



GEORGIA'S EARLY EDUCATION EMPOWERMENT ZONES QUARTERLY EVALUATION REPORT

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Executive Summary

In September 2014, Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) announced the four sites selected to become the first Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RT3-ELC) grant Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs). The sites each include one to five counties pre-identified into clusters. The zones are in 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 purpose of the E3Zs is to increase the availability of high-quality early learning and development options and to 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 were designed to include one community coordinator per zone. The role of the community coordinator is to develop, implement, and monitor community-based projects and programs related to the implementation of the E3Zs. The community coordinators perform this role under the direction of the E3Z Director, who is instrumental in coordinating services for the zones and coordinators, as well as liaising with other DECAL and state administrators.

This report is intended to be a quarterly summary of the RT3-ELC grant activities happening within each zone. The current iteration of this report includes information about the E3Z implementation between August 2015 and September 2015.² The information contained in this report is derived from the community coordinators whose testimonies supply much needed and sometimes nuanced local rationale for a community's response to its own perceived need.

The RT3-ELC Strategies

The State is targeting specific strategies to increase the quality of and access to early learning and development options—especially for children with high needs. The State is also supporting local efforts within each E3Z to coordinate key programs and services that target children and families with high needs. The strategies include:

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
4. Enhancing professional development opportunities for early childhood workers
5. Decreasing family co-pays in high-quality child care programs

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 Reports on previous reporting cycles can be found on the GOSA website: <https://gosa.georgia.gov/race-top-early-learning-challenge-grant-evaluation>.

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

This report focuses on the strategies that have been implemented through September 30, 2015.³ These strategies include those related to the Birth-to-Eight Teams, Quality Rated and Tiered Family Co-Pays, Great Start Georgia, and Enhanced Professional Development. The other strategies—economic incentives, increased subsidy rates, Summer Transition Programs, comprehensive assessments and screenings, and family engagement grants—are still being developed for local implementation.

Birth-to-Eight Teams

Each E3Z has a Birth-to-Eight Team that is responsible for working with the community coordinator to lead the implementation of RT3-ELC strategies throughout the zone. The Birth-to-Eight Team meetings are held in central, publicly-accessible facilities and occur about every other month. The work of the Birth-to-Eight Teams is facilitated by the community coordinator. The Teams include community stakeholders who represent organizations, such as public and private child care programs, local school systems, postsecondary institutions, for-profits and nonprofits, technical assistance providers, chambers of commerce, local library systems, public and private healthcare providers, state departments, elected officials from the General Assembly, and members of the general public.

Quality Rated & Tiered Family Co-Pays

Quality Rated is Georgia’s voluntary tiered quality rating and improvement system. The statewide goal for Quality Rated participation in the RT3-ELC grant is 100%.⁴ Table 1 shows that the current participation rate for the state is 39%. This is a slight increase of one percentage point from the previous E3Z reporting quarter, which ended July 31, 2015. The E3Zs are intensifying efforts to increase participation in Quality Rated, which should also increase access to quality child care for all children. Part of the work of the Birth-to-Eight Teams is to reach all child care programs in their zone and help all child care programs improve the quality of care they provide to children. Currently, each of the E3Z’s Quality Rated participation rates is equal to or greater than the participation rate statewide (see Table 1). Compared to the previous quarter, Bibb E3Z’s participation rate increased by eight percentage points, E3Z North and South Georgia E3Z increased by one percentage point, and Clarke E3Z remained the same.

³ Note that all data tables include data through October 15, 2015, in an effort to report the most recent data.

⁴ Child care programs are considered “participating” in Quality Rated when they complete a Quality Rated application.

With the exception of Bibb E3Z, three out of four E3Zs are surpassing the state’s percentage of child care programs that are rated in Quality Rated.⁵ The state’s percentage of rated child care programs is 13% (one percentage point increase); whereas in the E3Z North the rate is 25% (two percentage point increase), 21% in South Georgia E3Z (one percentage point increase), and 16% in Clarke E3Z and 10% in Bibb E3Z, where both zones have held steady since the last reporting cycle.

Table 1: Total Child Care Program Quality Rated Participation and Rating Rates, Statewide & E3Z

	Licensed Child Care	QR Eligible ¹	Participating (No.) ²	Participating (%)	1-Star	2-Star	3-Star	Rated (No.) ³	Rated (%)
E3Z North	114	108	58	51%	7	11	11	29	25%
Clarke E3Z	61	55	24	39%	3	2	5	10	16%
Bibb E3Z	133	128	58	44%	1	8	4	13	10%
South Georgia E3Z	170	164	82	48%	16	13	6	35	21%
Statewide	6,162	5,848	2,380	39%	249	385	162	796	13%

Source: Quality Rated Program

¹To be eligible to be rated, a child care program must be compliant with licensing regulations.

²Any licensed program is allowed to fill out a Quality Rated application; however, only programs compliant with licensing are eligible to be rated in Quality Rated.

³Rated in Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.

In terms of increasing access to high-quality child care for children with high needs, one of the ways the state accomplishes this goal is by making quality child care more affordable. The Tiered Family Co-Pay program is only available in the E3Zs and is offered through the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, which subsidizes childcare for low-income families in all of Georgia’s 159 counties. Through the Tiered Family Co-Pay program, the family co-pay for CAPS-eligible children is decreased to \$15 in 1-star Quality Rated programs, \$10 in 2-star Quality Rated programs, and \$5 in 3-star Quality Rated programs. The Tiered Family Co-Pay program went into effect on July 1, 2015.

Table 2 shows the enrollment rates for CAPS-eligible children in each of the E3Zs. To be eligible for a decreased family co-pay, a CAPS-eligible child must be enrolled in a 1-, 2-, or 3-star Quality Rated child care program. One way to increase access to high-quality child care for children with high needs is to increase the number of high-quality child care programs available in the E3Zs. The initial focus should be on child care programs that serve CAPS-eligible children but are only participating in Quality Rated and are not yet rated. In the Clarke E3Z, for example, this would mean that an additional 67% of CAPS-eligible children would benefit from decreased family co-pays if their child care programs become Quality Rated.

⁵ “Rated” in Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.

CAPS subsidies are provided on a weekly basis, which means the CAPS data fluctuates on a weekly basis. This fluctuation makes comparisons over short time periods (e.g, less than three months) difficult. However, the South Georgia E3Z doubled the percentage of CAPS-eligible children in child care programs participating in Quality Rated. Similarly, the Bibb E3Z also increased its percentage of CAPS-eligible children in child care programs participating in Quality Rated from 36% to 57%. In Bibb E3Z, though, the total number of CAPS-eligible children increased about six percent from the last reporting cycle. Comparisons between the state and the zones, in regards to the Tiered Family Co-Pay program, cannot be made because the strategy is only being applied within the E3Zs.

Table 2: Tiered Family Co-Pays within the E3Zs

	E3Z North	Clarke E3Z	Bibb E3Z	South Georgia E3Z
Number of CAPS-Eligible Children	526	419	3,058	1,108
Proportion of CAPS-eligible children throughout the E3Zs	10%	8%	60%	22%
<i>Percentage of CAPS-eligible children in programs that are....</i>				
Rated in Quality Rated ¹	35%	16%	12%	41%
Participating in Quality Rated ²	42%	67%	57%	44%
Neither Rated nor Participating	23%	17%	32%	15%

Source: CAPS Program, October 1, 2015

¹Rated in Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.

²Participating in Quality Rated means that a child care program has started the process to becoming Quality Rated, but has not yet earned a rating of 1-, 2-, or 3-stars.

Enhanced Professional Development & Great Start Georgia

The E3Zs are designing enhanced and creative professional development opportunities for early childhood workers in their communities. Three out of four E3Zs, with the exception of Clarke E3Z, have a Directors' Network, which is a grassroots peer-support network designed to bring formalized training from certified instructors to child care center directors on a convenient and regular cycle. In the E3Zs, the community coordinators work with the regional Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies, local higher education institutions, and DECAL specialists to offer zone-specific trainings requested by the Directors' Networks.

Great Start Georgia (GSG) is Georgia's Maternal and Early Childhood System, sponsored by the Georgia Department of Human Services-Division of Family and Children Services and in partnership with the Department of Public Health. GSG operates the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, which prioritizes evidence-based

home visiting (EBHV) models with proven outcomes.⁶ For the E3Zs, GSG is implementing one new or expanded EBHV program that will be based inside a child care center. Each child care center will house a First Steps Service Coordinator whose job is to identify, recruit, and screen children and families—who attend and do not attend the child care center—and connect children and families to available resources. All four of the child care center-based EBHV programs in the E3Zs are operational, recruiting and screening families, and networking with other local family support services.

Next Steps for the E3Zs

The four E3Zs are each taking the strategies outlined in the RT3-ELC grant and implementing them in ways that address community needs. In many cases, the E3Zs are also working with local partners to create new and innovative initiatives in response to other areas of the community's need. One area of need, identified by all of the E3Zs, relates to the implementation of the Tiered Family Co-Pay program. Below is a summary of the difficulty and suggestions to address it.

Building Internal Competencies for the Tiered Family Co-Pay Strategy

For the Tiered Family Co-Pay strategy to be successful, every individual and organization from the state level to the family unit needs to understand the purpose, eligibility, and processes of the program. The three E3Zs with Directors' Networks expressed a need from their child care providers for additional information on the Tiered Family Co-Pay program. DECAL is working individually with the Directors' Networks to provide face-to-face question and answer sessions for child care providers and zone stakeholders who need more clarity about what their responsibilities are to secure decreased family co-pays for parents. Clarke E3Z, which does not currently have a Directors' Network, also expressed a need for the same type of communications about the program.

In the E3Z North, the Birth-to-Eight Team is working to connect Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) directors and CAPS caseworkers with the same information about the existence, purpose, eligibility, and processes of the tiered family co-pay program. The other zones may need to reach out to their local DFCS directors and CAPS caseworkers in a similar fashion. It is crucial to build competency amongst the various agencies that are instrumental in communicating with families and securing resources for families with high needs. This way, if a potentially eligible child's family does not interact with the E3Z or child care director, there is still a greater possibility of the family becoming aware of its eligibility for decreased family co-pays through DFCS, The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infant, and Children (WIC), CAPS caseworker, or some other agency. If the families are aware that they should be receiving additional benefits by enrolling in a Quality Rated child care program, then they may be more inclined to follow up with their child care center or caseworker about securing those benefits.

⁶ For more information on Great Start Georgia, please visit its [website](https://www.greatstartgeorgia.org/home): <https://www.greatstartgeorgia.org/home>.

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Table of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
DECAL	Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning
RT3-ELC	Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge
E3Z	Early Education Empowerment Zone
GSG	Great Start Georgia
EBHV	Evidence Based Home Visitation
CAPS	Childcare and Parent Services
CCR&R	Child Care Resource and Referral System
DFCS	Division of Family and Children Services
WIC	The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infant, and Children
GELDS	Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards
UWCG	United Way of Central Georgia

Introduction

In September 2014, Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) announced the four sites selected to become the first Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RT3-ELC) grant Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs). The sites each include one to five counties pre-identified into clusters. The zones are in North Georgia (Catoosa, Whitfield, Murray, Gordon, and Gilmer counties), Clarke County, Bibb County, and South Georgia (Colquitt, Cook, Brooks, Lowndes, and Echols counties).⁷ The purpose of the E3Zs is to increase the availability of high-quality early learning and development options and to 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 were designed to include one community coordinator per zone. The role of the community coordinator is to develop, implement, and monitor community-based projects and programs related to the implementation of the E3Zs. The community coordinators perform this role under the direction of the E3Z Director, who is instrumental in coordinating services for the zones and coordinators, as well as liaising with other DECAL and state administrators.

This report is intended to be a quarterly summary of the RT3-ELC grant activities happening within each zone. The current iteration of this report includes information about the E3Z implementation between August 2015 and September 2015.⁸ The information contained in this report is derived from the community coordinators whose testimonies supply much needed and sometimes nuanced local rationale for a community's response to its own perceived need.

⁷ 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.

⁸ Reports on previous reporting cycles can be found on the GOSA website: <https://gosa.georgia.gov/race-top-early-learning-challenge-grant-evaluation>.

Evaluation

Implementation Science

The E3Zs are evaluated using an Implementation Science framework to identify drivers for scale-up feasibility. Traditionally, implementation science is “the study of methods to promote the integration of research findings and evidence into... policy and practice.”⁹

One of the strengths of implementation science is the way it separates program evaluation from implementation evaluation. For the E3Zs, implementation science is used to both organize the zone activity and evaluate the context and effectiveness of local implementation while also observing the measurable outcomes. The measurable outcomes are mainly the increase in quality of child care programs and access to high-quality child care for children with high needs throughout the E3Zs.

Specifically, the concepts of implementation stages and implementation drivers are being used to evaluate the E3Zs and research the local implementation activities within each zone. As defined by the National Implementation Research Network, there are four stages of implementation:

- Exploration — identifying the need for change, learning about possible interventions that may provide solutions, learning about what it takes to implement the innovation effectively, developing stakeholders and champions, assessing and creating readiness for change, and deciding to proceed (or not)
- Installation — establishing the resources needed to use an innovation and the resources required to implement the innovation as intended
- Initial Implementation — the first use of an innovation by teachers and others who have just learned how to use the innovation working in school and district environments that are just learning how to support the new ways of work
- Full Implementation — the skillful use of an innovation that is well-integrated into the repertoire of teachers and routinely and effectively supported by successive building and district administrations (National Implementation Research Network, 2015)¹⁰

These four stages are used to identify how each strategy within the E3Zs is progressing and what types of activities can be expected to follow. Each strategy will also have its own set of implementation drivers, which are interactive supports necessary to achieve active and successful implementation. Implementation drivers are organized into three broad categories: competency drivers (coaching, training, and selection), organization drivers (systems intervention, facilitative

⁹ Though healthcare is the context of the definition, implementation science can be used in nearly every social science setting. Definition courtesy of the National Institutes of Health: <http://www.fic.nih.gov/researchtopics/pages/implementationscience.aspx>

¹⁰ For more information on implementation science, please visit the National Implementation Research Network website: <http://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/>.

administration, and decision support data system), and leadership drivers (technical and adaptive).

Finally, though this report evaluates the E3Z strategies and zone activities used to achieve the project goals, this evaluation does not expect implementation science to be appropriate for all contexts, especially policy changes that do not allow for local implementation. One example of this type of policy change is the strategy to decrease family co-pays in high-quality child care programs within the E3Zs. Any changes to family co-pays will be unilaterally made at the state level and, therefore, will not allow for local implementation. Still, this type of policy change should improve access to high-quality child care for families with high needs which is a distinct, measureable goal of the E3Z project.

Local Capacity

Local capacity is required to implement and maintain a local system of partnerships to support and improve early learning. The individuals and organizations that join the partnership share a common goal and are dedicated to the realization of that goal. The priorities of the RT3-ELC grant help 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 priorities of the grant by using the core areas and focused investment areas as an outline for design and implementation.¹¹

When the eleven potential E3Z sites were identified, before the four finalists were selected, representatives from within each region were able to showcase local, ongoing initiatives that affect early care and education. After the final four E3Z sites were selected, four E3Z zone coordinators were hired to help lead the work of the Birth-to-Eight Teams in implementing the RT3-ELC strategies. The following profiles summarize the local capacity of each E3Z, as evidenced by its activities, to implement and maintain the RT3-ELC strategies between August 2015 and September 2015.

¹¹ 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>.

E3Z Strategies

The State is targeting specific strategies to increase the quality of and access to early learning and development options—especially for children with high needs. The State is also supporting local efforts within each E3Z to coordinate key programs and services that target children and families with high needs. The strategies include:

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
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

Birth-to-Eight Teams

A Birth-to-Eight Team is a local collaboration of community stakeholders working to create and sustain early learning and development gains for children from birth through age eight. The Birth-to-Eight Team meetings are held in central, publicly-accessible facilities and occur about every other month. The Teams include community stakeholders who represent organizations, such as public and private child care programs, local school systems, postsecondary institutions, for-profits and nonprofits, technical assistance providers, chambers of commerce, local library systems, public and private healthcare providers, state departments, elected officials from the General Assembly, and members of the general public. Participation in the Birth-to-Eight Team is completely voluntary. The Team is spearheaded by the efforts of the E3Z Community Coordinator who works to assemble and convene the Team, as well as help the Team implement the ELC strategies.¹²

Quality Rated

Quality Rated is Georgia's voluntary tiered quality rating and improvement system for child care programs. The initiative began in July 2012 and now includes nearly 800 rated and over 3,200 participating child care programs. By becoming Quality Rated, child care programs agree to meet standards that exceed the state's licensing requirements and demonstrate their commitment to improving the quality of care they provide to children. Quality Rated child care

¹² For more information on specific Birth-to-Eight Team activities, or to get involved, please contact [Laura Wagner](mailto:laura.wagner@dec.al.gov), Early Education Empowerment Zone Director, at laura.wagner@dec.al.gov.

programs earn one-, two-, or three-stars depending on the number of points they are awarded through their program portfolio and classroom observations.¹³

The statewide goal for Quality Rated participation in the RT3-ELC grant is 100%. The current participation rate for the state is 39% (see Table 1), up one percentage point from the previous quarter. The E3Zs are intensifying efforts to increase participation in Quality Rated, which should also increase access to quality child care for all children. Part of the work of the Birth-to-Eight Teams is to reach all child care programs in their zone and help all child care programs improve the quality of care they provide to children.

Table 1: Total Child Care Program Rates for Quality Rated Participation and Rating, Statewide

Licensed Child Care	QR Eligible	Participating (No.)	Participating (%)	1-Star	2-Star	3-Star	Rated (No.)	Rated (%)
6,162	5,848	2,380	39%	249	385	162	796	13%

Source: Quality Rated Program, October 2015

Tiered Family Co-Pay Program¹⁴

Georgia’s Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program provides subsidized child care to low-income families in all of Georgia’s 159 counties. The CAPS subsidy reimburses authorized child care providers up to a certain amount. Families that qualify for the CAPS program can choose their own child care provider. Most eligible families share in the cost of care by paying a fee based on their household income, family size, and number of children receiving subsidies. This fee is paid directly to the child care provider, and the fee amount that a low-income family must pay for child care varies across the state.

Within the E3Zs, families receiving CAPS and attending a Quality Rated child care center are seeing their family co-pay decrease dependent on the provider’s Quality Rated star level. Table 2 provides a breakdown. Eligible families attending a one-star Quality Rated center are paying a co-pay of \$15 per week; eligible families attending a two-star Quality Rated center are paying a co-pay of \$10 per week; and eligible families attending a three-star Quality Rated center are paying a co-pay of \$5 per week.

Families living within an E3Z and sending their children to a Quality Rated child care program within an E3Z do not need to take any extra action to receive this benefit. Child care providers, on the other hand, need to be Quality Rated, serve CAPS-eligible families, and be located in one of the twelve E3Z counties. The benefits began July 1, 2015, and will last for the duration of the RT3-ELC grant. Comparisons between the state and the zones, in regards to the Tiered Family Co-Pay program, cannot be made because the strategy is only being applied within the E3Zs.

¹³ For more information on Quality Rated, or to find a Quality Rated child care program, please visit the Quality Rated program [website](http://qualityrated.org/): <http://qualityrated.org/>.

¹⁴ Language regarding the Tiered Family Co-Pay Program continues to be updated and clarified. GOSA updated this report in March 2016 to reflect the changes. For more information on the CAPS Tiered Family Co-Pay Program in the E3Zs, please visit the CAPS [website](http://decal.ga.gov/QualityInitiatives/CAPS.aspx): <http://decal.ga.gov/QualityInitiatives/CAPS.aspx>.

Table 2: Family Co-Pay Rate Chart (effective July 1, 2015)

Quality Rated Level	1-Star Provider	2-Star Provider	3-Star Provider
Family Co-Pay	\$15	\$10	\$5

Source: CAPS Program webinar, June 2015

Great Start Georgia Home Visitation Model

Great Start Georgia (GSG) is Georgia’s Maternal and Early Childhood System, sponsored by the Georgia Department of Human Services-Division of Family and Children Services and in partnership with the Department of Public Health. GSG operates the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program which prioritizes evidence-based home visiting (EBHV) models with proven outcomes.¹⁵ For the E3Zs, GSG is implementing one new or expanded EBHV program that is based inside of a child care center.

Grounding an EBHV program inside of a child care center is a new and novel approach. For this strategy, only two EBHV models were chosen for implementation within the E3Zs: Healthy Families Georgia and Parents as Teachers. Both of these models are designed to serve families with children from prenatal stages through age five. Each child care center houses a First Steps Service Coordinator who identifies, screens, and recruits children and families— who attend and do not attend the child care center—and connects children and families to available resources.

Enhanced Professional Development

One of the focused investment areas of Georgia’s RT3-ELC grant is on its early education workforce. One method to ensuring that all children, especially those with high needs, have access to high-quality child care is to train early childhood and education workers to provide higher quality care. Within the E3Zs, local stakeholders from the preschool through higher education pipeline are working together to provide free, high-quality professional development opportunities to child care workers in their communities.

Summary

This report focuses on the strategies that have been implemented through September 30, 2015.¹⁶ These strategies include those related to the Birth-to-Eight Teams, Quality Rated and Tiered Family Co-Pays, Great Start Georgia, and Enhanced Professional Development. The other strategies—economic incentives, increased subsidy rates, Summer Transition Programs, comprehensive assessments and screenings, and family engagement grants—are still being developed for local implementation. The sections that follow provide more detailed implementation information for each of the E3Zs.

¹⁵ For more information on Great Start Georgia, please visit its [website](https://www.greatstartgeorgia.org/home): <https://www.greatstartgeorgia.org/home>.

¹⁶ Note that all data tables include data through October 15, 2015, in an effort to report the most recent data.

E3Z North

The E3Z North consists of five counties, three of which make up part of the Georgia/Tennessee border: Catoosa, Whitfield, Murray, Gordon, and Gilmer counties.

Birth-to-Eight Team

The E3Z North’s Birth-to-Eight Team is in its initial implementation stage. The Team has over 60 members and meets every other month on the fourth Tuesday of the month in the North Georgia Regional Library. The Team is comprised of members from various organizations including: various nonprofit organizations, public and private child care providers, postsecondary institutions, community volunteers, public and private healthcare providers, regional Pre-K directors, private business and industry, the regional libraries, the local school systems, and representatives from state and local agencies.

The E3Z North Team has several priority areas, one of which is to increase the regional participation of parents and family child care providers in the Birth-to Eight Team activities. Another priority is to reach out to children who are not in child care. The Birth-to-Eight Team is actively trying to fold itself into local, ongoing initiatives and share data. Recently, the Team worked to provide Whitfield County Schools with the community commitment necessary for the school system to be awarded a \$10,000 GOSA Innovation Fund Planning Grant for Birth to Age Eight Language and Literacy Development. Table 3 provides some detail about the specific project for Whitfield County Schools. The Whitfield County Schools project, in partnership with community agencies, will research, design, and pilot a literacy program that integrates Learning Academies and Power Lunches for high need children and their families.¹⁷

Table 3: FY2016 Innovation Fund Planning Grant Project, E3Z North

Organization Priority	Whitfield County Schools
Project Name	Beyond the Classroom
Area(s) Addressed	Birth to Age Eight Language and Literacy Development
Area(s) Served	Whitfield County
Amount Funded	\$10,000.00
Description of Project	Whitfield County Schools, in partnership with community agencies, will research, design, and pilot a literacy program that integrates Learning Academies and Power Lunches for high need children and their families.

Source: GOSA Innovation Fund Grant Award Winners (October 5, 2015)¹⁸

¹⁷ For more information regarding the Whitfield County Schools project, or for a full list of FY2016 Innovation Fund Grant award winners, please visit the GOSA Innovation Fund website: <http://gosa.georgia.gov/awards-granted>.

¹⁸ To read more about all of the FY2016 Innovation Fund Planning Grant winners and projects, please click here: <https://gosa.georgia.gov/sites/gosa.georgia.gov/files/Innovation%20Fund%20Fiscal%20Year%202016%20Grant%20Award%20Winners.pdf>.

Quality Rated & Tiered Family Co-Pays

Quality Rated is in initial implementation in the E3Z North. Most of the work for getting programs participating and rated through Quality Rated is done by the regional Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agency. The CCR&R works one-on-one with child care providers to offer technical assistance and professional development opportunities. The CCR&R is also part of the E3Z North Birth-to-Eight Team and provides updates on the status of Quality Rated in the zone during each of the Team meetings. Public awareness for quality child care is one mechanism used in the E3Z North to increase Quality Rated participation. At each of the local events, the public is reminded of the importance of quality child care and how to find quality child care.

The Birth-to-Eight Team works to support the CCR&R by finding ways to reach child care centers who are not participating in Quality Rated. Currently, 51% of the zone's licensed child care programs are participating in Quality Rated. This rate is higher than the statewide participation rate of 39%, and one percentage point higher than the previous reporting cycle. Individually, each county within the zone is also surpassing the state's participation rates for Quality Rated (see Table 4). For the E3Z North, transportation is a regional challenge. The Team has identified the lack of transportation as one reason why families cannot access quality child care. As the zone continues to plan events and engage families, it incorporates transportation resources, where possible. For example, during this year's "Make a Difference Day" project, an annual event coordinated by the United Way of Northwest Georgia, the zone worked to provide transportation to and from the event for the region's neediest families.

Table 4: Total Child Care Programs Participating in Quality Rated, E3Z North

		Licensed Child Care	Eligible for Quality Rated ¹	Participating in QR ² (No.)	Participating in QR (%)	Sept 2015 Participation Rate (%)
Catoosa County	Child Care Learning Centers	27	27	20	74%	74%
	Family Child Care Homes	1	1	0	0%	0%
	Catoosa County Total	28	28	20	71%	71%
Whitfield County	Child Care Learning Centers	37	36	15	41%	38%
	Family Child Care Homes	16	14	8	50%	47%
	Whitfield County Total	53	50	23	43%	41%
Murray County	Child Care Learning Centers	6	5	3	50%	50%
	Family Child Care Homes	2	2	1	50%	50%
	Murray County Total	8	7	4	50%	50%
Gordon County	Child Care Learning Centers	15	14	7	47%	47%
	Family Child Care Homes	6	5	2	33%	33%
	Gordon County Total	21	19	9	43%	43%
Gilmer County	Child Care Learning Centers	4	4	2	50%	50%
	Family Child Care Homes	0	0	0	N/A	N/A
	Gilmer County Total	4	4	2	50%	50%
E3Z Total		114	108	58	51%	50%
Statewide Total		6,162	5,848	2,380	39%	38%

Source: Quality Rated Program, October 2015

¹To be eligible to be rated, a child care program must be compliant with licensing regulations.

²Any licensed program is allowed to fill out a Quality Rated application; however, only programs compliant with licensing are eligible to be rated in Quality Rated.

Table 5 shows the distribution of rating levels within each county of the E3Z North. Within the zone, Whitfield County increased the percentage of its Quality Rated family child care homes from 18% to 31%, which helped to increase the zone’s overall rated average (25%) to nearly twice the state’s average of 13% rated. Similar comparisons cannot be made between the state and zone for the RT3-ELC tiered family co-pay strategy because it is a strategy that is being applied within the E3Zs only. Table 6 shows participation and rated rates for the child care programs that currently serve children receiving CAPS subsidies.¹⁹ The rates for these programs

¹⁹ Note that Table 5 shows different total rated amounts than Table 6 because, though all licensed child care providers are eligible to receive CAPS, not every licensed child care provider currently serves or accepts children who receive subsidies. Additionally, not every Quality Rated child care program currently serves or accepts children who receive subsidies; therefore, the total numbers in Table 5 are smaller than Table 6.

participating in Quality Rated and receiving a rating have stayed relatively steady since the previous reporting cycle. About 26% of these child care programs are Quality Rated, meaning they have earned 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program. Thirty-six percent are participating in Quality Rated; however, the majority of the programs (38%) are neither participating nor rated in Quality Rated.

Table 5: Total Child Care Programs Rated in Quality Rated, E3Z North

		Licensed Child Care	1- Star	2- Star	3- Star	Total Rated ¹ (No.)	Total Rated (%)	Sept 2015 Rated (%)
Catoosa County	Child Care Learning Centers	27	3	3	5	11	41%	41%
	Family Child Care Homes	1	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
	Catoosa County Total	28	3	3	5	11	39%	39%
Whitfield County	Child Care Learning Centers	37	1	3	4	8	22%	22%
	Family Child Care Homes	16	2	2	1	5	31%	18%
	Whitfield County Total	53	1	5	5	13	25%	20%
Murray County	Child Care Learning Centers	6	0	2	0	2	33%	33%
	Family Child Care Homes	2	0	0	0	0	N/A	N/A
	Murray County Total	8	0	2	0	2	25%	25%
Gordon County	Child Care Learning Centers	15	1	1	0	2	13%	13%
	Family Child Care Homes	6	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
	Gordon County Total	21	1	1	0	2	10%	10%
Gilmer County	Child Care Learning Centers	4	0	0	1	1	25%	25%
	Family Child Care Homes	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Gilmer County Total	4	0	0	1	1	25%	25%
E3Z Total		114	5	11	11	29	25%	23%
Statewide Total		6,162	239	375	157	771	13%	12%

Source: Quality Rated Program, October 2015

¹Rated in Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.

Table 6: Total Number of Providers Serving Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, E3Z North

	Catoosa	Whitfield	Murray	Gordon	Gilmer	E3Z Total (No.)	E3Z Total (%)	Sept 2015 E3Z Total (%)
Quality Rated ¹	6	5	1	1	0	13	26%	25%
QR Participating ²	4	7	1	6	0	18	36%	35%
Not Quality Rated	0	11	3	4	1	19	38%	40%
Total	10	23	5	11	1	50	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, October 2015

¹Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.

²QR Participating means that a child care program has started the process to becoming Quality Rated, but has not yet earned a rating of 1-, 2-, or 3-stars.

In terms of the number of children who are affected by the program’s participation in Quality Rated, Table 7 shows that 183 (35%) children are receiving a decreased family co-pay because they attend a Quality Rated child care program. Another 42% of children (221) could see their family co-pays decrease if the child care program they attend moves from participating to fully rated. Still, nearly a quarter of all children receiving CAPS subsidies (122) are in programs that are not participating in Quality Rated. The overall percentages have remained the same since the previous reporting cycle.

Table 7: Number of Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, E3Z North

	Catoosa	Whitfield	Murray	Gordon	Gilmer	E3Z Total (No.)	E3Z Total (%)	Sept 2015 E3Z Total (%)
Quality Rated	82	46	33	22	0	183	35%	35%
QR Participating	49	39	21	112	0	221	42%	42%
Not Quality Rated	0	67	7	39	9	122	23%	23%
Total	131	152	61	173	9	526	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, October 2015

One recent challenge to implementing the decreased family co-pay strategy is the lack of local knowledge of the program. The E3Z North Birth-to-Eight Team received feedback from child care directors and parents that they did not know how to take advantage of the decreased family co-pay program. Additionally, Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) directors and CAPS caseworkers were equally unfamiliar with the decreased family co-pay strategy. The Team organized a face-to-face session for child care directors and DECAL representatives. The Team is currently working to facilitate a similar learning session between DFCS directors, CAPS caseworkers, and DECAL representatives.

Great Start Georgia

Whitfield County, in the E3Z North, already has a Great Start Georgia (GSG) evidence-based home visiting program in place. As part of the ELC grant, Gordon County received a new home visiting program that is based out of a child care center. The home visiting initiative is in

the initial implementation stage in the E3Z North. The Family Resource Center of Gordon County is serving as the fiscal agent for the grant, and Brighter Tomorrows Child Development Center in Calhoun is serving as the child care hub.

One challenge to the implementation of GSG in the E3Z North is the limited pool of eligible children in the child care hub. The GSG team is working to recruit families and children from outside of the child care center. The First Steps Service Coordinator, the resource personnel who is stationed within the child care center, and the home visiting team are reaching out to families with the help of the Gordon County and Calhoun City Pre-K Directors and Parent Engagement Coordinators. The Team is also trying setup networks with the Alatoona Head Start, The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) office, local Health Departments, and pediatric offices.

Enhanced Professional Development

Enhanced professional development is in the installation stage of implementation in the E3Z North. The regional CCR&R provides monthly trainings for providers participating in Quality Rated. The zone held a Professional Development Summit at Dalton State College in August for any child care provider (including parents) to learn basic, quality child care essentials.

The zone is also implementing a Directors' Network, which has met several times in the past few months. The Directors' Network participants receive specialized training on RT3-ELC initiatives, such as the Tiered Family Co-Pay program, as well as on-demand trainings in requested areas, such as a Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) training that is scheduled for Spring 2016.²⁰ Partners in the E3Z North Directors' Network include the CCR&R, DECAL, Dalton State College, local school systems, the Chamber of Work Force Development, Georgia Northwestern Technical College, and child care directors.

Challenges & Opportunities

One of the strengths of the E3Z North is its ability to identify its own challenges and work creatively to devise local solutions. Some of the identified challenges include encouraging the voices of parents and family child care providers at their Birth-to-Eight meetings, ensuring that each county in the region feels like an equal partner in the zone's initiatives, reaching a subpopulation of 0-5 year olds who are not in licensed child care settings, and combating fears that higher trained child care workers will look for employment elsewhere.

The E3Z North benefits from having a DECAL board member who is actively involved in the zone's initiatives. This involvement, coupled with the presence and interest of other DECAL administrators, signals to local stakeholders that DECAL will listen to their ideas and be operational at a local level.

What's Next

The E3Z North helped to provide evidence of a strong partnership between Whitfield County Schools and community agencies in an effort to help the school system secure the Innovation Fund grant. The Team is looking forward to working with and learning from the

²⁰ For more information on the GELDS, please see the DECAL website: <http://gelds.dec.al.gov/>.

Whitfield County Schools' upcoming literacy program pilot. In addition to collaborating with other ongoing local initiatives, the E3Z North is actively building relationships with the region's postsecondary institutions in an effort to extend high-quality, credentialed in-service training to early childhood education professions.

Clarke E3Z

The Clarke E3Z consists of Athens-Clarke County in northeast Georgia.

Birth-to-Eight Team

Athens-Clarke County has a longstanding partnership between Family Connection and Communities in Schools Athens. For over a decade, this partnership has continued through the work of six strategic action teams, one of which is devoted to early care and learning. When Athens-Clarke County was designated as an E3Z, the Early Care and Learning Strategic Action Team (ECL-SAT) took on the role of the Birth-to-Eight Team of the Clarke E3Z.

The ECL-SAT meets once per month in Athens, GA. Much of the ECL-SAT agenda is already in place, due in part to a number of existing initiatives. Some of the represented organizations include: the local school system; faculty and staff from higher education institutions; technical assistance providers; child care providers; public early childhood education programs, such as Head Start and Georgia Pre-K; nonprofits and foundations; and parents.

Currently, the ECL-SAT is in the full implementation stage. The ECL-SAT uses data from the Family Connection community needs assessment to help understand community issues and set priorities. As the work moves forward, one of the priorities is to encourage participation on the team from private child care providers and the business community. The ECL-SAT is not only focused on E3Z strategies or DECAL initiatives but also with any program that might improve early childhood education in the region.

Quality Rated & Tiered Family Co-Pays

Quality Rated is in the full implementation stage in the Clarke E3Z, and it is mostly implemented by the regional Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agency. The CCR&R provides technical assistance to child care programs as they become Quality Rated, and works with other local stakeholders to encourage more child care programs to become Quality Rated. The zone's participation rate of 39%, has remained constant over the past couple of months and is just one percentage point higher than the statewide participation rate of 38% (Table 8). Table 9 shows the percentage of licensed child care programs in the zone that are rated (16%), which is still higher than the state average for Quality Rated licensed child care programs (12%).

Table 8: Total Child Care Programs Participating in Quality Rated, Clarke E3Z

	Licensed Child Care	Eligible for Quality Rated ¹	Participating in QR ² (No.)	Participating in QR (%)	Sept 2015 Participation Rate (%)
Child Care Learning Centers	37	33	16	43%	43%
Family Child Care Homes	24	22	8	33%	33%
E3Z Total	61	55	24	39%	39%
Statewide Total	6,162	5,848	2,380	39%	38%

Source: Quality Rated Program, October 2015

¹To be eligible to be rated, a child care program must be compliant with licensing regulations.

²Any licensed program is allowed to fill out a Quality Rated application; however, only programs compliant with licensing are eligible to be rated in Quality Rated.

Table 9: Total Child Care Programs Rated in Quality Rated, Clarke E3Z

	Licensed Child Care	1-Star	2-Star	3-Star	Rated ¹ (No.)	Rated (%)	Sept 2015 Rated (%)
Child Care Learning Centers	37	2	2	4	8	22%	22%
Family Child Care Homes	24	1	0	1	2	8%	8%
E3Z Total	61	3	2	5	10	16%	16%
Statewide Total	6,162	239	375	157	771	13%	12%

Source: Quality Rated Program, October 2015

¹Rated in Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.

Table 10 reflects the number of child care programs in the Clarke E3Z that currently serve children who receive CAPS subsidies.²¹ Comparisons between the state and zone cannot be made for the RT3-ELC tiered family co-pay strategy because it is a strategy that is being applied within the E3Zs only. Out of 29 total programs, 21% are Quality Rated, which is a two percentage point increase from the last quarter. Another 34%, another two percentage point increase, are participating in Quality Rated. The bulk of programs serving children who receive subsidies (45%) are neither rated nor participating in Quality Rated.

Table 10: Number of Providers Serving Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, Clarke E3Z

	No. of Providers	Percent of Providers	Sept 2015 Percent of Providers
Quality Rated ¹	6	21%	19%
QR Participating ²	10	34%	32%
Not Quality Rated	13	45%	49%
Total	29	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, October 2015

¹Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.

²QR Participating means that a child care program has started the process to becoming Quality Rated, but has not yet earned a rating of 1-, 2-, or 3-stars.

There is potential for child care programs that serve children receiving CAPS subsidies to extend the benefits of the tiered family co-pay to those children. Table 11 shows that only 68 (16%) children who receive subsidies attend a Quality Rated child care program. The family co-pays for these children has been dropped to \$5, \$10, or \$15 depending on the child care program's rating level. However, 279 (67%) children who receive subsidies attend a child care program that is only participating in Quality Rated. This means that the child care program has

²¹ Note that Table 10 shows different total rated amounts than Table 9 because, though all licensed child care providers are eligible to receive CAPS, not every licensed child care provider currently serves or accepts children who receive subsidies. Additionally, not every Quality Rated child care program currently serves or accepts children who receive subsidies; therefore, the total numbers in Table 10 are smaller than Table 9.

not yet earned 1-, 2-, or 3-stars. If these ten programs (see Table 10) were to be rated, 67% of Clarke E3Z’s children receiving subsidies would see a decrease in their weekly family co-pay rates.

Table 11: Total Number of Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, Clarke E3Z

	No. of Children	Percent of CAPS-Eligible Children	Sept 2015 Percent of CAPS-Eligible Children
Quality Rated	68	16%	16%
QR Participating	279	67%	67%
Not Quality Rated	72	17%	17%
Total	419	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, October 2015

Great Start Georgia

Athens-Clarke County, even before becoming an E3Z, is home to two Great State Georgia evidence-based home visiting programs. The county has a program for the Early Head Start-Home Based Option, as well as Healthy Families Georgia. Since Athens-Clarke is already operating Healthy Families Georgia in the county, GSG designed the zone’s RT3-ELC home visiting program as an extension to the existing Healthy Families Georgia. For the extension grant, Prevent Child Abuse Athens is serving as the fiscal agent for the grant and Little Angels Daycare is serving as the child care hub.

The GSG strategy in the Clark E3Z is experiencing one major challenge. Most of the families within the child care hub do not qualify for initial or extended home visitation services because the families in the child care hub do not exhibit certain risk factors. This means that the First Steps Service Coordinator must work with contacts and resources outside of the child care hub to operate at projected capacity for the number of families receiving home visitation services.

Challenges and Opportunities

Though the number of child care programs participating in Quality Rated doubled in less than six months during the previous reporting cycle, the exponential growth in the zone, in terms of Quality Rated saturation, has slowed. In terms of access to high-quality child care programs, the zone’s largest recipient of CAPS-eligible children in child care became noncompliant during this reporting cycle. Under the current systems a licensed, noncompliant child care program is not eligible to receive a Quality Rated rating until the program’s compliance is restored. Compliance designations are valid for a calendar year, and noncompliant child care programs must wait until July of the following year to regain their compliance designation

What's Next

The Clarke E3Z continues its partnership with Frontiers of Innovation to design and measure peer-to-peer support received by teachers in high-quality child care centers.²² The ELC-SAT is also working with DECAL to offer specialized trainings within the zone for child care professionals. A Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) training is scheduled for Winter 2016.²³ The Clarke E3Z also continues to encourage participation in its decision-making process from private child care providers and families.

²² For more information Frontiers of Innovation, please visit their website: http://developingchild.harvard.edu/activities/frontiers_of_innovation/.

²³ For more information on the GELDS, please see the DECAL website: <http://gelds.dec.al.ga.gov/>.

Bibb E3Z

The Bibb E3Z consists of Bibb County in central Georgia.

Birth-to-Eight Team

Community members and early childhood education partners in Bibb County have a history of working together to improve outcomes for the region's youngest children. Prior to being designated as an E3Z, the area was serviced through the United Way of Central Georgia's (UWCG) Early Learning Project. The UWCG includes fourteen central Georgia counties, one of which is Macon-Bibb County. The strategic focus of the project is to support comprehensive early childhood and grade-level reading.

When Bibb County, which includes the city of Macon, was selected as an E3Z, the zone already had a working team of partners dedicated to coordinating support services for young children. As such, the structure of the Birth-to-Eight Team was largely in place and the groundwork had already been set. The Bibb Birth-to-Eight Team is formally known as the Early Learning Network. Some of the represented organizations include: the local school system; state departments such as the Department of Health and the Department of Family and Children Services; postsecondary institutions; technical assistance providers; child care providers; faith-based organizations; public early childhood education programs, such as Head Start and Georgia Pre-K; and nonprofits and foundations, such as the UWCG and Family Connection.

Currently, the Early Learning Network is in the initial implementation stage. Due in large part to the UWCG's work, the Early Learning Network has a strong presence in the community. The Network focuses on four main initiatives: school readiness, school attendance, summer learning, and Quality Rated.

Quality Rated & Tiered Family Co-Pays

Quality Rated is largely being implemented in the Bibb E3Z through the work of the regional Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agency. Members of the CCR&R sit on the Early Learning Network and provide updates to the group. The CCR&R holds a number of events around Quality Rated: informational classes for child care providers, specialized technical assistance, conference calls, and focus groups. The Georgia Program for Infant and Toddler Care offered specialized training for child care workers who serve children from birth to three years old. Licensing consultants from DECAL also provide specialized training in the region to help child care programs prepare for Quality Rated.

Table 12: Total Child Care Programs Participating in Quality Rated, Bibb E3Z

	Licensed Child Care	Eligible for Quality Rated ¹	Participating in QR ² (No.)	Participating in QR (%)	Sept 2015 Participation Rates (%)
Child Care Learning Centers	101	96	49	49%	42%
Family Child Care Homes	32	31	9	28%	28%
E3Z Total	133	127	58	44%	38%
Statewide Total	6,162	5,848	2,380	39%	38%

Source: Quality Rated Program, October 2015

¹To be eligible to be rated, a child care program must be compliant with licensing regulations.

²Any licensed program is allowed to fill out a Quality Rated application; however, only programs compliant with licensing are eligible to be rated in Quality Rated.

Table 12 shows that the Bibb E3Z has 133 licensed child care programs, five more than the last reporting cycle. This number includes both child care centers and family child care homes. About 44% of those licensed programs are currently participating in Quality Rated, which is an improvement from the last quarter, in which the zone’s participation rate matched the state’s participation rate at 38%. The average participation rate is higher for child care centers (49%) than it is for family child care homes (28%). The gap between Quality Rated participation by child care centers and family child care homes is widening in the Bibb E3Z, partially because the overall number of child care learning centers has increased with its participation rate. Table 13 shows more detail about child care programs that are rated in Quality Rated. Of the 133 licensed child care programs only 10% are rated, meaning they have earned 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program. No new programs were rated during the last quarter.

Table 13: Total Child Care Programs Rated in Quality Rated, Bibb E3Z

	Licensed Child Care	1-Star	2-Star	3-Star	Rated ¹ (No.)	Rated (%)	Sept 2015 Rated (%)
Child Care Learning Centers	96	1	7	4	12	13%	13%
Family Child Care Homes	32	0	1	0	1	3%	3%
E3Z Total	128	1	8	4	13	10%	10%
Statewide Total	6,162	249	385	162	796	13%	12%

Source: Quality Rated Program, October 2015

¹Rated in Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.

Comparisons between the state and the zone cannot be made for the RT3-ELC tiered family co-pay strategy because it is a strategy that is being applied within the E3Zs only. Table 14 describes the number of child care centers that accept children receiving CAPS subsidies that are Quality Rated, participating in Quality Rated, and not participating in Quality Rated.²⁴ About

²⁴ Note that Table 14 shows different total rated amounts than Table 13 because, though all licensed child care providers are eligible to receive CAPS, not every licensed child care provider currently serves or accepts children

13% of these programs earned 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in Quality Rated. Another 46% of these programs are participating in Quality Rated, which means they have not yet earned any stars. Just over 40% of these programs are not participating or rated in Quality Rated; however, this is an improvement over the last quarter where nearly half (49%) of all programs that accept CAPS subsidies were neither participating nor rated in Quality Rated.

Table 14: Total Number of Providers Serving Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, Bibb E3Z

	No. of Providers	Percent of Providers	Sept 2015 Percent of Providers ³
Quality Rated ¹	10	13%	13%
QR Participating ²	35	46%	38%
Not Quality Rated	31	41%	49%
Total	76	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, October 2015

¹Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.

²QR Participating means that a child care program has started the process to becoming Quality Rated, but has not yet earned a rating of 1-, 2-, or 3-stars.

³The previous report overestimated the total number of Quality Rated child care programs that accepts CAPS-eligible children. The total number was 10, not 12, which changes the currently published percentages from the last reporting cycle.

Table 15 shows the number of children who receive CAPS subsidies that are enrolled in Quality Rated child care programs, child care program participating in Quality Rated, and child care programs not participating in Quality Rated. Twelve percent of children receiving CAPS subsidies in the Bibb E3Z are benefiting from decreased family co-pays of \$5, \$10, or \$15. This number has also changed considerably since the previous quarter. Even though the total amount of CAPS-eligible children in the zone increased by about 5% this quarter, the percentage of those children in Quality Rated care fell from 21% to 12%. A more detailed examination is necessary, but this transference of CAPS-eligible children from rated Quality Rated centers to participating in Quality Rated centers could be due to any number of factors—for example, the variable nature of the week-by-week CAPS data or issues of noncompliance. Under the current system, a licensed, noncompliant child care program is not eligible to receive a Quality Rated rating until the program’s compliance is restored. Compliance designations are valid for a calendar year, and noncompliant child care programs must wait until July of the following year to regain their compliance designation. When a Quality Rated program becomes noncompliant, the program loses its Quality Rated star rating and is only considered participating.

About 57% of children receiving subsidies attend programs that are in the process of becoming Quality Rated. When these 35 programs (see Table 14) earn 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in Quality Rated, the children enrolled in these programs who receive subsidies can receive a

who receive subsidies. Additionally, not every Quality Rated child care program currently serves or accepts children who receive subsidies; therefore, the total numbers in Table 14 are smaller than Table 13.

decreased family co-pays. However, almost one-third of children who receive CAPS subsidies attend child care programs that are neither rated nor participating in Quality Rated.

Table 15: Total Number of Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, Bibb E3Z

	No. of Children	Percent of CAPS-Eligible Children	Sept 2015 Percent of CAPS-Eligible Children
Quality Rated	359	12%	21%
QR Participating	1,732	57%	43%
Not Quality Rated	967	32%	36%
Total	3,058	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, October 2015

Great Start Georgia (GSG)

The implementation of the Great Start Georgia home visitation model is in the initial implementation stage in the Bibb E3Z. The UWCG is the fiscal agent for the grant, and Sandy’s Sandbox Child Care Center serves as the hub of the program. Currently, the First Steps Service Coordinator and the three certified Parents Educators are in place and have started reaching out to families within the child care center, as well as to referrals from the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) office, Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), and the Department of Health.

The Bibb E3Z Early Learning Network aligned with the UWCG’s Read2Succeed initiative to focus resources on early literacy for children ages 0 to 8 years old. Bibb E3Z identified its ten worst performing elementary schools and designated the areas around these elementary schools as target areas for home visiting services. In order to reach these families, the First Steps Service Coordinator holds office hours at the WIC office on Wednesdays, the DFCS office on Thursdays, and will soon also hold office hours at a local health center for prenatal services.

Enhanced Professional Development

In the Bibb E3Z, enhanced professional development has taken the form of a Directors’ Network. The Directors’ Network was started by the zone’s CCR&R as a peer support network for child care directors. The group, which is comprised of upwards of 27 child care center directors meets every other month and follows a suggested list of learning topics of most interest to its members.

The Directors’ Network works actively to recruit new members and keep current members up-to-date on information. The group has its own Facebook page, which is currently managed by one of the member child care centers. The group also has a regular newsletter it sends out to everyone on its mailing list, including the Early Learning Network. The CCR&R recruits most members through word-of-mouth, and the network is open to all child care directors, both licensed and unlicensed.

Challenges & Opportunities

An advantage for the Bibb E3Z is the already existing network of partners who work to provide coordinated services for children and youth. The United Way of Central Georgia provides a lot of this structure. This means that the Bibb E3Z Early Learning Network is comprised of individuals who not only know each other, but have also worked—and are working—with each other extensively.

A challenge for the Bibb E3Z is keeping continuing access to high-quality child care for children with high needs. The reduction in the number of CAPS-eligible children in Quality Rated child care, even though the number of CAPS-eligible children increased overall, should be closely monitored.

Another challenge for the Bibb E3Z is getting more family child care providers engaged, participating, and rated in Quality Rated. Although one family child care provider is rated in Quality Rated, that one provider only accounts for about 3% of all eligible family child care homes in the zone (see Table 13). Most licensed family child care providers have only one director and no additional staff available to provide care for up to six children. Quality Rated is a voluntary program, and for the amount of time it could take to complete the Quality Rated portfolio, some family child care providers may not think the benefit is worth the cost. Also, most family child care providers operate within their homes. Quality Rated requires an official classroom observation, which means that a new stranger—in addition to the CCR&R consultant, the licensing consultant, the nutrition consultant, and other regulatory consultants—will enter the provider's home to conduct an observation. As a result, the CCR&R experiences resistance from family child care providers when it tries to recruit for Quality Rated. The Bibb E3Z is committed to turning around the lack of participation from family child care providers by building a peer-support network specifically for family child care providers.

What's Next

Bibb E3Z is part of a pilot program in the ConnectHome grant, which will supply 1,500 tablet computers with internet access and educational content to low-income families in the area. The James M. Cox Foundation will provide home internet service for about \$10 per month, and the tablets will be available with educational content for a reduced price of \$30.

There are also a couple of community initiatives being developed. Attend Café, sponsored by the UWCG, was devised to tackle the problem of school attendance and truancy rates, and was celebrated in September as part of National Attendance Awareness Month. Born Learning Academy is a school-based workshop series that will teach busy, overwhelmed parents and caregivers how to turn everyday moments into learning opportunities.

South Georgia E3Z

The South Georgia E3Z consists of five counties, three of which make up part of the Georgia/Florida border: Colquitt, Cook, Brooks, Lowndes, and Echols counties.

Birth-to-Eight Team

When the South Georgia E3Z was selected as a finalist, there was little zone-wide coordination of local initiatives designed to improve the quality of or access to early care and education options for families. This meant that the zone coordinator first needed to pull together early care and education stakeholders across the zone to help form a Birth-to-Eight Team which then began implementing the strategies of the RT3-ELC grant. The zone's Birth-to-Eight Team is formally known as the South Georgia E3Z Leadership Team. This name was chosen to reduce confusion related to local Family Connections Collaborative groups that work within the counties of the zone.

The South Georgia E3Z Leadership Team is in its installation stage and meets regularly every other month at Wiregrass Georgia Technical College in Valdosta. Currently, the team consists of about 27 individuals who represent different organizations across the five-county zone. Some of the represented organizations include: infant, toddler, and preschool teachers; early learning and development program administrators; elementary school principals and superintendents; business leaders; healthcare professionals; public library systems; technical colleges and university systems; nonprofit organizations; faith-based organizations; local chambers of commerce; local Family Connection Collaborative from each county; the Department of Public Health; and a state representative from the Georgia House of Representatives.

The Team identified six strategies that they are actively using achieve the goals of the RT3-ELC grant, as well as improve early childhood education in the region. Their seven strategies are (1) implementing a Directors' Network, (2) offering professional development opportunities for child care workers, (3) maintaining a strong Leadership Team with a dedicated vision, (4) increased Summer Transition Program participation, (5) increased Summer Feeding Service Program participation, (6) increased community awareness of Quality Rated, and (7) promoting the Little Leaders Program.

Quality Rated & Tiered Family Co-Pays

In the South Georgia E3Z, the Quality Rated initiative is in the initial implementation stage. Quality Rated is implemented mostly by the Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agency in that region. One of the main objectives of the CCR&Rs is to help child care programs become Quality Rated. To this end, CCR&R staff work one-on-one with child care programs, walking program directors through the Quality Rated process and helping directors identify areas of program improvement.

The five counties that make up the South Georgia E3Z contain varying amounts of child care options (Table 16). For example, Brooks County has no licensed family child care homes. Echols County, similarly, has only one licensed family child care home and one licensed child care center, neither of which are participating in Quality Rated. The lack of available, licensed child care options poses a problem to families in need of child care. The regional CCR&R is

committed to working with the local child care programs to help them raise the quality of care that they provide to children and families.

Table 16: Total Child Care Programs Participating in Quality Rated, South Georgia E3Z

		Licensed Child Care	Eligible for Quality Rated ¹	Participating in QR ² (No.)	Participating in QR (%)	Sept 2015 Participation Rates (%)
Colquitt County	Child Care Learning Centers	31	30	15	48%	48%
	Family Child Care Homes	5	5	0	0%	0%
	Colquitt County Total	36	35	15	42%	42%
Cook County	Child Care Learning Centers	8	7	4	50%	50%
	Family Child Care Homes	11	10	5	45%	45%
	Cook County Total	19	17	9	47%	47%
Brooks County	Child Care Learning Centers	5	5	2	40%	40%
	Family Child Care Homes	0	0	0	N/A	N/A
	Brooks County Total	5	5	2	40%	40%
Lowndes County	Child Care Learning Centers	67	65	41	61%	58%
	Family Child Care Homes	41	40	15	37%	37%
	Lowndes County Total	108	105	54	50%	50%
Echols County	Child Care Learning Centers	1	1	0	0%	0%
	Family Child Care Homes	1	1	0	0%	0%
	Echols County Total	2	2	0	0%	
E3Z Total		170	164	80	47%	47%
Statewide Total		6,162	5,848	2,380	39%	38%

Source: Quality Rated Program, October 2015

¹To be eligible to be rated, a child care program must be compliant with licensing regulations.

²Any licensed program is allowed to fill out a Quality Rated application; however, only programs compliant with licensing are eligible to be rated in Quality Rated.

Table 16 also shows that, with the exception of Echols County, all of the South Georgia E3Z counties—and the zone as a whole (47%)—are surpassing the statewide Quality Rated participation rate (39%), though, the zone’s overall participation rate has remained unchanged from the previous quarter. Table 17 shows that the same relationship holds true when the total rated percentage for the South Georgia E3Z (21%, up one percentage point from the previous quarter) is compared to the statewide percentage for total rated programs (13%, also up one percentage point from the previous quarter). This may be because of the local efforts within the zone to increase Quality Rated participation. Similar comparisons cannot be made for the RTT-ELC tiered family co-pay strategy because it is a strategy that is being applied within the E3Zs only.

Table 17: Total Child Care Programs Rated in Quality Rated, South Georgia E3Z

		Licensed Child Care	1- Star	2- Star	3- Star	Total Rated ¹ (No.)	Total Rated (%)	Sept 2015 Rated (%)
Colquitt County	Child Care Learning Centers	31	1	1	0	2	6%	6%
	Family Child Care Homes	5	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
	Colquitt County Total	36	1	1	0	2	6%	6%
Cook County	Child Care Learning Centers	8	1	2	0	3	38%	38%
	Family Child Care Homes	11	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
	Cook County Total	19	1	2	0	3	16%	16%
Brooks County	Child Care Learning Centers	5	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
	Family Child Care Homes	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Brooks County Total	5	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Lowndes County	Child Care Learning Centers	67	13	10	0	23	33%	33%
	Family Child Care Homes	41	1	0	6	7	17%	17%
	Lowndes County Total	108	14	10	6	30	27%	27%
Echols County	Child Care Learning Centers	1	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
	Family Child Care Homes	1	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
	Echols County Total	2	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
E3Z Total		170	16	13	6	35	21%	20%
Statewide Total		6,162	249	385	162	796	13%	12%

Source: Quality Rated Program, October 2015

¹Rated in Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.

Table 18 and Table 19 are related the number of programs and the number of children receiving subsidies, respectively, that are benefiting from the RTT-ELC strategy designed to decrease family co-pays.²⁵ Across the zone, 74 child care providers serve 1,108 total children that receive CAPS subsidies. However, only 458 (41%) of these children and their families can take advantage of the decreased family co-pays because they attend one of the 20 child care providers that are Quality Rated. The number of CAPS-eligible children in Quality Rated programs is down from the previous quarter. Another 30 child care providers in the zone are participating in Quality Rated, which means they are not yet rated have but started the process. If they were to become Quality Rated and earn 1-, 2-, or 3-stars, then an additional 482 (44%) children and their families would see a reduction in their co-pays to either \$5, \$10, or \$15. Forty-

²⁵ Note that Table 18 shows different total rated amounts than Table 17 because, though all licensed child care providers are eligible to receive CAPS, not every licensed child care provider currently serves or accepts children who receive subsidies. Additionally, not every Quality Rated child care program currently serves or accepts children who receive subsidies; therefore, the total numbers in Table 18 are smaller than Table 17.

four percent of CAPS-receiving programs participating in Quality Rated, which is a significant increase from the 34% of programs participating in Quality Rated during the previous quarter.

Table 18: Total Number of Providers Serving Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, South Georgia E3Z

	Colquitt	Cook	Brooks	Lowndes	Echols	E3Z Total (No.)	E3Z Total (%)	Sept 2015 E3Z Total (%)
Quality Rated ¹	2	2	0	16	0	20	27%	30%
QR Participating ²	5	2	1	22	0	30	41%	35%
Not Quality Rated	3	2	1	17	1	24	32%	35%
Total	10	6	2	55	1	74	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, October 2015

¹Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.

²QR Participating means that a child care program has started the process to becoming Quality Rated, but has not yet earned a rating of 1-, 2-, or 3-stars.

Table 19: Total Number of Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, South Georgia E3Z

	Colquitt	Cook	Brooks	Lowndes	Echols	E3Z Total (No.)	E3Z Total (%)	Sept 2015 E3Z Total (%)
Quality Rated	31	12	0	415	0	458	41%	44%
QR Participating	138	2	4	338	0	482	44%	34%
Not Quality Rated	51	28	5	83	1	168	15%	22%
Total	220	42	9	836	1	1,108	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, October 2015

Great Start Georgia

The Great Start Georgia evidence-based home visiting model is in the initial implementation stage in the South Georgia E3Z. The Family Connection of Lowndes County serves as the fiscal agent for the Great Start Georgia grant, and Bright Start Preschool and Learning Center in Valdosta will serve as the child care hub. Currently, there are six local personnel funded through the home-visiting program: one First Steps Service Coordinator, one Parents as Teachers supervisor, and four certified Parent Educators. GSG service delivery in the South Georgia E3Z started October 1, 2015, about three months later than the other three E3Zs.

To find families eligible for home visitation services, the First Steps Service Coordinator is reaching out to other local agencies that serve families and children with high needs. The GSG team is also partnering with a local health club to offer a special reduced rate to the health club for eligible families.

Enhanced Professional Development

The South Georgia E3Z has a Directors' Network, and it is in the initial implementation stage. The South Georgia E3Z Directors' Network expressed concerns that much of the available trainings and professional development opportunities took place far away from the zone. The Leadership Team has been working with DECAL to offer specialized trainings within the zone for child care professionals. A Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) training is scheduled for Winter 2016, and the CCR&R is continuing to offer local trainings during the week and on the weekends.²⁶

Challenges & Opportunities

One of the biggest challenges facing the South Georgia E3Z is internet access. This is one challenge that the CCR&R faces constantly, and that the community coordinator recognizes in her interactions with child care providers. Becoming Quality Rated requires access to the internet. The Quality Rated portfolio can only be completed and submitted online. Further, most Quality Rated communications are delivered via email, a medium that rural child care providers may not access often.

What's Next

The South Georgia E3Z continues to work diligently to establish a network of supports for children aged zero through eight. The Leadership Team is organizing information for the development of a Family Child Care Network. The Family Child Care Network would meet quarterly in the evenings or on weekends to accommodate the varying schedules of family child care providers.

²⁶ For more information on the GELDS, please see the DECAL website: <http://gelds.dec.al.gov/>.

Conclusion

The four E3Zs are each taking the strategies outlined in the RT3-ELC grant and implementing them in ways that address community needs. In many cases, the E3Zs are also working with local partners to create new and innovative initiatives in response to other areas of the community's need. One area of need, identified by all of the E3Zs, relates to the implementation of the Tiered Family Co-Pay program. Below is a summary of the difficulty and suggestions to address it.

Building Internal Competencies for the Tiered Family Co-Pay Strategy

For the Tiered Family Co-Pay strategy to be successful, every individual and organization from the state level to the family unit needs to understand the purpose, eligibility, and processes of the program. The three E3Zs with Directors' Networks expressed a need from their child care providers for additional information on the Tiered Family Co-Pay program. DECAL is working individually with the Directors' Networks to provide face-to-face question and answer sessions for child care providers and zone stakeholders who need more clarity about what their responsibilities are to secure decreased family co-pays for parents. Clarke E3Z, which does not currently have a Directors' Network, also expressed a need for the same type of communications about the program. For all zones, it is unclear whether every family who is eligible for a reduction is currently receiving a reduction or even aware that they are eligible for a reduction.

In the E3Z North, the Birth-to-Eight Team is working to connect Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) directors and CAPS caseworkers with the same information about the existence, purpose, eligibility, and processes of the tiered family co-pay program. The other zones may need to reach out to their local DFCS directors and CAPS caseworkers in a similar fashion. It is crucial to build competency amongst the various agencies that are instrumental in communicating with families and securing resources for families with high needs. This way, if a potentially eligible child's family does not interact with the E3Z or child care director, there is still a greater possibility of the family becoming aware of its eligibility for decreased family co-pays through DFCS, The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infant, and Children (WIC), CAPS caseworker, or some other agency. If the families are aware that they should be receiving additional benefits by enrolling in a Quality Rated child care program, then they may be more inclined to follow up with their child care center or caseworker about securing those benefits.

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Georgia's Quality Rated Program

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