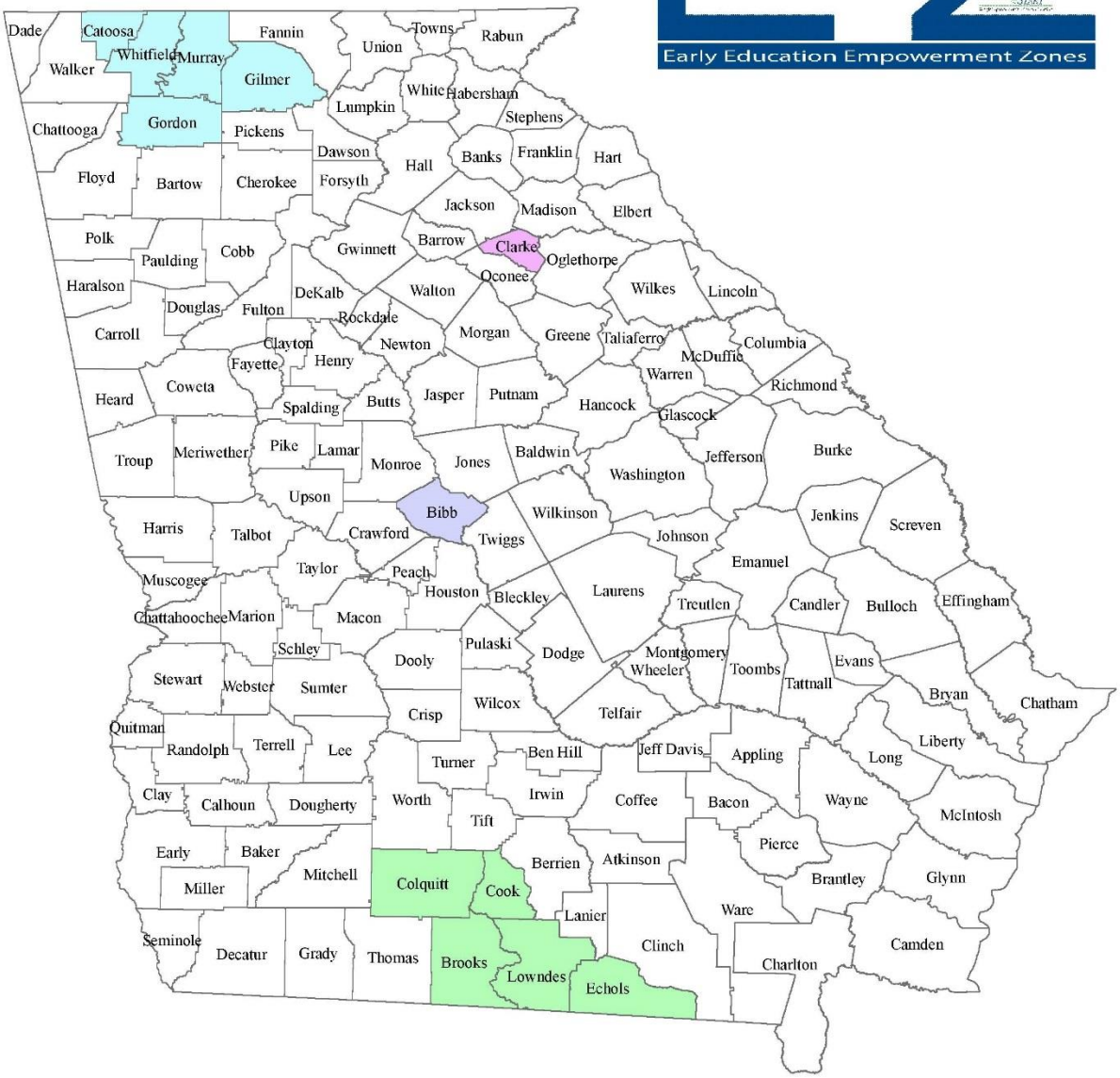

GEORGIA'S EARLY EDUCATION EMPOWERMENT ZONES QUARTERLY EVALUATION REPORT

Prepared by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement

October 2015

THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE of STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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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, the first of its kind, includes information about the E3Z implementation starting from around February 2015 through July 31, 2015. 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
6. Increasing the availability of high-quality child care programs by using economic incentives for new businesses

[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.

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 since February 2015—around the time all four E3Z community coordinators were in place—through July 31, 2015.[2] These strategies include those related to the Birth-to-Eight Teams, Quality Rated, Great Start Georgia, Enhanced Professional Development, and Tiered Family Co-Pays. 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 has met numerous times between February 2015 and July 2015. 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%. Table 1 shows that the current participation rate for the state is 38%. 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 are equal to or greater than the participation rate statewide (see Table 1). With the exception of Bibb E3Z, three out of four E3Zs are surpassing the state's percentage of child care programs that are Quality Rated. The state's percentage of rated child care programs is 12%, and the E3Z percentages range from 10% in the Bibb E3Z to 23% in the E3Z North.

[2] Note that all data tables include data through September 1, 2015, in an effort to report the most recent data.

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	115	109	57	50%	5	11	11	27	23%
Clarke E3Z	61	55	24	39%	3	2	5	10	16%
Bibb E3Z	128	122	49	38%	1	8	4	13	10%
South Georgia E3Z	170	164	80	47%	15	13	6	34	20%
Statewide	6170	5840	2350	38%	239	375	157	771	12%

[1]To be eligible to be rated, a child care program must be compliant with licensing regulations.
[2]Any 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.
Source: Quality Rated Program
[3]Rated 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. 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 for the states to further 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. This means focusing on the child care programs that enroll 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 will benefit from decreased family co-pays if their child care programs become Quality Rated.

Table 2: Tiered Family Co-Pays within the E3Zs

	E3Z North	Clarke E3Z	Bibb E3Z	South Georgia E3Z
Number of CAPS-Eligible Children	518	447	2,889	1,114
Proportion of CAPS-eligible children throughout the E3Zs	11%	9%	58%	22%
Percentage of CAPS-eligible children in programs that are….				
Rated in Quality Rated[1]	35%	16%	15%	44%
Participating in Quality Rated[2]	42%	67%	36%	22%
Neither Rated nor Participating	23%	17%	36%	22%

[1]Rated in Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.
[2]Participating 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.
Source: CAPS Program, September 2015

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. Child care center directors, unlike family child care providers, usually have additional staff and may also have the flexibility to meet during the workday. Family child care providers, on the other hand, do not have additional staff and must remain on-site during the workday. This difference in the business operations of a child care center versus a family child care home has led two E3Zs, E3Z North and Bibb E3Z, to start developing a similar peer-support network specifically for family child care providers.

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.[3] For the E3Zs, GSG is implementing one new or expanded EBHV program that will be based inside of 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. Three E3Zs started delivering services on July 1, 2015, and one E3Z (South Georgia E3Z) is scheduled to begin service delivery on October 1, 2015.

[3] For more information on Great Start Georgia, please visit their website: https://www.greatstartgeorgia.org/home.

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. Below are three areas of need identified by all E3Zs and suggestions for ways to address them.

Defining the Work of the Birth-to-Eight Teams

All of the E3Z community coordinators are working with their Birth-to-Eight Team to craft a mission and vision statement that will help to define the work of the Team, as well as help to communicate the strategic focus of the Team. Although the E3Z North has finalized its mission statement using the principles of CBPR, the Team also understands that its mission statement can be a fluid proclamation. As the E3Zs work to address the needs of their communities, the needs might change or the priorities might shift, which will also require a shift in the focus of the Birth-to-Eight Team. The purpose of the mission statement is to help guide the work of the Team and help keep the Team focused on the long-term goals of the group.

Increasing Access to High Quality Child Care for Children with High Needs

This report highlights that there are at least two ways to increase access to high quality child care for children with high needs. First, access is increased as more child care programs become Quality Rated. Quality Rated helps children and families easily identify high quality child care programs. Second, access is increased as more high quality child care programs become affordable to children with high needs. The tiered family co-pay program is making quality child care more affordable by decreasing family co-pays for CAPS-eligible children in Quality Rated programs. By focusing their efforts on getting more programs rated and helping rated programs achieve a higher rating, especially those programs that accept CAPS subsidies, the E3Zs can broaden the access to children with high needs by making those high-quality programs more affordable.

Professional Development Opportunities for Family Child Care Homes

Three out of four E3Zs have a peer-support network to enhance the professional development opportunities of child care directors. In these peer-support networks, the Directors' Networks, the E3Zs bring together professionally certified instructors from DECAL, technical assistance providers, and postsecondary institutions, to create and administer a curriculum for child care directors. This is a great opportunity for child care center directors, and the networks offer flexible training schedules to meet the businesses demands. Still, the E3Zs should consider—two of the E3Zs are actively—creating a separate network to address the needs of family child care homes that could include both licensed and unlicensed Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care. The smaller child care settings, when compared to child care centers, often have different operational procedures. Quality Rated recognizes this by using a classroom observation tool different from the tools used in child care centers. By having a peer-support network that tailors to the needs of smaller child care settings, the E3Zs may be able to reach more child care providers and help improve the quality of care for all children in the zone.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary i
Table of Contents vi
Table of Figures and Tables i
Table of Abbreviations ii
Introduction 1
Evaluation 1
- Implementation Science 1
- Local Capacity 2

E3Z Strategies 3
- Birth-to-Eight Teams 3
- Quality Rated 3
- Great Start Georgia Home Visitation Model 4
- Enhanced Professional Development 4
- Tiered Family Co-Pay Program 5

E3Z North 6
Clarke E3Z 12
Bibb E3Z 16
South Georgia E3Z 21
Conclusion 26
- Defining the Work of the Birth-to-Eight Teams 26
- Increasing Access to High Quality Child Care for Children with High Needs 26
- Professional Development Opportunities for Family Child Care Homes 26

Acknowledgements 27

Table of Figures and Tables

Table 1: Statewide Rates for Quality Rated Participation and Rating 4
Table 2: Family Co-Pay Rate Chart (effective July 1, 2015) 5
Table 3: Child Care Programs Participating Quality Rated, E3Z North 8
Table 4: Child Care Programs Rated in Quality Rated, E3Z North 9
Table 5: Number of Providers Serving Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, E3Z North 9
Table 6: Number of Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, E3Z North 10
Table 7: Child Care Programs Participating in Quality Rated, Clarke E3Z 12
Table 8: Child Care Programs Rated in Quality Rated, Clarke E3Z 13
Table 9: Number of Providers Serving Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, Clarke E3Z 13
Table 10: Number of Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, Clarke E3Z 14
Table 11: Child Care Programs Participating in Quality Rated, Bibb E3Z 17
Table 12: Child Care Programs Rated in Quality Rated, Bibb E3Z 17
Table 13: Number of Providers Serving Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, Bibb E3Z 18
Table 14: Number of Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, Bibb E3Z 18
Table 15: Child Care Programs Participating in Quality Rated, South Georgia E3Z 22
Table 16: Child Care Programs Rated in Quality Rated, South Georgia E3Z 23
Table 17: Number of Providers Serving Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, South Georgia E3Z 24
Table 18: Number of Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, South Georgia E3Z 24

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
CCR&R	Child Care Resource and Referral System
CAPS	Childcare and Parent Services
CBPR	Community-Based Participatory Research
GSG	Great Start Georgia
UWCG	United Way of Central Georgia
FFNCA or FFNC	Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care Alliance
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children

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).[4] 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, the first of its kind, includes information about the E3Z implementation starting from around February 2015—which is when all four community coordinators were in place and working in their respective communities—through July 31, 2015. 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.

[4] 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.

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."[5]

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)[6]

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

[5] 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

[6] 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

The idea of having a local system of partnerships to support and improve early learning is not new, but it does to take a certain degree of capacity to implement and maintain. 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.[7]

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 capacity of each E3Z, as evidenced by its activities, to implement and maintain the RT3-ELC strategies from their beginning through July 31, 2015.

[7] 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.[8]

Quality Rated

Quality Rated is Georgia's voluntary tiered quality rating and improvement system for child care programs. The initiative begin 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

[8] For more information on specific Birth-to-Eight Team activities, or to get involved, please contact Kristin Bernhard, DECAL Deputy Commissioner for System Reform.

programs earn one-, two-, or three-stars depending on the number of points they are awarded through their program portfolio and classroom observations.[9]

The statewide goal for Quality Rated participation in the RT3-ELC grant is 100%. The current participation rate for the state is 38% (see Table 1). 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 (%)
6,170	5,840	2350	38%	239	375	157	771	12%

Source: Quality Rated Program, September 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.[10] For the E3Zs, GSG will implement one new or expanded EBHV program that will be 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 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.

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, quality professional development opportunities to child care workers in their communities.

[9] 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/.

[10] For more information on Great Start Georgia, please visit their website: https://www.greatstartgeorgia.org/home.

Tiered Family Co-Pay Program[11]

Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program provides subsidized child care to low-income families in all of Georgia's 159 counties. CAPS works by reimbursing child care providers a percentage of a child's enrollment cost if the child qualifies for and receives CAPS subsidies. The 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 to one flat fee 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 only $15 per child per week; eligible families attending a two-star Quality Rated center are paying only $10 per child per week; and eligible families attending a three-star Quality Rated center are paying only $5 per child per week.

Families 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.

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

Summary

This report focuses on the strategies that have been implemented through July 31, 2015. These include the strategies related to the Birth-to-Eight Teams, Quality Rated, Great Start Georgia, Enhanced Professional Development, and Tiered Family Co-Pays. 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.

[11] 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.

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 Greater Dalton Greater Chamber. To create the Birth-to-Eight Team, the E3Z North community coordinator reached out the individuals and organizations that were part of the region's proposal to become an E3Z. At the time of the proposal, the zone coordinator was heavily involved in the community's activities as director of Whitfield County's Family Connections. Now, 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. Following a two-day training on community-based participator research, the E3Z North Birth-to-Eight Team recently finalized its vision statement, which reads: "Our E3Z team is a regional, collaborative effort that supports early learning for young children and families within our communities, and provides them with high quality resources in order to ensure that they may have a more vibrant, healthy and sustainable future."

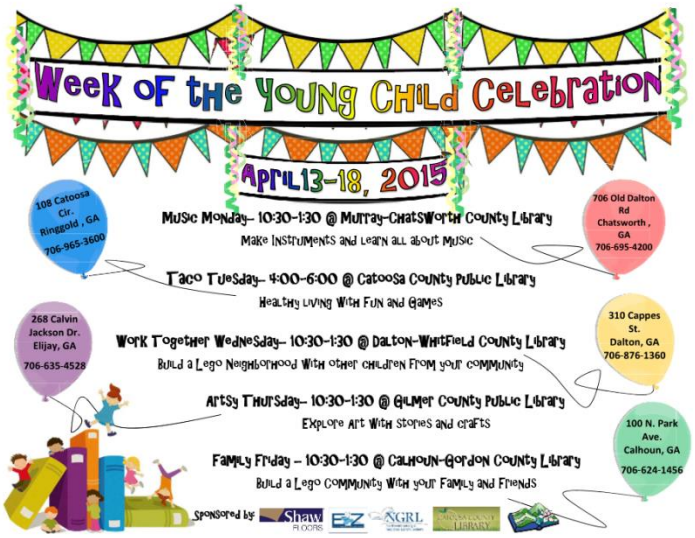
Vision Statement: "Our E3Z team is a regional, collaborative effort that supports early learning for young children and families within our communities, and provides them with high quality resources in order to ensure that they may have a more vibrant, healthy and sustainable future."

The E3Z North Team has several priority areas, one of which is to increase the participation of parents and family child care providers in the region. 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. Currently, the Team is working on local initiatives with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the BUILD Initiative, and the North Georgia Regional Libraries.

The E3Z North Birth-to-Eight Team coordinated events to celebrate the Week of the Young Child, which is an annual week-long celebration designed to "focus public attention on the needs of young children and their families and to recognize early childhood programs and services that meet those needs."[12] This year's Week of the Young Child celebration took place from April 12-18, 2015. The event is sponsored by the National Association for the Education of

[12] For more information on Week of the Young Child™, please visit the NAEYC website here.

Young Children (NAEYC), which designates the dates and theme for the event, and provides planning resources to help local communities create their daily events.



In the E3Z North, the regional libraries in each of the five counties hosted a unique Week of the Young Child event for each day of the week. For Murray's Music Monday, the library celebrated musical creativity by demonstrating how to make musical instruments using simple household items. Taco Tuesday in Catoosa was celebrated in the afternoon and a local medical center provided a nutritious taco bar. For Whitfield's Working Wednesday, the libraries used their regular story time to invite special guests. Artsy Thursday in Gilmer took place at the local Head Start center, and Gordon's Family Friday was attended by many families eager to celebrate their children. Before celebrating Week of the Young Child as a zone, the event was only celebrated in Whitfield County.

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 drive up 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, 50% of the zone's licensed child care programs are participating in Quality Rated. This rate is much higher than the statewide participation rate of 38%. Individually, each county within the zone is also surpassing the state's participation rates for Quality Rated (see Table 3). Transportation is one of the regional challenges for families that need access to quality child care. Another regional challenge is the use of non-consanguineous care, also known as Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care (FFNC). FFNC are usually in-home, unlicensed child care settings. To reach this group of child care, the E3Z North is working on ways to create a peer-to-peer network of professional

development that sends qualified, trained child care professionals to in-home and family child care providers.

Table 3: Total Child Care Programs Participating Quality Rated, E3Z North

		Licensed Child Care	Eligible for Quality Rated[1]	Participating in QR[2] (No.)	Participating in QR (%)
Catoosa County	Child Care Learning Centers	27	27	20	74%
	Family Child Care Homes	1	1	0	0%
	Catoosa County Total	28	28	20	71%
Whitfield County	Child Care Learning Centers	37	36	14	38%
	Family Child Care Homes	17	15	8	47%
	Whitfield County Total	54	51	22	41%
Murray County	Child Care Learning Centers	6	5	3	50%
	Family Child Care Homes	2	2	1	50%
	Murray County Total	8	7	4	50%
Gordon County	Child Care Learning Centers	15	14	7	47%
	Family Child Care Homes	6	5	2	33%
	Gordon County Total	21	19	9	43%
Gilmer County	Child Care Learning Centers	4	4	2	50%
	Family Child Care Homes	0	0	0	N/A
	Gilmer County Total	4	4	2	50%
E3Z Total		115	109	57	50%
Statewide Total		6,170	5,840	2,350	38%

[1]To be eligible to be rated, a child care program must be compliant with licensing regulations.
[2]Any 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.
Source: Quality Rated Program, September 2015

Table 4 shows the distribution of rating levels within each county of the E3Z North. The overall rated average for the zone (23%) is almost twice the state's average of 12% rated. Table 5 shows participation and rated rates for the child care programs that accept children receiving CAPS subsidies.[13] Only one-quarter of these child care programs are Quality Rated, meaning they have earned 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program. Thirty-five percent are

[13] Note that Table 4 shows different total rated amounts than Table 5 because not every licensed child care program accepts children who receive subsidies. Additionally, not every Quality Rated child care program accepts children who receive subsidies; therefore, the total numbers in Table 4 are smaller than Table 5.

participating in Quality Rated; however, the majority of the programs (40%) are neither participating nor rated in Quality Rated.

Table 4: 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 (%)
Catoosa County	Child Care Learning Centers	27	3	3	5	11	41%
	Family Child Care Homes	1	0	0	0	0	0%
	Catoosa County Total	28	3	3	5	11	39%
Whitfield County	Child Care Learning Centers	37	1	3	4	8	22%
	Family Child Care Homes	17	0	2	1	3	18%
	Whitfield County Total	54	1	5	5	11	20%
Murray County	Child Care Learning Centers	6	0	2	0	2	33%
	Family Child Care Homes	2	0	0	0	0	N/A
	Murray County Total	8	0	2	0	2	25%
Gordon County	Child Care Learning Centers	15	1	1	0	2	13%
	Family Child Care Homes	6	0	0	0	0	0%
	Gordon County Total	21	1	1	0	2	10%
Gilmer County	Child Care Learning Centers	4	0	0	1	1	25%
	Family Child Care Homes	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Gilmer County Total	4	0	0	1	1	25%
E3Z Total		115	5	11	11	27	23%
Statewide Total		6,170	239	375	157	771	12%

Source: Quality Rated Program, September 2015

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

Table 5: Total Number of Providers Serving Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, E3Z North

	Catoosa	Whitfield	Murray	Gordon	Gilmer	E3Z Total (No.)	E3Z Total (%)
Quality Rated[1]	6	5	1	1	0	13	25%
QR Participating[2]	5	7	1	5	0	18	35%
Not Quality Rated	0	13	3	4	1	21	40%
Total	11	25	5	10	1	52	100%

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

[2]QR 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.

Source: CAPS, September 2015

In terms of the number of children who are affected by the program's participation in Quality Rated, Table 6 shows that 182 (35%) children are receiving a decreased family co-pay because they attend a Quality Rated child care program. Another 42% of children (216) 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 (120) are in programs that are not participating in Quality Rated, which would make the program's children receiving subsidies eligible for a reduction in fees.

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

	Catoosa	Whitfield	Murray	Gordon	Gilmer	E3Z Total (No.)	E3Z Total (%)
Quality Rated	85	45	32	20	0	182	35%
QR Participating	53	40	21	102	0	216	42%
Not Quality Rated	0	72	8	31	9	120	23%
Total	138	157	61	153	9	518	100%

Source: CAPS, September 2015

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 will receive a new home visiting program that will be based out of a child care center. The home visiting initiative is in the installation 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. The E3Z North Birth-to-Eight Team identified two challenges to the home visiting program. The first challenge is that parents of children in the child care center are working. This means that those parents may be less available to meet during business hours. To answer this challenge, the director of Brighter Tomorrows Child Development Center has opened the center to after-hours parent engagement activities for its families who participate in the home visiting program.

Another challenge is the limited pool of eligible children in the child care center. 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. The home visiting team is also working with the local health department and doctors' offices for referrals.

Enhanced Professional Development

There are a couple of local options for in-service and pre-service early childhood professionals in the E3Z North. The regional CCR&R provides monthly trainings for providers participating in Quality Rated. One of the local colleges, Dalton State College, also offers hands-on pre-service training for its Early Childhood Education students through the implementation of the Summer Power lunches. During the Summer Power lunches, college students and professors organize meals for children that are delivered into the community. The college students organize

lesson plans and activities to coincide with the lunch so that the children have an opportunity to eat a nutritious meal and engage in a learning activity at the same time.

The zone is also implementing a Directors' Network. The E3Z North community coordinator worked with the CCR&R and local Pre-K directors to survey all child care center directors about interest in a peer-support network. The first E3Z North Directors' Network meeting was held in July 2015 and included eighteen child care directors from three counties. The Team is currently pulling together a learning agenda for the meetings based on feedback from the directors. 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

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. The zone is also planning to hold a Super Saturday Professional Development Summit during the fall. The goal of the summit is to help any child care provider (including parents) learn basic quality child care essentials.

Clarke E3Z

The Clarke E3Z consists of one county and metropolitan area, 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 is led by the Family Connection-Communities in Schools Executive Director and 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 initial implementation stage. The ECL-SAT uses data from the Family Connection community needs assessment to help understand community issues, such as why child care centers are closing or how to promote its foster parent campaign. 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.

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. The CCR&R has also worked with the Nancy Travis Foundation to reach more child care providers throughout the zone. As a result of this collaborative effort, the number of child care programs participating in Quality Rated doubled in less than six months. This puts the zone's participation rate of 39%, just one percentage point higher than the statewide participation rate of 38% (Table 7). Table 8 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 7: 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 (%)
Child Care Learning Centers	37	33	16	43%
Family Child Care Homes	24	22	8	33%
E3Z Total	61	55	24	39%
Statewide Total	6,170	5,840	2,350	38%

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

Source: Quality Rated Program, September 2015

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

	Licensed Child Care	1-Star	2-Star	3-Star	Rated[1] (No.)	Rated (%)
Child Care Learning Centers	37	2	2	4	8	22%
Family Child Care Homes	24	1	0	1	2	8%
E3Z Total	61	3	2	5	10	16%
Statewide Total	6,170	239	375	157	771	12%

Source: Quality Rated Program, September 2015
[1]Rated in Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.

Table 9 reflects the number of child care programs in the Clark E3Z that accept children who receive CAPS subsidies.[14] Out of 31 total programs, only about 19% are Quality Rated, and another 32% are participating in Quality Rated. The bulk of programs serving children who receive subsidies (49%) are neither rated nor participating in Quality Rated.

Table 9: Number of Providers Serving Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, Clarke E3Z

Quality Rated[1]	6	19%
QR Participating[2]	10	32%
Not Quality Rated	15	49%
Total	31	100%

[1]Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.
[2]QR 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.
Source: CAPS, September 2015

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 10 shows that only 71 (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, 300 (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 not yet earned 1-, 2-, or 3-stars. If these ten programs (see Table 9) were to be rated, 67% of Clarke E3Z's children receiving subsidies would see a decrease in their weekly family co-pay rates.

[14] Note that Table 9 shows different total rated amounts than Table 8 because not every licensed child care program accepts children who receive subsidies. Additionally, not every Quality Rated child care program accepts children who receive subsidies; therefore, the total numbers in Table 9 are smaller than Table 8.

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

Quality Rated	71	16%
QR Participating	300	67%
Not Quality Rated	76	17%
Total	447	100%

Source: CAPS, September 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. Still, offering an evidence-based home visitation model from within a child care setting is a new initiative. Since Athens-Clarke is already operating Healthy Families Georgia in the county, GSG designed the zone's RTT-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 experienced one major challenge: Little Angels Daycare has very limited physical space, therefore, the First Steps Georgia Service Coordinator is not be able to have an office in the child care program. The lack of office space means that there is no room available to dedicate to screening children and holding family meetings. These challenges were known when Little Angels Daycare was chosen as the hub, and all parties—including Little Angels Daycare, Great Start Georgia, Prevent Child Abuse Athens, and the Clarke E3Z—worked diligently to find viable solutions to help fully implement the strategy. The solution is to use a nearby elementary school for families and screenings. The First Steps Service Coordinator still works with the child care center's teachers and staff, but her work with families occurs off-site.

Challenges and Opportunities

With Clarke E3Z being a single county zone, geography does not pose a barrier. All of the ECL-SAT meetings have taken place in the same building in Athens, GA. The building location, the Early Learning Center on the H. T. Edwards campus, is owned by the Clarke County School District (CCSD) and is home to a few other programs: CCSD's Athens Community Career Academy, CCSD's Head Start and Early Head Start programs, CCSD's Classic City High School, Athens Technical College's adult education programs, and the Boys & Girls Club of Athens. Although CCSD offers the federal Head Start and Early Head Start programs, as well as Georgia's Pre-K, it is not traditionally a place frequented by private child care providers. The meeting location could be one reason why private child care providers have not participated as strongly with the Clarke E3Z.

The location of the ECL-SAT meetings, however, are also an opportunity. By holding meetings in a familiar place for children aged zero through eight years old, the Clarke E3Z is positioned to reach families directly and conveniently integrate specialized programs and events.

What's Next

Members of the Clarke E3Z, along with members of the other three E3Zs, participated in a two-day training to introduce them to the concept of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and how to incorporate CBPR principles into their local work. As a follow-up to the training, the ELC-SAT is currently creating a shared vision statement, mission, and goals that will help to define their work.

The Clarke E3Z has a unique opportunity to work with Jack Shonkoff and the Harvard Center on the Developing Child's Frontiers of Innovation (FOI). "FOI's work is guided by the theory that we must build the capabilities of adult caregivers in order to achieve significant outcomes for children. By supporting the development of adults' self-regulation skills, executive functioning, and mental health, members of the FOI community hope to enhance employability, resulting in improved economic and social stability of the family for an even larger impact on young children."[15] FOI has two partner sites in Georgia: the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Atlanta Civic site and the Clarke E3Z. Details about the partnership and its initiatives will be detailed in future reports.

[15] For more information on Jack Shonkoff and Frontiers of Innovation, please visit their website here.

Bibb E3Z

The Bibb E3Z consists of one county and metropolitan area, Macon-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 Macon-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. It is implementing a child care Directors' Network, which has had several meetings, and is creating a Family, Friend and Neighbor Care Alliance as an additional peer-support network for family child care providers. Due in large part to the UWCG's work, the Early Learning Network has a strong presence in the community.

Quality Rated & Tiered Family Co-Pays

For the most part, Quality Rated is 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 has held 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. Parents receive information about Quality Rated through child care centers and the local school system. By using the Family Engagement Coordinator, the local school system is able to send information to families who might otherwise not know about Quality Rated.

There are some challenges to implementing Quality Rated in the Bibb E3Z. According to the community coordinator, some providers see Quality Rated as a burden instead of a benefit. Becoming Quality Rated requires change on the providers' part that can be difficult to implement and harder to sustain, which makes the whole process of continuous quality improvement somewhat frustrating. Sometimes, providers do not understand the requirements of the Quality

Rated program, and, for some who do become rated, they feel as though they do not receive enough useful feedback after the whole process is complete.

Table 11: 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 (%)
Child Care Learning Centers	96	91	40	42%
Family Child Care Homes	32	31	9	28%
E3Z Total	128	122	49	38%
Statewide Total	6,170	5,840	2,350	38%

[1]To be eligible to be rated, a child care program must be compliant with licensing regulations.
[2]Any 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.
Source: Quality Rated Program, September 2015

Table 11 shows that the Bibb E3Z has 128 licensed child care programs. This number includes both child care centers and family child care homes. Only about 38% of those licensed programs are currently participating in Quality Rated. The average participation rate is higher for child care centers (42%) than it is for family child care homes (28%). Table 12 shows more detail about child care programs that are rated in Quality Rated. Of the 128 licensed child care programs only 10% are rated, meaning they have earned 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.

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

	Licensed Child Care	1-Star	2-Star	3-Star	Rated[1] (No.)	Rated (%)
Child Care Learning Centers	96	1	7	4	12	13%
Family Child Care Homes	32	0	1	0	1	3%
E3Z Total	128	1	8	4	13	10%
Statewide Total	6,170	239	375	157	771	12%

Source: Quality Rated Program, September 2015
[1]Rated in Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.

Table 13 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.[16] About 15% of these programs earned 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in Quality Rated. Another 37% of these programs are participating in Quality Rated, which means they have not yet earned any stars. Most of these programs (48%), however, are not participating or rated in Quality Rated.

[16] Note that Table 13 shows different total rated amounts than Table 12 because not every licensed child care program accepts children who receive subsidies. Additionally, not every Quality Rated child care program accepts children who receive subsidies; therefore, the total numbers in Table 13 are smaller than Table 12.

Table 13: Total Number of Providers Serving Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, Bibb E3Z

Quality Rated[1]	12	15%
QR Participating[2]	29	37%
Not Quality Rated	38	48%
Total	79	100%

[1]Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.
[2]QR 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.
Source: CAPS, September 2015

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-one percent of children receiving CAPS subsidies in the Bibb E3Z are benefiting from decreased family co-pays of $5, $10, or $15. About 43% of children receiving subsidies attend programs that are in the process of becoming Quality Rated. When these 29 programs (see Table 13) earn 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in Quality Rated, the children enrolled in these programs who receive subsidies can receive a decreased family co-pays. However, more than one-third of children who receive CAPS subsidies attend child care programs that are neither rated nor participating in Quality Rated.

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

Quality Rated	597	21%
QR Participating	1,259	43%
Not Quality Rated	1,033	36%
Total	2,889	100%

Source: CAPS, September 2015

Great Start Georgia (GSG)

The implementation of the Great Start Georgia home visitation model is in the exploration 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. Service delivery started July 1, 2015.

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 organized family-centered events including an open house and

an ice cream social, and attends family-centered events such as the back-to-school community event and Mother's Day Out meetings. The First Steps Service Coordinator also reached out to community-centered organizations, such as the Housing Authority, the Bibb County School District, and Head Start.

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 includes upwards of 27 members, meets every other month and follows a suggested list of learning topics of most interest to its members. Led by Central Georgia Tech, the group's last meeting was in May 2015 and focused on Human Resources. The Director's Network will reconvene in Fall 2015.

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.

The Directors' Network consists of mostly child care center directors, which means that a host of other types of child care providers are not participating in the network. To attract these providers, the Bibb E3Z is developed a Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care Alliance (FFNCA) to target licensed and unlicensed family child care providers whose needs may be different from child care centers. The FFNCA is also spearheaded by the CCR&R and the recruitment relies heavily on word-of-mouth. Unlike the Directors' Network, the FFNCA is still developing its own learning agenda based on feedback from family child care providers. The goal is to have the providers organize themselves by proscribing their own needs and setting their own learning agenda. The Bibb E3Z FFNCA held its first meeting in June 2015 on the campus of Central Georgia Technical College.

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. However, this association can also pose a challenge by allowing little room for new roles or new agendas.

Another challenge that the Bibb E3Z is committed to tackling is the lack of participation from family child care providers. 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. A similar resistance occurs when the CCR&R or other individuals try to recruit providers for the FFNCA.

What's Next

Members of the Bibb E3Z, along with members of the other three E3Zs, participated in a two-day training to introduce them to the concept of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and how to incorporate CBPR principles into its local work. As a follow-up to the training, the Bibb E3Z Early Learning Network is currently creating a shared vision statement, mission, and goals that will help to define its work.

The next local strategy that the Bibb E3Z is considering is called the Raising of Macon. Modeled after the central concepts in documentary film *The Raising of America*,[17] the Raising of Macon is a public engagement campaign to explore how a strong start for all kids can lead to a healthier and stronger Macon-Bibb County.

[17] For more information on the documentary film, please visit the film's website here.

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 ELC grant. The South Georgia E3Z Community Coordinator reached out to individuals who participated in the zone's E3Z site visit before finalists were selected. She then broadened her recruitment to include recommended organizations. 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 has met five times since inception and is in its installation stage. The meetings are held in Valdosta, GA, which could pose a geographic challenge for those members who live further out in the zone. This location, however, was confirmed by a consensus to keep the Leadership Team meetings at Wiregrass Georgia Technical College in Valdosta, as opposed to rotating the meeting location around the zone. Currently, the team consists of about 20 individuals who represent different organization across the five-county zone. Borrowing from the Clarke E3Z, the South Georgia E3Z Leadership Team focuses each of its decisions on the children by asking, "How will this decision affect our children?"

"How will this decision affect our children?"

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.

One challenge for the South Georgia E3Z Community Coordinator has had to face is the effect of turnover on the representation in the South Georgia E3Z Leadership Team. For example, since beginning the work in the South Georgia E3Z, four key stakeholders have left their positions—the local school superintendent in Echols county, the library and Pre-K directors in Brooks county, and the Pre-K director in Lowndes county. Once each is replaced, the E3Z Community Coordinator wants to reach out to them, and encourage their participation in the South Georgia E3Z.

Quality Rated & Tiered Family Co-Pays

In the South Georgia E3Z, the Quality Rated initiative is implemented mostly by the Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agency in that region. The South Georgia E3Z, and indeed the other three E3Zs, are each part of a CCR&R 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 South Georgia E3Z counties are part of the Region 4 CCR&R, which contains 52 total counties.

The five counties that make up the South Georgia E3Z contain varying amounts of child care options (Table 15). 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 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 15: 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 (%)
Colquitt County	Child Care Learning Centers	31	30	15	48%
	Family Child Care Homes	5	5	0	0%
	Colquitt County Total	36	35	15	42%
Cook County	Child Care Learning Centers	8	7	4	50%
	Family Child Care Homes	11	10	5	45%
	Cook County Total	19	17	9	47%
Brooks County	Child Care Learning Centers	5	5	2	40%
	Family Child Care Homes	0	0	0	N/A
	Brooks County Total	5	5	2	40%
Lowndes County	Child Care Learning Centers	67	65	39	58%
	Family Child Care Homes	41	40	15	37%
	Lowndes County Total	108	105	54	50%
Echols County	Child Care Learning Centers	1	1	0	0%
	Family Child Care Homes	1	1	0	0%
	Echols County Total	2	2	0	0%
E3Z Total		170	164	80	47%
Statewide Total		6,170	5,840	2,350	38%

[1]To be eligible to be rated, a child care program must be compliant with licensing regulations.
[2]Any 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.
Source: Quality Rated Program, September 2015

Table 15 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 (38%). Table 16 shows that the same relationship holds true when the total rated percentage for the South Georgia E3Z (20%) is compared to the statewide percentage for total rated programs (12%). 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 16: 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 (%)
Colquitt County	Child Care Learning Centers	31	1	1	0	2	6%
	Family Child Care Homes	5	0	0	0	0	0%
	Colquitt County Total	36	1	1	0	2	6%
Cook County	Child Care Learning Centers	8	1	2	0	3	38%
	Family Child Care Homes	11	0	0	0	0	0%
	Cook County Total	19	1	2	0	3	16%
Brooks County	Child Care Learning Centers	5	0	0	0	0	0%
	Family Child Care Homes	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Brooks County Total	5	0	0	0	0	0%
Lowndes County	Child Care Learning Centers	67	12	10	0	22	33%
	Family Child Care Homes	41	1	0	6	7	17%
	Lowndes County Total	108	13	10	6	29	27%
Echols County	Child Care Learning Centers	1	0	0	0	0	0%
	Family Child Care Homes	1	0	0	0	0	0%
	Echols County Total	2	0	0	0	0	0%
E3Z Total		170	15	13	6	34	20%
Statewide Total		6,170	239	375	157	771	12%

Source: Quality Rated Program, September 2015

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

Tables 17 and 18 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.[18] Across the zone, 78 child care providers serve 1,114 total children that receive CAPS subsidies. However, only 496 (44%) of these children and their families can

[18] Note that Table 17 shows different total rated amounts than Table 16 because not every licensed child care program accepts children who receive subsidies. Additionally, not every Quality Rated child care program accepts children who receive subsidies. So the total numbers in Tables 17 are smaller than Table 16.

take advantage of the decreased family co-pays because they attend one of the 24 child care providers who are Quality Rated. Another 27 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 377 (34%) children and their families would see a reduction in their co-pays to either $5, $10, or $15. For the South Georgia E3Z, nearly a quarter of its low-income children are in licensed child care (22%) and 70% of licensed child care options are missing out on the benefit of a decreased family co-pay.

Table 17: Total Number of Providers Serving Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, South Georgia E3Z

	Colquitt	Cook	Brooks	Lowndes	Echols	E3Z Total (No.)	E3Z Total (%)
Quality Rated[1]	2	2	0	20	0	24	30%
QR Participating[2]	4	3	1	19	0	27	35%
Not Quality Rated	3	1	1	21	1	27	35%
Total	9	6	2	60	1	78	100%

[1]Quality Rated means that a child care program has earned either 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program.
[2]QR 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.
Source: CAPS, September 2015

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

	Colquitt	Cook	Brooks	Lowndes	Echols	E3Z Total (No.)	E3Z Total (%)
Quality Rated	31	15	0	450	0	496	44%
QR Participating	119	3	2	253	0	377	34%
Not Quality Rated	43	29	5	163	1	241	22%
Total	193	47	7	866	1	1,114	100%

Source: CAPS, September 2015

Great Start Georgia

The Great Start Georgia evidence-based home visiting model is in the exploration 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. Service delivery for this initiative began on July 1, 2015.

Enhanced Professional Development

The South Georgia E3Z Leadership Team is implementing a peer-support network for child care directors within the region. The E3Z community coordinator worked with the regional CCR&R and a child care center to create and disseminate flyers for zone's Directors' Network.

The South Georgia E3Z has a Directors' Network had its first meeting in July 2015 at the public library in Valdosta. About sixteen child care providers attended the meeting. The Leadership Team is working on securing professional development opportunities for child care professionals from the CCR&R, DECAL, postsecondary institutions, and other certified trainers.

Challenges & Opportunities

One of the biggest challenges facing the South Georgia E3Z is geography. The zone includes part of the Valdosta metropolitan area, the micropolitan area of Moultrie, and the rural area of Cook County.[19] The rurality of the zone presents a challenge for the Leadership Team and child care providers, specifically in access to the internet. This is one challenge that the CCR&R faces constantly. Child care providers in rural areas have a harder time connecting to the internet. Becoming Quality Rated, however, 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.

The geography is a challenge, but it is also an opportunity. The South Georgia E3Z Leadership Team is working to create a peer-support network of child care directors within the region. One advantage of a peer-support network is the one-on-one communication it encourages and the mentoring relationships it fosters. If a child care provider wants the benefits of a peer-support network but is unable to communicate with other providers online, this could lead to stronger, longer-lasting one-on-one relationships with her peers. Picking up the phone to make a phone call or send a text, or getting into the car to visit with another provider require more effort for the provider ,but the value of the professional relationship could outweigh the cost.

What's Next

Members of the South Georgia E3Z, along with members of the other three E3Zs, participated in a two-day training to introduce them to the concept of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) and how to incorporate CBPR principles into their local work. As a follow-up to the training, the South Georgia E3Z Leadership Team is currently creating a shared vision statement, mission, and goals that will help to define their work.

The South Georgia E3Z is also working 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 zone is organizing initiatives, such as Little Free Libraries, designed to offer free books for children, and E3Z Little Learners, a weekly schedule of family engagement activities for children on the Pre-K waiting list.

[19] Metropolitan, micropolitan, and rural areas are based on the 2013 US Census Core Based Statistical Areas and Counties Map for Georgia.

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. Below are three areas of need identified by all E3Zs and suggestions for ways to address them.

Defining the Work of the Birth-to-Eight Teams

All of the E3Z community coordinators are working with their Birth-to-Eight Team to craft a mission and vision statement that will help to define the work of the Team, as well as help to communicate the strategic focus of the Team. Although the E3Z North has finalized its mission statement using the principles of CBPR, the Team also understands that its mission statement can be a fluid proclamation. As the E3Zs work to address the needs of their communities, the needs might change or the priorities might shift, which will also require a shift in the focus of the Birth-to-Eight Team. The purpose of the mission statement is to help guide the work of the Team and help keep the Team focused on the long-term goals of the group.

Increasing Access to High Quality Child Care for Children with High Needs

This report highlights that there are at least two ways to increase access to high quality child care for children with high needs. First, access is increased as more child care programs become Quality Rated. Quality Rated helps children and families easily identify high quality child care programs. Second, access is increased as more high quality child care programs become affordable to children with high needs. The tiered family co-pay program is making quality child care more affordable by decreasing family co-pays for CAPS-eligible children in Quality Rated programs. By focusing their efforts on getting more programs rated and helping rated programs achieve a higher rating, especially those programs that accept CAPS subsidies, the E3Zs can broaden the access to children with high needs by making those high-quality programs more affordable.

Professional Development Opportunities for Family Child Care Homes

Three out of four E3Zs have a peer-support network to enhance the professional development opportunities of child care directors. In these peer-support networks, the Directors' Networks, the E3Zs bring together professionally certified instructors from DECAL, technical assistance providers, and postsecondary institutions, to create and administer a curriculum for child care directors. This is a great opportunity for child care center directors, and the networks offer flexible training schedules to meet the businesses demands. Still, the E3Zs should consider—two of the E3Zs are actively—creating a separate network to address the needs of family child care homes that could include both licensed and unlicensed Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care. The smaller child care settings, when compared to child care centers, often have different operational procedures. Quality Rated recognizes this by using a classroom observation tool different from the tools used in child care centers. By having a peer-support network that tailors to the needs of smaller child care settings, the E3Zs may be able to reach more child care providers and help improve the quality of care for all children in the zone.

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Georgia's Quality Rated Program

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