

Georgia
Study of
**Early Care
and Education**
Family
**Child Care
Findings**

Executive Summary

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The executive summary and full report from this study are available at www.dec.state.ga.us.

Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Family Child Care Findings

Executive Summary

Nationwide, most young children are cared for regularly by someone other than their parents, and family child care homes (sometimes referred to as family day care) are a common form of non-parental care. About one-quarter of children are in family child care at some point during their first five years of life, spending an average of 31 hours per week in family child care, including night and weekend hours.¹ According to the 2010 Child Care in the State of Georgia Fact Sheet produced by the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, Georgia has 3,715 registered family child care homes with the capacity to serve 20,898 children.²

As in center-based settings, research has demonstrated a modest but statistically significant link between the quality of the care provided in family child care homes and children's academic and social skills.³ Research on brain development has underscored the importance of providing high quality experiences for young children.^{4, 5} Thus, improving the quality of family child care homes is an important strategy for supporting children's readiness for school success.

Purpose

The primary purpose of this statewide study was to describe the quality and services in registered family child care homes across Georgia, as well as characteristics of the providers and care environments.

Key Findings

Findings from this study suggest that providers in registered family child care homes are providing an important service for the families of young children. The homes in this study were open to care for children for long hours (mean = 12.5 per day). About half provided second shift care and over one-quarter provided weekend care. Such hours are unusual in center-based settings, suggesting that family child care homes are filling an

Study Description

In 2009-10, FPG conducted a statewide study of randomly selected family child care homes in Georgia, collecting data on the observed quality and characteristics of these programs.

Data were collected in 155 registered family child care homes between September 2009 and April 2010. Data were gathered using multiple methods: observations by independent data collectors, review of written documents, and providers' self-reports.

This report focuses on the findings from the study of Georgia's registered family child care homes that were part of a statewide study of early care and education. Two companion reports, *Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Child Care Center Findings* and *Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Findings from Georgia's Pre-K Program* describe the characteristics and quality of Georgia's child care and pre-k programs. Together, all three reports describe the quality of early care and education in Georgia (reports are available at www.decal.ga.gov).

important niche in the community. Most also reported providing a range of services and supports to the families they serve and offering families ways to participate in the program.

Almost all family child care homes in this study were in compliance with Georgia’s licensing regulations. Almost all of the programs met the basic state requirements for group size and ratio of children per adult. On the day of the observation for the study, researchers collected information about the total number of children and adults present. The mean number of all children under 13 years of age present was 4.0 (range = 1 to 12). On average, there were 0.7 infants (less than 12 months), 2.1 toddlers (12 to 35 months), 1.1 preschoolers (36 to 59 months) and 0.1 school-aged children (60 months to 12 years, 11 months). On average, the child-to-adult ratio was 3.33 children for each adult (range = 1 to 8). Licensing also requires family child care providers to participate in at least 10 hours of professional development each year, and over three-quarters of providers in the study met that criterion.

Quality in Georgia’s registered family child care homes was generally low. The mean total score on the *Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised* (FCCERS-R)⁶ was 2.50. As evident in Figure 1, slightly more than three-quarters of the programs fell into the “low” quality range, with all of the remaining programs in the “medium” quality range. No program received a FCCERS-R score in the “high” quality range.

Low quality is generally characterized by the following: few age-appropriate toys available; inappropriate provider expectations; language aimed primarily at controlling children’s behavior rather than promoting learning; multiple indoor and outdoor safety hazards; and recommended health practices not being followed.

Mean scores across the FCCERS-R subscales were generally in the “low” quality range (see Table 1), with exceptions in Interaction and Program Structure, where the averages were in the “medium” quality range.

Figure 1.
Quality of Programs in Family Child Care Homes
(FCCERS-R total mean = 2.50)

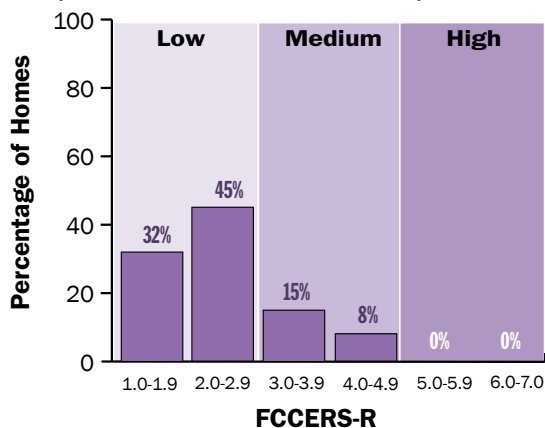


Table 1. FCCERS-R Subscale Scores

| Subscale | Mean | Range |
|------------------------|------|--------------|
| Space and Furnishings | 2.67 | 1.17 to 6.00 |
| Personal Care Routines | 1.85 | 1.00 to 3.83 |
| Listening and Talking | 2.75 | 1.00 to 6.00 |
| Activities | 2.20 | 1.00 to 4.91 |
| Interaction | 3.41 | 1.00 to 6.75 |
| Program Structure | 3.13 | 1.00 to 7.00 |

Conclusions and Recommendations

- **This study highlights the need for improving the quality of care provided in family child care homes across Georgia.** Three-fourths of the family child care homes in this study were rated as having “low” quality. Although these findings are generally consistent with other research, the quality of family child care homes must be strengthened if Georgia wants to support young children’s optimal growth and development.⁷
- **Improving the quality of family child care homes will require purposeful, coordinated technical assistance and professional development strategies.** About a third of the providers in this study had an Associate’s, Bachelor’s, or Master’s degree. Although providers were engaged in a median of 12 hours of professional development in the past year, their education and professional development had not translated into the type of care that is best for children. The variability among provider education levels will require careful planning of the specific professional development efforts and supports that best match a provider’s needs for strengthening her teaching practices. With so many homes in the low quality range, special supports may be needed to emphasize basic health and safety issues of caring for young children as well as a general understanding of appropriate expectations for young children.
- **Quality improvement efforts should build on the growing body of research regarding how best to support quality improvement in family child care.** Past research in family child care suggests that Georgia’s family child care providers would likely benefit from increased coaching and consultation that use a well-defined model and specially-trained and closely supervised consultants.^{8, 9, 10} The Supporting Quality in Home-Based Child Care project issued a series of reports in 2010 that provide helpful guidance in developing and implementing effective quality improvement efforts for family child care.^{11, 12} They propose that intensity and individualization should each be considered when developing support services. Improvement strategies should be *intense* enough to produce meaningful changes in the learning environment and provider practices. The collection of strategies offered to family child care providers should ensure that that an individual provider has supports that are *individualized* to her needs.
- **Improving the quality of family child care homes in Georgia will require greater public and private investments.** Findings from this study suggest that efforts to improve the quality of family child care have not been enough to support high quality early care and education. As mentioned in the other reports of Georgia’s child care centers and Pre-K programs, significantly improving the quality of family child care will require greater public *and* private investments. Recognizing that resources are always limited, we hope that the reports will help policymakers and administrators make wise decisions about investments that are most likely to improve program quality.

- **Policymakers and administrators must think systemically about early care and education.** Family child care, child care centers, and Georgia’s Pre-K are all part of the early care and education system that supports children’s school and life success. This report is the final in a series of three reports that provide statewide data about the current quality of Georgia’s early care and education system. While each report focuses on one aspect of the system (e.g., family child care), policymakers, administrators, and stakeholders are encouraged to think systemically about the findings—recognizing that many children are served in multiple settings and that the collective quality of the system is important in supporting children’s success. The success of Georgia’s young children does not rest on any one setting, organization, or program but rather depends on the overall quality of the early care and education system.

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