



GEORGIA'S EARLY EDUCATION EMPOWERMENT ZONES QUARTERLY EVALUATION REPORT

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Executive Summary

In September 2014, Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) announced the four sites selected to become the first Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RT3-ELC) grant Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs). The sites each include one to five counties pre-identified into clusters. The zones are in North Georgia (Catoosa, Whitfield, Murray, Gordon, and Gilmer counties), Clarke County, Bibb County, and South Georgia (Colquitt, Cook, Brooks, Lowndes, and Echols counties).¹ The purpose of the E3Zs is to increase the availability of high-quality early learning and development options and to integrate new or expanded services into high-quality child care programs focused on children with high needs, which includes children who are low-income, English learners, and children with disabilities or developmental delays.

The E3Zs were designed to include one community coordinator per zone. The role of the community coordinator is to develop, implement, and monitor community-based projects and programs related to the implementation of the E3Zs. The community coordinators perform this role under the direction of the E3Z Director, who is instrumental in coordinating services for the zones and coordinators, as well as liaising with other DECAL and state administrators.

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

The RT3-ELC Strategies

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

1. Supporting local Birth-to-Eight Teams
2. Expanding Quality Rated participation and access
3. Implementing the Great Start Georgia home visitation model in high-quality child care programs
4. Enhancing professional development opportunities for early childhood workers
5. Decreasing family co-pays in high-quality child care programs

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

² Reports on previous reporting cycles can be found on the GOSA website: <https://gosa.georgia.gov/race-top-early-learning-challenge-grant-evaluation>.

6. Increasing the availability of high-quality child care programs by using economic incentives for new businesses
7. Increasing subsidy rates in high-quality child care programs
8. Offering Summer Transition Programs in high-quality child care programs
9. Instituting comprehensive assessments and screenings
10. Offering targeted grants to increase family engagement

This report focuses on the strategies that have been implemented through December 31, 2015.³ These strategies include those related to the Birth-to-Eight Teams, Quality Rated and Tiered Family Co-Pays, Great Start Georgia, Enhanced Professional Development, Economic Development Incentives, and Family Engagement Opportunity Grants. The other strategies—increased subsidy rates, Summer Transition Programs, and comprehensive assessments and screenings—are still being developed for local implementation.

Birth-to-Eight Teams

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

Quality Rated & Tiered Family Co-Pays

Quality Rated is Georgia’s voluntary tiered quality rating and improvement system. The statewide goal for Quality Rated participation in the RT3-ELC grant is 100%.⁴ Table 1 shows that the current participation rate for the state is 40%. This is a slight increase of one percentage point from the previous E3Z reporting quarter, which ended September 30, 2015. The E3Zs are intensifying efforts to increase participation in Quality Rated, which should also increase access to quality child care for all children. Part of the work of the Birth-to-Eight Teams is to reach all child care programs in their zone and help all child care programs improve the quality of care they provide to children. Currently, each of the E3Z’s Quality Rated participation rates is equal to or greater than the participation rate statewide (see Table 1). Compared to the previous quarter, the participation rates of Bibb E3Z and South Georgia E3Z each increased by one percentage point. For the E3Z North, its participation rate increased by two percentage points, and the participation rate for Clarke E3Z remained the same.

³ Note that all data tables include data through January 5, 2016, in an effort to report the most recent data.

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

With the exception of Bibb E3Z, three out of four E3Zs continue to surpass the state’s percentage of child care programs that are rated in Quality Rated.⁵ The state’s percentage of rated child care programs is 14%, a one percentage point increase from last quarter. This quarter, however, the E3Zs have each seen larger growth, compared to the state, in their Quality Rated rates. The E3Z North (27%), Bibb E3Z (12%), and South Georgia E3Z (23%) each increased their rated rates by two percentage points. Clarke E3Z increased its rate by four percentage points, going from 16% to 20% since the last quarter.

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	112	106	59	53%	8	11	11	30	27%
Clarke E3Z	61	55	24	39%	2	4	6	12	20%
Bibb E3Z	131	126	59	45%	3	9	4	16	12%
South Georgia E3Z	168	162	83	49%	17	16	6	39	23%
Statewide	6,116	5,815	2,442	40%	300	416	167	883	14%

Source: Quality Rated Program, January 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.

Making quality child care more affordable is one way the state is increasing access to high-quality child care for children with high needs. 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 live in an E3Z county and be enrolled in a 1-, 2-, or 3-star Quality Rated child care program. One way to increase access to high-quality child care for children with high needs is to increase the number of high-quality child care programs available in the E3Zs. The initial focus has been on 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 65% of CAPS-eligible children would benefit from decreased family co-pays if their child care programs become Quality Rated.

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

CAPS subsidies are provided on a weekly basis. Therefore, the CAPS data fluctuate on a weekly basis. This fluctuation makes comparisons over short time periods (e.g., less than three months) difficult. Still, it is useful to examine where the zones are seeing the most amount of movement. In the South Georgia E3Z, for example, 10% of CAPS-eligible children went from being enrolled in a child care program that was only participating in Quality Rated to being enrolled in a child care program that is rated in 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	421	340	2,830	1,016
Proportion of CAPS-eligible children throughout the E3Zs	9%	7%	61%	22%
<i>Percentage of CAPS-eligible children in programs that are....</i>				
Rated in Quality Rated ¹	39%	18%	17%	51%
Participating in Quality Rated ²	37%	65%	57%	34%
Neither Rated nor Participating	25%	17%	25%	15%

Source: CAPS Program, January 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.

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, tied directly to the Birth-to-Eight Team. In the E3Zs, the community coordinators work with the regional Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies, local higher education institutions, and DECAL specialists to offer zone-specific trainings requested by the Directors' Networks.

Great Start Georgia (GSG) is Georgia's Maternal and Early Childhood System, sponsored by the Georgia Department of Human Services-Division of Family and Children Services and in partnership with the Department of Public Health. GSG operates the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, which prioritizes evidence-based home visiting (EBHV) models with proven outcomes.⁶ For the E3Zs, GSG is implementing one new or expanded EBHV program that will be based inside a child care center. Each child care center will house a First Steps Resource Coordinator whose job is to identify, recruit, and screen

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

children and families—who attend and do not attend the child care center—and connect children and families to available resources. All four of the child care center-based EBHV programs in the E3Zs are operational, recruiting and screening families, and networking with other local family support services.

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.

In November 2015, DECAL awarded one grant in round one to Angels in Motion in the Clarke E3Z. The program will receive over \$80,000 to support equipment costs and salary subsidies. DCA and DECAL officials are currently examining the second round of child care expansion grant applications and are preparing to launch a third round later this spring.⁷

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 are currently being offered within the E3Z counties and the ten Metro Atlanta counties.⁸ 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.⁹

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. Two areas of need, identified by all of the E3Zs, include helping more providers qualify for the economic development incentives and adapting the Great Start Georgia

⁷ 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>.

⁸ Metro Atlanta is defined as the 10-county area including Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry and Rockdale counties, as well as the City of Atlanta.

⁹ To find out more about the Family Engagement Opportunity Grants, please visit the DECAL website for funding opportunities: <http://decalfga.gov/QualityInitiatives/Grants.aspx>.

home visitation hub to cater to the specific needs of the community. Below is a summary of the difficulties and suggestions to address them.

Raising Quality to Qualify for Grant Opportunities

The DCA/DECAL child care expansion grant was written with strict criteria for higher child care quality standards. Applicants needed to be 2- or 3-star Quality Rated child care providers. Applicants also needed to ensure that any additional classrooms or programs created as a result of grant funds became 2- or 3-star Quality Rated within one year of receiving the award. The rigor of the grant helps to underscore the importance of high quality child care and connect that importance to economic benefits at the provider level.

In addition to the program in Clarke E3Z that was awarded during the first round, one provider in the E3Z North also met the rigorous standards during round one. Unfortunately, this child care provider declined the award because of sustainability issues. For this provider, securing the matching funds necessary to create two additional teaching positions became an insurmountable challenge. This challenge speaks to the overall context of the RT3-ELC grant, in general, in moving from development to implementation to sustainability. On the one hand, the grant encourages the development of higher quality child care for all children, especially children with high needs. On the other hand, the grant—and the E3Z initiative—wants to foster longstanding development and change. Being about halfway through the grant period, most stakeholders are starting to switch their focus from development and implementation to implementation and sustainability.

Supporting an Adaptive Resource Hub

For at least nine months now, Great Start Georgia has been operating a home visitation program located within a child care center in each of the E3Zs. The hub programs have all experienced similar issues with working from within a child care center. One such issue is the limited pool of eligible, and available, families to receive home visiting services. The limitations within the child care center have increased the need for the hub programs to connect to other community agencies, like the local Department of Health, local Head Start programs, regional hospitals, and local school systems.

Another issue for the hub programs is responding to community needs which may be outside of the scope of the grant. These additional community needs require the hubs to tailor their services. For example, the hub program in the Bibb E3Z offers counseling and career services, in addition to a parent store that rewards parents for being engaged (e.g., volunteering, attending special events, completing parent-teacher conferences, etc.). The hub program in the South Georgia E3Z continues to look for ways to provide services and resources outside of the scope of home visitation. For example, the hub helped secure housing for a homeless mother and her children, but the family also needed continued resources and support after housing was secured. The hub programs may not have initially forecasted the additional needs of individual families, but as the hub programs continue they are becoming more efficient in adapting to the needs of their specific communities.

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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
GELDS	Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards
DCA	Department of Community Affairs

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).¹⁰ 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.

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¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ Reports on previous reporting cycles can be found on the GOSA website: <https://gosa.georgia.gov/race-top-early-learning-challenge-grant-evaluation>.

Evaluation

Implementation Science

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

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,¹³ 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 practitioners and others who have just learned how to use the innovation in local systems and 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 practitioners, and routinely and effectively supported by systems leaders

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

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>

¹³ 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, measurable goal of the E3Z project.

Local Capacity

Local capacity is required to implement and maintain a local system of partnerships to support and improve early learning. The individuals and organizations that join the partnership share a common goal and are dedicated to the realization of that goal. The priorities of the RT3-ELC grant help states build a stronger and more efficient system of early learning and development. Like many of Georgia's RT3-ELC projects, the E3Zs encompass the priorities of the grant by using the core areas and focused investment areas as an outline for design and implementation.¹⁴

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

¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

Quality Rated

Quality Rated is Georgia's voluntary tiered quality rating and improvement system for child care programs. The initiative began in July 2012 and now includes nearly 900 rated and over 2,400 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

¹⁵ 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.gov.

programs earn one-, two-, or three-stars depending on the number of points they are awarded through their program portfolio and classroom observations.¹⁶

The statewide goal for Quality Rated participation in the RT3-ELC grant is 100%. The current participation rate for the state is 40% (see Table 1), up one percentage point from the previous quarter. The E3Zs are intensifying efforts to increase participation in Quality Rated, which should also increase access to quality child care for all children. Part of the work of the Birth-to-Eight Teams is to reach all child care programs in their zone and help all child care programs improve the quality of care they provide to children.

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

Licensed Child Care	QR Eligible	Participating (No.)	Participating (%)	1-Star	2-Star	3-Star	Rated (No.)	Rated (%)
6,116	5,815	2,442	40%	300	416	167	883	14%

Source: Quality Rated Program, January 2016

Tiered Family Co-Pay Program¹⁷

Georgia’s Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program provides subsidized child care to low-income families in all of Georgia’s 159 counties.¹⁸ 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. Table 2 provides a breakdown. Eligible families attending a one-star Quality Rated center are paying a co-pay of \$15 per week; eligible families attending a two-star Quality Rated center are paying a co-pay of \$10 per week; and eligible families attending a three-star Quality Rated center are paying a co-pay of \$5 per week.

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

¹⁶ 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/>.

¹⁷ For more information on the CAPS Tiered Family Co-Pay Program in the E3Zs, please visit the DECAL website for Quality Initiatives: <http://decals.ga.gov/QualityInitiatives/CAPS.aspx>.

¹⁸ For more information about CAPS, including eligibility requirements, applications, initiatives, and contact information, please visit the CAPS website: <http://caps.decals.ga.gov/en/>.

regards to the Tiered Family Co-Pay program, cannot be made because the strategy is only being applied within the E3Zs.

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

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

Source: CAPS Program webinar, June 2015

Great Start Georgia Home Visitation Model

Great Start Georgia (GSG) is Georgia’s Maternal and Early Childhood System, sponsored by the Georgia Department of Human Services-Division of Family and Children Services and in partnership with the Department of Public Health. GSG operates the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program which prioritizes evidence-based home visiting (EBHV) models with proven outcomes.¹⁹ For the E3Zs, GSG is implementing one new or expanded EBHV program that is based inside of a child care center.

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

Enhanced Professional Development

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

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

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

toddlers. DCA and DECAL officials are currently examining the second round of child care expansion grant applications, and are preparing to launch a third round later this spring.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 are currently being offered within the E3Z counties and the ten Metro Atlanta counties.²¹ 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.²²

Summary

This report focuses on the strategies that have been implemented through December 31, 2015.²³ These strategies include those related to the Birth-to-Eight Teams, Quality Rated and Tiered Family Co-Pays, Great Start Georgia, Enhanced Professional Development, Economic Development Incentives, and Family Engagement Opportunity Grants. The other strategies—increased subsidy rates, Summer Transition Programs, and comprehensive assessments and screenings—are still being developed for local implementation. The sections that follow provide more detailed implementation information for each of the E3Zs.

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 Metro Atlanta is defined as the 10-county area including Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry and Rockdale counties, as well as the City of Atlanta.

²² 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>.

²³ Note that all data tables include data through January 5, 2016, in an effort to report the most recent data.

E3Z North

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

Birth-to-Eight Team

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

The E3Z North Team has several priority areas, one of which is "dual-generation education." The Team strives to educate parents and families alongside educating children. This effort is shown in their recent \$10,000 GOSA Innovation Fund Planning Grant, which is aimed at piloting literacy programs by integrating learning academies and power lunches for high need children and their families.²⁴ 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

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

The Birth-to-Eight Team works to support the CCR&R by finding ways to reach child care centers who are not participating in Quality Rated. Currently, 52% of the zone's licensed child care programs are participating in Quality Rated. This rate is higher than the statewide participation rate of 40% and one percentage point higher than the previous reporting cycle. Individually, each county within the zone is also surpassing the state's participation rates for Quality Rated (see Table 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 and engage families, it incorporates transportation resources, where possible.

²⁴ For more information regarding the Whitfield County Schools project, or for a full list of FY2016 Innovation Fund Grant award winners, please visit the GOSA Innovation Fund website: <http://gosa.georgia.gov/awards-granted>.

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

		Licensed Child Care	Eligible for Quality Rated ¹	Participating in QR ² (No.)	Participating in QR (%)	Oct 2015 Participation Rate (%)
Catoosa County	Child Care Learning Centers	27	27	20	74%	74%
	Family Child Care Homes	1	1	0	0%	0%
	Catoosa County Total	28	28	20	71%	71%
Whitfield County	Child Care Learning Centers	35	34	15	43%	41%
	Family Child Care Homes	16	16	8	50%	50%
	Whitfield County Total	51	50	23	45%	43%
Murray County	Child Care Learning Centers	6	6	3	50%	50%
	Family Child Care Homes	2	2	1	50%	50%
	Murray County Total	8	8	4	50%	50%
Gordon County	Child Care Learning Centers	15	13	7	47%	47%
	Family Child Care Homes	6	6	2	33%	33%
	Gordon County Total	21	19	9	43%	43%
Gilmer County	Child Care Learning Centers	4	4	2	50%	50%
	Family Child Care Homes	0	0	0	N/A	N/A
	Gilmer County Total	4	4	2	50%	50%
E3Z Total		112	109	58	52%	52%
Statewide Total		6,116	5,815	2,442	40%	40%

Source: Quality Rated Program, January 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 shows the distribution of rating levels within each county of the E3Z North. In Gordon County, one of the fifteen 15 licensed child care centers was recently rated, bringing the county's percentage of rated child care centers from 13% to 21% and the overall rated average (14%) in line with the state's rated average. Similar comparisons cannot be made between the state and zone for the RT3-ELC tiered family co-pay strategy because it is a strategy that is being applied within the E3Zs only. Table 5 shows participation and rated rates for the child care programs that currently serve children receiving CAPS subsidies.²⁵ The rates for these programs

²⁵ Note that Table 4 shows different total rated amounts than Table 5 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 4 are smaller than Table 5.

participating in Quality Rated and receiving a rating have stayed relatively stable since the previous reporting cycle. About 27% of these child care programs are Quality Rated, meaning they have earned 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in the Quality Rated program. Thirty-three percent are 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 (%)	Oct 2015 Rated (%)
Catoosa County	Child Care Learning Centers	27	3	3	5	11	41%	41%
	Family Child Care Homes	1	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
	Catoosa County Total	28	3	3	5	11	39%	39%
Whitfield County	Child Care Learning Centers	35	1	3	4	8	23%	22%
	Family Child Care Homes	16	2	2	1	5	31%	31%
	Whitfield County Total	51	3	5	5	13	25%	25%
Murray County	Child Care Learning Centers	6	0	2	0	2	33%	33%
	Family Child Care Homes	2	0	0	0	0	0%	N/A
	Murray County Total	8	0	2	0	2	25%	25%
Gordon County	Child Care Learning Centers	15	2	1	0	3	20%	13%
	Family Child Care Homes	6	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
	Gordon County Total	21	2	1	0	3	14%	10%
Gilmer County	Child Care Learning Centers	4	0	0	1	1	25%	25%
	Family Child Care Homes	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Gilmer County Total	4	0	0	1	1	25%	25%
E3Z Total		112	8	11	11	30	27%	25%
Statewide Total		6,116	300	416	167	883	14%	13%

Source: Quality Rated Program, January 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: Total Number of Providers Serving Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, E3Z North

	Catoosa	Whitfield	Murray	Gordon	Gilmer	E3Z Total (No.)	E3Z Total (%)	Oct 2015 E3Z Total (%)
Quality Rated ¹	5	5	1	2	0	13	27%	26%
QR Participating ²	5	5	1	5	0	16	33%	36%
Not Quality Rated	0	9	3	6	1	19	40%	38%
Total	10	19	5	13	1	48	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, January 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.

In terms of the number of children who are affected by the program’s participation in Quality Rated, Table 6 shows that 163 (39%) children are receiving a decreased family co-pay because they attend a Quality Rated child care program. Another 37% of children (154) could see their family co-pays decrease if the child care program they attend moves from participating to fully rated. Still, a quarter of all children receiving CAPS subsidies (104) are in programs that are not participating in Quality Rated. The overall percentages for the number of children receiving benefits in the decreased family copay program have gone up since the previous reporting cycle.

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

	E3Z Total (No.)	E3Z Total (%)	Oct 2015 E3Z Total (%)
Quality Rated	163	39%	35%
QR Participating	154	37%	42%
Not Quality Rated	104	25%	23%
Total	421	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, January 2016

Previously, the E3Z North realized that there was a lack of local knowledge regarding the decreased family co-pay program, and this lack of local knowledge prevented families from receiving the benefits. The zone’s Birth-to-Eight Team began a targeted strategy to dissect the “rhetoric” and bring knowledge about the initiative directly to child care providers. This started with the zone’s community coordinator receiving extensive training with CAPS staff members. Then DECAL staff hosted a Q&A session with the Director’s Network in the zone. By bringing in official, first-hand knowledge regarding the program, the Team and the Director’s Network were able to comprehend the program more fully, how it works to increase quality, and what they need to do to help families obtain the benefits. The Team is currently working to facilitate similar learning sessions between DFCS directors, CAPS caseworkers, and DECAL representatives.

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

One challenge to the implementation of GSG in the E3Z North is the limited pool of eligible children in the child care hub. Every family within the child care hub may not qualify for home visiting services. Additionally, those who do qualify tend to be less available for home visits because they work outside of the home. The GSG team is working to recruit families and children from outside of the child care center. The First Steps Resource Coordinator, the resource personnel who is stationed within the child care center, and the home visiting team are reaching out to families with the help of the Gordon County and Calhoun City Pre-K Directors and Parent Engagement Coordinators. The Team is also trying setup networks with the Alatoona Head Start, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) office, local Health Departments, and pediatric offices.

Enhanced Professional Development

Enhanced professional development is in the installation stage of implementation in the E3Z North. 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 CCR&R recently provided training for the ECERS-3, one of the classroom observation tools used by Quality Rated to measure process quality in child care settings.

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. The providers in the Directors' Network underscore the need for increased workforce development. For example, some Head Start and Early Head Start centers are using substitute teachers because they cannot find qualified teachers with the necessary, minimum Child Development Associate credential.

Child Care Expansion Grants

The child care expansion grants were designed to bring economic development incentives to the E3Zs. The E3Z North's community coordinator noted that sustainability needs to be addressed in order to implement the child care expansion grants in the zone successfully. One child care provider in the E3Z North was selected to receive a child care expansion grant during the first round of grants. Unfortunately, the provider ultimately declined the offer because she was unable to secure the matching funds required for the grant.

Family Engagement Opportunity Grants

In mid-December 2015, grant writing training for the Family Engagement Opportunity Grants was held in the E3Z North. The zone's community coordinator and Birth-to-Eight Team are working with interested child care providers, nonprofits, and local organizations to write family engagement grants. One challenge identified while writing these grants is the fact that many of the zone's local organizations serve multiple counties within the zone, but none of the zone's local organizations serve all five counties within the zone. Serving every county within the zone is not required to receive a family engagement grant, though the Team believes it will make for a stronger grant application and lead to a wider community impact.

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. One identified challenge this quarter is economic sustainability. As the zone continues to collaborate on grant funded opportunities, such as the \$10,000 GOSA Innovation Fund Grant that Whitfield County Schools received last quarter, so does the importance of ongoing, continued financial support once the grant funds are finished. The zone is working to broadcast the message that early care and education is not only important to children and families, it is equally important the economic sustainability of businesses and labor markets throughout the region.

What's Next

Workforce development continues to be a priority for the E3Z North. In the zone, child care providers are the first ones to feel the effect of a limited early care and education workforce. The providers in the Directors' Network help to bring the issue to light, and the Birth-to-Eight team makes workforce development a priority. Currently, the Team is working with the local school systems and colleges and universities to advocate for a more formalized path to employment for high school students who want to enter the early care and education workforce. Additionally, the zone continues to build relationships with the region's postsecondary institutions in an effort to extend high-quality, credentialed in-service training to early childhood education professionals.

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.

Currently, the ECL-SAT is in the full implementation stage. 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.

Quality Rated & Tiered Family Co-Pays

Quality Rated is in the full implementation stage in the Clarke E3Z, and it is mostly implemented by the regional Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agency. The CCR&R provides technical assistance to child care programs as they become Quality Rated and works with other local stakeholders to encourage more child care programs to become Quality Rated. Over the past few months, the regional CCR&R has been working with a couple of local nonprofit organizations to increase the Quality Rated participation and rated rates within the zone. While the zone's participation rate of 39% has remained constant over the past couple of months, and is just one percentage point lower than the statewide participation rate of 40% (Table 7), the zone's rated rates have increase four percentage points (20%) since the previous quarter (Table 8). The zone continues to surpass the statewide average of 14% for the percentage of rated programs. Similar comparisons cannot be made for the RT3-ELC tiered family co-pay strategy because it is a strategy that is being applied within the E3Zs only.

Table 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 (%)	Oct 2015 Participation Rate (%)
Child Care Learning Centers	37	33	16	43%	43%
Family Child Care Homes	24	22	8	33%	33%
E3Z Total	61	55	24	39%	39%
Statewide Total	6,116	5,815	2,442	40%	39%

Source: Quality Rated Program, January 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: Total Child Care Programs Rated in Quality Rated, Clarke E3Z

	Licensed Child Care	1- Star	2- Star	3- Star	Rated ¹ (No.)	Rated (%)	Oct 2015 Rated (%)
Child Care Learning Centers	37	2	3	4	9	24%	22%
Family Child Care Homes	24	0	1	2	3	8%	8%
E3Z Total	61	2	4	6	12	20%	16%
Statewide Total	6,116	300	416	167	883	14%	13%

Source: Quality Rated Program, January 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 reflects the number of child care programs in the Clarke E3Z that currently serve children who receive CAPS subsidies.²⁶ Out of 29 total programs: 28% are Quality Rated (up seven percentage points from the last quarter); another 28% are participating in Quality Rated (down six percentage points); but the bulk (45%) continue to be neither rated nor participating in Quality Rated.

²⁶ 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.

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

	No. of Providers	Percent of Providers	Oct 2015 Percent of Providers
Quality Rated ¹	8	28%	21%
QR Participating ²	8	28%	34%
Not Quality Rated	13	45%	45%
Total	29	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, January 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.

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 61 (18%) children who receive subsidies attend a Quality Rated child care program. The family co-pays for these children have been dropped to \$5, \$10, or \$15 depending on the child care program’s rating level. However, 220 (65%) 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 eight programs (see Table 9) were to be rated, an additional 65% of Clarke E3Z’s children receiving subsidies would see a decrease in their weekly family co-pay rates.

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

	No. of Children	Percent of CAPS-Eligible Children	Oct 2015 Percent of CAPS-Eligible Children
Quality Rated	61	18%	16%
QR Participating	220	65%	67%
Not Quality Rated	59	17%	17%
Total	340	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, January 2016

Great Start Georgia

Athens-Clarke County, even before becoming an E3Z, is home to two Great State Georgia evidence-based home visiting programs. The county has a program for the Early Head Start-Home Based Option, as well as Healthy Families Georgia. Since Athens-Clarke is already operating Healthy Families Georgia in the county, GSG designed the zone’s RT3-ELC home visiting program as an extension to the existing Healthy Families Georgia. For the extension

grant, Prevent Child Abuse Athens is serving as the fiscal agent for the grant, and Little Angels Daycare is serving as the child care hub. The extension grant has been operational in the zone for about nine months.

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.

Economic Development Incentives & Family Engagement Opportunity Grants

In early 2016, the Clarke E3Z held information sessions for both the child care expansion grant and the family engagement opportunity grants. The community coordinator noted that interest in these two grant opportunities is high. The challenge, however, is finding programs that meet all of the requirements for the grants. For example, the child care expansion grant is only available to currently rated 2- or 3-star child care programs. There are currently 10 2- or 3-star rated programs, out of 55 eligible programs, in the Clarke E3Z. Any new or expanded program must be 3-star Quality Rated within one year of the grant award. Based on the amount of time it takes child care programs within the zone to become Quality Rated, becoming Quality Rated within one year is a real concern for any child care expansion grant recipient.

Challenges and Opportunities

More child care programs in the Clarke E3Z are participating and becoming rated in Quality Rated. While the zone has maintained its participation rate since last quarter, its rated rates have increased more than any other zone. Again, this may be because many of those programs have been in the “pipeline” and have recently received a rating. The zone’s hope is that this level of growth will continue.

The community coordinator expressed a need for getting licensed, noncompliant child care programs to participate in Quality Rated even though those programs cannot receive a rating until their compliance designations are renewed. Under the current system a licensed, noncompliant child care program is not eligible to receive a Quality Rated rating until the program’s compliance is restored.

What’s Next

The Clarke E3Z is turning its focus to encourage parents and business leaders to take an interest in Quality Rated and the quality of early care and education in the zone. At this point, each and every one of the zone’s licensed child care providers knows about Quality Rated. The Birth-to-Eight Team would like to use the power of consumer demand and economic investments to encourage programs to participate in and become Quality Rated.

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 and Family Connections.

Currently, the Early Learning Network is in the initial implementation stage. 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 offered specialized training for child care workers who serve children from birth to three years old. Licensing consultants from DECAL also provide specialized training in the region to help child care programs prepare for Quality Rated.

Table 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 (%)	Oct 2015 Participation Rates (%)
Child Care Learning Centers	100	96	50	50%	49%
Family Child Care Homes	31	30	9	29%	28%
E3Z Total	131	126	59	45%	44%
Statewide Total	6,116	5,815	2,442	40%	39%

Source: Quality Rated Program, January 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 11 shows that the Bibb E3Z has 131 licensed child care programs, including both child care centers and family child care homes. About 45% of those licensed programs are currently participating in Quality Rated, which is an improvement from the last quarter. The zone is still about five percentage points higher than the state (40%) in terms of Quality Rated participation. The average participation rate is still higher for child care centers (50%) than it is for family child care homes (29%); however, the participation rates for both types of providers each increased over the last quarter. Similar comparisons cannot be made for the RT3-ELC tiered family co-pay strategy because it is a strategy that is being applied within the E3Zs only. Table 12 shows more detail about child care programs that are rated in Quality Rated. Of the 131 licensed child care programs, about 12% 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 (%)	Oct 2015 Rated (%)
Child Care Learning Centers	100	3	8	4	15	15%	13%
Family Child Care Homes	31	0	1	0	1	3%	3%
E3Z Total	131	3	9	4	16	12%	10%
Statewide Total	6,116	300	416	167	883	14%	13%

Source: Quality Rated Program, January 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 describes the number of child care centers that currently serve children receiving CAPS subsidies that are Quality Rated, participating in Quality Rated, and not participating in Quality Rated.²⁷ Sixteen percent of these programs earned 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in

²⁷ 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

Quality Rated, a three percentage point increase from the previous quarter. Another 42% of these programs are participating in Quality Rated, which means they have not yet earned any stars. The final 42% of programs are neither participating nor rated in Quality Rated.

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

	No. of Providers	Percent of Providers	Oct 2015 Percent of Providers ³
Quality Rated ¹	13	16%	13%
QR Participating ²	35	42%	46%
Not Quality Rated	35	42%	41%
Total	83	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, January 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.

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

Table 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. Seventeen percent of children receiving CAPS subsidies in the Bibb E3Z are benefiting from decreased family co-pays of \$5, \$10, or \$15, up from 12% last quarter.

About 57% of children receiving subsidies attend programs that are in the process of becoming Quality Rated. When these 35 programs (see Table 13) earn 1-, 2-, or 3-stars in Quality Rated, the children enrolled in these programs who receive subsidies can receive decreased family co-pays. Still, one-quarter 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

	No. of Children	Percent of CAPS-Eligible Children	Oct 2015 Percent of CAPS-Eligible Children
Quality Rated	495	17%	12%
QR Participating	1,620	57%	57%
Not Quality Rated	715	25%	32%
Total	2,830	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, January 2016

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 12.

Great Start Georgia (GSG)

The implementation of the Great Start Georgia home visitation model is in the initial implementation stage in the Bibb E3Z. The United Way of Central Georgia 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 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. Since August 2015, 80 families have been screened and 33 families are receiving home visitation services.

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 peer-support network for child care directors. The group, which is comprised of upwards of 27 child care center directors meets every other month and follows a suggested list of learning topics of most interest to its members.

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

Challenges & Opportunities

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

Another challenge for the Bibb E3Z is getting more family child care providers engaged, participating, and rated in Quality Rated. Although one family child care provider is rated in Quality Rated, that one provider only accounts for about 3% of all eligible family child care homes in the zone (see Table 12). 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 given the amount of time it could take to complete the Quality Rated

portfolio, some family child care providers may not think the benefit is worth the cost. Also, most family child care providers operate within their homes. Quality Rated requires an official classroom observation, which means that a new stranger—in addition to the CCR&R consultant, the licensing consultant, the nutrition consultant, and other regulatory consultants—will enter the provider’s home to conduct an observation. As a result, the CCR&R experiences resistance from family child care providers when it tries to recruit for Quality Rated. The Bibb E3Z is committed to turning around the lack of participation from family child care providers by building a peer-support network specifically for family child care providers.

What’s Next

The zone is developing a couple of community initiatives. Attend Café, sponsored by the United Way of Central Georgia, was devised to tackle the problem of school attendance and truancy rates, and was first celebrated in September as part of National Attendance Awareness Month. Born Learning Academy is a school-based workshop series that will teach busy, overwhelmed parents and caregivers how to turn everyday moments into learning opportunities.

South Georgia E3Z

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

Birth-to-Eight Team

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

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

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

Quality Rated & Tiered Family Co-Pays

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

The five counties that make up the South Georgia E3Z contain varying amounts of child care options (Table 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, licensed child care options poses a problem to families in need of child care. The regional CCR&R is

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

Table 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 (%)	Oct 2015 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%	42%
Cook County	Child Care Learning Centers	8	7	4	50%	50%
	Family Child Care Homes	11	10	5	45%	45%
	Cook County Total	19	17	9	47%	47%
Brooks County	Child Care Learning Centers	5	5	2	40%	40%
	Family Child Care Homes	0	0	0	N/A	N/A
	Brooks County Total	5	5	2	40%	40%
Lowndes County	Child Care Learning Centers	68	66	42	62%	61%
	Family Child Care Homes	39	38	15	38%	37%
	Lowndes County Total	107	104	57	53%	50%
Echols County	Child Care Learning Centers	1	1	0	0%	0%
	Family Child Care Homes	1	1	0	0%	0%
	Echols County Total	2	2	0	0%	0%
E3Z Total		168	162	83	49%	48%
Statewide Total		6,116	5,815	2,442	40%	39%

Source: Quality Rated Program, January 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 15 also shows that, with the exception of Echols County, all of the South Georgia E3Z counties—and the zone as a whole (49%)—are surpassing the statewide Quality Rated participation rate (40%). Table 16 shows that the same relationship holds true when the total rated percentage for the South Georgia E3Z (23%, up two percentage points from the previous quarter) is compared to the statewide percentage for total rated programs (14%, up one percentage point from the previous quarter). This may be because of the local efforts within the zone to increase Quality Rated participation. Similar comparisons cannot be made for the RT3-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 (%)	Oct 2015 Rated (%)
Colquitt County	Child Care Learning Centers	31	1	1	0	2	6%	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	11	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
	Cook County Total	19	1	2	0	3	16%	16%
Brooks County	Child Care Learning Centers	5	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
	Family Child Care Homes	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Brooks County Total	5	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
Lowndes County	Child Care Learning Centers	68	14	12	0	26	38%	33%
	Family Child Care Homes	39	1	1	6	8	21%	17%
	Lowndes County Total	107	15	10	6	34	32%	27%
Echols County	Child Care Learning Centers	1	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
	Family Child Care Homes	1	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
	Echols County Total	2	0	0	0	0	0%	0%
E3Z Total		168	17	13	6	39	23%	21%
Statewide Total		6,116	300	416	167	883	14%	13%

Source: Quality Rated Program, January 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 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.²⁸ Across the zone, 74 child care providers serve 1,016 total children that receive CAPS subsidies. The majority (51%) of these children and their families can take advantage of the decreased family co-pays because they attend one of the 27 child care providers that are Quality Rated. Each quarter, the zone has watched the percentages of CAPS-receiving programs participating in Quality Rated grow from 34% to 41% and now to 51%. Another 25 child care providers in the zone are participating in Quality Rated, which means they are not yet rated have but have started the process. If they were to become Quality Rated and earn 1-, 2-, or 3-

²⁸ 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.

stars, then an additional 350 (34%) children and their families would see a reduction in their co-pays to either \$5, \$10, or \$15.

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

	Colquitt	Cook	Brooks	Lowndes	Echols	E3Z Total (No.)	E3Z Total (%)	Oct 2015 E3Z Total (%)
Quality Rated ¹	2	2	0	23	0	27	36%	27%
QR Participating ²	5	1	1	18	0	25	34%	41%
Not Quality Rated	3	3	1	14	1	22	30%	32%
Total	10	6	2	55	1	74	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, January 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: Total Number of Children Receiving CAPS Subsidies, South Georgia E3Z

	E3Z Total (No.)	E3Z Total (%)	Oct 2015 E3Z Total (%)
Quality Rated	516	51%	41%
QR Participating	350	34%	44%
Not Quality Rated	150	15%	15%
Total	1,016	100%	100%

Source: CAPS, January 2016

Great Start Georgia

The Great Start Georgia evidence-based home visiting model is in the initial implementation stage in the South Georgia E3Z. The Family Connection of Lowndes County serves as the fiscal agent for the Great Start Georgia grant, and Bright Start Preschool and Learning Center in Valdosta 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 is reaching 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, however, they then needed help finding safe furniture and other daily supplies.

Enhanced Professional Development

The South Georgia E3Z has a Directors' Network, and it is in the initial implementation stage. The South Georgia E3Z Directors' Network expressed concerns that much of the available trainings and professional development opportunities took place far away from the zone. To address the concerns of the South Georgia E3Z Directors' Network, DECAL scheduled a specialized Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) training in February 2015. The CCR&R continues to offer local trainings during the week and on the weekends.²⁹

Challenges & Opportunities

One of the biggest challenges facing the South Georgia E3Z is helping providers qualify for the child care expansion grants and finding organizations to apply for the Family Engagement Opportunity Grants. For the child care expansion grant, the community coordinator received interest from centers who did not qualify because they were not 2- or 3-star rated.

What's Next

The South Georgia E3Z is developing a Summer Feeding Service Program for summer 2016. The Leadership Team recently received guidance from the E3Z North's community coordinator about how the Summer Feeding Service Program is being implemented in the other five-county E3Z.

²⁹ For more information on the GELDS, please see the DECAL website: <http://gelds.dec.al.ga.gov/>.

Conclusion

The four E3Zs are each taking the strategies outlined in the RT3-ELC grant and implementing them in ways that address community needs. In many cases, the E3Zs are also working with local partners to create new and innovative initiatives in response to other areas of the community's need. Two areas of need, identified by all of the E3Zs, include helping more providers qualify for the economic development incentives and adapting the Great Start Georgia home visitation hub to cater to the specific needs of the community. Below is a summary of the difficulties and suggestions to address them.

Raising Quality to Qualify for Grant Opportunities

The DCA/DECAL child care expansion grant was written with strict criteria for higher child care quality standards. Applicants needed to be 2- or 3-star Quality Rated child care providers. Applicants also needed to ensure that any additional classrooms or programs created as a result of grant funds became 2- or 3-star Quality Rated within one year of receiving the award. The rigor of the grant helps to underscore the importance of high quality child care and connect that importance to economic benefits at the provider level.

In addition to the program in Clarke E3Z that was awarded during the first round, one provider in the E3Z North also met the rigorous standards during Round 1. Unfortunately, this child care provider declined the award because of sustainability issues. For this provider, securing the matching funds necessary to create two additional teaching positions became an insurmountable challenge. This challenge speaks to the overall context of the RT3-ELC grant, in general, in moving from development to implementation to sustainability. On the one hand, the grant encourages the development of higher quality child care for all children, especially children with high needs. On the other hand, the grant—and the E3Z initiative—wants to foster longstanding development and change. Being about halfway through the grant period, most stakeholders are starting to switch their focus from development and implementation to implementation and sustainability.

Supporting an Adaptive Resource Hub

For at least nine months now, Great Start Georgia has been operating a home visitation program located within a child care center in each of the E3Zs. The hub programs have all experienced similar issues with working from within a child care center. One such issue is the limited pool of eligible, and available, families to receive home visiting services. The limitations within the child care center have increased the need for the hub programs to connect to other community agencies, like the local Department of Health, local Head Start programs, regional hospitals, and local school systems.

Another issue for the hub programs is responding to community needs which may be outside of the scope of the grant. These additional community needs require the hubs to tailor their services. For example, the hub program in the Bibb E3Z offers counseling and career services, in addition to a parent store that rewards parents for being engaged (e.g., volunteering, attending special events, completing parent-teacher conferences, etc.). The hub program in the South Georgia E3Z continues to look for ways to provide services and resources outside of the scope of home visitation. For example, the hub helped secure housing for a homeless mother and her children, but the family also needed continued resources and support after housing was

secured. The hub programs may not have initially forecasted the additional needs of individual families, but as the hub programs continue they are becoming more efficient in adapting to the needs of their specific communities.

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Georgia's Quality Rated Program

