i>	2.8	-1.5	
<b>% Children ages 0-5 with no parent in the labor force<sup>14</sup></b> <i>Lower rates of workforce participation can indicate family economic insecurity. Families' financial well-being provides a strong foundation for healthy child development.</i>	11.4%	+4.2	
<b>% Children in households with a high housing cost burden<sup>15</sup></b> <i>Households are considered cost burdened when they spend more than 30% of their income on rent, mortgage, and other housing needs.</i>	29%	+1	