



GEORGIA'S EARLY EDUCATION EMPOWERMENT ZONES EVALUATION REPORT

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Executive Summary

In September 2014, Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) announced 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.

Each E3Z is facilitated by a Community Coordinator, and the four Community Coordinators work closely with the E3Z Director. The team has a weekly check-in call during which they share challenges, achievements, important dates, and upcoming initiatives. As a team, the group receives first-hand information about DECAL plans and programs for the E3Zs. The coordinators are able to learn from each other and take newly shared information back into their communities. The intentional, strategic networking at the state and local levels allows for more integrative collaboration on joint projects.

In June 2016, DECAL released key elements of its four-year strategic plan.² Goal IV of DECAL's 2016 Strategic Plan focuses directly on the alignment and coordination of programs and services, similar to the E3Z design. The first measurable objective of Goal IV aims to increase the percentage of community-based birth-age eight collaboratives supported by DECAL. Currently, four DECAL-supported, community-based birth-age eight collaboratives exist across the state: E3Z North, Clarke E3Z, Bibb E3Z, and South Georgia E3Z. Research regarding the implementation of programs and services and the identification of key practices that promote sustainability in each E3Z will help to achieve Goal IV.

DECAL 2016 Strategic Plan, Goal IV: Build a framework that aligns and coordinates DECAL programs and services across regions for children from birth to age eight.

The purpose of this report is to summarize the recent RT3-ELC grant activities in the E3Zs, communicate the details of implementation, and identify the key practices needed to sustain the E3Z work. Information for this report is derived from the Community Coordinators, whose testimonies supply much needed and sometimes nuanced local rationale for a community's

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 Please see the DECAL website for more information on its 2016 Strategic Plan: <http://www.decals.ga.gov/BftS/StrategicPlan.aspx>

response to its own perceived need. The current iteration of this report includes information about the E3Z implementation between January 2016 and June 2016.³

This report is organized into three main sections. The first section introduces the E3Z initiative and its evaluation framework; it also provides a detailed overview of each RT3-ELC strategy. The second section includes a high-level summary of the recent activities happening throughout the E3Zs. The third section is an appendix that provides detailed profiles of each E3Z including zone-specific data related to Quality Rated and the Decreased Family Co-Pay Program, the latter being a strategy only available within the zones.

Summary of Recent E3Z Activities

Partnerships and Activities

The E3Z Community Coordinators and their Birth-to-Eight Teams leverage their relationships with local partners to advance the work of the RTC-ELC grant. During the past six months, local partners strove to improve their systems of early care and education by raising public awareness for the importance of quality child care and creating learning opportunities for all children aged zero to eight. In the South Georgia E3Z, the Mayor of Valdosta and the County Manager have been instrumental in planning and executing Thank a Provider Week, which is aimed at recognizing the valuable service of early childhood professionals. Concurrent to DECAL's statewide public awareness campaign for Quality Rated, local partners in the Bibb E3Z, Clarke E3Z, and E3Z North launched marketing campaigns designed to increase public awareness of Quality Rated and gather feedback from parents about finding child care.⁴ Local school systems and colleges and universities continue to be valuable partners in the improvement of early care and education systems, as evidenced by the two-generational Learning Academies in the E3Z North's Whitfield County School System. During the Learning Academy, current teachers and student teachers from Dalton State College facilitated sessions for families to learn how to promote literacy inside the home.

In February 2016, DECAL awarded Family Engagement Opportunity Grants to five early childhood care and education organizations across Georgia. The Family Engagement Opportunity Grants are intended to increase availability and accessibility to quality family engagement programs, activities and opportunities in the E3Zs and Metro Atlanta. Grant recipients are expected to provide supplemental educational outlets that promote, encourage and support community awareness and advocacy, as well as provide access to free and ongoing

³ Beginning with this report, the E3Z reports will be published semi-annually to allow time for the planning and implementation of RT3-ELC and local strategies. Reports on previous reporting cycles can be found on the GOSA website: <https://gosa.georgia.gov/race-top-early-learning-challenge-grant-evaluation>

⁴ In summer 2016, DECAL and the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) introduced a new statewide public awareness campaign for Quality Rated. Read more about the campaign in the *Decidedly DECAL* May 2016 monthly newsletter: <http://dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/DECALMay2016.pdf>

parent leadership and child development resources. Grants were awarded to at least one recipient in each E3Z, as well as one recipient in the Metro Atlanta area.⁵

Challenges and Opportunities

By working with their local partners, the E3Zs have identified challenges that are sometimes unique to their communities, but often common to similar communities around the state. For example, the South Georgia E3Z Leadership Team learned about some of the specific learning obstacles—such as the lack of supervision, electricity, and learning materials in the home—faced by children in their community through the reports from Great Start Georgia home visiting initiative, based out of a child care center. Additionally, all of the E3Z and non-E3Z sites are gearing up for administrative transitions in the Great Start Georgia program. The administration and oversight of the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting grant and oversight of RT3-ELC Grant home visiting sites will be transferred from the Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) to the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH), Maternal and Child Health Section (MCH). Programmatic and/or procedural changes due to the administrative shift are yet to be observed.

Next Steps

Local capacity within each zone is being supported by a number of state and local initiatives. Currently, the Community Coordinators and the E3Z Business Operations Specialist are working together to encourage Quality Rated Child Care programs to submit applications for the fourth round of Child Care Expansion Grants. Child Care Expansion Grants, offered through the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, are economic development incentive packages of up to \$100,000 available to current child care programs in the E3Zs.⁶

As each of the E3Zs continues to build new partnerships and strengthen existing collaborations between organizations at the local level, DECAL continues to support the zones by helping to connect community leaders to a broader, multi-state network of RT3-ELC transformation zones. A transformation zone is a geographic area where the State targets funding and specialized services to support strategic, systems-level work. In April 2016, the E3Z Team attended a national convening of RT3-ELC states which have supported transformation zone efforts. Ten states, including Georgia, included transformation zones as key parts of their RT3-ELC grant proposals.⁷ Transformation zones look different in each state, but the goal remains the same: to increase the quality of early care and learning in high needs communities.

⁵ Read more about the five recipients of the Family Engagement Opportunity Grants at the DECAL website: <http://dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/familyengagementopportunitygrantpressrelease.pdf>

⁶ For more information on the Child Care Expansion Grant, please visit the Georgia Department of Community Affairs website: <http://www.dca.ga.gov/communities/CommunityInitiatives/programs/E3Z.asp>.

⁷ For more information on states implementing a transformation zone as part of their RT-ELC grants, please see the ELC Technical Assistant Program publication: <https://elc.grads360.org/services/PDCService.svc/GetPDCDocumentFile?fileId=16241>.

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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 Agency
DFCS	Division of Family and Children Services
WIC	The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infant, and Children
DCA	Department of Community Affairs

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Introduction

In September 2014, Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) announced 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).⁸ 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's main objective is to summarize the RT3-ELC grant activities in the E3Zs. This information 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 current iteration of this report includes information about the E3Z implementation between January 2016 and June 2016.⁹

This report is organized into three main sections. The first section introduces the E3Z initiative and its evaluation framework; it also provides a detailed overview of each RT3-ELC strategy. The second section includes a high-level summary of the recent activities happening throughout the E3Zs. The third section is an appendix that provides detailed profiles of each E3Z including zone-specific data related to Quality Rated and the Tiered Family Co-Pay Program, the latter being a strategy only available within the zones.

⁸ 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.

⁹ Beginning with this report, the E3Z reports will be published semi-annually to allow time for the planning and implementation of RT3-ELC and local strategies. Reports on previous reporting cycles can be found on the GOSA website: <https://gosa.georgia.gov/race-top-early-learning-challenge-grant-evaluation>.

Overview

Local Capacity-Building

Local capacity is required to implement and maintain a local system of partnerships to support and improve early learning and to implement the RT3-ELC strategies. 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.¹⁰ The following sections summarize the local capacity of the E3Zs, as evidenced by their activities, to implement and maintain the RT3-ELC strategies between January 2016 and June 2016.

In June 2016, DECAL released key elements of its four-year strategic plan.¹¹ Goal IV of DECAL's 2017-2020 Strategic Plan focuses directly on the alignment and coordination of programs and services, similar to the E3Z design. The first measurable objective of Goal IV aims to increase the percentage of community-based birth-age eight collaboratives supported by DECAL. Currently, four DECAL-supported, community-based birth-age eight collaboratives exist across the state: E3Z North, Clarke E3Z, Bibb E3Z, and South Georgia E3Z. Research regarding the implementation of programs and services and the identification of key practices that promote sustainability in each E3Z will help to achieve Goal IV.

DECAL 2016 Strategic Plan, Goal IV: Build a framework that aligns and coordinates DECAL programs and services across regions for children from birth to age eight.

Evaluation Framework

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."¹² 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.

¹⁰ 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>.

¹¹ Please see the DECAL website for more information on its 2016 Strategic Plan: <http://www.dec.al.ga.gov/BftS/StrategicPlan.aspx>

¹² 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/implementationsscience.aspx>

Each RT3-ELC strategy and local strategy also has its own set of implementation drivers, which are interactive supports necessary to achieve active and successful implementation. Implementation science is used as a framework to identify how each strategy within the E3Zs is progressing and to plan future activities to sustain implementation.

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.

The RT3-ELC Strategies

As part of its RT3-ELC proposal, DECAL is targeting specific strategies to increase the quality of and access to early learning and development options, especially for children with high needs, as well as supporting local efforts to coordinate key programs and services that target children and families with high needs. The strategies include:¹³

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. 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. Generally, the Birth-to-Eight Teams meet every other month in central, publicly-accessible facilities. 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

¹³ A detailed description of each implemented RT3-ELC Strategy is provided in Appendix A.

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 to help the Team implement the ELC strategies.¹⁴

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 over 1,100 rated and nearly 2,700 participating child care programs (see Table 1). 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 programs earn one-, two-, or three-stars depending on the number of points they are awarded through their program portfolio and classroom observations.¹⁵

Georgia’s RT3-ELC grant set specific targets for the grant term. Georgia’s goals by the end of the grant term include a statewide Quality Rated participation rate of 100%, with 85% of all eligible child care programs being rated in the Quality Rated program. Child care programs are considered “participating” in Quality Rated when they complete a Quality Rated application. “Rated” in Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.

Currently, the statewide Quality Rated Participation rate is 45% and the percentage of rated programs is 19%. These rates tend to be slightly higher in the E3Zs (see Table 1). The E3Zs are designed to intensify 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.

¹⁴ For more information on specific Birth-to-Eight Team activities, or to get involved, please contact Laura Wagner, Early Education Empowerment Zone Director, at laura.wagner@dec.al.ga.gov.

¹⁵ 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/>.

Table 1: Quality Rated Participation and Rating Rates, Statewide & E3Z

	Licensed Child Care	QR Eligible ¹	Participating (No.)	Participating (%)	Rated (No.) ³	Rated (%)	Jan 2016 Participating (%)	Jan 2016 Rated (%)
E3Z North	113	106	66	58%	37	33%	53%	27%
Clarke E3Z	61	55	28	46%	12	20%	39%	20%
Bibb E3Z	135	126	63	47%	27	20%	45%	12%
South Georgia E3Z	162	162	87	54%	51	31%	49%	23%
Statewide	6,022	5,833	2,697	45%	1,130	19%	40%	14%

Source: Quality Rated Program, July 2016

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.

Tiered Family Co-Pay Program¹⁶

Georgia’s Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program provides subsidized child care to low-income families in all of Georgia’s 159 counties.¹⁷ 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 depending on the provider’s Quality Rated star level. CAPS-eligible 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.

¹⁶ For more information on the CAPS Tiered Family Co-Pay Program in the E3Zs, please visit the DECAL website for Quality Initiatives: <http://dec.al.ga.gov/QualityInitiatives/CAPS.aspx>.

¹⁷ For more information about CAPS, including eligibility requirements, applications, initiatives, and contact information, please visit the CAPS website: <http://caps.dec.al.ga.gov/en/>.

Table 2 shows the enrollment rates for CAPS-eligible children in each of the E3Zs.¹⁸ Thus far, the focus has been on child care programs that enroll CAPS-eligible children but are only participating in Quality Rated and are not yet rated.

Table 2: Tiered Family Co-Pays within the E3Zs

	E3Z North	Clarke E3Z	Bibb E3Z	South Georgia E3Z
Number of CAPS-Eligible Children	624	476	2,864	1,606
Proportion of CAPS-eligible children throughout the E3Zs	11%	9%	51%	29%
<i>Percentage of CAPS-eligible children in programs that are....</i>				
Rated in Quality Rated ¹	56%	21%	28%	50%
Participating in Quality Rated ²	35%	68%	51%	38%
Neither Rated nor Participating	9%	11%	21%	12%

Source: CAPS Program, June 1, 2016

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.

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, 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.¹⁹ For the E3Zs, GSG is implementing one new or expanded EBHV program 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 Resource Coordinator. The First Steps Resource Coordinator is responsible for identifying, screening, and recruiting children and families, as well as connecting 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.

¹⁸ CAPS subsidies are provided on a weekly basis. Therefore, the CAPS data fluctuate on a weekly basis.

¹⁹ For more information on Great Start Georgia, please visit its website: <https://www.greatstartgeorgia.org/home>.

Enhanced Professional Development

One of the focused investment areas of Georgia’s RT3-ELC grant is on its early education workforce. One method of 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.

Each E3Z has a professional development group, either a Peer Support Network or a Directors’ Network. A Peer Support Network is a local convening of Quality Rated providers supported in part by DECAL. A Directors’ Network 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. It is tied directly to the Birth-to-Eight Team. 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.

Economic Development Incentives

In partnership with the Department of Community Affairs (DCA), DECAL is offering child care expansion grants to two- and three-star Quality Rated child care programs. The competitive Child Care Expansion Grants are aimed at increasing openings for infants and toddlers and will supply up to \$100,000 to child care programs seeking to expand their current child care program or open a new child care program within an E3Z. Eligible projects must create new classrooms that will also create at least two new full-time jobs that serve at least ten additional infants and toddlers. DCA and DECAL officials are currently preparing to launch a fourth round of child care expansion grants, with applications set to close in mid-September.²⁰

Family Engagement Opportunity Grants

DECAL defines family engagement as “the shared responsibility of families, schools, early education programs, and communities to actively promote, support, and sustain family wellbeing, healthy child development, strong family-child relationships, and lifelong learning for all children and families.” Family Engagement Opportunity Grants were awarded in February 2016 to five Georgia early care and education organizations. Four of these grants were awarded to individual organizations within each E3Z. The purposes of the grants are: (1) to increase the availability and accessibility to quality family engagement programs, activities, and opportunities; (2) to provide supplemental educational outlets that promote, encourage, and support community awareness and advocacy; and (3) to provide access to free, ongoing parent leadership and child development resources.²¹

²⁰ To find out more about the E3Z Child Care Expansion Grant, please visit the DCA website: <http://www.dca.ga.gov/communities/CommunityInitiatives/programs/E3Z.asp>.

²¹ To find out more about the Family Engagement Opportunity Grants, please visit the DECAL website for funding opportunities: <http://dec.al.ga.gov/QualityInitiatives/Grants.aspx>.

Recent E3Z Activities

This section focuses on the local partnerships that are working together to meet the RT3-ELC grant objectives, as well as spark new, local initiatives aimed at reaching the common goal of improved early care and education for all.

Partnerships and Activities

The E3Z Community Coordinators and their Birth-to-Eight Teams leverage their relationships with local partners to advance the work of the RTC-ELC grant. Recently, county and city government officials have recommitted to the improvement of their local early care and education systems; public and private organizations launched marketing campaigns designed to reach parents and families in their communities; and public schools across the Pre-K through college spectrum created learning opportunities for children aged zero to eight.

Over the summer in the South Georgia E3Z, the Mayor of Valdosta visited ten Quality Rated (or Quality Rated Participating) child care centers as part of the region's "Read Across Valdosta" initiative.²² This is the first time that the Valdosta Mayor has brought this initiative to a child care setting, as the Mayor normally visits public K-12 schools. The Valdosta Mayor and County Manager also declared June 20-24 to be Thank a Provider Week, during which public events and activities were designed to show appreciation for child care providers in the region.

Local efforts to increase public awareness of Quality Rated are happening concurrent to DECAL's statewide public awareness campaign for Quality Rated.²³ In the Bibb E3Z, Clarke E3Z, and E3Z North, local partners launched marketing campaigns designed to increase public awareness of Quality Rated and gather feedback from parents about finding child care. The Bibb E3Z created a Quality Rated Parental Marketing Campaign Team tasked with finding ways to encourage non-participating providers to become actively involved in the Quality Rated process. The Clarke E3Z is hoping to use its network of neighborhood leaders to reach parents by putting baskets together for new and expecting mothers who receive services at the local hospitals. These baskets will include information about finding and paying for a Quality Rated child care, as well as other resources for families. In collaboration with the BUILD Initiative, the E3Z North held two family listening sessions to gauge the decision-making process that families use when choosing a child care provider. One of the listening sessions took place in the city of Dalton (Whitfield County) with Hispanic families who were receiving child care subsidies to attend a Quality Rated child care program; the other listening session took place in Murray County and targeted all families.

Local school systems and higher education institutions continue to be valuable partners in the improvement of local early care and education systems. The Whitfield County School System in the E3Z North is implementing its recent \$10,000 GOSA Innovation in Language and Literacy

²² Rated in Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.

²³ In summer 2016, DECAL and the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) introduced a new statewide public awareness campaign for Quality Rated. Read more about the campaign in the *Decidedly DECAL* May 2016 monthly newsletter: <http://dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/DECALMay2016.pdf>

Planning Grant. The school system held parent focus groups at four of its schools. The focus groups delved into families' perceptions of their own language and literacy development. To promote a two-generation learning program, the school system also held Learning Academies at one of its elementary schools. During the Learning Academies, current teachers and student teachers from Dalton State College facilitated sessions for families to learn how to promote literacy inside the home.

Challenges and Opportunities

By working with their local partners, the E3Zs have identified challenges that are sometimes unique to their communities and often common to similar communities around the state. For example, through the reports from Great Start Georgia home visiting initiative, based out of a child care center, the South Georgia E3Z Leadership Team learned about some of the specific learning obstacles faced by children in their community. These learning obstacles include low rates of parental education and employment, safety concerns like the lack of adult supervision, health concerns like insect infestations and a lack of electricity or running water, and access concerns like the number and quality of learning materials in the home. The Bibb E3Z, like other E3Zs and many other regions in the state, is trying to find ways to increase the engagement of family child care learning homes in the work of the E3Z and in the Quality Rated program.

The Clarke E3Z is undertaking the unique task of opening a second Great Start Georgia home visiting hub in a second child care center. Meanwhile, all of the E3Zs and Community Coordinators are gearing up for administrative transitions in the Great Start Georgia program. The administration and oversight of the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting grant and oversight of RT3-ELC Grant home visiting sites will be transferring from the Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) to the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH), Maternal and Child Health Section (MCH). Programmatic and/or procedural changes due to the administrative shift are yet to be observed.

Next Steps

Local capacity within each zone is being supported by a number of state and local initiatives. Currently, the Community Coordinators are working with the E3Z Business Operations Specialist to encourage Quality Rated child care programs to apply the fourth round of Child Care Expansion Grants. Child Care Expansion Grants, offered through the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, are economic development incentive packages of up to \$100,000 available to current child care programs in the E3Zs.²⁴

As each of the E3Zs continues to build new partnerships and strengthen existing collaborations between organizations at the local level, DECAL continues to support the zones by helping to connect community leaders to a broader, multi-state network of RT3-ELC transformation zones. Ten states, including Georgia, included transformation zones as key parts of their RT3-ELC

²⁴ For more information on the Child Care Expansion Grant, please visit the Georgia Department of Community Affairs website: <http://www.dca.ga.gov/communities/CommunityInitiatives/programs/E3Z.asp>

grant proposals.²⁵ A transformation zone is a geographic area where the State targets funding and specialized services to support strategic, systems-level work. Transformation zones look different in each state, but the goal remains the same: to increase the quality of early care and learning in high needs communities.

Conclusion

With the adoption of DECAL's new 2017-2020 Strategic Plan, the lessons learned from the E3Z become primary data sources for state leaders hoping to broaden, replicate, and scale-up the zone initiative. Goal IV of the 2017-2010 Strategic Plan is to "build a framework that aligns and coordinates DECAL programs and services across regions for children from birth to age eight." The goal has a specific, measurable objective to increase the number of community collaboratives each year by 50%. The E3Zs provide invaluable, state-specific data to help meet this goal and its objective. With this goal in mind, future iterations of this report will focus on surfacing lessons learned within the E3Zs in an effort to support long-term sustainability and scalability of the initiative.

Over the past six months, the E3Zs have focused on strengthening local partnerships and increasing local capacity. Most, if not all, of the work in the zones happens through strategic collaborations. These strategic collaborations are vital to the E3Zs' implementation of RT3-ELC strategies and local initiatives. In the next few months, the collaboratives will weather administrative changes in a long-standing, federally-funded home visitation program.

²⁵ For more information on states implementing a transformation zone as part of their RT-ELC grants, please see the ELC Technical Assistant Program publication:

<https://elc.grads360.org/services/PDCService.svc/GetPDCDocumentFile?fileId=16241>.

Appendix: E3Z Profiles & 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 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 "dual-generation education." The Team strives to educate parents and families alongside educating children. This effort is also a focus for their family engagement activities as they work to secure a zone-wide Family Engagement Opportunity Grant.

Quality Rated & Tiered Family Co-Pays

In the E3Z North, the regional Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agency does most of the work for getting programs participating and rated through Quality Rated. 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, 58% of the zone's licensed child care programs are participating in Quality Rated (see Table 3). 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 to engage families, it actively incorporates transportation options for these events, where possible.

Table 4 shows the distribution of rating levels within each county of the E3Z North, and Table 5 shows participation rates and star-level rates for the child care programs that currently serve children receiving CAPS subsidies. In terms of the number of children who are affected by the program's participation in Quality Rated, Table 6 shows that 348 (56%) children are receiving a decreased family co-pay because they attend a Quality Rated child care program.

Great Start Georgia

Before the RT3-ELC, Whitfield County already had 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 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.

Enhanced Professional Development

One of the key goals of the Birth-to-Eight Team is to foster collaboration between school systems and higher education institutions to improve workforce development for early childhood professionals across the zone. The regional CCR&R provides monthly trainings for providers participating in Quality Rated. The zone is also implementing a Directors' Network, which includes approximately 25 child care and pre-k providers across the region. Partners in the E3Z North Directors' Network include the CCR&R, DECAL, Dalton State College, local school systems, the Chamber of Commerce Division of Workforce Development, Georgia Northwestern Technical College, and child care directors. The group meets every other month to plan for their needs and receive specialized professional development.

E3Z North – Data Profile

Table 3: 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 (%)	Jan 2016 Participating (%)
Catoosa County	Child Care Learning Centers	27	26	20	77%	74%
	Family Child Care Homes	1	1	0	0%	0%
	Catoosa County Total	28	27	20	74%	71%
Whitfield County	Child Care Learning Centers	36	33	17	47%	43%
	Family Child Care Homes	16	14	10	63%	50%
	Whitfield County Total	52	47	27	52%	45%
Murray County	Child Care Learning Centers	6	6	4	67%	50%
	Family Child Care Homes	2	2	1	50%	50%
	Murray County Total	8	8	5	63%	50%
Gordon County	Child Care Learning Centers	15	15	7	47%	47%
	Family Child Care Homes	6	6	4	67%	33%
	Gordon County Total	21	21	11	52%	43%
Gilmer County	Child Care Learning Centers	4	4	3	75%	50%
	Family Child Care Homes	0	0	0	N/A	N/A
	Gilmer County Total	4	4	3	75%	50%
E3Z Total		113	107	66	58%	52%
Statewide Total		6,047	5,833	2,697	45%	40%

Source: Quality Rated Program, July 2016

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 4: Child Care Programs Rated in Quality Rated, E3Z North

		Licensed				Total	Total	Jan 2016
		Child	1-	2-	3-	Rated ¹	Rated	Rated
		Care	Star	Star	Star	(No.)	(%)	(%)
Catoosa County	Child Care Learning Centers	27	4	4	5	13	48%	41%
	Family Child Care Homes	1	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
	Catoosa County Total	28	4	4	5	13	46%	39%
Whitfield County	Child Care Learning Centers	36	2	5	3	10	28%	23%
	Family Child Care Homes	16	3	1	1	5	31%	31%
	Whitfield County Total	52	5	6	4	15	29%	25%
Murray County	Child Care Learning Centers	6	1	3	0	4	67%	33%
	Family Child Care Homes	2	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
	Murray County Total	8	1	3	0	4	50%	25%
Gordon County	Child Care Learning Centers	15	3	1	0	4	27%	20%
	Family Child Care Homes	6	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
	Gordon County Total	21	3	1	0	4	19%	14%
Gilmer County	Child Care Learning Centers	4	0	0	2	2	50%	25%
	Family Child Care Homes	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Gilmer County Total	4	0	0	2	2	50%	25%
E3Z Total		113	13	14	11	38	34%	27%
Statewide Total		6,047	412	534	184	1,130	19%	14%

Source: Quality Rated Program, July 2016

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

Table 5: Providers Serving Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, E3Z North²⁶

	Catoosa	Whitfield	Murray	Gordon	Gilmer	E3Z Total (No.)	E3Z Total (%)	Jan 2016 E3Z Total (%)
Quality Rated ¹	6	7	1	3	0	17	32%	27%
QR Participating ²	6	7	1	4	1	19	36%	33%
Not Quality Rated	0	9	3	4	1	17	32%	40%
Total	12	23	5	11	2	53	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, June 1, 2016

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 6: Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, E3Z North

	E3Z Total (No.)	E3Z Total (%)	Jan 2016 E3Z Total (%)
Quality Rated	348	56%	39%
QR Participating	221	35%	37%
Not Quality Rated	55	9%	25%
Total	624	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, June 1, 2016

²⁶ Note that Table 5 shows different total rated amounts than Table 4 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 4.

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 Connections 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. 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.

The ECL-SAT uses data from the Family Connections 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.

Enhanced Professional Development

Child care providers in the Clarke E3Z have two opportunities for enhanced professional development. The first opportunity is the Peer Support Network, which is led by an ambassador from a local Quality Rated child care provider. The Peer Support Network has quarterly team meetings to learn and select future learning topics. The Network is setup to develop and deliver professional development resources to child care providers throughout the community.

The second enhanced professional development opportunity is through a Directors' Network, which is organized by the Georgia Alliance for Quality Child Care. The group uses monthly meetings to learn about and discuss issues related to early childhood education and care.

Quality Rated & Tiered Family Co-Pays

In the Clarke E3Z, Quality Rated 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. Currently, the zone's Quality Rated Participation rate is 39% (see Table 7) and the percentage of rated programs is 20% (see Table 8).

Table 9 reflects the number of child care programs in the Clarke E3Z that currently serve children who receive CAPS subsidies. Out of 29 total programs: 24% are Quality Rated; another 38% are participating in Quality Rated; and 38% continue to be neither rated nor participating in Quality Rated. Table 10 shows that 99 (21%) children who receive subsidies attend a Quality

Rated child care program. The family co-pays for these children have been lowered significantly depending on the child care program's rating level.

Great Start Georgia

Athens-Clarke County, even before becoming an E3Z, was 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 was already operating Healthy Families Georgia, 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 Clarke 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 Resource 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.

Clarke E3Z – Data Profile

Table 7: 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 (%)	Jan 2016 Participation Rate (%)
Child Care Learning Centers	37	36	18	49%	43%
Family Child Care Homes	24	21	10	42%	33%
E3Z Total	61	57	28	46%	39%
Statewide Total	6,047	5,833	2,697	45%	40%

Source: Quality Rated Program, July 2016

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 8: Child Care Programs Rated in Quality Rated, Clarke E3Z

	Licensed Child Care	1-Star	2-Star	3-Star	Rated ¹ (No.)	Rated (%)	Jan 2016 Rated (%)
Child Care Learning Centers	37	1	4	4	9	24%	24%
Family Child Care Homes	24	1	1	1	3	8%	8%
E3Z Total	61	2	5	5	12	20%	20%
Statewide Total	6,047	412	534	184	1,130	19%	14%

Source: Quality Rated Program, July 2016

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

Table 9: Providers Serving Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, Clarke E3Z²⁷

	No. of Providers	Percent of Providers	Jan 2016 Percent of Providers
Quality Rated ¹	7	24%	28%
QR Participating ²	11	38%	28%
Not Quality Rated	11	38%	45%
Total	29	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, June 1, 2016

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 10: Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, Clarke E3Z

	No. of Children	Percent of CAPS-Eligible Children	Jan 2016 Percent of CAPS-Eligible Children
Quality Rated	99	21%	18%
QR Participating	324	68%	65%
Not Quality Rated	53	11%	17%
Total	476	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, June 1, 2016

²⁷ Note that Table 9 shows different total rated amounts than Table 8 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 9 are smaller than Table 8.

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 Early Learning Project. The United Way of Central Georgia 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 United Way of Central Georgia. Due in large part to the United Way of Central Georgia'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 offers 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 11 shows that the Bibb E3Z has 137 licensed child care programs, including both child care centers and family child care homes. About 47% of those licensed programs are currently participating in Quality Rated. Table 12 shows more detail about child care programs that are rated in Quality Rated. Of the 137 licensed child care programs, about 20% are rated, meaning they have earned 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.

Table 13 describes the number of child care providers that currently serve children receiving CAPS subsidies that are Quality Rated, participating in Quality Rated, and not participating in Quality Rated. Twenty-five percent of these programs earned 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in Quality Rated;

38% of these programs are participating in Quality Rated, which means they have not yet earned any stars, and the final 38% of programs are neither participating nor rated in Quality Rated.

Table 14 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. Twenty-eight percent of children receiving CAPS subsidies in the Bibb E3Z are benefiting from decreased family co-pays.

Great Start Georgia

United Way of Central Georgia is the fiscal agent for the Great Start Georgia home visitation grant in the Bibb E3Z. Sandy's Sandbox Child Care Center serves as the hub of the program. Currently, the First Steps Resource 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's iteration of the Great Start Georgia model includes services that were, initially, outside of the scope of home visiting services. The zone realized that the community needed additional services, such as career services, resume writing, and direct referrals to other service agencies. To adapt to the needs of the community, the home visiting hub now includes job fair resources, counseling for families, credit counseling, and a parent store. The parent store is supported by donations from the zone's Directors' Network, Early Learning Network and the United Way of Central Georgia. Parents who attend family engagement opportunities—like a seminar or parent-teacher conference—earn “parent bucks” to purchase items from the parent store.

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 venue to support professional learning 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.

In early 2016, the Bibb Director's Network forged a partnership with the statewide Peer Support Network in order to develop sustainable professional development resources for providers in their community. The Peer Support Network meets quarterly in order to provide relevant trainings for child care providers from the area.

The Bibb Peer Support 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.

Bibb E3Z – Data Profile

Table 11: 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 (%)	Jan 2016 Participation Rates (%)
Child Care Learning Centers	104	102	55	53%	50%
Family Child Care Homes	33	33	10	30%	29%
E3Z Total	137	135	65	47%	45%
Statewide Total	6,047	5,833	2,697	45%	40%

Source: Quality Rated Program, July 2016

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: Child Care Programs Rated in Quality Rated, Bibb E3Z

	Licensed Child Care	1-Star	2-Star	3-Star	Rated ¹ (No.)	Rated (%)	Jan 2016 Rated (%)
Child Care Learning Centers	104	8	12	4	24	23%	15%
Family Child Care Homes	33	1	2	0	3	9%	3%
E3Z Total	137	9	14	4	27	20%	12%
Statewide Total	6,047	412	534	184	1,130	19%	14%

Source: Quality Rated Program, July 2016

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

Table 13: Providers Serving Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, Bibb E3Z²⁸

	No. of Providers	Percent of Providers	Jan 2016 Percent of Providers ³
Quality Rated ¹	19	25%	16%
QR Participating ²	29	38%	42%
Not Quality Rated	29	38%	42%
Total	77	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, June 1, 2016

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 14: Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, Bibb E3Z

	No. of Children	Percent of CAPS-Eligible Children	Jan 2016 Percent of CAPS-Eligible Children
Quality Rated	809	28%	17%
QR Participating	1,454	51%	57%
Not Quality Rated	601	21%	25%
Total	2,864	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, June 1, 2016

²⁸ Note that Table 13 shows different total rated amounts than Table 12 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 13 are smaller than Table 14.

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 meets regularly every 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 seven strategies that they are actively using to 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) increasing Summer Feeding Service Program participation, (6) increasing community awareness of Quality Rated, and (7) promoting the Little Leaders Program, which is a weekly enrichment class for children and families who are on the Georgia Pre-K waiting list.

Quality Rated & Tiered Family Co-Pays

In the South Georgia E3Z, 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 them identify areas of program improvement.

The five counties that make up the South Georgia E3Z contain varying amounts of child care options. For example, Brooks County has no licensed family child care homes and two child care learning centers. Echols County, similarly, has only one licensed family child care home and one licensed child care center. 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. As a whole, the zone's Quality Rated Participation rate is 54% (see Table 15), and the percentage of rated programs is 31% (see Table 16). Table 17 and Table 18 are related to the number of programs and the number of children receiving subsidies, respectively, that are benefiting from the RT3-ELC strategy designed to decrease family co-pays. Across the zone, 79 child care providers serve 1,606 total children who receive CAPS subsidies. Half (50%) of these children and their families can take advantage of the decreased family co-pays because they attend a Quality Rated child care provider.

Great Start Georgia

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 serves as the child care hub. Currently, there are six local personnel funded through the home-visiting program: one First Steps Resource 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 Resource Coordinator reaches out to other local agencies that serve families and children with high needs. The GSG team is working closely with the Department of Public Health to share data. The team is also working on a securing a partnership with the South Georgia Medical Center. One challenge that the GSG team is experiencing is securing additional resources and support, which may be outside the scope of the grant, for families in need. For example, the team was able to find housing a family that was living in a park. Once the family moved into the apartment, they then needed help finding safe furniture and other daily supplies.

Enhanced Professional Development

The South Georgia E3Z has a Directors' Network which is made up of child care center directors. The Directors' Network meets regularly and received specialized training from both DECAL and the regional CCR&R.

South Georgia E3Z – Data Profile

Table 15: 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 (%)	Jan 2016 Participation Rates (%)
Colquitt County	Child Care Learning Centers	31	30	15	48%	48%
	Family Child Care Homes	4	4	0	0%	0%
	Colquitt County Total	35	34	15	43%	43%
Cook County	Child Care Learning Centers	8	8	4	50%	50%
	Family Child Care Homes	10	10	4	40%	45%
	Cook County Total	18	18	8	44%	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	65	66	43	66%	62%
	Family Child Care Homes	37	35	19	51%	38%
	Lowndes County Total	102	101	62	61%	53%
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%	0%
E3Z Total		162	160	87	54%	49%
Statewide Total		6,047	5,833	2,697	45%	40%

Source: Quality Rated Program, July 2016

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: 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 (%)	Jan 2016 Rated (%)
Colquitt County	Child Care Learning Centers	31	2	1	0	3	10%	6%
	Family Child Care Homes	4	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
	Colquitt County Total	35	1	1	0	2	6%	6%
Cook County	Child Care Learning Centers	8	1	2	0	3	38%	38%
	Family Child Care Homes	10	0	1	3	4	40%	0%
	Cook County Total	18	1	3	3	7	39%	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	65	14	16	0	30	46%	38%
	Family Child Care Homes	37	2	2	7	11	30%	21%
	Lowndes County Total	102	16	18	7	41	40%	32%
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		162	18	22	10	50	31%	23%
Statewide Total		6,047	412	534	184	1,130	19%	14%

Source: Quality Rated Program, July 2016

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

Table 17: Providers Serving Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, South Georgia E3Z²⁹

	Colquitt	Cook	Brooks	Lowndes	Echols	E3Z Total (No.)	E3Z Total (%)	Jan 2016 E3Z Total (%)
Quality Rated ¹	2	4	0	23	0	29	37%	36%
QR Participating ²	5	1	1	17	0	24	30%	34%
Not Quality Rated	3	5	1	16	1	26	33%	30%
Total	10	10	2	56	1	79	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, June 1, 2016

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 18: Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, South Georgia E3Z

	E3Z Total (No.)	E3Z Total (%)	Jan 2016 E3Z Total (%)
Quality Rated	803	50%	51%
QR Participating	609	38%	34%
Not Quality Rated	194	12%	15%
Total	1,606	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, June 1, 2016

²⁹ Note that Table 17 shows different total rated amounts than Table 16 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 17 are smaller than Table 16.

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Georgia's Quality Rated Program

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