

Foundations for Learning

Issue Definition

Research has demonstrated a direct link between early experiences and later success in life. The relationships, environments, early experiences, and supports that children receive have a profound impact on their development. From birth, there are multiple factors that together impact a child’s capacities for communication, self-regulation, learning, and social interaction. These factors include good health; safe, stable, and nurturing relationships; appropriate learning environments; and supportive communities. Early learning and childcare are crucial parts of ensuring these needs are met for children. A lack of high-quality early learning opportunities and responsive interactions puts children at risk for poor mental and physical health, behavior problems, and school failure.

Elements of an Effective System

Top-performing states and educational systems have strong foundations in place to support children and families before students arrive at school. Internationally, high-performing countries help ensure that children enter school healthy and ready to learn by focusing these foundational supports on prenatal care, mother and child nutrition, access to health care, and access to high-quality early learning for all children.

The Alliance for Early Success developed a Birth Through Eight State Policy Framework that seeks to provide a foundation for all children across the United States to be successful in school. It incorporates health, family supports, and learning.

HEALTH – policies and practices focused on the physical and mental health of young children and the adults who care for them

EARLY LEARNING – policies aimed at providing effective early learning in multiple settings from birth

FAMILY SUPPORTS – policies that provide families the knowledge, skills, stability, and basic resources needed to enhance children’s development and learning

Georgia Data

HEALTH INDICATORS

	GEORGIA	US
Low-birthweight babies	9.5%	8.1%
Children <i>without</i> health insurance	7.0%	5.0%
Births to women receiving late or no prenatal care	8.0%	6.0%
Children with one or more emotional, behavioral, or developmental conditions	17.0%	17.0%
Households that are food insecure	14.9%	13.7%

EARLY LEARNING INDICATORS

- 18%** of eligible children ages 3-5 have access to Head Start
- 3%** of eligible children under 3 have access to Early Head Start
- 50%** of 3- and 4-year-olds in Georgia enrolled in preschool (national average 47%)
- 58%** of eligible early care centers participating in Quality Rated
- 60%** of estimated 4-year-olds participating in Georgia Pre-K
- 28th** State spending on preschool programs
- 37th** All reported spending on early learning education (including state and federal dollars)

FAMILY SUPPORTS

- 89%** of Food Stamp-eligible participants are enrolled in this program in Georgia (National average – 83%)
- 140%** Georgia child care subsidy income limit, as a percentage of poverty
 - 40 states eligibility levels > **140%** of poverty
 - 9 states eligibility levels < **140%** of poverty
 - 10 states eligibility levels > **200%** of poverty

Opportunities

Georgia has been working to provide a solid foundation for learning so that children enter school ready to learn.

Best-practice research indicates that state policies must align across three primary areas:

- 1. HEALTH:** Policies and practices focused on the physical and mental health of young children and the adults who care for them
- 2. LEARNING:** Policies aimed at effective early learning in multiple settings from birth
- 3. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORTS:** Policies that provide families the knowledge, skills, stability, and basic resources needed to enhance children's development and learning

ALERT! POLICY MISSING OR NEEDS IMMEDIATE ACTION

Georgia must increase access to health supports for young children and their families, including access to insurance and providers as well as mental and oral health support.

- Expand access to medical insurance.
- Focus on mental health.

Increase access to family supports, such as work supports and family leave.

Examine the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

YIELD! PROCEED WITH CAUTION, MORE WORK TO BE DONE

Increase access to high-quality early learning programs, especially for low-income children

- Explore innovative funding strategies to continue the support and expansion of Quality Rated.
- Georgia Childcare and Parent Services Program (CAPS) needs appropriate resources to serve all eligible children.
- Fully implement Governor Deal's Education Reform Commission recommendations for early learning, including tiered-reimbursement for higher quality centers and a combination of tax incentives for providers, teachers, and families.

Fully leverage the opportunities under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act to strengthen and expand connections between early learning programs and elementary schools, improve instruction, and measure progress.

- Develop assessments and accountability systems that explicitly consider and address P-2 and also align with birth-five.
- Develop accountability measures that reflect the importance of children's earliest years.
- Engage early learning in the Comprehensive Needs Assessment for school improvement.
- Include the Department of Early Care and Learning as a partner in school turnaround plans.
- Support alignment and transitions between early learning environments and kindergarten.

Support the Department of Public Health's efforts to increase access to screenings, assessments, referrals, and mental health services for children ages birth to eight.

- Continue Project LAUNCH after the pilot period ends and scale it to more districts.
- Expand access to home visiting programs.

GO! KEEP MOVING FORWARD: STRONG POLICIES IN PLACE

Continue to support statewide coalitions like those listed below to align the work being done across all policy areas, including health, education, and family well-being.

- Get Georgia Reading Campaign
- Framework for School Readiness in Georgia

Support and expand Georgia's Pre-K Program.

Continue to support the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning's work developed under the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant.