



Georgia's **Preschool Development Grant**

BIRTH THROUGH FIVE

**STRENGTHENING
GEORGIA'S EARLY
CHILDHOOD CARE AND
EDUCATION SYSTEM
STRATEGIC PLAN**

STRENGTHENING GEORGIA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION SYSTEM STRATEGIC PLAN

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Additional information on the PDG B-5 grant can be found at: www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/PreschoolDevelopmentGrant.aspx

INTRODUCTION

In December 2018, Georgia was awarded an initial Preschool Development Grant, Birth through Five (PDG B-5) by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, and the US Department of Education. This initial grant provided Georgia with a unique opportunity to strengthen the early childhood care and education (ECCE) system-level framework and to better align and further expand critical services and programs for children ages birth through five.

A key component of Georgia's initial PDG B-5 grant was developing a comprehensive Needs Assessment to analyze the state's existing mixed-delivery system of programs and services to determine how well Georgia was meeting the needs of families of children ages birth through five. In December 2019, Georgia was awarded a three-year renewal PDG B-5 through December 2022 to continue the activities started with the initial PDG B-5 and to address the gaps identified through the Needs Assessment, including developing a statewide strategic plan.

To carry out the work of the PDG B-5 and to develop a strategic plan, a Cross Agency Child Council (CACC) was formed. The CACC is made up of senior-level staff from state agencies and partner organizations that serve children ages birth through five. The CACC also includes representatives from the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning's (DECAL) Family Ambassador initiative. CACC membership is listed in the table on the following page.



SCOPE AND ALIGNMENT

Developing Georgia's PDG B-5 strategic plan was proposed and funded as part of the PDG B-5 grant application. To ensure long-term sustainability, the CACC decided to extend the scope and timeline of the strategic plan beyond the grant period for at least five years. By expanding this focus, the strategic plan ensures that the advances made for Georgia's birth through five mixed-delivery system will continue after the grant has concluded.

Part of this long-term planning included aligning the plan with the work of the Georgia's Children's Cabinet, which serves as Georgia's Early Childhood Advisory Council. In 2019, Georgia's Office of the Governor appointed members of the executive and full Children's Cabinet, which includes the heads of Georgia's 14 child-serving agencies. The purpose of the Children's Cabinet is to support a sustainable and comprehensive system of education and care to best serve the children and families in each region of the state by taking a comprehensive, systematic, and whole-family approach to ensure children are and feel safe, are healthy, and are learning. Many of the agencies on the Children's Cabinet are also represented at the deputy commissioner level on the CACC.

In developing the PDG B-5 strategic plan, the CACC intentionally aligned its goals and strategies to the higher level priorities of the Children's Cabinet. Areas of alignment between the PDG B-5 strategic plan and the work of the Children's Cabinet are marked with an asterisk to highlight these connections.



CACC MEMBERS

Allison Setterlind

Head Start, Georgia Head Start State Collaboration Director

Bentley Ponder, Ph.D.

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NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The PDG B-5 Needs Assessment provides a comprehensive snapshot of Georgia’s understanding of its early childhood mixed-delivery system. It includes the conditions and demographics of the state’s birth-through-five population and the types of supports the state provides to its youngest children and their families. It details what is *known* about Georgia’s early childhood system and, more importantly, what is *not known*.

Georgia was required to identify programs within the mixed-delivery system offering direct early childhood services to children birth to age five and their families. The programs are listed in Table 1. Additionally, Georgia identified focal populations for the Needs Assessment which are listed in Table 2.

Findings from the Needs Assessment are organized in seven reports with additional reports expected when the state completes research related to the COVID-19 public health emergency.¹ Findings from the Needs Assessment revealed five critical areas of focus: system building, data and research, workforce, access and quality, and family engagement. These five critical areas were used to guide the strategic planning process.

TABLE 1 Programs within Georgia’s Mixed-Delivery System Offering Direct ECCE Services

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION
Child Care Services	DECAL licenses and regulates child care centers, family child care learning homes, and exempt programs that receive CCDF funds. Prior to the pandemic, Georgia had more than 3,000 child care centers and more than 1,400 family child care learning homes.
Georgia’s Pre-K Program	Georgia’s Pre-K Program serves more than 80,000 children each year (approximately 60% of the state’s 4-year-old population) and is available in every county of the state. Full-day programs are operated in a variety of settings, including local school systems, private child care facilities, and Head Start programs on a school year calendar. Additionally, Georgia’s Pre-K Summer Transition Program operates a six-week summer program designed for vulnerable populations. The program serves approximately 3,000 children.
Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Administrative Home: DECAL	CAPS provides child care subsidies to more than 50,000 low-income children per week. In the last two years, considerable policy revisions have been implemented to better support vulnerable families including lower family fees, 12-month eligibility, and updated priority groups.
Head Start, Early Head Start, Migrant Head Start, and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships (EHS-CCP)	The programs promote school readiness of children ages birth to 5 from low-income families by supporting the development of the whole child. They support children’s growth and development in a learning environment through a variety of services, which include early learning, health, and family well-being.
Quality Rated Administrative Home: DECAL	Quality Rated assigns 1, 2, or 3 stars to child care providers based on program characteristics and onsite observations. In 2015, the state established a Quality Rated/CAPS 2020 Goal that all programs participating in CAPS would be Quality Rated by December 31, 2020. Due to the pandemic, this goal has been extended to December 31, 2021. As of November 2020, more than 2,400 programs are Quality Rated.
Preschool Special Education	IDEA Part B, Section 619 funding is utilized to provide critical early education services to children with disabilities ages 3 to 5. In 2017–2018, the program served 18,833 children, or 4.7% of the overall population. Local school systems offer these services through school-based and community-based models.

Continued on following page

1. As of December 2020, the Needs Assessment reports were finalized. Once published, they can be accessed at www.dec.state.ga.us/BftS/PreschoolDevelopmentGrant.aspx.

TABLE 1 Continued

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION
Babies Can't Wait Program	The state uses IDEA Part C funding to provide critical early education services to children with developmental delays and disabilities from birth through age 2. The Annual Performance Report for FY 2018, spanning July 2018 through June 2019, reported that the program served 0.8% of children ages birth-1 and 2.5% of children ages birth-3.
Georgia Home Visiting Program (GVHP)	GVHP helps new parents who need consistent, ongoing support during the first years of their child's life and focuses on parents with identified vulnerabilities, including unemployment, late or no prenatal care, or a history of substance abuse. The program requires the use of an evidence-based model. Approved models include Parents as Teachers, Nurse-Family Partnership, Early Head Start-Home Visiting, and Healthy Families Georgia.

TABLE 2 Populations Identified as Vulnerable and Underserved

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION
Children Living in Poverty	Children in poverty; defined as children residing in households at the poverty (<100% FPL) and low income (100%-199% FPL) levels
Dual Language Learners	Children whose home language is a language other than English
Children with Developmental Delays and Disabilities	Children identified with developmental delays or disability. Children screened for or receiving services through IDEA Part C and Part B, Section 619
Children in Foster Care and Protective Services	Children in foster care placement and children who remain in their home but with an active protective services case
Children Experiencing Homelessness	Homelessness as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act. Additional information about the McKinney-Vento Act can be found at https://nche.ed.gov/mckinney-vento/
Infants and Toddlers	Children ages birth to 36 months. A 2016 economic impact study of Georgia's ECCE industry ^a found that only 15% of infants and 22% of toddlers are receiving formal early education. Additionally, a 2008 study of ECCE program quality found that two-thirds of infant and toddler classrooms are low quality. ^b Current analyses regarding the availability of infant and toddler care indicate that areas of the some state have little or no access to high-quality infant and toddler care.
Children and Families in Rural Areas	Georgia has a significant rural population, often with limited access to high-quality ECCE and therefore more likely to be underserved. Specifically, 120 (75%) of Georgia's 159 counties are classified as rural. ^c Approximately 132,005 (20%) children ages 0-4 live in rural counties in Georgia.

Note: FPL = federal poverty line

a. Georgia State University: Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, & The University of Georgia: Carl Vinson Institute of Government. (2016). *Economic Impact of the Early Care and Education Industry in Georgia*. Retrieved from <http://www.dec.state.ga.gov/documents/attachments/EconImpactReport.pdf>

b. Maxwell, K. L., Early, D. M., Bryant, D., Kraus, S., Hume, K., & Crawford, G. (2009). *Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Child Care Center Findings*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, FPG Child Development Institute. Retrieved from www.dec.state.ga.gov/documents/attachments/ChildCare_Report.pdf

c. State Office of Rural Health | Georgia Department of Community Health



STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The CACC met virtually three times (June 2, September 30, and October 20, 2020) to develop Georgia’s strategic plan. The strategic planning process was facilitated by the faculty and staff of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia.

The June 2, 2020 meeting provided an organizational orientation to the PDG B-5 and identified the roles and responsibilities of the CACC. Data were collected to augment the Needs Assessment to include agency issues that had emerged since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and how these issues were impacting the birth through five mixed-delivery system.

The second CACC meeting, on September 30, 2020, included an environmental scan as part of the strategic planning process. Specifically, CACC members participated in a strength, opportunity, aspiration, and risk (SOAR) analysis related to Georgia’s current B-5 mixed-delivery system. Members used an interactive virtual tool called MURAL, a digital workspace that facilitates visual collaboration. Once the SOAR analysis was complete, items from each category were sorted into short-term (1-2 years), mid-term (2-3 years), and long-term (3-5 years) categories. CACC members then voted on which items they considered to be the most critical to the birth through five mixed-delivery system. In addition to the SOAR analysis, DECAL PDG B-5 leaders presented data from the Needs Assessment to further inform the strategic planning process.

The third CACC meeting occurred on October 20, 2020. Results from the SOAR analysis were used to draft goal areas for the strategic plan. CACC members used these results, along with data from the Needs Assessment, to develop comprehensive strategies and action items. The CACC also drafted potential measures of progress for each goal. Institute of Government staff used the data from this final planning meeting to develop the strategic plan.

The remainder of this report presents Georgia’s PDG B-5 Strategic Plan. The plan begins with the vision and mission statements adopted by the CACC and a goal for each of the following strategic areas: system building, data and research, workforce, access and quality, and family engagement.

This introductory section is followed by sections focused on each of the strategic areas, including the goal, specific strategies, projects, and measures. The projects are efforts specifically supported by the CACC and may be included as part of Georgia’s PDG B-5 renewal grant activities. Projects that are not part of Georgia’s PDG B-5 renewal grant will be conducted by the CACC.

Two types of measures are included in the strategic plan: (1) milestones—used to document the completion of project milestones (X project was completed); and (2) operational indicators—used to track progress on the projects after key milestones are met.



STRENGTHENING GEORGIA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION SYSTEM STRATEGIC PLAN

VISION

All children in Georgia from birth to five years of age, particularly children from vulnerable and underserved populations, will have equitable access to high-quality early childhood experiences through an integrated and coordinated mixed-delivery system that will provide a strong foundation for success in school and throughout life.

MISSION

Provide every child in Georgia access to high-quality, affordable early childhood care and education and services through partnerships with families and the coordination, integration, and alignment of a strong, statewide birth through five mixed-delivery system. The PDG is particularly focused on the developmental needs of children in underserved and vulnerable populations.

STRATEGIC GOALS



System Building

Ensure alignment, integration, and coordination in Georgia's B-5 mixed-delivery system to better meet the needs of each and every child, especially in underserved and vulnerable populations.



Data & Research

Establish a data and research agenda that enhances informed decision-making to support the effective and efficient delivery of early childhood programs and services in Georgia, especially to children in underserved and vulnerable populations.



Workforce

Recruit, retain, and diversify a professional early learning workforce that supports high-quality early childhood programs and services in Georgia.



Access & Quality

Provide access to high-quality programs to meet the unique developmental and familial needs of each and every child in Georgia, especially in underserved and vulnerable populations.



Family Engagement

Foster authentic family engagement to strengthen family voice and engage families in their children's care and education.



STRATEGIC GOAL 1

System Building

Goal Statement: Ensure alignment, integration, and coordination in Georgia's B-5 mixed-delivery system to better meet the needs of each and every child, especially in underserved and vulnerable populations.

1 Increase understanding of Georgia's early childhood B-5 mixed-delivery system to better serve families and meet the full and unique needs of each and every child

PROJECTS

Documenting Services, Programs, and Resources

To enhance the understanding and coordination of services to families and children, additional research will further inventory the services, programs, and resources available in the birth through five mixed-delivery system. This research will help Georgia understand the services available to children and families and will focus on documenting how and where families and children interact with the system to obtain needed services. This work will lay the foundation for deeper analysis as outlined in the following projects that also inform other strategies and projects in the strategic plan.

Analyzing Early Intervention Services

Conduct research to understand how families, with special focus on families with dual language learners and individuals with disabilities, access early intervention services, navigate enrollment and transitions, and connect to needed resources. This Early Intervention Services Landscape Analysis will help identify gaps and problems that families face in accessing early intervention services.

Conducting 2021 Economic Impact Study

In response to findings from the Needs Assessment, conduct a research study of the economic impact of the early learning industry in Georgia. This study, conducted in different phases, will enable state leaders to quantify and explain the economic multipliers of the early learning industry. This study will build on previous studies conducted in 2008 and 2014.

2 Ensure alignment of early childhood care and education priorities and efforts across state agencies

PROJECTS

Cross Agency Child Council (CACC)

Continue to support the CACC, created to complete the work of the PDG B-5 and strategic planning process, and to encourage alignment with the Georgia Children's Cabinet to resolve system fragmentation and overlap issues. The CACC will develop and revise policies, identify additional funding, and establish priorities to support the strategic plan.

Unified Communications Strategy

Create and implement a cross-agency communications strategy that considers internal and external audiences. The communications strategy will promote a common language and message across state agencies.

Key Indicators Dashboard*

Develop a policy-level, statewide key indicators dashboard of birth through five population- and program-level data for state leaders. The dashboard design will allow data to be tailored to agency heads, partners, and other users.

* Area of alignment between this strategic plan and the work of the Georgia Children's Cabinet

Progress Indicators

- ✓ **Milestone**
Completion of Early Intervention Services Landscape Analysis
- ✓ **Milestone**
Completion of each phase of the Economic Impact Study
- ✓ **Milestone**
Completion of the Key Indicators Dashboard
- ✓ **Operational Indicator**
Number of joint communications produced by two or more CACC agencies on topics related to early childhood care and education in Georgia





Data and Research

Goal Statement: Establish a data and research agenda that enhances informed decision-making to support the effective and efficient delivery of early childhood programs and services in Georgia, especially to children in underserved and vulnerable populations.

1 Encourage the alignment and availability of birth through five data across state and local agencies

PROJECTS

Cross-Agency Child Data System (CACDS) Strategic Plan

Develop a CACDS strategic plan to update and strengthen CACDS by improving data sets, increasing data literacy at the state and community levels, enhancing reporting features, creating data architecture, and promoting system usage.

Data Sharing Agreements*

Establish or update data sharing agreements among state and local agencies. Work with the attorney general's office to develop templates for data sharing agreements that can work across agencies. Also, identify barriers to data sharing (e.g., HIPAA).

2 Promote continued quality improvement and program accountability using data, research, and evaluation

PROJECTS

Program Performance Evaluation Plan

Use the required PDG Program Performance Evaluation Plan (PPEP) to monitor and inform the implementation of projects. Determine measures and outcomes related to the framework and identify the data needed to support measures. The PPEP should be used to target needs/opportunities, guide research and grants, and support decisions.

COVID-19 Impact Study

Conduct data collection and research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on key programs and focal populations to address outstanding issues and to change policies and procedures to prepare for future disruptions of operations.

3 Enhance data literacy to promote the use of data and research by state and local governments

PROJECTS

Data Literacy Orientation and Training

Create and conduct a birth through five data orientation and training to promote understanding and “best practices” use of data. The orientation and training should consider various audiences, their data needs, and sources of data beyond CACDS, including data from the Georgia Department of Education, Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, Division of Family and Children Services, Georgia Department of Public Health, and other agencies.

* Area of alignment between this strategic plan and the work of the Georgia Children’s Cabinet

Progress Indicators

- ✓ **Milestone**
Completion of the CACDS strategic plan
- ✓ **Milestone**
Delivery of the first data literacy orientation and training
- ✓ **Operational Indicator**
Percentage of CACDS strategic plan projects implemented
- ✓ **Operational Indicator**
Number of interagency data-sharing agreements created and maintained between CACC agencies each year
- ✓ **Operational Indicator**
Number of CACC staff or community partners completing a B-5 data orientation training each year





STRATEGIC GOAL 3

Workforce

Goal Statement: Recruit, retain, and diversify a professional early learning workforce that supports high-quality early childhood care and education services in Georgia.

1 Support career pathways and aligned credentials

PROJECTS

Workforce Knowledge and Competency Standards and Career Pathways

Examine Georgia's career pathways to identify current challenges and align them to Workforce Knowledge and Competency standards. Update the competencies to inform career pathways and professional credentialing initiatives for administrators, trainers, and technical assistance providers to promote recruitment and retention efforts with an emphasis on the infant and toddler workforce.

Alternative Pathways

Strengthen supports for three target audiences: early childhood care and education professionals who speak more than one language; high school students in the state's Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) program interested in early childhood care and education careers; and nontraditional students. This effort will help expand and diversify the child care workforce.

DECAL Scholars Program

Evaluate and update the DECAL Scholars Program, which provides early childhood care and education professionals access to more education and skill development. Georgia's youngest children benefit from higher quality care when these professionals continue their professional development and stay longer in their jobs.

2 Enhance training and job-embedded supports

PROJECTS

Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) Updates

Update the GELDS trainings and resources to increase workforce understanding of child development, lesson planning, differentiated instruction, assessment, and supporting children with disabilities and dual language learners. Prioritize training for early intervention therapists, special education preschool teachers, and home visitors.

Early Learning Coaches

Develop a cadre of early learning coaches to provide more job-embedded supports for the early childhood care and education workforce.

Bilingual Workforce

Develop a career pathway for bilingual early childhood care and education providers to better address the needs of dual language learners and their families.

Professional Development in Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Services

Develop a credentialing pathway for professionals in infant early childhood mental health.

Trauma-Responsive Care Training*

Develop and implement opportunities for trauma-responsive trainings and resources for early learning professionals.

* Area of alignment between this strategic plan and the work of the Georgia Children's Cabinet

3

Support community leaders in understanding best practices

PROJECTS

Trauma-Responsive Care Grants

Expand Trauma-Responsive Care Grants (formally referred to as Early Learning Leadership Collaborative Grants) to implement trauma-responsive care in additional communities.

Progress Indicators

- ✓ **Milestone**
An update of the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) training and resources
- ✓ **Milestone**
An update of the Workforce Knowledge and Competencies (WKC)s
- ✓ **Milestone**
An evaluation of the DECAL Scholars Program to inform updates to the program
- ✓ **Milestone**
Development of a credential pathway for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health professionals
- ✓ **Operational Indicator**
Number of early learning coaches who earn a Coaching Designation each year
- ✓ **Operational Indicator**
Number of active users of the Planning Educational Activities for Children (PEACH) website
- ✓ **Operational Indicator**
Number of training sessions and number of professionals trained in the following key areas per year, as recorded in the Georgia Professional Development System (GaPDS):

GELDS (Standards 101, 102, 103, and 104)	Trauma-responsive care	Social emotional development	Infant early childhood mental health	Supporting dual language learners
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STRATEGIC GOAL 4

Access and Quality

Goal Statement: Provide access to high-quality programs to meet the unique developmental and familial needs of every child in Georgia, especially in underserved and vulnerable populations.

1

Ensure access to quality services and programs for focal populations

PROJECTS

Community Transformation Grants Program

Pilot and evaluate Community Transformation Grants to support communities in expanding resources and programs for children and families from focal populations, such as children with disabilities, dual language learners, and families experiencing food insecurity.

Family Child Care Learning Home Hubs

Promote capacity growth in family child care learning homes through support networks or “hubs” to promote services to infants and toddlers and dual language learners, particularly in under-resourced and rural areas.

Cost of Quality Research Study

Develop a cost-of-quality model for early childhood education programs and related services. This model will be used to identify additional needed resources and supports.

Home Visiting Access and Quality Research Study

Conduct a research study to understand access to and the quality of home visiting services.

2

Update and strengthen Quality Rated, Georgia’s quality rating and improvement system, to reflect current research and the diverse needs of families and children

PROJECTS

Quality Rated Update

Conduct a comprehensive review of Quality Rated that can be used to make revisions to the program and to identify and implement strategies to enhance Quality Rated technical assistance.

Quality Rated Language and Literacy Endorsement

Pilot a language and literacy endorsement at the facility level to be incorporated in Quality Rated.

Progress Indicators

- ✓ **Milestone**
Completion of the Early Intervention Services Landscape Analysis
- ✓ **Milestone**
Completion of the comprehensive Quality Rated review
- ✓ **Milestone**
Completion of the home visiting research study
- ✓ **Milestone**
Creation of two family child care learning home hubs
- ✓ **Operational Indicator**
Number of programs that receive a Quality Rated endorsement
- ✓ **Operational Indicator**
Number of community grants issued each year





STRATEGIC GOAL 5

Family Engagement

Goal Statement: Foster authentic family engagement to strengthen family voice and engage families in their children's care and education.

1

Help families better understand childhood development and how they can support their child's development

PROJECTS

Developmental Milestones Website

Enhance the Developmental Milestones website (www.decal.ga.gov) to continue to help parents understand how their children are progressing through the development process, identify signs of developmental delays as early as possible, and secure resources to support child development.

Trauma-Informed Care Training for Families*

Create and deliver trauma-informed care training to families to better prepare them to support child development and well-being.

2

Help families select and connect to early learning programs and services that best fit the needs of their children through better understanding of the early childhood mixed-delivery system in Georgia

PROJECTS

Family-Friendly Licensing Reports

Enhance family-friendly licensing reports so families can easily and quickly identify child care providers that deliver services related to their specific needs and can see the provider's quality rating.

2Generation Grants*

Expand the number and scope of 2Generation grants to support additional communities, particularly those in rural areas and those serving a high proportion of families from focal populations.

3

Ensure the voices of families, especially those from focal populations, are heard during improvements to the birth through five mixed-delivery system

PROJECTS

Cross Agency Family Council

Establish a Cross Agency Family Council to strengthen the family voice in the state system. The council will seek feedback from families based on their experiences in the system and will provide recommendations to the CACC.

Family Peer Ambassador Program

Expand the Family Peer Ambassador Program by developing a larger cadre of family peer ambassadors. Provide training to the ambassadors to promote an understanding of early learning programs, collaboration with state staff, and participation and input in system improvements. Establish and encourage strong communication practices with ambassadors to ensure information is disseminated to the field and feedback from program experiences is relayed to state leaders.

* Area of alignment between this strategic plan and the work of the Georgia Children's Cabinet

Progress Indicators

- ✓ **Milestone**
First meeting of the Cross Agency Family Council
- ✓ **Milestone**
Completion of the Developmental Milestones website updates
- ✓ **Operational Indicator**
Number of family ambassadors trained per year
- ✓ **Operational Indicator**
Number of families reached through ambassador events and programs
- ✓ **Operational Indicator**
Number of 2Generation grants
- ✓ **Operational Indicator**
Number of visits to the Developmental Milestones website per year



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BRIGHT FROM THE START

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