

Pandemic Relief Funding for Georgia's ECE Providers and Families Through Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Initiatives

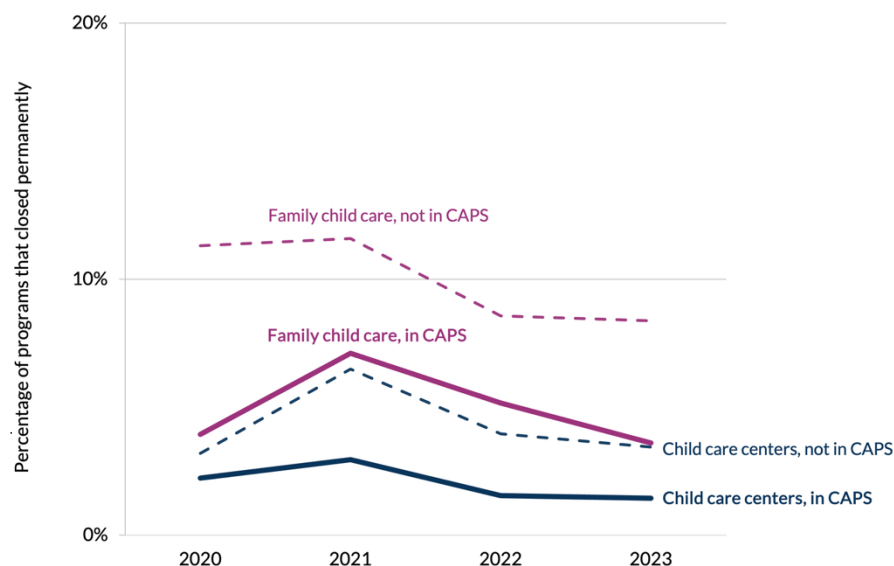
Rachel Abenavoli, Jing Tang, Dale Richards, Elizabeth Villegas, Ilana Huz, Jack Fojut, Diana E. Gal-Szabo, Diane Early, and Cassandra Gerson

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Georgia's Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) used state and federal pandemic relief funding to implement approximately 30 initiatives to stabilize the early care and education (ECE) industry and support young children and their families. Some of those initiatives supported providers and families participating in the Childcare and Parents Services (CAPS) program, Georgia's child care subsidy program. **This snapshot summarizes findings from Child Trends' evaluation of DECAL's pandemic relief initiatives for CAPS providers and families.** Additional evaluation findings, along with details about the study design, can be found in companion briefs and reports on [DECAL's website](#). Throughout, we include quotes from families to contextualize our findings.

From May 2020 to October 2023, about 70 percent of center-based providers and a little over one third of family child care providers participated in CAPS. As of October 2023, over 50,000 families were using a CAPS scholarship. Through the Awarding Child Care Education Scholarship Supplements (ACCESS) project, ECE providers participating in CAPS received increased reimbursement rates. The CAPS Emergency Policy Payments initiative paid providers based on enrollment instead of attendance. ACCESS also paid providers their full published rate for care, including the family fee, so families did not have to cover those costs. The CAPS Expansion project, broadened CAPS eligibility and the number of CAPS scholarships available.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, CAPS providers had significantly lower permanent closure rates than providers who did not participate in CAPS (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Permanent program closure rates from 2020 to 2023 for providers who did and did not participate in CAPS, by provider type



Source: Child Trends' analysis of CAPS and licensing data

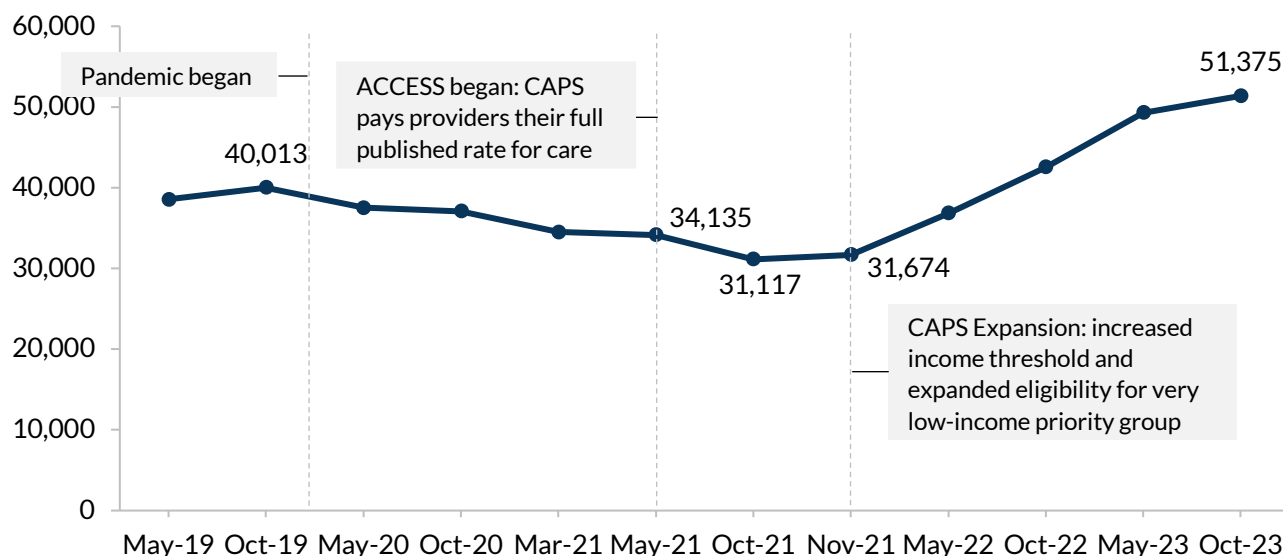
The number of families using a CAPS scholarship fluctuated from May 2019 to October 2023, ranging from over 30,000 in October 2021 to over 50,000 in October 2023. **Participation in CAPS slightly decreased from October 2019 to October 2021, despite the launch of ACCESS in May 2021. CAPS participation increased by 62 percent following the launch of the CAPS Expansion in November 2021, which broadened CAPS eligibility and the number of available CAPS scholarships (see Figure 2).** The proportion of families receiving CAPS who had incomes above 150 percent of the federal poverty level increased over time, particularly after CAPS Expansion began, which in part raised the maximum income families could earn to be eligible.

Families reported that they would not have been able to afford child care if not for ACCESS, which removed family fees for children with CAPS scholarships. Families also reported that access to free child care allowed them to keep their job, purchase household essentials and equipment for remote learning, and contribute to their savings.

"My kids probably wouldn't have went [to child care]. I would have had to try [to] find something else to do, maybe having to work less, because I couldn't afford for them to go during the pandemic and have to pay it all."

"In my case, I probably would have lost my job if I didn't have the assistance because I don't have family in the state and because of how many kids I have, it was hard for me. So, CAPS did come through for me."

Figure 2. Total number of families using a CAPS scholarship from May 2019 to October 2023



Source: Child Trends' analysis of CAPS data, 2019-2023.

Several pandemic relief-funded initiatives were designed to support providers and families participating in CAPS. Overall, CAPS providers had significantly lower closure rates than nonparticipating providers, and families reported they would not have been able to afford child care during this time if not for ACCESS. These initiatives helped both providers and families access needed care and kept programs operating.

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