



GEORGIA FOUNDATION FOR  
EARLY CARE + LEARNING

# ANNUAL REPORT

## FISCAL YEAR 2024





## WHO WE ARE

The Georgia Foundation for Early Care and Learning is an independent 501(c)3 that supports the efforts of the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). In 2017, the Georgia General Assembly passed legislation enabling the foundation to form. Shortly after Governor Nathan Deal signed the legislation into law, the nonprofit was created and began making strategic investments to improve and expand high-quality education.

## OUR MISSION

To support access to high-quality early childhood education by Georgia's youngest learners and their families, providers, and teachers through established strategic investments, collaborations, and partnerships to equip Georgia's current and future workforce.

## OUR VISION

To provide the best beginnings possible for all of Georgia's children.

## WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Research has shown that every dollar invested in high-quality early education saves, on average, \$13 later in reduced crime rates, lower demand for social services, and increased tax revenues. Investing in early childhood education is vital to the success and stability of individuals and our communities.

# FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends of the Foundation,

I am delighted to update you on two significant areas of our work: supporting the early childhood workforce and advancing our Quality Rated (QR) system. Both are central to our mission of enhancing early childhood education and supporting the educators who play a crucial role in shaping young lives in Georgia.

Early childhood educators are the heart of our efforts to nurture and develop the potential of our youngest learners. Their role extends beyond delivering foundational education; they are instrumental in fostering children's social, emotional, and cognitive growth. Georgia's ECE workforce deserves great praise and public support. It is one of my greatest joys to be part of a team that honors them. Seeing these teachers smile with gratitude that their performance in the classroom is recognized is a truly awesome experience.



As you may have heard, leaders responsible for Georgia's Quality Rated program, the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) are identifying potential revisions for the system. As a robust QRIS helps parents make informed decisions and encourages child care programs to implement best practices and innovations, the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) itself is committed to continuous improvement. Through support from our Foundation, the DECAL team conducted stakeholder engagement, including surveys, focus groups, and webinars, all of which yielded positive feedback and valuable insights for our planning process.

Additionally, The Foundation supported professional development efforts and incentives for two Quality Rated Endorsements, a new endorsement for Nutrition and Physical Activity and continuing education for child care programs that earned the Language and Literacy Endorsement in 2023. Through this collaboration with Quality Rated, the Foundation supported 35 child care programs with a capacity of 3,830 children. Three DECAL teams collaborated to provide these unique offerings.

Thank you for your dedication and partnership as we continue to advance early childhood education and support our educators. Your commitment is vital to the success of these initiatives and to the betterment of the lives of the children and families we serve.

Should you have any questions or wish to provide further feedback, please feel free to contact me at [laura.wagner@decalfga.gov](mailto:laura.wagner@decalfga.gov).

Warm regards,

A stylized, handwritten signature in dark blue ink, appearing to read 'LW' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

**LAURA WAGNER**



# Celebrating Georgia's ECE Workforce:



Early childhood educators play a pivotal role in shaping the developmental trajectory of young children, making their influence both profound and far-reaching. These professionals are not only responsible for delivering foundational educational content but also for nurturing a child's social, emotional, and cognitive growth. Through their interactions with young children, early childhood educators create supportive and stimulating environments that encourage curiosity, resilience, and a love for learning. They help children develop critical skills such as communication, problem-solving, and self-regulation, which are essential for future academic and personal success. Additionally, early childhood educators serve as role models, providing care and guidance that fosters positive behavior and social interactions. Their expertise and dedication are fundamental to ensuring that every child has a strong start in life, setting the stage for lifelong learning and development.



Since 2017, the Foundation has honored Georgia's Pre-K Teachers of the Year from both private child care programs and public schools. In 2021, we expanded our recognition to include Early Childhood Educators of the Year from the following categories: Infant, Toddler, and Preschool.

This year, we awarded five new Early Childhood Educators of the Year from communities across the state - Hoschton, Roswell, Cusseta, Evans, and Savannah. Nominations for these awards were reviewed and scored by the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning's Pre-K and Practice and Support teams. Winners received \$2,000 to go toward a classroom makeover; up to \$2,500 to support conference attendance and travel related to their title as Educator of the Year; and \$3,000 for their own personal use.



Through this program, the Foundation continues to spotlight a diverse group of educators who significantly impact the lives of young children. By celebrating their achievements, we not only honor their dedication and hard work but also intend to motivate others in the field to pursue excellence.

# Georgia's Early Childhood Educators of the Year 2023-2024:

## Noel Weimer

Water Oak Family Child Care, Roswell Early Childhood Educator of the Year – Infant Category

## Bianca Brown

The Bradley Schools – Greenbrier, Evans Early Childhood Educator of the Year – Toddler Category

## Chantelle Hester

Smart Starters Academy FCCLH, Savannah Early Childhood Educator of the Year – Preschool Category

## Merodie Brown

New Odyssey for Children, Hoschton Georgia Pre-K Teacher of the Year – Private School

## Charlotte Richards

Chattahoochee County Pre-K, Cusseta Georgia Pre-K Teacher of the Year – Public School



## Congratulations to our 2023-2024 Finalists:

### Olivia Silvers

Lemon Tree Academy, Monroe Infant Early Childhood Educator of the Year Finalist

### Donna Humphreys

Donna B Humphreys FCCLH, Woodstock Toddler Early Childhood Educator of the Year Finalist

### Ricquella Preston

Bright Start Preschool, Valdosta Preschool Early Childhood Educator of the Year Finalist

### Robin Davis

Sunshine House #63, Decatur Georgia Pre-K Teacher of the Year Finalist (Private School)

### Shereka Jenkins

St. John Child Development Center, Atlanta Georgia Pre-K Teacher of the Year Finalist (Private School)

### Kerri Metcalf

Hollis Hand Elementary School, LaGrange Georgia Pre-K Teacher of the Year Finalist (Public School)

### Kimberly Tomlinson

Barksdale Elementary School, Conyers Georgia Pre-K Teacher of the Year Finalist (Public School)



## Supporting Innovation in Child Care through Quality Rated

**In Fiscal Year 2024, the Foundation was able to support the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning with three different efforts tied to Quality Rated: Quality Rated Stakeholder Engagement; the Quality Rated Nutrition and Physical Activity Endorsement Pilot; and the Quality Rated Language and Literacy Endorsement.**

Since its creation, the Foundation has provided strategic support for Georgia's Quality Rated program. Quality Rated is Georgia's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), an essential system for ensuring that early childhood programs meet high standards of care and education. Quality early learning experiences profoundly impact children's developmental outcomes. By providing a structured framework for assessing and enhancing program quality, Quality Rated helps identify areas for improvement and fosters continuous professional development among caregivers and educators. These systems promote accountability and transparency, offering parents a reliable way to evaluate the quality of child care options and make informed decisions. Quality Rated also supports programs in implementing best practices, encourages innovation, and drives improvements in educational and care standards.

### Quality Rated Stakeholder Engagement

In 2022 Quality Rated celebrated its 10-year anniversary. In the 12 years since its design, the landscape of early education looks a bit different. Along with a global pandemic, there has been heightened emphasis around initiatives related to 2Gen, language and literacy, and equity. New research about best practices for ECE and new tools for measuring quality have emerged.



In 2023 and 2024 the Foundation played a key role in engaging stakeholders in a large-scale effort to collect data about how the Quality Rated program performs in the eyes of child care providers, teachers, families, Quality Rated assessors, CCR&R technical assistance consultants, advocates, and other stakeholders. The process included surveys, focus groups, data walks, large convenings, and a public webinar, and we collaborated with partners such as GEEARS and Child Trends to organize and interpret the data we collected.

We received positive feedback from participants in these processes, and the data collected will be fundamental to planning revisions to Quality Rated, a process that is getting underway now.

**As of now, nearly 2,900 programs across Georgia have received a QR star rating, representing 64% of eligible programs statewide. Our online database, [qualityrated.org](https://qualityrated.org), continues to be a vital resource, providing data-driven insights about both rated and unrated programs at the community level by zip code and county.**



# Quality Rated Nutrition and Physical Activity Endorsement Pilot



This year, the Foundation and DECAL partnered to create and pilot a brand-new Quality Rated Endorsement related to nutrition and physical activity. Positive nutrition and physical activity practices in child care settings are crucial for fostering the holistic development of young children. These practices not only support healthy growth and development but also lay the foundation for lifelong habits that contribute to overall well-being. By integrating nutritious foods and regular physical activity into daily routines, child care programs help children build strong bones and muscles, enhance cognitive function, and maintain a healthy weight. Additionally, these practices promote better behavior and learning outcomes, as well as reduce the risk of chronic diseases later in life. Ensuring that child care settings are equipped with the resources and knowledge to support these practices is essential for nurturing a generation of healthy, active, and engaged learners. This pilot marks our first collaboration between the Quality Rated team and DECAL's Nutrition Services.

Through Physical Activity Learning Sessions (PALS) trainings, nutrition trainings, the use of a self-assessment tool (GONAPSACC), and individualized technical assistance, the Nutrition Services and Quality Rated teams have helped 14 participating programs evaluate and improve their practices. Each program received a \$5,300 mini grant to support their goals for program improvement. The integration of training and financial support has proven effective in promoting sustainable change in child care settings.

*Through the Nutrition and Physical Activity Endorsement Pilot, we have tailored trainings, resources, and technical assistance to each childcare program, while also building a community of ECE leaders focused on these important areas of whole child development. This pilot has informed our DECAL team of approaches that support in meaningful, sustainable ways. Programs have integrated nutrition education and physical activity, benefiting children, families, and staff. Collaboration with other DECAL divisions has highlighted and addressed barriers, improving the implementation of programs that support comprehensive child development while accomplishing multiple goals simultaneously.*

*Diana Myers, Nutrition and Physical Activity Supervisor, GA DECAL*

# Quality Rated Language and Literacy Endorsement (QRLLE) Update

In 2019 Governor Kemp charged DECAL with designing a Quality Rated Language and Literacy Endorsement. The purpose of the endorsement is to support providers in implementing evidenced-based language and literacy instruction to help in the development of critical pre-reading skills among the birth-to-5 age group.

Early exposure to rich language experiences and literacy activities helps children develop essential skills such as vocabulary, comprehension, and communication abilities, which are crucial for academic success and lifelong learning. By prioritizing positive language and literacy practices, child care settings play a pivotal role in shaping a child's ability to learn, express themselves, and engage confidently with the world around them. A total of 34 child care learning centers and family child care learning homes received the endorsement in 2023.

Though this project has been successful, DECAL recognizes the need to support previous endorsement awardees in sustaining practices gained during the endorsement process. Therefore, DECAL and the Foundation worked together this year to create several virtual Professional Learning Communities (PLC) for these previously endorsed child care providers.



Out of 34 previously endorsed programs, 26 participated in in-person or virtual training sessions, and 23 completed our virtual PLC training this spring. With the support of five trainers, we organized eight PLC cohorts, benefiting 119 participants. These sessions have enhanced staff knowledge of early language and literacy best practices. Lastly, the Foundation provided \$4,500 mini-grants to participating providers to support ongoing growth and implementation of best practices.

*"This project was a wonderful opportunity to re-engage with and support Quality Rated Language and Literacy Endorsed programs. Participants were able to review their goals and efforts from the initial endorsement and consider ways to be intentional about keeping the work going. These professionals are committed to enhancing, improving, and maintaining best practices in language and literacy and it was mutually energizing to refresh this work."*

*Angela Shelton  
Workforce Supports Supervisor, GA DECAL*





# FINANCIAL STATEMENT

## REVENUES

Contributions and Grants*	429,696.19
Other Revenue	12,204.77

TOTAL REVENUES	441,830.96
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## EXPENSES AND GRANTS

Awards and Grants	222,291.65
Supplies and Maintenance	55,653.91
Other Operating Expenses	29,463.52
TOTAL EXPENSES AND GRANTS	307,409.08

CHANGES IN NET POSITION	134,421.88
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NET POSITION JULY 1, 2023	212,089.36
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NET POSITION JUNE 30, 2024	346,511.24
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## \* COMMUNITY SUPPORT

UNITED WAY OF METROPOLITAN ATLANTA	362,500.00
NASERIAN FOUNDATION DONATION	50,000.00
CHILD TRENDS DONATION	1,001.98
GEORGIA LOTTERY	5,000.00
OTHER MISCELLANEOUS DONORS	11,124.21

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