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BRIEF



Georgia's Working Families Need Early Care and Education

Policymakers must increase investments in CAPS, to benefit children and families, the economy, public safety, and national security

There are approximately 765,000 children under age 6 in Georgia, and 70 percent of these children have all available parents in the workforce.[1] Parents need early care and education (ECE) so they can go to work, remain productive, and build successful careers to support their families. Children depend on nurturing, stimulating environments, at home and in ECE, during the critical early years of brain development.

Research demonstrates the benefits of high-quality ECE for children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. For example, a longitudinal study of more than 1,300 children found that children in higher-quality child care were better prepared for school at age 4 compared to those in lower-quality child care. At age 15, they were still performing slightly above their peers and had significantly lower levels of behavior problems.[2] At age 26, participants from low-income families who spent two or more years in high-quality child care were more likely to graduate from college and had higher salaries, compared to those who had been in lower-quality care.[3]

ECE programs that emphasize healthy eating and physical activity can help reduce children's risk of obesity. For example, a study of North Carolina's Abecedarian ECE program found that girls who participated were less likely to become obese as adults, and boys had fewer risk factors for heart disease, stroke and diabetes.[4]

Quality preschool programs also have positive effects on children's development. Children who had attended Georgia's Pre-K program outperformed non-participants on third-grade tests in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.[5] Pre-K participants were also twice as likely to meet state standards on mathematics

achievement tests through seventh grade.[6] Children *not* served by the Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC) preschool program were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18.[7] By age 24, the people served by the CPC were 20 percent less likely to have served time in jail or prison.[8]

Early care and education also contributes to public safety and national security

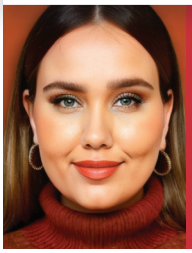
Beyond benefits for individual children and families, quality ECE also strengthens our state and our nation. Our national security relies on qualified young adults who are ready, willing, and able to serve in the U.S. military. However, educational deficits, health issues (overweight), or having a record of crime or substance use prevent 77 percent of American youth from qualifying for service.[9] There is scientific consensus that early brain development sets the stage for children's future success. Without a solid ECE system, our nation risks having an even smaller recruiting pool in the future.

Further, Georgia's jails are full of people serving time for serious and costly crimes. It doesn't have to be that way. Providing at-risk kids with high-quality early learning opportunities can help reduce the human and fiscal costs of crime in the future.

Georgia families do not have the early care and education they need

Despite the value of ECE to families, our state, and the nation, many Georgia families do not have the ECE they need, particularly those with infants and toddlers. Child care is unaffordable for many families, especially those with low incomes.

> "Investing in affordable child care access will help solve our state's labor shortages by ensuring more parents can get back to work at local businesses. We urge policymakers to address the economic impacts of insufficient child care on our state's small business community."



Rachel Shanklin
Small Business Majority's Georgia Director and ReadyNation Member

The cost of infant care in a center averages more than $9,200 per year in Georgia, which is more expensive than in-state public college tuition and fees.[10] A married couple spends an average of nine percent of their annual income on child care, more than the seven percent defined as affordable.[11]

Georgia's Pre-K program is an option for 4-year-old children, to cover part of parents' working days. But, the program, although universal, serves just 55 percent of 4-year-olds.[12]



CAPS helps Georgia's working families with low incomes afford child care

The Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program provides scholarships to help Georgia families with low incomes pay for child care.[13] Parents must work or participate in education or training programs, or other work activities. CAPS is funded mainly by the federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), along with supplemental state funds. Parents also pay a share of the cost, designed to be capped at seven percent of family income. Investments in CAPS fall far short of the need, with only 14 percent of eligible children served.[14] Adding $4.7 million to the CAPS program reimbursement rates can take Georgia's from the 50th to the 75th percentile nationwide, making our state more competitive.

Georgia policymakers must support early care and education for working families

High-quality early care and education has myriad benefits, for children, families, our state and the nation. Georgia policymakers must increase investments in the CAPS program, to help more eligible working families access quality child care. Legislators must also sustain investments in Georgia's Pre-K program, to serve 4-year-olds and their families. Support for high-quality early care and education is an investment in our future public safety, national security, and economic well-being.

Endnotes

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