

Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE September 10, 2014

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Selection Process Completed for Early Education Empowerment Zones (E³Zs)

Four Regions will participate in Coordinated System Reform Effort

ATLANTA, Ga., (September 10, 2014) – Today, Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) announced its four Early Education Empowerment Zones (E³Zs), selected to promote early education system reform initiatives that support better outcomes for young children. Clarke County, Bibb County, a North Cluster (Catoosa, Whitfield, Murray, Gordon and Gilmer) and a South Cluster (Colquitt, Cook, Brooks, Lowndes, Echols) will each receive over \$1-million in targeted resources and will participate in research that will help the state identify sustainable and replicable implementation strategies that can be scaled statewide. Each E³Z is home to around 10,000 children under the age of five.

"We are so very excited to partner with these four communities in piloting early education system reform initiatives that support better outcomes for young children," said Amy M. Jacobs, DECAL Interim Commissioner. "Each of these regions demonstrated their commitment to early childhood education through participation from their local Quality Rated child care programs, universities and technical colleges with strong early childhood education programs, and support from public school superintendents, elected officials, the business community, and nonprofit and philanthropic organizations."

Funding for the E³Z initiative is part of the \$51.7 million Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant received last year by DECAL from the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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DECAL used quantitative data like third grade reading proficiency, poverty level, premature birth rates, and the percentage of licensed childcare capacity filled by children receiving subsidy gathered from the Department of Public Health, Department of Economic Development, and the Department of Education to initially identify eleven geographic regions of the state with challenging circumstances for children. A team of reviewers then conducted site visits to each of the potential zones to examine qualitative data focused on each community's capacity to pilot, refine, and model early education initiatives and partnerships.

The E³Z initiative will be implemented over the three-year period remaining for the ELC Grant. 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 is being accomplished through partnerships with other state and federal agencies and non-profit organizations.

E³Z Community Commitment Days will be held in each of the selected zones on **Thursday**, **October 2, 2014**, and **Friday**, **October 3, 2014**, officially launching the initiative in the communities.



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.decal.ga.gov