



# Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning's Federal COVID-19 Relief Funding Spending Summary

Over the past two years the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) has used more than \$2 billion of federal relief funds to help the child care industry, families with young children, and communities surmount the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The funds come from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the federal Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act, and the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act.

**Through CARES, DECAL received \$144,000,000.** The purpose of CARES funds was to provide fast, direct relief to communities negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Through CRRSA, DECAL received \$403,660,875.** The purpose of CRRSA funds is to help mitigate negative financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Georgia's child care industry and to provide additional supports to enable Georgia families to access child care.

**Through ARP, DECAL received \$1,573,679,980.** DECAL received ARP funding through two distinct awards with different funding requirements and spending deadlines:

**\$968,278,648 of ARP funds are earmarked as stabilization funds** to support eligible child care providers as the state continues recovering from the pandemic. These funds will help ensure the stability of Georgia's child care industry.

**\$605,401,332 of ARP funds are allocated as additional Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) dollars.** These funds can also be used to support child care providers, families with young children, and the state's early care and education (ECE) workforce while also adding resources to support the state's ECE infrastructure, raising child care quality, and increasing access to care.

Following are ongoing projects and initiatives DECAL is implementing to support Georgia's child care providers, the early care and education workforce, families with young children, and other groups. These projects address the priorities of stabilizing Georgia's child care industry through the pandemic and recovery, increasing access to high quality child care for all families of young children, and supporting the state's ECE workforce.

The appendix provides an overview of projects and initiatives that have concluded.



## CAPS Initiatives Supporting Child Care Providers and Families



*Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) is Georgia’s program that assists no to low-income families with the cost of child care.*

### ACCESS

DECAL created the **Awarding Child Care Education Scholarship Supplements (ACCESS)** initiative to temporarily support CAPS families by increasing access to and paying for child care while they work or attend an education program. By paying the full cost of child care tuition, ACCESS temporarily alleviates the financial burden of child care for families in the CAPS program.

Through ACCESS, CAPS pays a child care provider’s full published rate for the type of care provided including the family fee and the remaining difference between the typical CAPS rate and the amount the provider charges through September 2023. Between October 2023 and September 2024, CAPS will continue to pay the typical CAPS rate plus the remaining difference between the provider’s full published rate and the typical CAPS rate. Based on federal funding requirements and in an effort to help families gradually return to paying a portion of their child care cost, families will return to paying only the family fee portion of their child care costs between October 2023 and September 2024. Continuing ACCESS supports families who may have continuing effects of financial hardships due to the pandemic.

In October 2022, a 7.87% increase was applied to the CAPS provider rates used to calculate ACCESS payments. An additional 4.3% increase will be applied in January 2024. To inform the increases, DECAL forecasted child care price growth for the duration of the initial ACCESS time period from May 2021 through September 2022 and the extension of ACCESS from October 2022 through September 2024, based on observed market changes in the price of full day child care. These increases, combined with the 15% tier bonus increase available for all Quality Rated-eligible providers, mean that the average weekly payment per child will have increased by 25.5% since ACCESS began in May 2021, ensuring that providers are compensated appropriately for providing high quality child care.

#### ACCESS Timeline

October 2022	First provider rate increase went into effect
September 2023	ACCESS continues through September 29, 2023, paying the child care provider’s full published rate
January 2024	Second provider rate increase goes into effect
September 2024	ACCESS continues through September 29, 2024, paying the child care provider’s full published rate minus the family fee

#### ACCESS Allocated Funding: CRRSA and ARP



## CAPS Student Parent 2Gen Pilot

DECAL will administer the CAPS Student Parent 2Gen Pilot to support student parents at three Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) campuses. The pilot will help student parents attain their educational and workforce training goals by providing easy access to CAPS, by helping them locate and pay for high quality child care, and by delivering services more quickly. Using a family centered coaching approach, the pilot will help student parents connect to resources using *Find Help Georgia* and to apply for other state services through Georgia Gateway. Pilot staff will help student parents identify and remove barriers to meeting their education goals and provide information and available resources regarding their child’s development. Child Trends, Inc., will evaluate the pilot.

### Student Parent 2Gen Pilot Timeline

January 2024 – June 2025	Conduct 2Gen Pilot
July – September 2025	Complete evaluation of 2Gen Pilot

**Student Parent 2Gen Pilot Allocated Funding:** ARP

## CAPS Expansion

DECAL increased the number of children served by CAPS by more than 10,000. This increase in the number of children was made possible by expanding the CAPS eligibility limits, making more children and families eligible for the program. The expanded guidelines increased the entry income threshold from 50% of the State Median Income (SMI) to 85% SMI. To be eligible for CAPS scholarships, a family must qualify for at least one priority group. For the “Very Low-Income” priority group, CAPS increased the percentage of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) guidelines that determine eligibility from 50% FPL to 150% FPL. Increasing the number of children served by CAPS by expanding the eligibility income limits made it possible for families who may not have been eligible for child care assistance before the expansion to be eligible. This expansion provides additional support to Georgia’s families and child care providers and ensures that more children have access to quality early education opportunities. To date, DECAL has supported more than 20,000 additional children in the CAPS program.

### CAPS Expansion Timeline

November 2021 – September 2024	CAPS expansion period
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**CAPS Expansion Allocated Funding:** ARP

## CAPS Emergency Policy Payments

DECAL implemented CAPS emergency policy payments to support child care providers by offering CAPS payments based on enrollment. Providers are paid whether they are open or temporarily closed and whether a child is present or absent if the child attended at least once in person since being enrolled in CAPS. Providers are paid the full-time rate for school-age



children who attended full time to complete virtual learning from a child care program. These payments help prevent providers from closing permanently and ensure that families have child care options to meet their needs.

**Emergency Policy Payments Timeline**

March 2020	Emergency policy payments began
September 2024	Emergency policy payments end

**Emergency Policy Payments Allocated Funding:** CARES

**Increased Tiered Reimbursement**

To help providers raise the quality of care they provide, CAPS increased Quality Rated tiered bonus payments by 15 percentage points per star level. One-star programs increased from 10% to 25%; two-star programs increased from 20% to 35%; and three-star programs increased from 40% to 55%. Child care providers in the process of achieving a rating, including those in a probationary or provisional status, received a 15% increase from current CAPS base rates to support their efforts to increase quality and successfully achieve a star rating. To date, DECAL has distributed \$100 million in additional tiered reimbursement to Quality Rated child care providers participating in the CAPS program.

**Increased Tiered Reimbursement Timeline**

November 2021	Increased tiered reimbursement began
September 2024	Increased tiered reimbursement ends

**Increased Tiered Reimbursement Funding:** ARP

**Grants and Other Resources for Child Care Providers**

**Child Care Tuition Assistance Program for Early Educators**

Through this pilot program, DECAL will pay a portion of child care costs for the children of eligible ECE employees enrolled at the facility. DECAL will pay 75% of the published child care tuition rates for each eligible staff member. The provider will cover a minimum of 15% of the published tuition rate, and employees pay 10%, although providers can also choose to cover that additional 10% themselves.

Eligible child care employees must work at least 30 hours per week as a family child care learning home provider, aide, or assistant, Georgia's Pre-K teacher or assistant teacher, child care lead teacher or assistant teacher, child care director or assistant director, child care floater, or school-age employee working in licensed child care.

Twenty-four child care learning centers and six family child care learning homes will be selected to participate in the pilot.



**Child Care Tuition Assistance Program Timeline**

October 2023	Application period October 11-20; selected programs notified October 31
November 2023 – August 2024	Pilot implementation

**Child Care Tuition Assistance Program Allocated Funding:** ARP

**Thriving Child Care Business Academy**



DECAL launched the Thriving Child Care Business Academy on September 26, 2023, to offer resources and training to child care providers to strengthen their business practices, support sustainability after COVID-19 relief funding ends, and increase their ability to offer high-quality early education services. Through the Academy, providers can access online trainings and resources to help them build and maintain thriving businesses by enhancing management skills. Offerings include large-group webinars, small

study groups, individual coaching, and a resource library of bilingual video and print resources covering various business topics.

**Thriving Child Care Business Academy Timeline**

September 2023	Thriving Child Care Business Academy launched
Fall 2023 – Summer 2024	Trainings, coaching, and small group studies are offered

**Thriving Child Care Business Academy Allocated Funding:** ARP

**Health and Safety Grants**

DECAL is awarding grants to licensed child care learning centers (CCLC) and family child care learning homes (FCCLH) to fund health and safety enhancements in the programs. Grant awards range from \$5,000 - \$40,000 based on capacity, and funds can be used for facility improvements that impact compliance, injury prevention, and Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) compliance.

**Health and Safety Grants Timeline**

April 2023 – March 2024	Grants are awarded
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**Health and Safety Grants Allocated Funding:** ARP



## Quality Rated Restoration Grants



DECAL awarded 2,380 Quality Rated Restoration Grants totaling more than \$46 million to child care programs scheduled to be rated through Quality Rated between July 1, 2022, and December 31, 2023. The purpose of these grants was to support providers as they prepared for on-site observations. Grant awards included \$5,000 per eligible classroom and could be used through ClassWallet to purchase materials, equipment, and professional development opportunities for teaching staff. These grants also included \$500 bonuses for eligible staff after a star rating has been achieved. Staff bonuses will continue to be awarded to staff in programs rated through March 31, 2024.

### Quality Rated Restoration Grants Timeline

November 2022 – August 2023	Grant payment period
April 2023	Staff bonus payments began
December 2023	Deadline to spend grant funds in ClassWallet

**Quality Rated Restoration Grants Allocated Funding:** CRRSA and ARP

## Workforce Supports and Resources

### School-Age State-Approved Trainers

DECAL is supporting school-age state-approved trainers to increase the number and quality of school-age trainings across the state. Participating trainers will be trained on best practices in school-age programs and on the Georgia Afterschool and Youth Development Standards (ASYD) through a “Training for Trainers” session. Trainers will also receive coaching on new ways to develop high quality training.

### School-Age State-Approved Trainers Timeline

October – December 2023	State-approved trainer webinars are offered
Fall 2023 – Fall 2024	Trainings are developed
Spring 2024	ASYD “Training for Trainers” offered

**School-Age State-Approved Trainers Allocated Funding:** ARP

### School-Age Projects

To increase supports for school-age providers, DECAL contracted with the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network to conduct stakeholder meetings, observe school-age providers, and expand school-age specific training. This project includes completing a crosswalk of the school-age observation tools SACERS and SAPQA and piloting a Georgia Afterschool and Youth Development Standards (ASYD) certificate and micro-credential.



**School-Age Projects Timeline**

June 2023 – October 2023	School-age observations period
August 2023	Completed the first draft of the SACERS and SAPQA crosswalk
September 2023	Stakeholder meetings and school-age enrichment “training for trainers” completed
October 2023 – June 2024	Pilot period for ASYD certificate and micro-credential

**School-Age Projects Allocated Funding:** ARP

**ECE Task Force**

The Early Childhood Education Task Force will research and make recommendations for how to best support the early childhood education workforce. The task force will focus on the state registry, career pathways and credentialing, and workforce data.

**ECE Task Force Timeline**

July – August 2023	Task force members identified
September – December 2023	Task force meetings held
Spring 2024	Issue final task force report

**ECE Task Force Allocated Funding:** ARP

**Workforce Entry**

DECAL is implementing strategies to increase entry to the ECE workforce by expanding access to the Child Development Associate (CDA), including adjusting DECAL Scholars eligibility criteria, paying the full cost of the CDA, contracting to offer the Teachstone CDA program for Pre-K, Head Start, and Early Head Start, and partnering with higher education institutions to explore alternative pathways (e.g., on-the-job training and apprenticeships). DECAL Scholars policies have been updated, and the number of approved applicants is increasing. Other CDA projects, including CDA Trainer Grants and CDA with CLASS, are ongoing.

**Workforce Entry Timeline**

October 2022	Teachstone CDA program began
January 2023	DECAL Scholars eligibility criteria updated
April – December 2023	CDA trainer grantee training period with 17 grantees
March 2024	CDA trainer grant participants submit for CDA to Council for Professional Recognition

**Workforce Entry Allocated Funding:** ARP



## Strengthening the ECE Career Pipeline

DECAL is developing supports for ECE professionals to continue their education and maintain employment in the ECE field, including expanding formal education pathways for infant and toddler teachers and awarding innovation grants to develop ECE career pipeline supports. DECAL partnered with the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) to increase access to entry-level ECE credentials among the adult education student population. Adult education students are pursuing a credential while also completing their high school equivalency. TCSG has issued grants to seven technical colleges to embed the Child Development Associate (CDA) or ECE Technical Certificate of Credit (TCC) into adult education programming. The goal is for students to complete the program and enter the workforce within five months of beginning their studies.

### ECE Career Pipeline Timeline

July 2023	Grants awarded to seven technical colleges
Spring 2024	Final reports due from grantees

**ECE Career Pipeline Allocated Funding:** ARP

## POWER-ED



The **Providing Our Workforce Essential Recognition (POWER)** program transitioned to **POWER-ED (Providing Our Workforce Essential Recognition for Educational Development)**, a program to help teachers in POWER-eligible programs attain higher credentials. POWER-ED funds will be used in conjunction with existing DECAL Scholars programs to support increased tuition reimbursement rates and to provide temporary wage supplements while pursuing a credential.

### POWER-ED Timeline

January 2023	POWER-ED updates added to DECAL Scholars
February 2023	Applications for POWER-ED opened
June 2024	Final applications due
September 2024	Final payments made

**POWER-ED Allocated Funding:** ARP

## Mental Health Consultation Pilot

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) is a prevention-based service provided by trained mental health professionals to help guide and support caregivers (families, teachers, and child care providers) to provide optimal social and emotional development for young children. DECAL will train and fund a cohort of IECMH consultants supporting three





contracts and evaluation to expand community- and family-based mental health supports in areas around Savannah, Macon, and DeKalb County.

**Mental Health Consultation Timeline**

September 2023 – July 2024	Train pilot sites and implement and evaluate IECMHC pilot
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**Mental Health Consultation Allocated Funding:** ARP

**Pyramid Model Training**

To help the ECE workforce develop children’s social-emotional skills, improve classroom climate, and use trauma-responsive practices, DECAL is providing Pyramid Model training to the ECE workforce using online modules with support from DECAL specialists. DECAL is also partnering with the Technical College System of Georgia to train early childhood faculty on the Pyramid Model.

**Pyramid Model Training Timeline**

February 2023 – May 2023	Forty-eight early childhood leaders representing 21 programs participated in the training.
June 2023 – September 2023	More than 200 infant, toddler, preschool, and Pre-K teachers participated in the training
October 2023 – June 2024	Up to 650 additional leaders, teachers, and family child care providers will participate in the training series. During this time, up to 30 technical college faculty will take the online modules and participate in a professional learning community focused on integrating Pyramid Model into their coursework.

**Pyramid Model Training Allocated Funding:** CRRSA and ARP

**OLLI Courses**



To support recruiting and retaining a skilled ECE workforce, DECAL is expanding the Online Learning Library Initiative (OLLI) in the Georgia Professional Development System (GaPDS) to include training for target audiences, such as substitute teachers and new teachers. DECAL will also develop courses for required Health and Safety Orientation, 40-Hour Director Training, and Ethics and Professionalism. Additionally, the Health and Safety Orientation and 40-Hour Director Training will be adapted to include content for school-age programs.

**OLLI Courses Timeline**

October 2023	Roll out Health and Safety Orientation and 40-Hour Director Training
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October – December 2023	Roll out curricula for substitute teachers and new teachers
October 2023 – September 2024	Additional course development for substitutes and new teachers

**OLLI Courses Allocated Funding:** ARP

## Other Initiatives Supporting Providers and Communities

### EXPAND Grants

DECAL is piloting the Expanding Parents’ Access through Nontraditional Delivery (EXPAND) grants to support families with child care needs during nontraditional hours, such as evenings, early mornings, overnight, and weekends. Based on research conducted by The Urban Institute on Georgia’s needs for child care during nontraditional hours, DECAL developed two types of grants: one for licensed child care providers to expand their operating hours and a second for government entities and nonprofit organizations to form collaboratives to address the child care access challenges in their communities. Providers and other interested entities submitted applications for the grants during summer 2023. Seven providers and six government entities and nonprofit organizations received the grants. Grant implementation is being evaluated by the University of Georgia’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government. Results from the evaluation will help DECAL determine how to best support child care during nontraditional hours.

#### EXPAND Grants Timeline

June – August 2023	EXPAND grants application period
October 2023 – December 2024	EXPAND grants project period

**EXPAND Grants Allocated Funding:** ARP

### Community Transformation Grants

DECAL’s Community Transformation Grants (CTGs) support projects that increase access to early childhood services and resources in local communities by creating early education partnerships among community agencies and other stakeholders. These partnerships design, tailor, and implement projects that address critical local needs. Expanding on the CTGs, DECAL will fund 18 new grants and offer extension grants to existing CTG grantees. CTGs are funded for 18 months and do not exceed \$125,000.

#### Community Transformation Grants Timeline

- September – October 2022: New CTGs application period
- January 2023 – June 2024: New CTGs project period
- January – December 2023: CTG extensions project period



**Community Transformation Grants Allocated Funding: ARP**

## **CAPS Research Project**

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DECAL is participating in a research project focusing on CAPS from the family perspective. The Urban Institute has designed the project around three components: understanding the CAPS-eligible population, exploring demographic characteristics of eligible families and comparing participants with non-participants, and understanding parent experiences with CAPS. The Urban Institute is conducting the research projects, which includes interviews, focus groups, and analyzing administrative data. Results of the research project will help DECAL better understand families who are and are not served through CAPS and inform needed improvements to the program.

### **CAPS Research Project Timeline**

- September 2023 – July 2024: Conduct research project

**CAPS Research Project Allocated Funding: ARP**

## **System Level Evaluation**

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COVID-19 relief funding has provided unprecedented opportunities to support early education. Because the funding is time-limited, DECAL will evaluate the impacts of COVID-19 relief funding and what happens when the funding ends. Child Trends, Inc. is designing and conducting the evaluation to include a close look at the activities related to COVID-19 relief funding (CARES, CRRSA, and ARP) and the system-level impacts of DECAL's COVID relief related projects.

### **System Level Evaluation Timeline**

- September 2023 – August 2024: Conduct evaluation

**System Level Evaluation Allocated Funding: ARP**



## Appendix: Relief Projects That Have Concluded

### CARES-funded Projects

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#### STABLE Rounds One, Two, and Three

Shortly after the CARES Act was enacted, DECAL created the **Short-Term Assistance Benefit for Licensed Entities (STABLE)** project. Child care providers were able to apply for funds to help pay staff salaries, purchase cleaning and classroom supplies, and provide tuition relief to families. The purpose of STABLE was to help offset losses incurred by the pandemic. DECAL used \$122.2 million of CARES funds and \$42.6 million of CRRSA funds for two rounds of STABLE in summer and fall 2020 and a third round of STABLE in spring 2021. Evaluation results demonstrate that these funds achieved their purpose and kept many providers from closing permanently.

#### CAPS Essential Services Workforce Priority Group

DECAL used \$2.6 million of CARES funds to create a new priority group for essential workers. This new priority group ensured that many workers providing essential services during the pandemic could access child care options that met their needs.

### CRRSA-funded Projects

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#### COVID Test and PPE Grants

DECAL used \$11.2 million of CRRSA funds to award grants to licensed child care providers to purchase COVID-19 test kits, personal protective equipment, and cleaning supplies. Funds were awarded April – June 2022 with amounts based on provider capacity.

#### POWER

Through **Providing Our Workforce Essential Recognition (POWER)**, approved ECE professionals received up to three payments of \$1,000. DECAL used \$117.8 million of CRRSA funds for POWER payments.

#### SHARE Grants

DECAL used \$4.3 million of CRRSA funds for the **School-Age Help and Relief Effort (SHARE)** grants. The funding supported providers who were caring for and supporting school-age children (ages 5–12 years) throughout the school year and those providing summer academic and social enrichment programs for school-age youth. Eligible providers included DECAL licensed child care learning centers that served school-age children, family child care learning homes that served school-age children, and license-exempt providers who had served at least one school-age child since May 1, 2019, who was enrolled in the CAPS program. Voices for Georgia's Children (through leadership of the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network) and the United Way of Greater Atlanta collaborated to administer and manage the school-age grants program. DECAL awarded 1,607 SHARE grants with award amounts ranging from \$1,075 for



licensed family child care learning homes to \$4,300 for license-exempt and licensed child care learning centers.

### **School-Age Grants**

DECAL used \$9.7 million dollars of CRRSA funds and \$440,000 of ARP funds to award school-age grants to 3,845 providers. From February to June 2023, licensed providers who were currently serving or had served school-age children within the past year were awarded funds based on their license capacity to purchase equipment and supplies specifically for school-age children.

## **ARP-funded Projects**

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### **STABLE 4ward**

DECAL used ARP stabilization funds for a fourth round of STABLE called STABLE 4ward in November 2021. Specifically, \$953 million was paid to licensed providers through STABLE 4ward. These funds were paid in monthly installments through September 2023. STABLE 4ward was intended to help child care providers with the cost of staffing their programs and to provide relief to families in their care. To meet this intent, recipients had to spend at least 70% of the funding provided on these types of costs. The remaining funds could be used for operational supplies and to maintain or improve the facility. While the final payments were made in September 2023, programs have until June 30, 2024, to spend all their funding.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

DECAL used nearly \$250,000 in ARP funds to solicit feedback from Georgia families, ECE providers and workforce, DECAL staff, and other stakeholder groups about supports Georgia's ECE system needed. DECAL contracted with the Urban Institute to conduct the stakeholder engagement and used the results to inform how CRRSA and ARP funds should be allocated and thus contributing to the development of many of the projects described in this document.

### **Teacher Supply Grants**

DECAL used \$4.2 million of ARP funds to award \$125 grants to eligible early learning professionals to purchase classroom and program supplies for the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years. 28,494 eligible professionals received grants.

### **Georgia's Pre-K Grants**

DECAL used \$18.6 million of ARP funds to award one-time grants of \$5,000 per classroom to each Georgia's Pre-K Program provider to support quality in Pre-K classrooms through the purchase of technology, instructional materials, approved Pre-K curricula, and classroom furniture. Grants were awarded to 3,728 classrooms from October 2022 through May 2023.