



REPORT 1

OVERVIEW OF GEORGIA'S NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROCESS

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NEEDS ASSESSMENT: REPORT 1

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Additional information on the PDG B-5 grant can be found at: www.decal.ga.gov/Bfts/PreschoolDevelopmentGrant.aspx

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Key Terms	Definitions
PDG B-5	Preschool Development Grant, Birth through Five
B-5	Birth through five
CACDS	Cross Agency Child Data System
CAPS	Childcare and Parent Services, a federal program that subsidizes child care for low-income parents and caregivers
DECAL	Department of Early Care and Learning, Bright from the Start
DHS	Georgia Department of Human Services
Dual language learner	Children whose home language is a language other than English
ECCE	Early childhood care and education
FCCLHs	Family child care learning homes
Georgia's Pre-K	Georgia's universal Pre-K program funded by the Lottery System of Georgia
Head Start/ Early Head Start	Head Start and Early Head Start programs provide free learning and development services to children B-5 from low-income families.
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, a federal act that provides funding for early education services to children with disabilities
Mixed-delivery system	Infrastructure that recognizes the need for differentiation of services based on individual community needs
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
STABLE	Short Term Assistance Benefit for Licensed Entities, funding provided to small businesses, including child care providers, through the federal CARES Act.
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

INTRODUCTION

In December 2018, Georgia was awarded an initial Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, and the US Department of Education. This initial grant provided Georgia with a unique opportunity to strengthen its early childhood care and education (ECCE) system-level framework and better align and further expand critical birth-through-five services and programs. A key component of Georgia's initial PDG B-5 was a requirement for states to conduct a system-level Needs Assessment. The goal of the Needs Assessment was to analyze the state's existing mixed-delivery system of programs and services to determine how well Georgia was meeting the needs of families of children ages birth through five. In December 2019, Georgia was awarded a three-year renewal PDG B-5 through December 2023 to continue the activities started with the initial PDG B-5 and to address the gaps identified by the Needs Assessment.

Data collection for Georgia's Needs Assessment was conducted in the summer and fall of 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic began as the state's PDG B-5 leadership team was finalizing the results of the Needs Assessment. In addition to delaying publication of the Needs Assessment, the pandemic also delayed the state's ability to finish other projects in the initial grant and begin new projects in the renewal grant. State leaders used the PDG B-5 opportunity to collect additional data and conduct analyses to better understand the pandemic's impact on vital ECCE services.

The findings from Georgia's Needs Assessment are organized in seven distinct parts that highlight key topics. For convenience, these results are published in two forms: as a comprehensive, full report available at <http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/PreschoolDevelopmentGrant.aspx> and as seven standalone reports. This is the first of the seven standalone reports.

The Needs Assessment provides a snapshot of Georgia's understanding of its early childhood system. It encompasses the conditions and demographics of the state's birth-through-five population and the types of supports the state provides its youngest children and their families. It also details what is *known* about Georgia's early childhood system and, more importantly, what is *not known*.

This report details Georgia's approach to the Needs Assessment, including the state's research methods and data sources. This report also includes a high-level summary of the pre-pandemic findings. See Appendix I for the Needs Assessment Crosswalk, which lists where in this report each requirement of the Needs Assessment is addressed.

The other six standalone reports cover other aspects of Georgia’s Needs Assessment. Report 2 defines key terms in Georgia’s PDG B-5 work and presents system-level findings. The other reports cover the following topics: family demographics and family engagement (Report 3), data and research (Report 4), access to early childhood programs and services in Georgia (Report 5), the quality of early childhood programs and services in Georgia (Report 6), and the early childhood care and education workforce in Georgia (Report 7). See Appendix I for the Needs Assessment Crosswalk, which lists where among the seven reports each requirement of the Needs Assessment is addressed. The findings related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will be issued in subsequent reports.

PROCESS AND METHODS

In 2018, Governor Brian Kemp designated the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) as the lead agency for the state’s PDG B-5 work. As the lead agency, DECAL managed implementation of the Needs Assessment, including developing the methodology, reviewing existing research, managing and conducting data collection, analyzing data, and ensuring that federal guidelines for the Needs Assessment were met. DECAL contracted with Child Trends and the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia to provide facilitation, organization, evaluation, and technical support for the Needs Assessment.

The Needs Assessment utilized multiple methods and drew from various data sources. Specific methods included conducting surveys and focus groups, analyzing administrative data, reviewing existing evaluation and research studies, and providing opportunities for overall stakeholder engagement that helped provide context to the findings. Specific data sources included Georgia’s Cross-Agency Child Data System (CACDS), the American Community Survey from the US Census Bureau, and administrative data from state agencies that serve Georgia’s birth-through-five population and their families. Table 1 provides additional details about Georgia’s Needs Assessment methodology and data sources.

Table 1. Methods and Processes Used to Inform the Needs Assessment

Method	Description
Document Review	Collected and summarized state documents, reports, evaluations, and existing needs assessments from all state agencies with programs serving young children. Documents were compiled in the winter and spring of 2019. Conducted a cross-sector review of the most recent significant reports of the targeted ECE programs, services, and B-5 population. See Appendix II for the complete list.
Stakeholder Survey	Fielded statewide stakeholder survey to gather feedback on the Needs Assessment, September 25, 2019 through October 30, 2019. A broad group of stakeholders were included: Georgia Head Start Association, Get Georgia Reading Leadership Team, state agency staff, and advocacy groups. The survey report can be accessed at http://www.decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/PDGB5SurveyReport.pdf .
Cross-Agency Child Data System	Georgia has the benefit of a well-established early childhood integrated data system, CACDS. CACDS data were used to determine unduplicated counts of children in programs, as described in Report 4. CACDS reports were also used to better understand access to early childhood programs and services, as described in Report 5.
ECCE Program Data Inventory	DECAL staff worked closely with researchers from Child Trends to catalog Georgia’s existing data sources and how these sources could be used for the Needs Assessment.
Birth–5 Population and Program Data Analysis Report	Using the data inventory, Child Trends analyzed Georgia’s birth-to-five population and program data. These data were used to understand population and programmatic data and their relationship to access to and quality of programs and services by population demographics (i.e., age, race, primary language, rural/urban).
Stakeholder Feedback Sessions	Stakeholder meetings were held in September through November of 2019. The sessions gathered feedback from a broad group of stakeholders from across the state, including families, child care providers, family child care providers, local school systems, Pre-K programs, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, state agency staff, child care resource and referral staff, teachers, and advocates from across the state. Stakeholders from rural areas and from diverse populations were recruited for participation. The agendas, minutes, and lists of participants for each session can be accessed at http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/PreschoolDevelopmentGrant.aspx
Family Focus Groups on Child Care	While families were part of the stakeholder feedback sessions, specific focus groups and a survey were conducted with parents with young children to gather information on how families locate child care, use the available resources such as websites and call centers, and understand child care licensing reports.

In addition to the methods listed in Table 1, Georgia planned regional community forums across the state that would be used to share initial findings of the Needs Assessment and collect

additional feedback. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these forums were postponed. However, the minutes for the stakeholder feedback sessions were posted for stakeholder review. Additionally, the PDG B-5 Needs Assessment work has been presented to existing interagency collaborations, including Georgia’s Cross Agency Child Council, the Georgia Children’s Cabinet (Georgia’s State Advisory Council), the Georgia Infant Toddler Coalition, the Interagency Coordinating Council, and the Get Georgia Reading State Leadership Team.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The pre-pandemic findings of the Needs Assessment have been organized into the six critical areas: system building, family engagement, quality of programs and services, access to programs and services, workforce, and data and research. These areas are described in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Needs Assessment Findings (Pre-Pandemic)

Critical Area	Descriptors of Findings
System Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A key takeaway is that Georgia’s B-5 system has been intentionally built and marketed as being for “all children,” which has led to a socio-economically diverse “buy-in” on early childhood but also creates challenges in implementing services for specific populations. • There is opportunity to better align and coordinate services for vulnerable children and their families across agencies at the state and community levels. • The Children’s Cabinet is perceived as a strength for the B-5 system. The Cabinet has a diverse membership and represents a collective voice for the needs of children across the state. • Having multiple programs housed at DECAL and the Department of Human Services (DHS) supports alignment of programs and services but also creates some challenges related to data systems and communication. • Existing policy, governance, and financing initiatives that align ECCE programs are housed at different agencies. • The Cross-Agency Child Data System (CACDS) is a significant collaboration across agencies serving children ages birth to five and their families; PDG is an opportunity to strengthen the system. • The integrated eligibility system (Gateway) is an opportunity to align B-5 program data with data from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

<p>Family Engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A key finding was that the state should increase its focus on building family resilience, particularly for vulnerable populations. • There should be added opportunities for peer learning and supports. • State leaders should increase opportunities for authentic family voices in policy making at the state and community levels. • Supports and resources for building families' understanding of child development and high-quality care should be developed and expanded. • The state should continue investing in two-generation strategies and programs. • Families need support navigating transitions between programs and services in the B-5 system.
<p>Quality of Programs and Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality is not consistently defined across different early childhood programs. • Quality Rated has been a lever for raising the quality of child care programs across the state. • Family child care learning homes (FCCLHs) are perceived as needing additional resources and supports developed specifically for the FCCLH setting. • The quality of preschool environments is higher than infant/toddler environments. • There is a need for developing supports and resources for early learning programs serving children with disabilities, children exhibiting persistent challenging behaviors, and children and families impacted by trauma. • Findings include the need for improved access to mental health and behavioral support. • Increasing the knowledge of child development, developmentally appropriate instruction, and child assessment for young children would improve the quality of B-5 programs and services.
<p>Access to Programs and Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased access to ECCE programs is needed for vulnerable populations and families in rural areas. • There is need for increased efficiency and coordination of child development screening, referrals, and early intervention services. • A challenge for offering high-quality preschool experiences are the large waiting lists for Georgia's Pre-K and Head Start in high-population, urban counties. • There is a need for increased supports for transitions, especially for children with a disability or children who are dual language learners. • There is very limited or no access to mental health services. • There is very limited access to Home Visiting programs. • Findings suggest a need to explore telehealth services to increase access in rural communities. • A continual theme was the need to develop strategies and supports for decreasing suspensions and expulsion from early learning settings.

Workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Findings highlight the following specific challenges for early childhood programs: (1) high workforce turnover, especially among child care teachers, (2) low workforce compensation, and (3) difficulty in credentialing, hiring, and retaining professionals, especially for positions in child care and early intervention. • Findings suggest a defined need for a credentialing program for professionals to provide mental health services for children ages B-5. • Findings indicate a need to develop policies and funding structures to support career pathways. • Increasing professional learning opportunities targeting professionals working with the following specific populations would raise the quality of and access to those services: infant and toddlers, dual language learners, afterschool programs. • Efforts are needed to develop and expand the bilingual workforce. • Increasing opportunities for professional learning on nutrition and physical education, trauma-informed care, and social-emotional learning would raise quality. • There is a need to support the workforce in understanding developmental surveillance and referrals for services. • Supporting program administrators' knowledge of child development and leadership skills should be a priority.
Data and Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CACDS represents a significant collaboration across B-5 agencies. • There is a need to better understand the data available and the data needed at the state and community levels. • Additional training is needed on CACDS and data literacy, data visualization, and collection. This training is needed at the state and community levels. • There is a need for common definitions for populations (dual language learner, poverty, etc.). • The state's CACDS system should develop and thereby increase access to more user-friendly reports. • State agencies need to have data available at the child and aggregate levels. • There is a need to standardize and better understand data relating to program transitions. • Findings highlighted CACDS data quality and reporting issues. • The state should continue tracking and analyzing data related to access to higher quality ECCE environments and supports.

CURRENT AND FUTURE DATA COLLECTION TO INFORM THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

This section describes additional activities being conducted as part of the Needs Assessment. These include activities related to understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and additional research related to current ECCE projects and initiatives. These data collection activities will help ensure that the Needs Assessment is a “living document” that can continue to inform the changing landscape of the system.

State B-5 PDG leaders are committed to ensuring that the Needs Assessment is not a one-time-only document, but is a resource where ongoing stakeholder engagement, data collection, and

analyses will gather additional feedback. These activities will not only provide insight into the changing landscape of Georgia’s early childhood system but will also specifically target populations who may be under-represented in initial Needs Assessment activities. These populations include families participating in specific services (child care subsidy, intervention and special education preschool, foster care) and the early childhood workforce.

An example of the additional research the state is conducting is studying the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, Georgia has partnered with UGA’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government to conduct three additional Needs Assessment activities. These activities will not only provide insight into the impact of the pandemic but will also engage specific stakeholders (owners of child care and education facilities, members of the early education workforce, and families representing targeted populations) to provide additional feedback from these critical voices. The reports for these Needs Assessment activities will be released later in 2021. Table 3 provides a description of each activity.

Table 3. Methods and Processes Used to Inform the Needs Assessment on the Impact of the Pandemic

Method	Description
STABLE Survey	The Institute of Government gathered input from licensed child care programs (centers and FCCLHs) in Georgia regarding their COVID-related needs and experiences applying for Short Term Assistance Benefit for Licensed Entities (STABLE) funds. The funds were from the federal CARES Act. The survey collected data regarding operational status, program needs, and use of the funding.
Focus Groups	<p>The Institute of Government conducted virtual focus groups in October 2020 to understand the impact of the pandemic on specific populations, programs, and services. Focus groups were conducted with the following groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families receiving Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) subsidies • Families with children receiving Special Education Preschool services (IDEA, Part B, Section 619) • Families with children receiving services through Babies Can't Wait (IDEA, Part C) • Foster care parents • Georgia's Pre-K teachers employed by a local school system • Georgia's Pre-K teachers employed by a private program • Infant/toddler teachers employed by a child care center • Preschool teachers employed by a child care program • Child care center directors • FCCLH providers • School-age teachers employed by a child care center
Key Informant Interviews	The Institute of Government will conduct key informant interviews with the members of the Cross Agency Council and state agency program leaders to help determine specific impacts to key programs and populations within the mixed-delivery system

Note: IDEA = Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Additionally, the Needs Assessment will function as a catalyst for more expansive research and evaluation during the Preschool Development Renewal Grant. The Cross Agency Child Council, created through the PDG B-5 grant and responsible for providing high-level oversight of Georgia's PDG activities, is proposing additional research and data collection that can be conducted through the renewal grant.

CONCLUSION

This report details Georgia’s multimethod approach to conducting the Needs Assessment, along with high-level findings. Overall, the findings show the strength of Georgia’s early childhood care and education mixed-delivery system but highlight specific results that show where improvements can be made. Such improvements include expanding a focus whereby “all children” reflects every child, increasing efforts to support the workforce, and strengthening data processes so the state can expand its “real-time” use of state- and community-level data.

APPENDIX I. NEEDS ASSESSMENT CROSSWALK

Needs Assessment Domain	Corresponding Section
Definitions: quality early childhood care and education (ECCE), ECCE availability, vulnerable or underserved children, children in rural areas, ECCE system as a whole	Report 2: Key Terms; Georgia's Mixed Delivery System
Focal Populations for the Grant: vulnerable or underserved children in your state/territory, and children who live in rural areas in your state/territory	Report 2: Focal Populations, Table 4
Quality and Availability: current quality and availability of ECCE, including availability for vulnerable or underserved children and children in rural areas	Report 1: Summary of Findings, Table 2 Report 5: all sections Report 6: all sections
Children Being Served and Awaiting Service: data available and/or plan for identifying the unduplicated number of children being served in existing programs and unduplicated number of children awaiting services in existing programs	Report 4: Introduction; Georgia's Cross-Agency Child Level Data System; Unduplicated Counts of Children
Gaps in data on quality and availability of programming and supports for children and families	Report 1: Summary of Findings, Table.2 Report 2: System Level Findings
Gaps in data or research to support collaboration between programs/services and maximize parental choice	Report 1: Summary of Findings, Table 2 Report 2: System Level Findings
Measurable indicators of progress that align with the state/territory's vision and desired outcomes for the project	Report 4: Introduction; Measurable Indicators of Progress
Issues involving early childhood care and education facilities	Report 6: Findings from Administrative Data Analyses
Barriers to the funding and provision of high-quality early childhood care and education services and supports and opportunities for more efficient use of resources	Report 1: Summary of Findings, Table 2 Report 2: System Level Findings

Needs Assessment Domain	Corresponding Section
Transition supports and gaps	<p>Report 1: Summary of Findings, Table 2</p> <p>Report 3: Findings Related to Family Engagement</p> <p>Report 5: Transitions and Access</p>
System integration and interagency collaboration	<p>Report 1: Summary of Findings, Table 2</p> <p>Report 2: System Level Findings</p>
Stakeholder Input	Corresponding Section
Parents/family members or guardians	Report 1: Process and Methods, Table 1
Child care providers from different settings (e.g., center-based, Head Start, home-based)	Report 1: Process and Methods, Table 1
Child care providers from different parts of the state including rural areas and areas with diverse populations	Report 1: Process and Methods, Table 1
Other early childhood service providers	Report 1: Process and Methods, Table 1
State/local early childhood advisory council(s) or other collaborative governance entity	Report 1: Process and Methods, Table 1
Key partner agencies	Report 1: Process and Methods, Table 1

APPENDIX II. DOCUMENT REVIEW

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Georgia's Preschool Development Grant | BIRTH THROUGH FIVE

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**Georgia Dept
of Early Care
and Learning**
BRIGHT FROM THE START

Additional information on the PDG B-5 grant can be found at
www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/PreschoolDevelopmentGrant.aspx