

CHILDCARE AND PARENT SERVICES PROGRAM (CAPS)

Stakeholder Engagement • 2016-2017
Process and Results

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Executive Summary

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) is the state agency responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia's children and their families. DECAL is responsible for administering the child care program for low-income families funded by the federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). In Georgia, the CCDF-funded child care assistance program is known as Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS). Recent changes related to the reauthorization of the federal law requires states to invest more of their CCDF dollars in raising the quality of early care and increasing access to high quality early care for low-income families. This is a shift in focus from primarily providing financial support to eligible low-income families to also ensuring access to high quality learning experiences that best support children's growth and development.

In order to comply with changing federal guidance, DECAL, in the fall of 2016, announced changes relating to family eligibility and the CAPS funding model. However, DECAL decided to postpone most of those changes in order to engage in additional stakeholder feedback. This enabled program leaders to hear additional input from families and providers impacted by any changes to the CAPS program. DECAL began a process of collecting feedback from child care providers, early care and education advocates, businesses, philanthropic organizations, and other stakeholders interested in the well-being of children and families.

Specifically, the state sought feedback to help inform Georgia's plan to maximize access to quality child care; comply with the necessary federal guidelines; and ensure minimal disruption of services to children, families, and providers. During an extensive stakeholder engagement process, DECAL shared its vision and provided information on the CAPS program. Through the feedback process, DECAL leaders learned more about the needs of communities and families as well as needed supports for young children, gathered feedback on specific CAPS funding models, and learned about concerns and challenges of the program that some families and providers experience.

This stakeholder engagement process included 1) surveying all CAPS providers, 2) holding two public community meetings open to any interested persons, 3) engaging families through four family forums held at child care programs for recipients of CAPS, and 4) utilizing the DECAL Advisory Committee to provide specific recommendations. The Advisory Committee is an existing stakeholder group of child care

Location of Stakeholder Meetings



providers, advocates, and family representatives convened by DECAL to study ongoing policy issues. As part of this stakeholder feedback, DECAL contracted with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia to facilitate the family, community, and advisory meetings and to analyze and compile the feedback and results. The process and results for this stakeholder engagement are detailed in this report.

In addition to complying with changes in federal law, DECAL is also preparing to assume full responsibility of the CAPS program including eligibility. Currently, DECAL contracts with the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) to handle eligibility. In addition to providing useful data on CAPS funding policy, this stakeholder engagement effort will also inform DECAL's next steps as it expects to begin full administration of the program in early 2018.

All stakeholder groups considered supporting children and families in high quality early education environments a priority. However, in terms of supporting specific funding mechanisms, the findings are mixed. In many cases, specific funding feedback depended on the audience engaged. For example, results from the family forum supported lowering the family fee, whereas results from the community meetings prioritized increasing the overall CAPS rate. With this feedback, the Advisory Committee was able to make recommendations to DECAL that encompass all the results from the stakeholder engagement.

Through this broad CAPS stakeholder engagement effort, DECAL engaged providers, families, child care industry representatives, and advocates to evaluate cost drivers and various funding scenarios. Stakeholders also provided feedback on the CAPS program and family support services to inform the future of how CAPS will be funded and operated. In summary, this stakeholder process provided a wealth of information that will continue to be used to inform CAPS policies and procedures.

