

# Recommendations

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**The Early Education Commission (EEC) is a volunteer group of metro Atlanta community leaders assembled to review early care and education in Georgia and develop recommendations designed to improve child outcomes. The EEC is firmly convinced that the key to Georgia’s future economic prosperity and social well-being lies in the care and education of our youngest children. This document presents our recommendations for moving forward over the next ten years.**

## **KEY PRINCIPLES**

**Over the course of the EEC's deliberations, these key principles guided the development of the recommendations. The principles included being:**

- Informed by a rigorous process of education, discussion, and debate among EEC members
- Supported by well-accepted evidence derived from credible research
- Coordinated with the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning and early childhood community stakeholders, with Atlanta serving as a catalyst for a broader state movement
- Financially viable through the identification of potential private, state and federal dollars
- Focused on all children, but with targeted strategies for priority populations (i.e. children “at risk” for reading failure, children living in highly concentrated neighborhoods of poverty, etc.)
- Driven by action within a concrete timeframe
- Flexible in determining implementation specifics
- Inclusive of bold and specific programmatic strategies that could be initiated in metro Atlanta with measurable outcomes and the potential for statewide application
- Addressed to stakeholders with demonstrated expertise to implement the recommendation(s)

## **PREMISES**

- Significant brain development, the foundation for a lifetime of learning, occurs before age 3.
- Early brain development is maximized through developmentally-appropriate activities, stimulating environments and positive interactions with parents and caregivers.
- Early education yields a significant long-term return on investment in terms of both workforce productivity and reduced societal costs of welfare and crime.

## **VISION**

By 2020, Georgia will be a national leader in ensuring that **all** children enter kindergarten ready to learn and on a path to *read to learn* by third grade.

## **MISSION**

To promote school readiness for children ages 0-5 through strategies informed by research, policy and practice, as measured by the developmental skills necessary to be successful in school and *reading to learn* by third grade:

- Health and physical development
- Social and emotional development
- Language development and communication
- Cognition and general knowledge

## STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

### Logic Model

*Quality* early learning experiences →

Positive mental and physical development (language, cognition, physical and motor, social, emotional) →

School readiness → Path to Read to Learn by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade Academic success (reduced truancy, drop-out rates; increased graduation rates) →

Skilled workforce (reduced poverty, welfare, crime, incarceration)

### Recommendations

Economic impact research clearly shows that investments in *quality* early childhood care and education yield significant economic and social benefits. In order to increase and maximize such investments in metro Atlanta and the state, the Early Education Commission (EEC) is recommending a new leadership model be created to oversee joint ventures in these key areas:

1. **QUALITY:** Set the bar high and support quality improvement for both center-based and home-based early care and education providers to improve children's school readiness.
2. **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT:** Support parents with information, tools and resources to provide quality learning experiences for their children, as the child's first teacher.
3. **PUBLIC AWARENESS:** Initiate a statewide campaign to raise awareness of the importance of quality early learning experiences for children ages 0-5 to prepare them for school and on a path to *read to learn* by third grade.
4. **ADVOCACY:** Advocate for increased quality, accessibility and affordability of early care and education, recognizing that learning occurs in the child's home as well as other settings.

Following are the commission's specific recommendations for the leadership model and the work moving forward:

## LEADERSHIP MODEL

The EEC believes a leadership entity must oversee the commission’s vision and mission and implement the commission’s strategic recommendations. The following model represents a flexible framework for that leadership.

The EEC will assure leadership, coordination, and long-term accountability for all stakeholders by establishing and chartering the Georgia Coalition for Early Education (the Coalition)—a leadership model characterized by:

- A champion/leader whom:
  - Will chair a governing board
  - Is passionate, credible, well-connected and can be the public face of this work
  - Is responsible for advocating on behalf of children
- An independent, voluntary governing board with a singular focus on early education comprised of members who:
  - Reflect the diversity of the communities that are being served
  - Have the ability to raise awareness of the importance of early learning and /or can help access funding
  - Are responsible for ensuring that the spirit and vision of the EEC is accomplished in a cohesive way
  - Provide oversight and guidance to the lead organization
- A supporting organization that:
  - Will provide resources (possibly in collaboration with other funders) to support the employment of a passionate, credible, and connected “Executive Director” to *coordinate the implementation* of the EEC’s recommendations through key partner organizations and across various stakeholder organizations (this should be someone with characteristics similar to those of the board chair)
  - Provides office space and administrative support and serves as the fiscal agent for the Coalition
- Key partner organizations that:
  - Collaborate with the Coalition to provide leadership and coordination in the areas of advocacy and public awareness, quality improvement and parental involvement, and research and evaluation

### EEC RECOMMENDATIONS

**The EEC is recommending short-term and long-term strategies to promote continuous quality improvement of early care and education and to increase parental involvement, both of which have a direct impact on a child's school readiness. In order to achieve these goals, the EEC recognizes that a sustained effort over time through public awareness and advocacy strategies will be required.**

#### QUALITY

**Set the bar high and support quality improvement for both center-based and home-based early care and education providers to improve children's school readiness.**

- Key components of high quality:
  - Evidence-based programs that include different approaches to instruction but also result in improved student outcomes and later school success
  - Programs that emphasize early literacy, since language and literacy development is the strongest predictor of school success
  - Programs based on developmentally-appropriate practices, as defined by national accrediting bodies
  - Comprehensive professional development and education to support a highly qualified workforce
  - Recruitment and retention efforts to ensure the stability of a highly qualified workforce
  - Continuous improvement toward a quality continuum and national accreditation for early care and education providers
- Support the implementation of a quality improvement system that would be piloted in selected metro Atlanta counties that:
  - Will be replicated statewide
  - Includes a funding mechanism as well as financial and non-financial incentives
- Support child care scholarships for parents to create an increased demand for higher quality
- Support training and technical assistance to improve quality of centers and home-based child care providers
- Collaborate with state and national organizations to provide in-classroom support for early care and education professionals
- Support wrap-around services that provide additional learning opportunities for children ages 0-5
- Establish a comprehensive effort to collect longitudinal child outcome data to inform decision-making and practice

## **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

**Support parents with information, tools and resources to provide quality learning experiences for their children, as the child's first teacher.**

- Increase and enhance programs for parents and families of children ages 0-5, including referral services, parenting education, and resources for families in crisis
- Expand home visitation programs
- Collaborate with the medical community to provide support for parents and caregivers
- Explore other innovative approaches to working with families living in highly concentrated neighborhoods of poverty

## **PUBLIC AWARENESS**

**Initiate a statewide campaign to raise awareness of the importance of quality early learning experiences for children ages 0-5 to prepare them for success in school and on a path to *read to learn* by third grade.**

**This public awareness campaign should:**

- Have a strong emphasis on ensuring that all children enter kindergarten ready to learn
- Be a broad campaign with targeted messages to various constituencies: parents, policy makers, the business community, faith-based organizations, school systems, etc.
- Include a call to action with a sense of urgency
- Engage the business community as a specific audience and recruit the State and Metro Atlanta Chambers of Commerce to engage and play leadership roles to ensure broad business community involvement

Tactics may include:

- Advocating for the creation of a children's cabinet at the state level that includes members from the private sector and focuses on all aspects of a child's physical, mental and academic well-being
- Conducting a summit on the "State of Early Childhood in Georgia" as a major event in the ongoing awareness campaign
- Utilizing talented, creative communications, marketing, and public relations professionals (e.g., the Ad Council)
- Utilizing non-traditional as well as traditional media outlets
- Collaborating with the United Way statewide association and other statewide organizations

## **ADVOCACY**

**Advocate for increased quality, accessibility and affordability of early childhood care and education, recognizing that learning occurs in the child's home as well as other settings.**

**Key advocacy issues may include:**

### **Quality-**

- Improving the quality of early learning programs (formal and informal)
- A quality improvement system, to inform parents and enable them to choose a high quality center/home, that would be piloted in selected metro Atlanta counties with the potential for replication statewide
- Releasing lottery reserves for quality improvement efforts during this economic climate
- Increasing teacher compensation in the early education field
- Continuing efforts to collect longitudinal data that is connected to student achievement and is used for continuous improvement of early care and education
- Raising the minimum licensing standards for early care and education providers

### **Accessibility-**

- Increasing the number of GA Pre-K slots for 4-year-olds to meet the ongoing need
- Home visitation programs and strategies that engage parents/caregivers of children ages 0-3 to decrease child abuse and neglect and promote healthy child development
- Support wrap-around services that provide additional learning opportunities for children ages 0-5 (i.e. summer enrichment)
- Developing strong partnerships with and among healthcare providers (e.g., pediatricians, public insurance providers) and early childhood care providers

### **Affordability-**

- Using quality dollars to improve quality and link child care subsidies to child developmental outcomes
  - Targeting resources where the greatest achievement gaps exist to achieve the greatest return on investment
  - Supporting broader eligibility guidelines for child care subsidies
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