

PROJECT BRIEF

Georgia's CCDBG Implementation Research and Evaluation Phase II Grant
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Project Description.

DECAL proposed four overarching objectives of the project: (1) Increase DECAL-supported research on infants and toddlers; (2) align existing policies and programs with the CCDF State Plan and improve services for infants and toddlers; (3) strengthen Georgia's early education research capacity; and (4) increase communication of findings and results of infant and toddler research. The specific research projects of Phase II include three interrelated themes connected to infant and toddler services: Classroom Quality, Workforce, and Access. For each of the themes, DECAL identified specific research questions that would inform state leaders and impact policies and programs related to infant and toddler services.

Research Questions.

Classroom Quality:

- How do teachers and child care providers define high-quality infant and toddler care?
- What are the challenges to providing high-quality infant and toddler care?
- How are various professional development models, such as coaching, Professional Learning Communities (PLC), training, and technical assistance linked to high-quality infant and toddler care?
- What program-level resources and supports are needed to achieve and sustain high-quality infant and toddler care?

Workforce:

- What is the state of current infant-toddler credentialing requirements and opportunities in Georgia?

- How many professional development opportunities exist for infant-toddler teachers in Georgia?
- What barriers do teachers face in accessing infant-toddler credentials and/or professional development?

Access:

- Where are the areas of the state that lack sufficient infant and toddler slots?
- What is the distribution of quality child care services across the state?
- What barriers do families, especially those with complex needs, face in accessing high-quality infant and toddler care?
- How do families, especially those with complex needs, define high-quality infant and toddler care?

Methods.

Classroom Quality: Evaluating specific components of infant and toddler services of three pilot programs: Lifting Infants and Toddlers Through Language Rich Environments (LITTLE) Classroom Grants, DECAL Early Head Start Child Care Partnership Grant (DEHSP), and the agency's Quality Rated Subsidy Grants (QRSB).

Workforce: Conducting a landscape analysis aligning Georgia's Workforce Knowledge and Competencies (WKC) with specific coursework required for credentials and professional development trainings offered in Georgia; & Statewide survey of the infant and toddler teacher and director workforce.

Access: Measuring access to infant and toddler care utilizing administrative and evaluation data; & Surveying families and child care providers and conducting targeted focus groups to

understand the barriers to accessing high-quality care in Georgia.

Progress Update.

Year One implementation focused on creating strong systems for conducting the proposed research and ensuring that the research is aligned with other DECAL projects. Additionally, a research contract was established with national early education experts from Child Trends for evaluation support. Three internal workgroups met regularly to move work forward on each of the three themes. The groups developed project plans, detailed timelines, and prepared for the first Research Summit. The Research Summit was designed to solicit input, create buy-in from, and engage DECAL staff for the grant's objectives and activities. The Summit successfully helped the three groups refine research questions, revise activities, and set timelines. Since the Summit, the groups have begun to work with Child Trends on taking the first steps to begin implementing the carefully planned research projects.

Implications for policy/practice.

Since DECAL also administers child care licensing, Georgia's Pre-K, Head Start Collaboration Office, child care subsidies, Quality Rated (Georgia's Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System), and other programs and initiatives related to the workforce and to special populations (infants and toddlers, children with disabilities, and dual language learners), bridging the gap between policy and practice is one major goal of this research. Specifically, the work on these projects will help inform DECAL's efforts to improve early education instruction and the quality of Georgia's infant and toddler classrooms. This work will also help inform how the state is meeting CCDF goals around increasing access to programs providing high-quality child care and development services, providing consumer information to families about high-quality programs, and supporting families in the development of their children.

Implications for research.

Preliminary research for the Access project has validated the national trend that the availability of child care across Georgia is decreasing. We have found that the majority of closures are with our Family Child Care Homes (FCCLH), which

is alarming as we know this program type often meets the needs of families with complex needs differently than center-based care can. More research is needed to understand what the decline in FCCLH means for Georgia's infant and toddler population, and what barriers the state can minimize for families and providers. Preliminary research for the Classroom Quality project, particularly with the LITTLE classroom grants, shows directors, peer coaches, and infant and toddler teachers have benefitted from the intensive professional development offered through the grants, visible by gains in confidence, competence, and skills related to responsive caregiving. Through a self-assessment of our DEHSP, we learned that families feel overwhelmingly supported by the partnership model. Additionally, while all partners report some level of benefit from the DEHSP, FCCLH providers are especially satisfied with the model and report great professional growth. Related to the Workforce project, we have found that most of our workforce comes from the technical college system, so we are working closely with them to understand the alignment of Georgia's WKC to coursework.

For more information:

<http://dec.al.ga.gov/BftS/Research.aspx>

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