

Priority: Birth to Eight Strategy

Improve the learning and health outcomes of young children through a statewide child development plan.

Policy Context	Key Outcome
<p>Ninety percent of brain development occurs before children enter kindergarten. Several factors support healthy brain development – nurturing relationships with adults, exposure to high-quality early learning experiences, and access to preventative health care services.</p> <p>Low parental education, community poverty, and the presence of chronic environmental stressors compromise brain development and contribute to poor physical health, behavioral health, and learning outcomes.</p>	<p>Increase third grade reading proficiency to 50% by 2033, up from the current rate of 39%.</p>
<p>State agency and nonprofit leaders in the child development space should identify shared goals, coordinate investments, and, most importantly, design and execute a statewide plan that provides greater assurances that vulnerable children receive the education, health, and family services and supports necessary to be ready for school and life.</p> <p>The statewide plan should focus on ensuring that young children are ready to read by the end of third grade. The research is clear – students who are proficient readers by the end of third grade are four times more likely to graduate from high school than their peers who are not reading on grade level. Reading proficiency is a significant predictor of future educational achievement, economic status, and lifelong health and well-being.</p> <p>In the Spring of 2023, 39% of children exiting third grade were proficient readers, as measured by the Georgia Milestones English Language Arts assessment. The Georgia General Assembly passed the 2023 Georgia Early Literacy Act, creating a comprehensive framework to improve reading proficiency. However, a K-12-only response will not address the family and community risk factors that contribute to literacy gaps.</p>	<p><u>EdQuest Framework</u></p> <p>Foundations for Learning</p> <p>Advanced Instructional Systems</p> <p>Supportive Learning Environments</p>

Power Strategies	
Early Care and Child Development	Family and Community Supports
Greater access to evidence-based strategies, such as home visiting, comprehensive screenings, quality child care, and early interventions for children with developmental delays, that promote school readiness and parental engagement.	Supporting multi-generation strategies that increase parental engagement and encourage the integration of services across Georgia’s education, health, and economic and workforce development sectors.

Getting Started: Focusing on Quick Wins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ State-agency leaders, in consultation with nonprofit and community partners, should (1) identify high-impact interventions and supports, (2) recommend how, when, and where to deliver services to children and families, and (3) set performance benchmarks to assess the quality and impact of services and supports. ➤ State policymakers should explore how to make early education and child health services more accessible and affordable by supplementing federal and lottery funds with increased state investment. ➤ State leaders should convene a working group that identifies how to measure school readiness using education, health, and environment data. The working group should use the Framework for School Readiness in Georgia, developed by a coalition led by Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS), as a model for developing a measurement tool.

Sustaining Momentum Through 2033

Progress Metrics

Each of the priorities presented in the EdQuest State Policy Plan includes at least one outcome measure and a set of metrics that help state and community leaders know whether they are making progress. This profile includes a non-exhaustive list of progress measures that contribute to healthy child development.

Education

- Enrollment in Georgia Pre-K programs
- Percent of children receiving subsidies to enroll in Quality-Rated child care
- Percent of elementary school students who miss less than six days of school per year

Health and Environment

- Full-term (mature) birth rates
- Percent of infants born weighing more than 5.5 pounds
- Maternal educational attainment
- Percent of children living in poverty

State Leadership

State leaders along with other state and local stakeholders can support child development in several ways including:

- Convening direct-service nonprofits and local providers to recommend a comprehensive process for screening infants and toddlers, providing targeted support to children with developmental and intellectual disabilities.
- Increasing public support for early learning by focusing on how investments impact long-term health and workforce outcomes.

Building on a Strong Foundation

State strengths and assets

Georgia Pre-K Program	Focus on universal screening and targeted reading interventions for K-3 students, as outlined in the Georgia Early Literacy Act (House Bill 538)
Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) 2022-2025 Strategic Plan	GEEARS – Georgia's Early Childhood Check-Up and School Readiness Framework
Get Georgia Reading's Four Pillar Framework	Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission

Improving on current policy and practice

A coordinated state strategy would serve as a unifying plan for a group of agencies and other stakeholders that all serve young children but may have different missions, funding sources, and governance arrangements.

The plan would put the focus where it should be – on infants, toddlers, young children, and their families. Specifically, the Georgia Partnership recommends the statewide plan include a standardized child development schedule that would publicize the services and supports that improve school readiness and promote childhood health and well-being.

Alignment with the North Star goal of 65% post-secondary attainment

School readiness and third grade reading proficiency are two early developmental milestones that predict future education, health, and economic outcomes.

Opportunity gaps exist before children enter kindergarten, so waiting to address inequality in K-12 environments complicates efforts to reach the North Star.

A more comprehensive, community-based approach would address the risk factors that widen opportunity gaps, while also communicating the benefits of investments in early learning and health interventions. Targeted investments to serve our youngest and most vulnerable children will help prevent more costly interventions as they grow into adolescents and adults.

Thus, a focus on early intervention and support does not only prime young Georgians for success. By closing resource and opportunity gaps earlier, Georgia's leaders could also dedicate scarce resources to other strategies.