



Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

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Selection Process Underway for Early Education Empowerment Zones

Four Regions Will receive over \$1-million in Early Childhood Education Resources

ATLANTA, Ga., (July 2, 2014) – Site visits and interviews are underway this summer to help determine the location of four Early Education Empowerment Zones, or E³Zs. Funding for the initiative is part of the \$51.7 million Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant received last year by Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning from the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Early Education Empowerment Zones, as defined in the state's grant will be multi-county regions of the state that are home to around 10,000 children under the age of five. Each Early Education Empowerment Zone will receive over \$1-million in targeted resources to improve early childhood outcomes in the region.

Kristin Bernhard, Deputy Commissioner for System Reform, said DECAL first used quantitative data from the Department of Public Health, Department of Economic Development, the Department of Community Affairs, and the Department of Education to identify eleven geographic regions of the state with challenging circumstances for children.

“We will ultimately decide the final locations considering both quantitative data and qualitative data,” Bernhard said. “First, we looked at indicators like third grade reading proficiency, poverty level, premature birth rates, the percentage of licensed childcare capacity filled by children receiving subsidy, Pre-K saturation, and other factors to determine regions of high need.”

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Bernhard said now DECAL will conduct site visits to each of the potential zones to examine qualitative data to narrow down the list of eleven potential zones to the final four. Communities could improve their chances of becoming E³Zs by having strong Quality Rated child care programs in or nearby, universities or technical colleges with strong programs in early childhood education, and demonstrating support from public school superintendents, elected officials, the business community, and nonprofit and philanthropic partners.

Community visits were held in June for the Statesboro area. This month the team will visit the regions around Albany, Macon, Sandersville, Dalton, and Valdosta, with the remaining potential zones on the calendar in August. DECAL hopes to have the four zones selected early this fall.

Governor Nathan Deal designated DECAL as the lead agency for the Early Learning Challenge Grant on behalf of the state.

Georgia's Early Learning Challenge grant will be implemented over a four-year period. Georgia's grant includes a variety of projects, all of which focus on improving services to Georgia's children from birth to age eight and their families. While DECAL is the lead agency for the grant, the work will be accomplished through partnerships with other state and federal agencies and non-profit organizations.

About Bright from the Start

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia's children and their families. It administers the nationally recognized Georgia's Pre-K Program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, administers Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, federal nutrition programs, and manages voluntary quality enhancement programs.

The department also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, distributes federal funding to enhance the quality and availability of child care, and works collaboratively with Georgia child care resource and referral agencies and organizations throughout the state to enhance early care and education. For more information, go to www.dec.al.ga.gov.

