2025
2026

GEEARS

GEORGIA EARLY EDUCATION ALLIANCE FOR READY STUDENTS

MEETING THE MOMENT

ANNUAL REPORT





WHO WE ARE

Since 2010, GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students has led a statewide movement for quality early learning and healthy development for all children, ages birth through five. Through advocacy, research, partnerships, and community engagement, GEEARS rallies business, civic, and government leaders to maximize the economic return on the state's investments in policies and programs that support young children and families.

MISSION

To ensure that all Georgia's children, birth to age five, thrive by championing research-backed policies and investments, fostering collaboration, and leading a statewide movement to advance public will.

VISION

Every child has a strong early foundation to reach their full potential.

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A LETTER FROM GEEARS' NEW CEO

To the GEEARS community,

I began working in public policy in Georgia in 2009, just one year before GEEARS was founded. While I can't find pictures to corroborate my memories, I remember attending GEEARS' very first Early Education Summit in 2010. When I moved from state government to national early childhood advocacy nearly a decade later, GEEARS remained a key partner, best practice example, and ally for its consistent advancement of the importance of the first five years of life. For more than 16 years as an organization and an alliance, GEEARS has consistently grown and thrived, earning longstanding respect on the state and national levels and influencing critical early childhood policies.

To say that it is humbling to now be at the helm of GEEARS is an understatement.

In reflecting on the content of this annual report, I'm reminded of one of our founding Executive Director Mindy Binderman's favorite sayings, a classic improv prompt that I learned when I was living in Chicago: *Yes, and. . .*

To me, *Yes, and. . .* means, *Let's embrace the existing and expand upon it. Let's build. Let's add more dimension. Let's honor the past while also adjusting to the new demands of this moment.*

That's what I've enthusiastically begun to do as CEO of GEEARS, alongside an incredibly strong, skilled team, a committed board of directors, and a bold strategic plan that charts our next four years. Together, we are. . .

- **Deepening our advocacy to advance the early learning and comprehensive well-being of young children and their families**, with a stronger focus on coalition-building, community engagement, and ensuring that investments in our youngest Georgians remain a priority across administrations and political parties.
- **Growing our statewide presence to impact more children and families** by strengthening our efforts to engage the private sector and community-level leaders in every part of our state. Perhaps most importantly, we'll lift the voices of people all around Georgia who have been most directly impacted by our early childhood systems.
- **Refining our community model for fostering public-private collective impact partnerships** that improve systems for families and young children. We'll build on our work in Atlanta to drive improved outcomes for children in other communities across the state.
- **Strengthening our organizational operations**, not just for the year at hand, but for years to come. This will ensure GEEARS' long-term strength as a leading, whole-child advocacy and research organization through brand building, strategic communications, sustainable revenue, strong governance, and regular assessment of our own efficacy and impact.

All of you reading this annual report, of course, are the ultimate *Yes, and. . .* You power our alliance with your partnership, which comes in the form of funding, expertise, introductions, storytelling, advocacy, and on

and on. It would be impossible to list all the ways that you express your commitment to GEEARS' mission; to every one of Georgia's youngest children.

I came to GEEARS to continue its powerful legacy of advocacy for Georgia's youngest children, their families, and the professionals who educate and care for them. As you'll see in this report, GEEARS strengthened its legacy this year by meeting this unique moment with enduring, respect-driven relationships, an impeccable research ethic, and meaningful advocacy that drove real impact for children.

I've already begun to build upon the ideas, projects, and professional roles we will use as we work to fulfill our mission. In other words, I'm meeting this moment right alongside this community.

Thank you for matching this energy with your support, your contributions, and your commitment to our mission. Together, we can achieve our vision of a Georgia where every child has a strong early foundation to reach their full potential.

Yours,

Kristin Bernhard



GEEARS MET THE MOMENT WITH...

ADVOCACY

ALL IN FOR GEORGIA'S YOUNGEST KIDS—AN APPROACH FOR EVERY SEASON

With lightning-fast federal policy changes rippling through our state's early childhood ecosystem, GEEARS needed to alert our community about urgent issues, such as the threat to critical programs like Medicaid, SNAP, Head Start, and WIC.

But just as important as urging our allies to contact their lawmakers was the need to avoid overwhelming them with a barrage of action items. Our answer was *All in for Georgia's Youngest Kids*, a weekly communication that met our readers where they were and provided talking points for their emails and calls.

Mid-year, we added a bit of sunshine to our messaging by instituting the *Summer Days of Action*, where we educated advocates about the importance of Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).



WE SHARED

18

ACTION ALERTS

OUR ADVOCATES SENT

799

MESSAGES TO LEGISLATORS



A COLLABORATIVE RESCUE MISSION FOR HEAD START

Last fall, about 6,500 Georgia children were faced with losing their Head Start slots due to the federal government shutdown. Within hours, GEEARS teamed up with our partners, the influential child care providers and advocates Easterseals North Georgia, Sheltering Arms, and the YMCA of Metro Atlanta. Together, we mobilized an urgent campaign to inform legislators and private funders why Head Start is so critical to Georgia's families and economy. Thanks to the support of the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta and a dozen local foundations and philanthropists, we secured an impossibly fast $8 million bridge loan that allowed Head Start programs in the Metro Atlanta and Augusta areas to keep their doors open.



GEEARS SPOKE OUT ABOUT EARLY CHILDHOOD VACCINATION RATES AND FOOD INSECURITY

Two trends leapt out of the 2025 Early Childhood Checkup, GEEARS' annual assessment of Georgia's support for its youngest children: Only **62% of Georgia children received their recommended seven-vaccine series by age 35 months**, down a whopping 8.3% from the last recorded measurement. And the number of **children living in households that were food insecure at some point during the year increased to 22%.**

GEEARS responded in *The Saporta Report* with a call to action for lawmakers:

1. We urged them to protect timely, affordable access to early childhood vaccines and safeguard accurate, evidence-based information about them.
2. We advocated that the legislature allocate an additional $50 million in state funding for SNAP administrative operations to mitigate new federal funding restrictions and fend off disruptions that could leave Georgia children hungry.

EARLY LITERACY MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

In 2025, only 35% of third graders demonstrated proficiency on the English Language Arts (ELA) portion of the Georgia Milestones assessment.

But here's what GEEARS knows: The years *leading up to* third grade critically shape children's literacy once they're *in* third grade. In other words, an educational strategy that doesn't include a robust investment in the early childhood years is inadequate for Georgia's needs.





So, in an August 2025 statement, GEEARS made these recommendations:

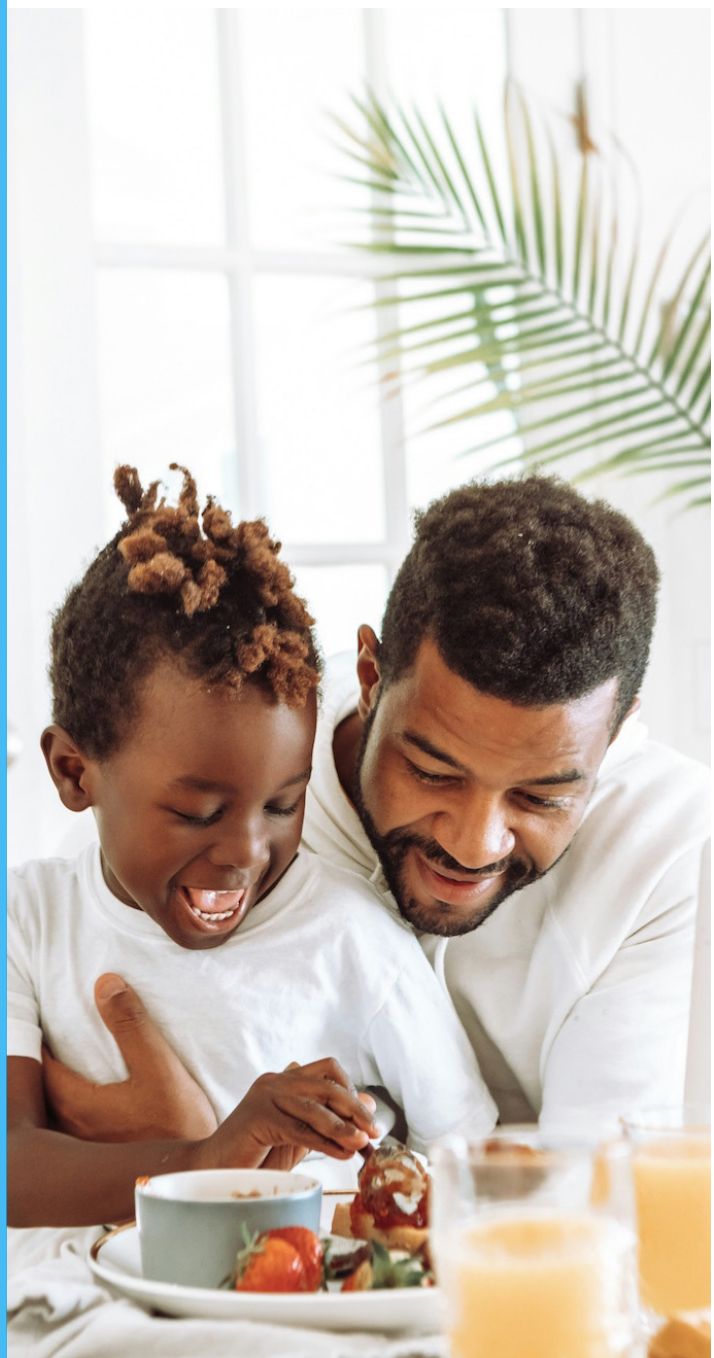
- Continue the state's critical investment in Georgia's nationally recognized pre-K program.
- Make a sustained and significant investment in Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS), a child care scholarship that helps eligible working families afford high-quality care.
- Continue to align our early education and K-3 systems, enabling elementary educators to build upon children's earliest experiences and increase quality across grade levels, learning settings, and curriculum and policy development.

The passage of HB 1193 in the 2026 legislative session addressed early literacy with provisions that allow five-year-olds to enroll in Georgia's Pre-K program instead of Kindergarten, requires all school systems to offer full-day Kindergarten, and requires school systems to collaborate with early learning providers to support school readiness and early language development.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY IS BUSINESS-FRIENDLY

The Best Place for Working Parents®-Georgia, a collaboration between GEEARS and the Georgia Chamber of Commerce Foundation, had a fruitful first year, inspiring dozens of businesses and organizations from around the state to earn designations as family-friendly workplaces. It's part of GEEARS' broader strategy to ensure that Georgia is not only the best state to do business but also to raise a family.





To celebrate this program and inspire other business leaders to champion "family-friendly," GEEARS co-produced a leadership forum, *How to Attract and Retain Top Talent through Family-Friendly Policies and HR Best Practices.* The May 6th luncheon was filled with compelling data, helpful tips and an "Innovator Award" for the Alliance Theatre's Artist Childcare program, which ensures that artists' infants and children are cared for, at no cost, in a creative, nurturing environment during rehearsals, performances, and other odd working hours.

Whether they were speaking to the group or just exchanging their own stories over lunch, everyone in the forum agreed that investing in family-friendly policies (and advertising that value by participating in *Best Place for Working Parents®-Georgia*) yields a spectacular ROI, financially, societally, and in a company's hiring and retention rates.

118 EMPLOYERS

HAVE EARNED THE BEST PLACE FOR WORKING PARENTS®-GEORGIA DESIGNATION!

GEORGIA
THE BEST PLACE FOR WORKING PARENTS®

GEEARS SPENT GEORGIA'S 2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION ADVOCATING, TESTIFYING, AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

In the most recent legislative session, GEEARS' year-round advocacy for Georgia's youngest children yielded progress in several key areas, including early care and learning, paid parental leave, and home visiting. The legislature's ongoing focus on early literacy and the introduction of the Families First Legislative Initiative by House leadership were testament to our elected officials' growing awareness of the importance of early childhood. And so was the Fiscal Year 2027 budget, which included more than $90 million in investment in young children and their families across Pre-K, home visiting, and early literacy initiatives.



MORE THAN

$90 MILLION

IN INVESTMENT IN YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES ACROSS PRE-K, HOME VISITING, AND EARLY LITERACY INITIATIVES.



Beyond the budget, we saw changes that will make a significant difference for Georgia's children, families, and those who serve them, including:

- *Approximately 1,300 more children receiving Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) scholarships*
- *115 counties—2/3 of all the counties in the state—now have access to Georgia's DPH Home Visiting Program, which will improve the health and well-being of mothers and babies in these counties*
- *Approximately 200,000 state employees, including K-12 teachers, now have access to extended paid parental leave (nine weeks for birth mothers and six weeks for other parents)*
- *Literacy coaches are in every K-3 school in the state—that's more than 1,300 schools and 350,000 students—to help build on the foundational skills developed during the birth-five years*

OUR NINTH ANNUAL STROLLING THUNDER WAS OUR BIGGEST FAMILY ADVOCACY DAY YET

Very early on a very cold January 29th, more than 150 attendees from 37 cities across Georgia turned out to shepherd their little ones around the Capitol and urge their lawmakers to support programs and policies they need to thrive.

Thanks to the stamina of a record-breaking 50+ volunteers and 14 partners, as well as GEEARS staffers, a great many legislators answered our advocates' summons to "the ropes" for quick moments of facetime and brief-but-potent discussions about issues like the underfunding of Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program. Representative Katie Dempsey and Chairman Billy Hickman both read resolutions in their chambers, declaring January 29th, 2026, Strolling Thunder Day. And several legislators joined us for lunch at our home base at the Georgia Freight Depot.

Our participants approached the long day with smiles on their faces and squirmy babies on their hips. After all, in the virtual trainings that had prepared them for the day, they'd committed to model advocacy to their children: *If you want to help your community, you must speak up, they said. If you want to make a change, you have to act.*

RECORD-BREAKING STROLLING THUNDER

MORE THAN

150 ATTENDEES

FROM

37 CITIES

50+
VOLUNTEERS

14
PARTNERS





GEEARS MET THE MOMENT BY...

INCREASING OUR STATEWIDE PRESENCE

THE GEORGIA INFANT-TODDLER COALITION—A DYNAMIC BACKBONE FOR THE GEEARS ALLIANCE

The Georgia Infant-Toddler Coalition continues to grow in both size and impact. In the past five years, organizational membership has nearly doubled and now includes more than 70 organizations statewide. Coalition partners span the early childhood ecosystem, including child care providers, health organizations, advocacy groups, business leaders, higher education institutions, and state and local agencies. They all work together to elevate the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families through coordinated advocacy, public education, and systems-building efforts. With support from ZERO TO THREE, the Coalition expanded its work in 2026 by launching a third policy committee focused on Housing Security, joining its existing Child Care Affordability and Early Intervention and Family Well-being committees.

GEEARS has continued to convene the **Early Childhood Switchboard**, a bi-weekly forum launched in February 2025 to monitor emerging federal developments, identify opportunities for action, and coordinate advocacy strategies in real time. During a period of significant uncertainty, the Coalition's nimble structure and sustained advocacy helped defend critical early childhood investments, including Head Start and the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), which ultimately received modest funding increases. This collective work also contributed to increased engagement from Georgia's congressional delegation, with a record eight members signing onto March 2026 *Dear Colleague* letters supporting early childhood programs and services.

GEEARS is proud to be the organizer of this incredibly proactive community.



A NEW INITIATIVE—THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CHANGEMAKERS

The fall 2025 launch of GEEARS' Early Childhood Changemakers (EC^2) initiative was a dream realized. GEEARS has partners all over the state—in rural areas, small towns, and on Georgia's coast—and we wanted to fuel our research and advocacy with more of their diverse experiences, voices, and perspectives.

Our first cohort is 20 leaders from Richmond, Muscogee, Clarke, Bulloch, and Bryan Counties, who've been building, training, and leading powerful advocate networks in their own communities and connecting with each other at events like our Macon-based statewide summit in December and at Strolling Thunder in January.

The Changemakers are aptly named. After completing their training in April, they've jumped into action, engaging with families to understand their needs, sharing advocacy resources, and elevating their voices. Meanwhile, Cohort #2 has begun prepping to make change in Rome, Athens, Dublin, and Gainesville.



CHILD CARE IS INFRASTRUCTURE—ADVOCATING FOR CAPITAL FUNDING FOR PROVIDERS

The success of the Atlanta-based PAACT Repair & Renovation Grant program demonstrated what targeted capital investments can mean for child care providers—and inspired GEEARS and the Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF) to pursue a statewide solution. Together, we envisioned a Georgia where child care providers have access to the resources needed to build, renovate, and modernize their facilities, allowing them to serve

more families, improve quality, and strengthen their workforce. To start this ball rolling, GEEARS and LIIF received a $200,000 grant from Voices for Healthy Kids to launch a statewide advocacy campaign focused on establishing a child care facilities fund program. Working alongside the Georgia Infant-Toddler Coalition, we developed Senate Bill 554, legislation to establish the Georgia Child Care Facilities program. Senator Chuck Payne, Vice Chair of the Senate Committee on Education and Youth, served as the bill's lead sponsor and introduced the legislation during the 2026 legislative session.

To demonstrate why the legislation matters, GEEARS developed the *Build Up Georgia* Campaign, creating seven photo-rich profiles highlighting the facility challenges and aspirations of child care providers across Georgia and a social media toolkit. When SB 554 received a hearing before the Senate Committee on Education and Youth, GEEARS brought



three rural child care providers to the Capitol to testify alongside coalition partners. Their testimony underscored the connection between safe, high-quality learning environments, affordable child care, and Georgia's workforce and economy.

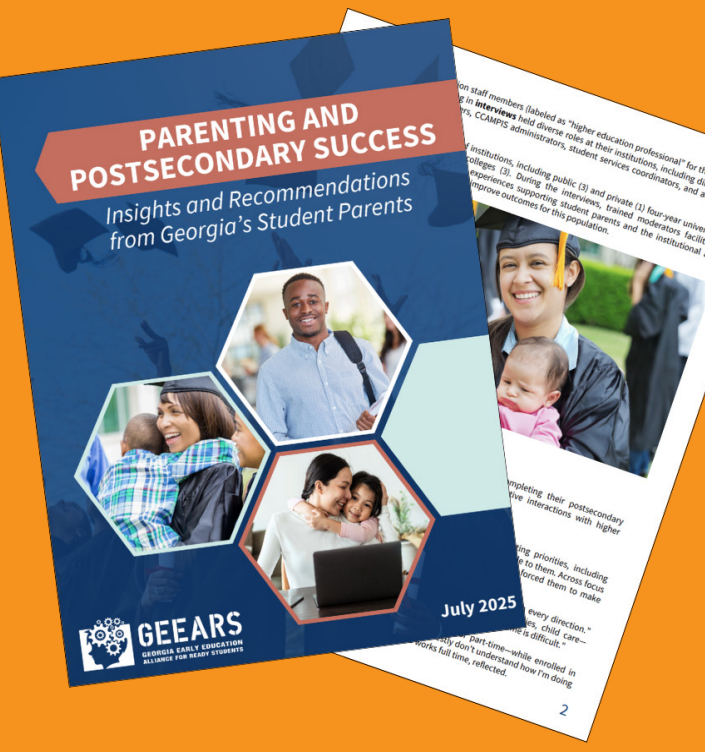
Although SB 554 did not advance during the 2026 legislative session, the campaign achieved an important milestone by securing bipartisan sponsorship, elevating child care infrastructure as a statewide policy priority, and building momentum for future action. GEEARS and our partners remain committed to advancing the legislation and ensuring that child care providers across Georgia have the facilities they need to serve children, families, and communities.

Build Up GEORGIA

Constructing a brighter future for early learners

GEEARS MET THE MOMENT WITH...

RESEARCH



SUPPORTING STUDENT PARENTS

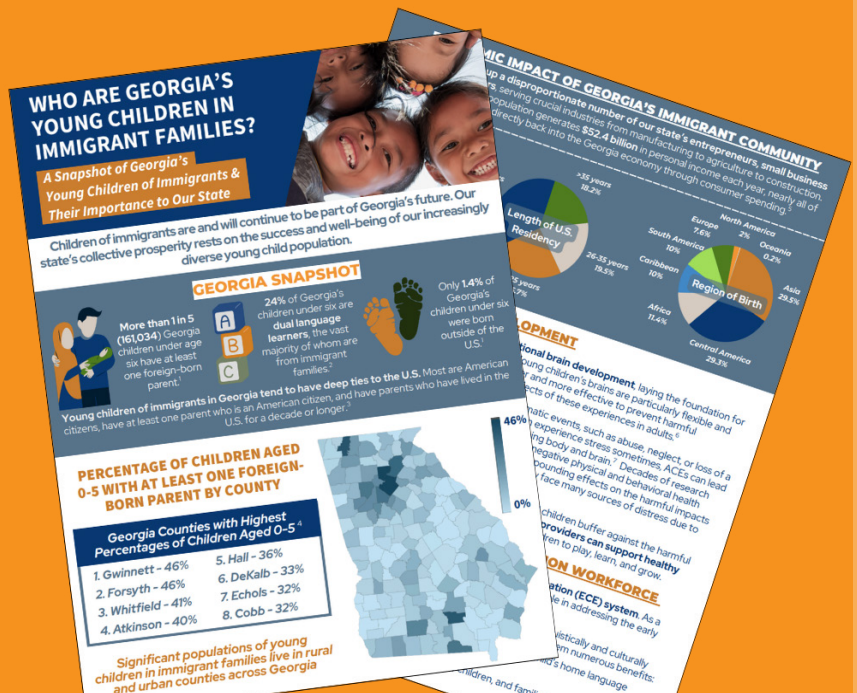
Student parents represent a critical but often overlooked segment of the college population. Since 2018, GEEARS has worked to understand how child care challenges affect parents' participation in school and the workforce. Building on this prior work, GEEARS conducted focus groups with student parents, as well as interviews with seven higher education professionals, to examine the experiences, challenges, and support needs of Georgia's student parents.

The resulting report, *Parenting and Postsecondary Success: Insights and Recommendations from Georgia's Student Parents*, offers a detailed look at the challenges student parents face and includes actionable recommendations for federal, state, and institutional policymakers. It features three institutional spotlights—a private four-year university, a public four-year university, and a two-year technical college—highlighting innovative practices and efforts to implement student-parent support policies and programs.

This work also informed GEEARS' broader advocacy efforts, including the creation of a policy brief elevating the role of CCAMPIS, a federal funding stream dedicated to supporting student parents' postsecondary success.

YOUNG CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS— A SIGNIFICANT AND HIGHLY VALUED SEGMENT OF GEORGIA'S POPULATION

Twenty-two percent of Georgia's young children live in families in which at least one parent is foreign-born, with significant populations residing in both urban and rural communities across the state. Supporting them also supports our state's future. GEEARS' brief tells the story of immigrants' significant contributions to our communities and economy, while recognizing that barriers to accessing critical services and experiences of discrimination can create stress during early childhood. Supporting children and families during this critical stage of development is essential to Georgia's future.



GEEARS MET THE MOMENT WITH...

ENGAGING EVENTS

In several events, GEEARS brought together experts and advocates who, in various ways, educated the public, engaged allies, and further impassioned our peers in the early childhood field.

A BUS TOUR HIGHLIGHTING INNOVATIVE, INCLUSIVE EARLY LEARNING

GEEARS' 2025 Bus Tour fostered collaboration among state agencies and non-profits. This diverse group of professionals saw the power of integrated services across Georgia and began dreaming about how to create more connected and streamlined services for young children with disabilities and their families. At Augusta's Apparo Academy, we saw how therapies and education in inclusive classrooms could all happen in the same classroom.





The impact went beyond the school walls too, as they employ a "two-generation" approach that also engages and empowers parents in their child's development journey. Apparo's model sets young children up for success as they leave the early childhood setting. In fact, 60% of Apparo's "graduates" don't need ongoing therapeutic services.

The Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) practitioners who spoke to us in Watkinsville, explained how they created a new system to help social workers, home visitors, and parents and foster parents work together to recognize and address babies' mental health needs.

While in Watkinsville, participants also got the opportunity to tour ESP, an organization that exists to create transformative experiences for people with disabilities and their families. Their inclusive playground did not disappoint, showing the possibilities of play for both children with disabilities and their typically developing peers.

At Easterseals North Georgia in Norcross, we learned how a team-based approach to supporting young children with disabilities fosters their long-term development.

"WORKING AND HOMELESS"—AN IMPORTANT DISCUSSION WITH BRIAN GOLDSTONE

Homelessness is a swiftly growing problem in our country—one that disproportionately affects families with young children. That's why GEEARS is using a $100,000 grant from Thrive From the Start to convene key leaders and constituencies from across the state to address the impact of housing instability and homelessness on Georgia's youngest children and their families.

It also inspired GEEARS to co-host a virtual book club and an in-person author discussion examining Brian Goldstone's *There Is No Place for Us: Working and Homeless in America*. Our study of this complex and heartbreaking portrait of five unhoused Atlanta families culminated in an October event with Goldstone, who would go on to win a Pulitzer Prize in May.





LOOKING BACK AND LAUNCHING AHEAD WITH STEVE BURNS AT OUR ANNUAL LUNCHEON

At our Annual Luncheon, GEEARS board member, Rabbi Peter Berg, gave our keynote speaker a memorable introduction. As the iconic, original host of *Blue's Clues*, Berg said, "Steve [Burns] made quiet kids feel heard and little kids feel big. He made children who felt lonely or lost feel like they had a true friend. He gave and kept giving, even when it was hard."

We also used the joyful event—filled with just as many laughs as moving moments—to honor the generosity of other early childhood heroes. Georgia Speaker Pro Tem Jan Jones received our Early Childhood Champion Award for her leadership on the House Working Group

on Early Childhood Education, an entity that evaluated Georgia's state-funded Pre-K program and recommended solutions for its improvement.

We awarded our Early Childhood Advocate honor to key members of Gwinnett Building Babies' Brains, a visionary school readiness model, laser-focused on the unique needs of Gwinnett families.

And for their generous work serving as fiscal agent for the PAACT Repair and Renovation Grant program, the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta received our Early Childhood Community Partner Award.

We ourselves were honored by generous event support from sponsors, our host committee, the donors who contributed prizes to our raffle, and 200 attendees.





A WILD, WHIMSICAL MAYOR'S SUMMER READING CLUB LAUNCH

On May 14th, the Mayor's Summer Reading Club's 14th season launched with baguettes and spaghetti flying through the air! That's what happens when your partner in promoting early literacy is the Alliance Theatre, reading (and giving away!) their original picture book, *DINOSAUR!* written by Olivia Aston Bosworth and illustrated by Alex Ferror.

Every summer, the MSRC enlists community partners all over the city to center literacy-rich programming around a single story like *DINOSAUR!* The tiny participants bring these books home, where their families can use the book's included READ Guide—created and customized each year by the Atlanta Speech School— to maximize the impact of reading with their kids.

2025's MSRC season (focused on the lovely original stories, *The Great Ant Sleepover* and *Our Family is Growing*) featured 149 events created by 61 camps, child care programs, libraries, doctor's offices, and other sites that little ones call home. We sent 21,000 books home with families. Seventy-eight partners participated in the 2026 season.

All of this early literacy outreach is made possible by generous funding from PNC Bank, with support from United Way of Greater Atlanta and programming contributions from the Alliance Theatre and the Atlanta Speech School's Rollins Center for Language and Literacy.

GEEARS MET THE MOMENT WITH...

A PROMISE THAT ALL ATLANTA CHILDREN THRIVE

WE COMPLETED A MAJOR PILOT STUDY

Led by GEEARS, PAACT: Promise All Atlanta Children Thrive is a citywide alliance of public and private partners collaborating to improve learning, health, and well-being outcomes for Atlanta's youngest children and their families.

To conduct *Enhancing Early Education Awareness Through Community Engagement*, a study funded by a grant from the *National African American Child and Family Research Center*, we interviewed and surveyed current and former ambassadors, then evaluated the effectiveness of their training and subsequent impact on families. *How well do our ambassadors help families assess care and related resources?*

PAACT will utilize the findings to fine tune our program, helping ambassadors target specialized populations, for instance, adding more bilingual ambassadors to our cohorts. We'll also disseminate our research to help us scale this successful program beyond Atlanta and provide a model for other organizations seeking to reach underserved families.



WE LAUNCHED A NEW WEBSITE

To highlight PAACT's initiatives, we've launched a new website—one that captures our journey and serves as a living record of our collective impact. Our website now makes it easier for people everywhere to understand who we are, what we do, and most importantly, how to connect with us because PAACT is powered by partnership.

This website is the product of a year of collaborative conversations, brainstorming sessions, and countless edits. We're deeply proud of it and excited for you to take a look. Go check us out!



WE WELCOMED AN 8TH COHORT OF ATLANTA EARLY CHILDHOOD AMBASSADORS

In March, our seventh cohort of Atlanta Early Education Ambassadors completed their one-year terms and graduated with "active almuni" status. At the same time, our next crew of 31 Ambassadors celebrated the completion of their training and hit the ground running to help Atlanta families sign up for our state's free, lottery-funded pre-K program and other early care and learning opportunities.



REPAIR AND RENOVATION GRANT UPDATE

The PAACT Repair and Renovation Grant program supports Atlanta's early care and learning system by funding improvements to child care facilities. It also bolsters providers' success by connecting them with business coaches and expert consultants. More than 70 Atlanta-based child care programs have received PAACT Repair and Renovation Grants! And we're not finished—implementation is ongoing.

PAACT's partners in this program are the City of Atlanta, the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, Reinvestment Fund, Low Income Investment Fund, and Early Learning Property Management.

Click here to view the official Repair and Renovation Grant Summative Evaluation Report.

70+

CHILD CARE PROGRAMS RECEIVED UP TO

$75,000

IN GRANT FUNDING TO REPAIR AND RENOVATE THEIR FACILITIES









PAACT SCHOLARSHIP INITIATIVE UPDATE

The PAACT Scholarship Initiative provides eligible families with scholarships to help alleviate the cost burden of child care. Two different scholarships are available: The PAACT Scholarship powered by Quality Care for Children (QCC)'s *BOOST*, funded by private philanthropy, and the APS Parent-Child Success Scholarship, funded by Atlanta Public Schools.

PAACT Scholarship powered by QCC's *BOOST*

OVER

$1.3 MILLION

IN PRIVATE FUNDS HAVE BEEN DISTRIBUTED TO PROVIDE CHILD CARE SCHOLARSHIPS TO MORE THAN

250 CHILDREN & **200** FAMILIES

104

CHILD CARE PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN PAID VIA SCHOLARSHIP



Atlanta Public Schools (APS) Parent-Child Success Scholarship

MORE THAN

200 FAMILIES

ARE CURRENTLY RECEIVING OR HAVE RECEIVED CHILD CARE SCHOLARSHIPS

$4.5 MILLION

HAS BEEN COMMITTED TO CHILD CARE SCHOLARSHIPS FOR APS EMPLOYEES OVER THREE YEARS



EARLY CHILDHOOD CHAMPIONS PROGRAM UPDATE

For the last three years, PAACT members City of Atlanta and Rotary Club of Atlanta have recognized early educators with cash bonuses and the "Mayor's Award for Early Literacy." The program helps teachers add new skills and curricula to their educational arsenal, increasing the quality of students' experiences.

So far, we've provided...

CASH BONUSES TO NEARLY

1,300 TEACHERS

OVER

12,800

HOURS OF FREE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS

OUR STAFF IS...

MEETING THE MOMENT



HONORING GEEARS' FOUNDING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This year featured a big transition as GEEARS said good-bye to our founding Executive Director, Mindy Binderman, in March. She left an enduring legacy in the form of our broad and committed alliance of advocates, our many initiatives, our legislative wins, and a bold strategic plan mapping our next five years.

Befitting this far-reaching impact, Mindy was honored with meaningful awards from Quality Care for Children and the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning Foundation—and a few send-off parties! We look forward to seeing Mindy work her magic in her new role at Low Income Investment Fund, and we're equally excited about GEEARS' next chapter under the leadership of our new CEO, Kristin Bernhard.

STRENGTHENING IMPACT THROUGH BOARD SERVICE

Shawnell Johnson, Director of PAACT: Promise All Atlanta Children Thrive, joined the board of Primrose Schools' Partnership for Children, Premier Academy was named Junior League of Atlanta's Executive Vice President-Elect, and is the committee chair for Jumpstart's Metro Atlanta Champions Circle.

"My calendar is a little more complicated these days; I can't deny it," says Shawnell, who's also a mom to two young girls. *"But in fact, my work and volunteer roles are so aligned, I don't always feel I need to differentiate them. Regardless of which hat I'm wearing at any moment, my focus is on rallying my community to help every single young child access what they need to launch into a life of safety, security, academic excellence, and healthy social-emotional development."*



A POLICY PRIMER WITH THE YWCA OF GREATER ATLANTA

Around the same time that she got a promotion and title change at GEEARS, PAACT Communications Coordinator Makhia Williams was selected to be a Fellow for the YWCA of Greater Atlanta's Georgia Women's Policy Institute (GWPI).

"During this year-long fellowship, I researched state-level policy solutions for important issues such as maternal health access and menstrual equity, advocated to lawmakers, and met with coalitions and nonprofit partners leading the charge," Makhia recounts. *"I also designed advocacy guides, resource sheets, and public education materials that make complex policy issues accessible to all audiences."*





A PROMISING BOARD APPOINTMENT

Senior Manager for Leadership and Learning, Greg Barrett, joined the board of Family Promise of Athens, an organization that uses community-based response to both prevent and end homelessness for families with children *and* help families achieve sustainable independence.

"While Family Promise of Athens has shelter and housing programs, they also help families stabilize their housing or avoid housing loss in the first place," Greg explains. *"I'm proud to serve on a board for Executive Director Madison Sanders, who is a GEEARS alumna and an incredible leader. This partnership is especially meaningful to GEEARS as we ramp up our work in the secure housing space for infants, toddlers, and their families around the state."*

MOVING ON UP TO CHAIR

Senior Health Policy Manager, Callan Wells, became chair of Motherhood Beyond Bars' board. Motherhood Beyond Bars (MBB) ensures a healthy start for infants born to incarcerated women by providing a network of comprehensive support for mothers and caregivers. MBB supports and strengthens families with the goal of long-term, healthy reunification and a permanent end to cycles of incarceration in families.

"Motherhood Beyond Bars' mission is deeply aligned with my passions and vision for the future," Callan says. *"MBB is working to create a world rooted in relationships, connection, and love between mothers, babies, and their communities. It is a tremendous honor to serve as Board Chair of such an inspiring organization and to help elevate the incredible work of its dedicated staff, who make this vision a reality every day."*





COLLABORATORS EXTRAORDINAIRE

At the 2025 Georgia Child Health Conference, GEEARS received an *Exceptional Collaboration Award* for our support of Georgia's Home Visiting program and Babies Can't Wait, Georgia's early intervention program for infants and toddlers with disabilities and developmental delays.

TWO GEEARS STAFFERS MASTER 2GEN

The two-generation approach recognizes that young children are fundamentally connected to their parents and caregivers, teachers, and communities. To support our little ones, we must also support their grown-ups. This value inspired PAACT Program Manager Gbemi Famule and Policy Outreach Manager Caitlyn Sanders to enroll in the Georgia Children's Cabinet's 2Gen Academy.

"My favorite takeaway," Gbemi says, *"was hearing all the family stories and the session on using data to bolster family stories when advocating for legislative support and funding."*

"My experience at the 2Gen Academy underscored the importance of early intervention, a key focus at GEEARS," Caitlyn says. *"When a child with autism receives an evaluation and interventions at a young age, they, along with their caregivers, are often more successful and may not need to interact with as many systems or need additional supports."*



THANK YOU

Our funders, donors, and sponsors are passionately committed to Georgia's youngest learners, their families, and their teachers and caregivers. Your support makes GEEARS' work possible. It makes a palpable and profound impact on our state's early childhood landscape.

FUNDERS

The following organizations have given grants to GEEARS to fund our work in FY2026.

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The Zeist Foundation
Thrive from the Start
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EVENT SPONSORS

Thank you to the individuals and organizations who sponsored our events last year: GEEARS Annual Luncheon 2025 and Strolling Thunder 2026.

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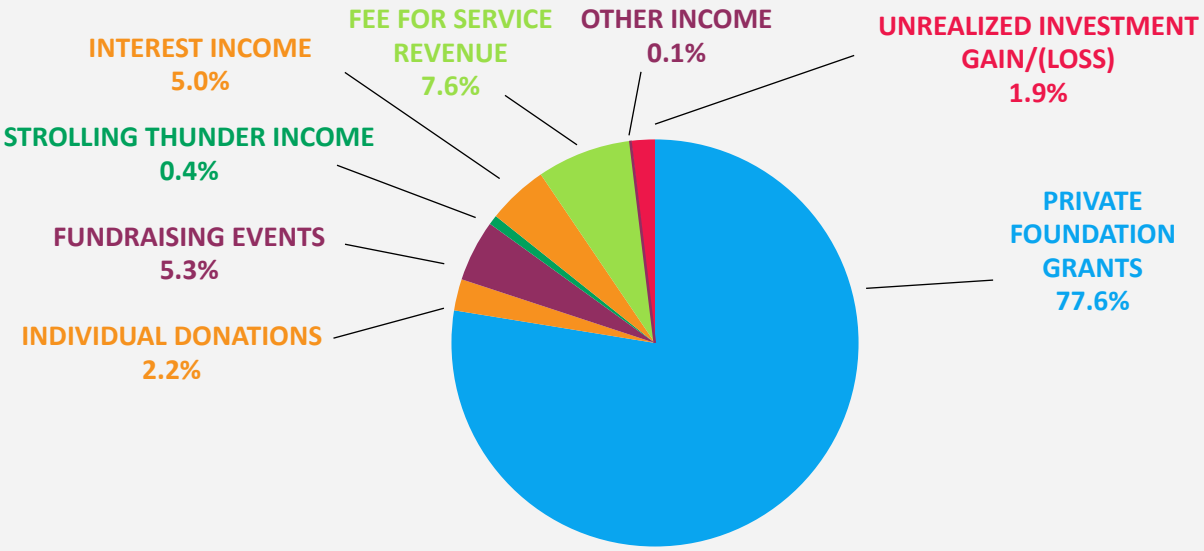
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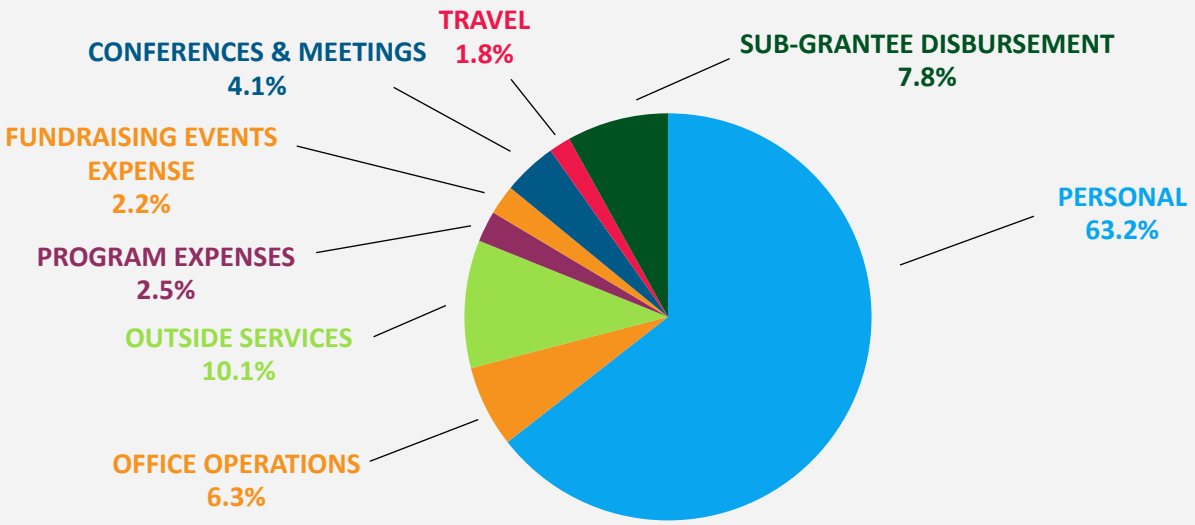


FINANCIAL BREAKDOWN

TOTAL INCOME BREAKDOWN FY2026



TOTAL EXPENSES BREAKDOWN FY2026







GEEARS

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ALLIANCE FOR READY STUDENTS

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