



Connected to Practice

Best practices—A Focus on What Works

Children Ready to Start School

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Family Connection Partnership is committed to improving the well-being of Georgia’s children, families, and communities. Family Connection Partnership works jointly with partners across the state to address the serious challenges facing Georgia's children and families.

Family Connection Partnership visions that all Georgia children can be healthy, ready to start and succeed in school, and have stable, economically self-sufficient families that live in strong communities.

Since 1995 Family Connection Partnership has measured the well-being of Georgia’s children using Georgia Kids Count indicators. In 2005 the indicators were revised and expanded. The second set of the revised Georgia Kids Count Indicators focuses on Children Ready to Start School. Early childhood, the period in a child's life from birth through age 5, is a critical time for children to develop the physical, emotional, social and cognitive skills they will need for the rest of their lives. The first three years of life provide a window of opportunity to ensure healthy development for all children.

Recent brain development research concludes that children who have positive, enriching experiences during early childhood are more readily able to develop the wiring in the brain that they will need for acquiring language and problem-solving skills, forming positive relationships, and developing many other abilities that are fundamental in later life.

Georgia Kids Count Indicators Children Ready to Start School

Eligible children, age 3, enrolled in Head Start
Eligible children enrolled in Georgia Pre-K
Eligible children enrolled in Medicaid or PeachCare
Children from low income families enrolled in Georgia Pre-K
Number of out-of-home childcare settings with national or Georgia accreditation
Babies born to mothers with less than 12 years of education

According to National Educational Goals Panel, the definition of readiness includes the physical, social and emotional well-being, and intellectual development of children.

Five dimensions of readiness:

- **Physical well-being and motor development.** Children's motor skills should be developed enough to successfully perform activities in school that require gross and fine motor skills such as learning to write, using scissors, and interacting with other students.
- **Social and emotional development.** Social development is a child's ability to exhibit positive social skills with peers and adults. Emotional development is a child's awareness of self and how the child feels about others.
- **Approaches to learning.** Children should have the ability to use skills, knowledge and capacities. Critical components are curiosity, enthusiasm and ability to stay with a task.
- **Language development.** This involves children's verbal and emerging literacy, which includes print awareness, story sense, and the writing process.
- **Cognition and general knowledge.** Children should have the ability to understand similarities, differences and associations from direct experiences with objects, peoples and events. They should also understand and recognize shapes, match certain sounds to letters, and number concepts, e.g., counting with objects and one-to-one correspondence.

What are the characteristics of children ready for school?

- Confident
- Cooperative
- Curious
- Ability to complete tasks on time
- Ability to control one's own behavior
- Capacity to communicate
- Able to attend to detail and to the quality of one's work
- Ability to concentrate
- Ability to accept school routines and curriculum
- Willing to engage in tasks and master skills
- Willing to accept school rules and authority
- Ability to work alone and in groups

INDICATORS RELATED TO EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS:

Eligible children, age 3, enrolled in Head Start
Eligible children enrolled in Georgia Pre-K
Increase percentage of low-income students in Head Start or Pre-K programs

Why are these indicators important?

- Early learning programs provide activities that help children grow mentally, socially, emotionally, and physically.
- Children leaving early learning and Pre-K programs are better prepared for kindergarten, excited about learning, and better prepared for success.
- Upon entering kindergarten, teachers expect students to be able to listen, follow directions, be interested in toys and tasks, start and finish small projects, express their needs, and respect others. These skills must be nurtured during a child's earliest years in a variety of learning situations. Unfortunately, many children do not have the opportunity to learn these skills without early learning or Pre-K programs.

- Early learning and Pre-K programs succeed in narrowing the gaps between disadvantaged and other children in vocabulary, writing, math, and social skills (Head Start FACES, 2001).
- Long-term benefits include reduced rates of grade retention and need for special education services, and increased rates of high school graduation (Kids Count, 2005).

What Works?

- **Maintain and expand existing preschool programs.**
- **Increase the availability of preschool slots available to underserved communities.**
- **Develop transportation resources to address the transportation barrier that exists for many families in underserved communities for accessing preschool services.**
- **Offer tuition grants to parents of low-income or at-risk children.**
- **Create new preschool programs.**
- **Provide continuing education to preschool staff.**
- **Increase federal funding to expand early learning and Pre-K programs so children in underserved communities can attend.**
- **Link families with available early learning and Pre-K programs and assist with arranging financial assistance for low-income families.**
- **Educate the community regarding the importance of quality early childhood education.**
- **Educate parents about the benefits of early learning and Pre-K programs.**

Resources

Bright from the Start. About Georgia Pre-K.

<http://www.decal.state.ga.us/PreK/PreKServices.aspx?Header=1&SubHeader=&Position=0&HeaderName=About%20PreK>

Children Enrolled in Head Start. 2007 Rhode Island KIDSCOUNT Fact Book.

<http://www.rikidscount.org/matriarch/documents/indicator47.pdf>

Georgia Early Childhood Development Facts. 2005. Children's Defense Fund.

<http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/DocServer/ga.pdf?docID=465>

Head Start Basics. 2005. Children's Defense Fund.

<http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/DocServer/headstartbasics2005.pdf?docID=616>

Head Start FACES: Longitudinal findings on program performance (Third Progress Report). 2001. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Lifetime Effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40.

<http://www.strategiesforchildren.org/images/pdfs/High%20Scope%20at%2040.pdf>

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (<http://www.naeyc.org>) Click on "Early Childhood," then "Research and Reports," then select paper.

Recommended:

- Making a Difference in the Lives of Infants and Toddlers and Their Families: The Impacts of Early Head Start
- From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development
- A Good Beginning: Sending America's Children to School with the Social and Emotional Competence They Need to Succeed
- Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers
- America's Kindergartners
- Early Learning, Later Success: The Abecedarian Study

INDICATORS RELATED TO QUALITY CHILDCARE:

Number of out-of-home childcare settings with national or Georgia accreditation

Why is this indicator important?

- Childcare programs need defined standards and enforceable minimum requirements for the legal operation of childcare programs available to the public. Children should be cared for in a safe, healthy, and developmentally appropriate environment, where they feel confident to fully explore and experience their environment free from injury or harm.
- Having quality childcare in the earliest years has long-term benefits for children's social and intellectual development (Seifert, 2001).
- Accreditation recognizes that quality standards are being met, making it easier for parents to choose the program that best meets their child's needs.

What Works?

1. Regulations

- **Regulate with no exceptions any program providing care and education to children from two or more unrelated families.** These protections must apply to all programs, without limiting definitions, exemptions, or exceptions. Whenever programs are exempted, not covered, or given special treatment, children are vulnerable, and the entire regulatory system is weakened.
- **Establish complementary processes for professional licensing of individuals as teachers, caregivers, or program administrators in all states.** Establishing licenses for the various roles performed in early childhood centers and family childcare homes protects children's healthy development by requiring the demonstration of key competencies. Individual licensure enhances early childhood professionalism and career development and holds promise for increasing the compensation of staff (Kagan & Cohen 1997). Licensing of individuals also is a more cost-effective way of regulating qualifications centrally rather than on a licensing visit.
- **Enforce regulations vigorously and equitably.**
- **Make the regulations for childcare setting highly visible.** It will help to inform potential and existing providers that standards exist and the need to comply with the law. **States need to invest adequate funding to ensure that childcare settings promote conditions essential for children's healthy development and learning and protect children from harm.**

2. Community Outreach Efforts and Education

- **Create coalitions of health professionals and childcare providers to promote healthy, safe childcare.**
- **Establish a partnership with local childcare resource and referral agencies to inform families about safe, affordable, available childcare services in or near their community.**
- **Involve the local business community in a campaign to promote awareness of joint responsibilities among health professionals, childcare providers, and families.**
Example: Promote and support activities such as health fairs and special outreach efforts.

- **Inform families, providers, and the public of the importance of the early years.** Share ways to create environments that promote children's learning and development using consumer and public education.
- **Promote messages about what constitutes good settings for young children to encourage parents to be better consumers of services for their children.** This can be done through public service announcements, the development and dissemination of brochures and flyers that describe state/local standards, open workshops, and ongoing communication with organized parent groups to inform and educate them about how to make good childcare choices.
- **Implement consumer education initiatives designed to meet the needs of low-income families.** Low income families may have low literacy levels and a limited amount of time and income to spend searching for childcare.
- **Establish partnerships with community colleges and/or local educational institutions to conduct workshops on childcare health and safety guidelines.**
- **Conduct outreach efforts to unregulated providers and provide training, materials, and support.** Invite them to local training sessions and workshops.

Resources

13 Indicators of Quality Childcare: Research Update. National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care, University of Colorado, 2002. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/ccquality-ind02/>

A Study of Family, Childcare, and Well-Being in Young Canadian Families. Seifert, 2001. <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/cs/sp/sdc/pkrf/publications/research/2001-000148/SP-554-12-02E.pdf>

Caring for Our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care, 2nd Edition. <http://nrc.uchsc.edu/CFOC/PDFVersion/National%20Health%20and%20Safety%20Performance%20Standards.pdf>

Child Care Basics. 2005. Children's Defense Fund. http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/DocServer/child_care_basics_2005.pdf?docID=282

Consumer Education Efforts Promote Quality Childcare. National Childcare Information Center. <http://www.nccic.org/ccb/issue14.html#2>

Georgia Early Childhood Development Facts. 2005. Children's Defense Fund. <http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/DocServer/ga.pdf?docID=465>

Healthy Childcare America: Blueprint for Action. National Child care Information Center. <http://www.nccic.org/pubs/blueprint/index.html>

Infants and Toddlers are Particularly Vulnerable: Good Child Care and Early Education Can Play a Vital Role in Their Development. 2003. Children's Defense Fund. http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/DocServer/keyfacts2003_infant.pdf?docID=587

Licensing and Public Regulation of Early Childhood Programs. National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care. http://nrc.uchsc.edu/CFOC/XMLVersion/Appendix_AA.xml

Quality Childcare Helps Parents Work and Children Learn. 2003. http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/DocServer/quality_child_care.pdf?docID=794

INDICATORS RELATED TO EARLY LEARNING:

Babies born to mothers with less than 12 years of education

Why is this indicator important?

- The educational status of mothers is a key fact in shaping healthy outcomes for children.
- Educational attainment of mothers has been linked to the school readiness skills of young children and to enrollment in early learning programs.
- Mothers who have children at a very young age often fail to complete their education, putting themselves and their children at risk for poverty.
- Children of mothers with less than 12 years of education are less likely to receive adequate prenatal care and are at higher risk of infant mortality.

What Works?

- **Acknowledge and educate communities about the connection between early childbearing and poverty.**
- **Offer community-based programs to teach parents about resources available to them to help them complete their education, earn a GED, and/or learn technical skills necessary to succeed in the workforce.**
- **Offer family literacy programs through local school systems, community colleges, private nonprofit community-based organizations, correctional institutions, and other state institutions.** Because parents are their children's first and most important teachers, it is critical that they have the basic skills to support their children's development in the early years of school.
<http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/pdfs/Report6.7.pdf>
- **Remove financial barriers.** Educate women about how they can gain access to health care services, including Medicaid, WIC, PeachCare, family planning, and TANF.
- **Intensify efforts to educate women in communities about the importance of reading to children and brain development research.**
- **Get support from powerful community, business, education, and faith-based leaders.**
- **Offer community-based parenting programs that provide parents with training, support, and strategies about effective child-rearing.** These may include programs for prospective parents, and for parents of infants, toddlers, preschoolers, school-age and teenage children. Programs should be diverse and cater to the needs of families of varying ethnic descent. Topics may include sibling rivalry, preventing drug abuse, the basics of communication, and effective discipline and supervision.
http://www.ciccparenting.org/cicc_effective.asp

Resources

National Effective Parenting Initiative (NEPI). Center for the Improvement of Child Caring
http://www.ciccparenting.org/cicc_effective.asp

Preventing Teen Pregnancies: Key Issues and Promising State Efforts
<http://www.nga.org/cda/files/022296TEENPREG.pdf>

Proven and Promising Programs to increase the percentage of babies born weighing 5.5 pounds or more
<http://www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=118&benchmarkid=51>

Reducing Health Disparities Among Children. Hughes, S., Ng, S. Health Insurance for Children. Vol 13, 1, Spring 2003. http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr_doc/ufoc13-1j.pdf

Right From the Start Medicaid Programs. <http://dfcs.dhr.georgia.gov/portal/site/DHR-DFCS/menuitem.76e501556de17147077a8110da1010a0/?vgnnextoid=ee1e938a16271010VgnVCM100000bf01010aRCRD>

Report of the Task Force on Adult Education and Literacy to the Virginia Board of Education and Recommendations for Improving Literacy Services in Virginia. June 2001.
<http://www.aelweb.vcu.edu/pdfs/Report6.7.pdf>

Researchers Identify Risk Factors for Infants Most Likely to be Homicide Victims. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/new/releases/homicid.cfm>

Reducing Low Birthweight by Resolving Risks: Results from Colorado's Prenatal Plus Program.
<http://www.ajph.org/cgi/content/abstract/95/11/1952>