
Georgia’s Early Education Empowerment Zones, Evaluation Report July 2017 – December 2017 Implementation

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OVERVIEW

In September 2014, Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) announced the first four Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RT3-ELC) grant Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs). The zones each include one to five counties pre-identified into clusters by DECAL. The zones include North Georgia (Catoosa, Whitfield, Murray, Gordon, and Gilmer counties), Clarke County, Bibb County, and South Georgia (Colquitt, Cook, Brooks, Lowndes, and Echols counties).¹

The RT3-ELC grant helps states build a stronger and more efficient system of early learning and development. Like many of Georgia’s RT3-ELC projects, the E3Zs encompass the grant’s priorities by using the core areas and focused investment areas as an outline for design and implementation.² The purpose of the E3Zs is to increase the availability of high-quality early learning and development options and integrate new or expanded services into high-quality child care programs focused on children with high needs, which includes children who are low-income, English learners, and children with disabilities or developmental delays.

The E3Zs include one community coordinator per zone. The Community Coordinator’s role is to facilitate and promote community-based projects and programs related to E3Z

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¹ The E3Zs are listed in order of geography, from North Georgia to South Georgia. The counties within the E3Z North and South Georgia E3Z are presented in geographic order from west to east.

² For an explanation of the RT3-ELC grant, please refer to the executive summary (2013)
<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/2013-executive-summary.doc>.

implementation.. The Community Coordinators work directly with DECAL and state administrators to coordinate services for their zones, pilot new initiatives, and share information. The Community Coordinators provide most of the information for this report. Their testimonies help contextualize each community's response to its own perceived need.³

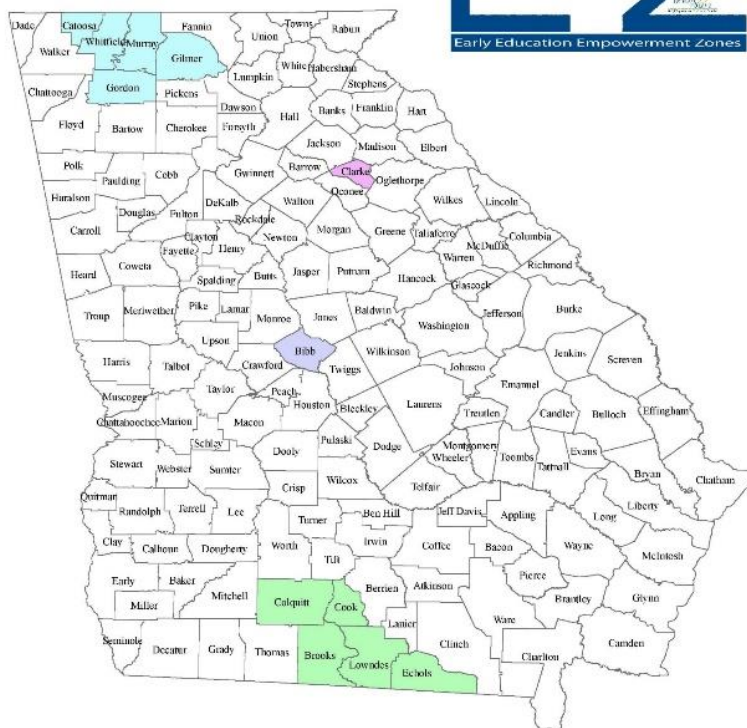
The purpose of this report is to summarize the recent RT3-ELC grant activities (from July through December 2017) in the E3Zs, communicate the details of implementation, and identify the key practices needed to sustain the E3Z

work. This report provides a brief overview of Georgia's RT3-ELC grant strategies within the E3Zs, details major accomplishments and challenges within the E3Zs, and concludes with next steps planned within the zones.

GEORGIA'S RT3-ELC STRATEGIES

As part of its RT3-ELC proposal, DECAL is implementing specific strategies to increase the quality of and access to early learning and development options, especially for children with high needs (which includes children who are low-income, English learners, and children with disabilities or developmental delays). In addition, the E3Zs support local efforts to coordinate key programs and services that target children and families with high needs. The strategies include:⁴

1. Supporting local Birth-to-Eight Teams
2. Expanding Quality Rated participation and access
3. Implementing the Great Start Georgia home visitation model in high-quality child care programs



³ Previous E3Z reports can be found on the GOSA website: <https://gosa.georgia.gov/race-top-early-learning-challenge-grant-evaluation>

⁴ For a more detailed description of each RT3-ELC grant E3Z strategy or detailed profiles of each of the E3Zs, please see the previous E3Z reports on the GOSA website: <https://gosa.georgia.gov/race-top-early-learning-challenge-grant-evaluation>.

4. Enhancing professional development opportunities for early childhood workers
5. Decreasing family co-pays in high-quality child care programs
6. Increasing the availability of high-quality child care programs by using economic incentives for new businesses
7. Increasing subsidy rates in high-quality child care programs
8. Offering Summer Transition Programs in high-quality child care programs
9. Instituting comprehensive assessments and screenings
10. Offering targeted grants to increase family engagement

REVIEW OF E3Z ACTIVITY BETWEEN JULY 2017 AND DECEMBER 2017

The E3Zs are moving into a period of scale-up and sustainability. Part of scaling-up means expanding through cross-community networking and collaboration. The Birth-to-Eight Teams and Community Coordinators celebrated their successes and shared their learned experiences with other communities looking to replicate similar initiatives. For example, the E3Zs shared lessons learned during implementation and scaling grants intended to deliver community-based initiatives for birth to age eight language and literacy. More communities, both E3Z and non-E3Z, are now collaborating to learn and implement new projects together, such as the Two-Gen Innovation Grant communities. The Coordinators have adopted regular Team Time as an opportunity to learn, one zone at a time, the different ways in which their work moves forward.

In regards to sustainability, the zones are always seeking ways to continue their current initiatives through outside grants and strategic partnerships. They have successfully secured a myriad of outside grants to continuously support their communities with external resources. The zones are also working to emphasize the importance of high quality early care and education to business interests, community needs, and other education initiatives, thereby, ensuring their continued success.

RECENT E3Z ACTIVITIES

This section focuses on the recent activities within the E3Zs. Through local partnerships, the zones are working to meet the RT3-ELC grant objectives, as well as spark new, local initiatives aimed at reaching the common goal of an improved early care and education system.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Through their trials and successes, the zones are inspiring other communities to make early care and education a priority. The zones are also working to build a shared early care and education agenda within their communities.

Two-Generation Innovation & Multigenerational Literacy

In 2016, Georgia was one of five states to be awarded the Parents and Children Thriving Together (PACTT) grant from the National Governors Association and the Center for Law and Social Policy. The PACTT grant is funding three Two-Gen Innovation Grants in Georgia. Two-Gen Innovation Grants are one-year, \$16,000 grants to pilot or expand community strategies that connect the early learning and postsecondary/workforce systems at the local level. The two-generation approach supports children from low-income families with high-quality early learning, while also supporting their families in attaining education, training, and ultimately jobs that lead to economic self-sufficiency.⁵

During 2017, DECAL selected three Georgia communities to receive a Two-Gen Innovation Grant: Bibb County, Clarke County, and Clayton County. All three communities hope to impact both the children who receive access to high quality early learning, as well as the ability of parents to attain jobs with wages that promote greater family economic security.

One stipulation of the Two-Gen Innovation Grant is that the local fiscal agent is a government entity or a non-profit. In Clarke County, the fiscal agent is Family Connection-Communities in Schools of Athens, one of the main partners in the zone's Birth-to-Eight Team. In Bibb County, the fiscal agent is the United Way of Central Georgia, also a main partner in the zone's Birth-to-Eight Team. In Clayton County, the local fiscal agent is Quality Care for Children. Both Bibb County and Clayton County have United Way organizations as community partners, and both United Way organizations include education or early learning action teams that are actively working to improve the system of early care and education in their communities. The similarities and geographic proximity between the two communities promote cross-community collaboration. The Bibb E3Z Community Coordinator, who helps to lead the Early Learning Network in Bibb County, is able to work closely with the Education Co-Chair in Clayton County as both communities learn from each other and implement the Two-Gen Innovation Grant.

⁵ The Two-Gen Innovation Grants are made possible through a partnership between DECAL, the University System of Georgia, the Technical College System of Georgia, the Department of Economic Development Workforce Division, and the Department of Labor.

In August 2017, Literacy For All awarded over \$200,000 in grants to support multigenerational literacy programs in ten Georgia communities, three of which are in E3Zs. The Brooks County Family Connection in the South Georgia E3Z received a Literacy For All grant to support its multigenerational program. The program distributes books to children, trains families on the importance of reading, promotes literacy awareness in the community, and provides books for the jail library. Additionally, the Cook County Family Connection, also in the South Georgia E3Z, received a Literacy For All grant to help strengthen the organization's literacy workshops and book distribution efforts. The United Way of Central Georgia, part of the Bibb E3Z, also received a Literacy For All grant to support the First Steps Initiative which provides early literacy education to expecting parents and parents of young children.

Cross-Community Networking and Team Time

The E3Zs continued to share their communities' successes with each other, their own stakeholders, and groups and individuals outside of their zones. In October 2017, the E3Z North held its Early Education Summit. Nearly 70 local, state, and national early education leaders and stakeholders gathered alongside community stakeholders to focus on the impact of high quality early education in the E3Z North community. The summit was also an opportunity for the zone to celebrate its successes and reflect on the impact their initiatives have had in the community over the past three years. The E3Z North Community Coordinator, along with partners from Whitfield County Schools, also met with representatives from Screven County Elementary School. Screven County Elementary School recently received a Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) Innovation Fund Planning Grant and is hoping to learn from Whitfield County Schools' success in implementing GOSA Innovation Fund Planning and Implementation Grants.

In September 2017, the Community Coordinators began having regular Team Time events with each other. Team Time is different than the monthly, in-person meetings that the Coordinators attend in Atlanta. During Team Time, all four of the Coordinators spend two days in one of the zones. Being in the zones allows the Coordinators to learn firsthand from each other. As a team, they attend the local Birth-to-Eight Team meeting and debrief about the meeting afterwards. They can then also take their experiences back to their own Birth-to-Eight Team meetings. They also tour the local community by visiting Quality Rated child care providers, early care and learning grant recipients (e.g., Child Care Expansion Grant recipients, Family Engagement Opportunity Grant recipients, etc.), and other local partners' meetings.

Although most of the Coordinators have been working in their roles since 2015, before Team Time, they did not have a scheduled time to see each other's work. Team Time allows them to spend ample time in each others' zones as a group. They have time to observe, connect, reflect, and share with each other. The first Team Time was held in the South Georgia E3Z in September. Future Team Times are scheduled for January (Clarke E3Z), March (E3Z North), and May (Bibb E3Z).

Inspiring a Collective Early Care and Education Agenda

Through their successes, the E3Zs continued to inspire a collective agenda amongst all community groups to improve the quality of their early care and education systems. For example, the Economic Development arm of the Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce invited the E3Z

North Community Coordinator to attend the Georgia Forum--Young Game Changers conference in October 2017. At the conference, she learned that while business leaders recognize the importance of high quality early education and reading on grade level by 3rd grade, they need actionable ideas on how to connect the two concepts and measure progress. Around the same time, the local chamber of commerce unveiled its strategic plan for the future, which features education as one of six key strategic community needs.

The Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce Early Education and Workforce Development Committee invited the South Georgia E3Z Community Coordinator to its meetings. The Committee is discussing interesting ways to promote early education and workforce development.

MAJOR CHALLENGES

Each of the zones continues to need ways to inspire all of their local child care programs to become Quality Rated.

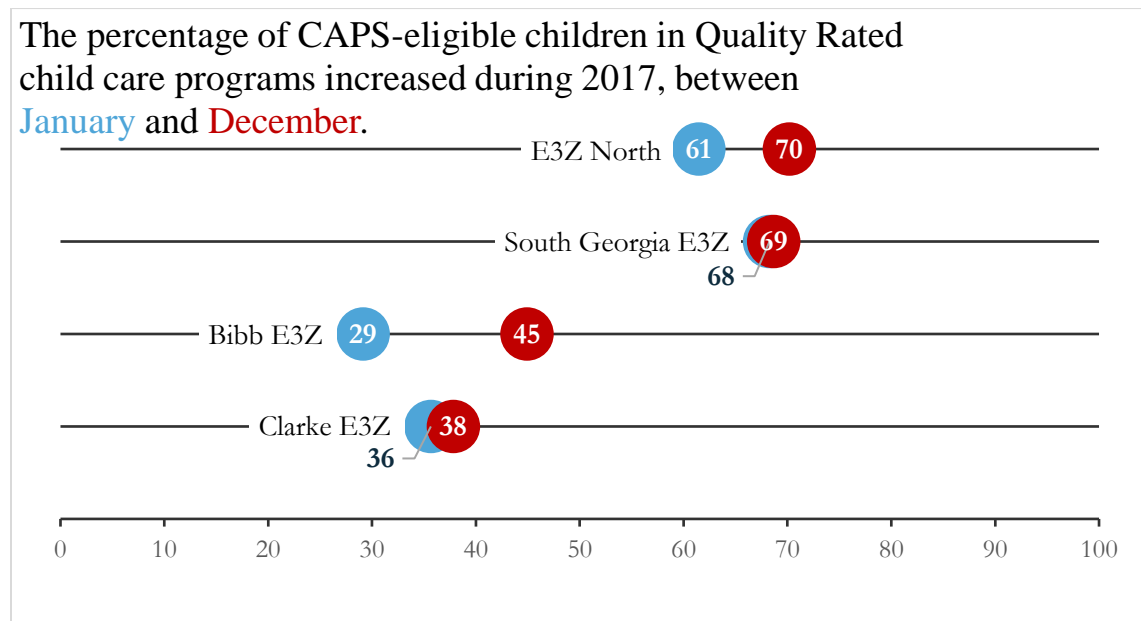
Measuring Continued Progress

Over the past three years, the E3Zs exhibited record growth in terms of the number of child care programs that are participating and rated in Quality Rated, as well as the percent of Quality Rated child care programs who serve children receiving Child Care and Parent Services (CAPS) subsidies.⁶ The growth, however, has slowed, and the zones continue to look for ways to incentivize providers to come on board.

The CAPS 2020 deadline is one such incentive for providers to become Quality Rated, especially those that want to continue to be eligible to accept CAPS subsidies. In December 2016, the DECAL Advisory Committee adopted the following policy: Quality Rated eligible providers must be star-rated by December 31, 2020 to continue to receive CAPS funding. DECAL recommends that any provider who accepts CAPS but is not yet Quality Rated should begin the rating process as soon as possible to meet the 2020 deadline. Although the percentage of CAPS-eligible children in Quality Rated child care programs increased during 2017 (see Figure 1), each of the zones still has 30% or more of CAPS-eligible children in child care programs that are not Quality Rated.

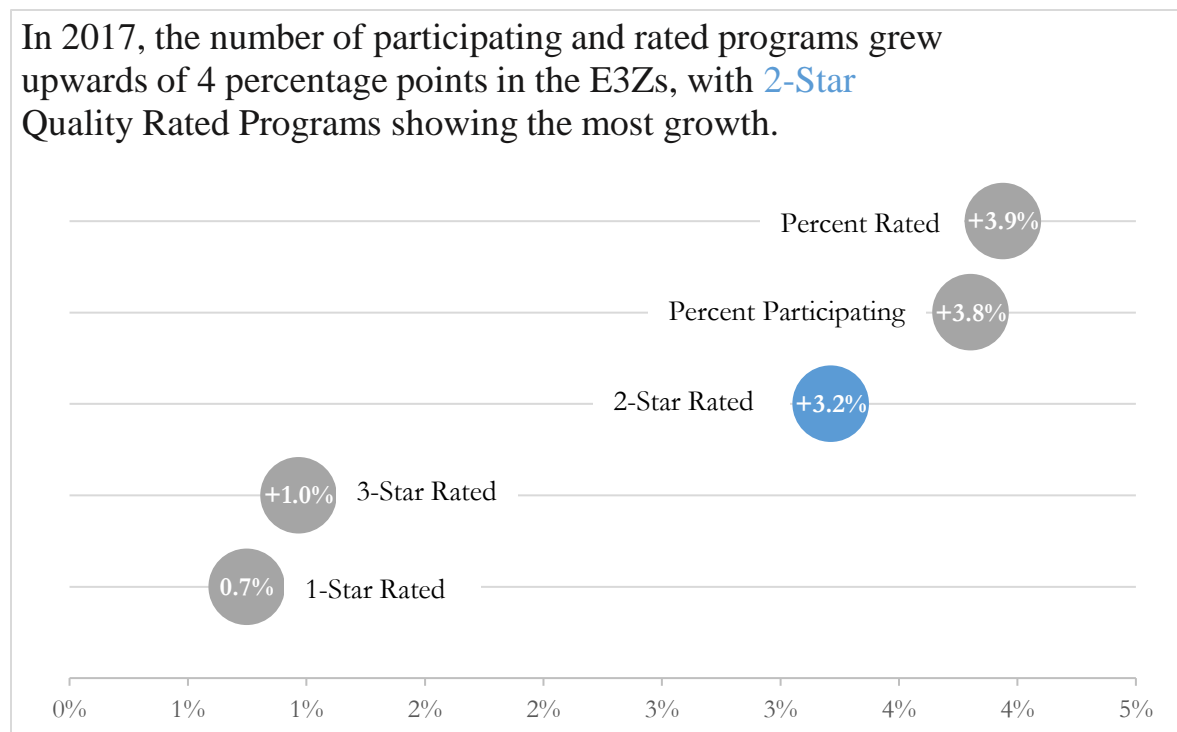
⁶ For more information about the CAPS and Quality Rated update, please see DECAL Commissioner Amy Jacob's letter in the CCR&R of Central Georgia newsletter:
http://caps.decal.ga.gov/Assets/downloads/WhatsNewinQualityRated_5-2-17.pdf.

Figure 1: CAPS-Eligible Children Served in Quality Rated Child Care Programs, within the E3Zs.



Quality Rated does not yet have the same type of high-stakes deadline attached to participation or increasing ratings. Child care providers who do not want to be involved with Quality Rated—which could include faith-based providers, family child care providers, providers with low enrollment numbers, or providers in remote geographic areas—have little reason to alter their current business practices. Still, the zones continued to increase their overall percentages of child care programs either participating or being rated in Quality Rated (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: 2017 E3Z Growth in Quality Rated Participation and Ratings



NEXT STEPS & CONCLUSION

Grant Implementation

Between July 2017 and December 2017, organizations within the E3Zs received over \$700,000 in grants to support early care and learning. The Two-Gen Innovation Grants will deliver \$16,000 each to Bibb and Clarke Counties. Communities in Bibb, Brooks, and Cook Counties will benefit from the Literacy For All grants awarded to the local Family Connection Partnership (Brooks and Cook) or United Way of Central Georgia (Bibb). The Clarke County School District received a \$669,000 GOSA Innovation Fund Implementation Grant to implement Pathway of Support: Trauma-Informed Care, which prioritizes birth to age eight language and literacy.

In addition to the recently awarded grants, the zones will continue to implement past grants. For example, the brand new Athens Regional Child Development Center is scheduled to open in January 2018 after receiving a \$80,000 Child Care Expansion Grant in 2016. Whitfield County, in the E3Z North, will continue to implement its \$611,000 GOSA Innovation Fund Implementation Grant that it also received in 2016.

The zones were also able to help their community organizations secure new grants to support early language and literacy. GOSA announced the Early Language and Literacy Mini-Grants finalists in January 2018.⁵

Sharing Lessons Learned

The zones and the Community Coordinators will continue to share their learned knowledge with other communities. For example, each of the Community Coordinators is scheduled to facilitate a table discussion during the Get Georgia Reading Campaign Learning Events. The Learning Events are one-day workshops that focus on addressing elements that impact student literacy. A total of nine Learning Events are scheduled across the state.

One of DECAL's goals for its 2017-2020 Strategic Plan is to increase the number of DECAL-supported, community-based, birth to age eight collaboratives. The experiences within the E3Zs and those of the Community Coordinators make the E3Zs prime learning ground for new zones. The zones, their Birth-to-Eight Teams, and their Community Coordinators will play a key role in meeting DECAL's strategic goal.

The Governor's Office of Student Achievement would like to thank the E3Z Community Coordinators and the state, regional, and local stakeholders who are working to implement the RT3-ELC grant in the E3Zs. The Governor's Office of Student Achievement would also like to thank the following individuals and programs who provided the data contained in this report:

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- *Bridgette Washington, Bibb E3Z Community Coordinator*
- *Jill O'Meara, South Georgia E3Z Community Coordinator & E3Z Manager*

⁵ For a full list of the winning Early Language and Literacy Mini-Grant proposals, see the GOSA website: https://gosa.georgia.gov/sites/gosa.georgia.gov/files/related_files/press_release/Early%20Literacy%20Mini%20Grant%20Summaries_FINAL_01242018.pdf.