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Serving Children in Georgia

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Recommended Citation

Hathaway, Alex and Childree, Aaron, "Serving Children in Georgia" (2019). *Georgia Policy Labs Reports*. 2. doi: <https://doi.org/10.57709/30728952>

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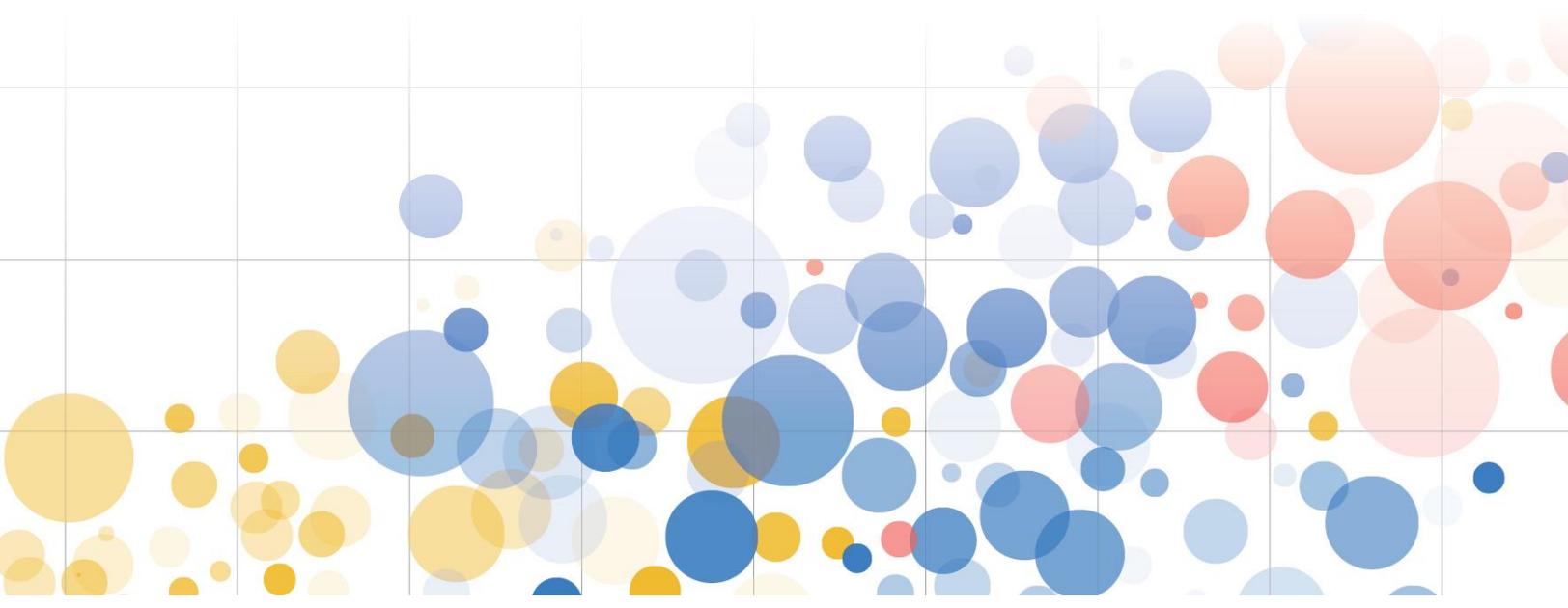
Child & Family Policy Lab
Georgia Policy Labs

Serving Children in Georgia

November 2019

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ABSTRACT

The landscape of public spending on children is complex and layered, in part because multiple governmental jurisdictions contribute to child-related services and because service delivery often requires the coordination of multiple agencies. This brief describes the framework of state-level departments and their divisions in Georgia that serve children, including discussions of their structure, mission, strategic plan, constitutional and statutory authority, and a department-level snapshot of expenditures in fiscal year 2019. For comparison, public spending on children outside of Georgia is also discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Serving children is a fundamental purpose of many public programs. However, the landscape of child spending is complex and layered. All levels of government contribute to child-related services—primarily through education, health care services, and welfare programs—and service delivery often requires the coordination of multiple agencies. Overlapping agency operations and potentially conflicting laws and regulations from multiple layers of government can create operational challenges for state and local agencies.

In Georgia, many state departments and divisions focus on supporting children, from portions of the Department of Public Health to the entirety of the Department of Education. These agencies navigate the complex child-spending landscape while looking for ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their services. This brief describes the framework of Georgia departments and divisions that serve children, including discussions of their structure, mission, strategic plan, constitutional and statutory authority, and a department-level snapshot of expenditures in fiscal year (FY) 2019. For comparison, public spending on children outside of Georgia is also discussed.¹

BACKGROUND

Governments expend public resources on programs catered toward children in three primary categories: education, health care, and welfare. These three priorities are often split among many different agencies (e.g., from portions of a U.S. state’s public health department to the entirety of its public K-12 education department), making it difficult to track

¹ The partner agencies of the Georgia Policy Labs are included in this discussion: the Department of Early Care and Learning; the

the aggregate effectiveness of a nation, state, or local entity in addressing the needs of its children. Ultimately, no comprehensive or universally accepted method is available to define or measure public spending on children.

Because of these challenges, research on government spending for children often analyzes separately how governments create and fund programs serving children in education, health care, and welfare. However, the difficulty in creating comparable measures remains. For instance, looking at K-12 education spending in the United States, the difficulty in accounting for cost differences results in large variability across states. The national average in the United States is \$12,756 per student as of the 2019 Education Week Quality Counts report (Education Week, 2019),² but the difference between the lowest-spending and highest-spending states is drastic: While Vermont spent \$20,540 per student, Utah spent \$7,635. Similarly, health care spending on children can also vary significantly from state to state. While 19 states offer Medicaid coverage eligibility to families at or above 300 percent of the federal poverty line, two states—North Dakota and Idaho—set their eligibility requirements at less than 200 percent of the poverty line (Artiga & Ubri, 2017).

In the child welfare literature, a Child Trends study from FY 2016 notes that total child welfare spending increased 5 percent from 2014 to 2016, but the direction and magnitude of changes in welfare spending varied substantially from state to state (Rosinsky & Williams, 2018). For example, from FY 2014–16, Arizona increased its aggregate

Division of Family and Children Services in the Department of Human Services; and the University System of Georgia.

² Values in 2019 dollars

spending in child welfare programs by 42 percent, while Missouri decreased child welfare spending by 23 percent during that same period.

RANGE OF OVERALL SPENDING

How the United States compares to other countries in total public spending on children depends largely on how spending on children is measured (Isaacs, 2009). While the United States spends significantly less than most Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations on some critical measures, such as cash transfer programs, the United States makes up for this lack of spending with much larger relative contributions to education and health care (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019).

Studies looking at U.S. states observe wide variability in spending (Billen et al., 2007; Rosinsky & Williams, 2018; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019; Education Week, 2019). Isaacs and Edelstein (2017) conducted an evaluation of child spending for all 50 states from 2013. Their study collected data on K-12 education spending, Medicaid, state EITC programs, and a list of 10 other programs, including State Children's Health Insurance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), childcare assistance, and foster care programs. The results support the idea that public spending on children varies widely across states. In this analysis, Vermont topped the list with an adjusted spending level of \$13,430 per child; Utah spent the least per child, with expenditures of \$4,594 per child that same year.

In a 2017 Urban Institute Kid's Share report, Isaacs et al. (2017) looked at public spending on children from a different angle and analyzed federal spending on programs that benefit children. This report finds that in 2016 the federal government spent

approximately 10 percent of its budget on programs that focus on serving children. For comparison, 7 percent was spent paying interest on the national debt and 15 percent on defense.

In sum, the literature shows that public spending on children comes from federal, state, and local sources. Each level of government has its own array of program priorities and funding mechanisms, which sometimes overlap with other levels of government. Even within a state, programs that serve children exist across a large variety of government agencies. In many circumstances, this diversity of funding sources makes it difficult to compare funding across states or time to make a clear picture of the resources available to children.

GEORGIA AGENCIES SERVING CHILDREN

This section looks at nine departments, divisions, and state organizations in Georgia that have a primary mission or substantial services focused on improving the lives of the state's 2.5 million children. These agencies include the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, the Department of Human Services and its Division of Family and Children Services, the Department of Early Care and Learning, the Department of Public Health, the Department of Education, the Department of Community Health, the Department of Juvenile Justice, and the University System of Georgia. Included for each is a background of the group and its child-centered programs and a discussion of priorities, legal authority, and budgeted expenditures.

DEPARTMENT OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Vision

Easy access to high-quality care that leads to a life of recovery and independence for the people we serve

Mission

Leading an accountable and effective continuum of care to support Georgians with behavioral health challenges, and intellectual and developmental disabilities in a dynamic health care environment

The Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) became a standalone agency in 2009 to administer state programs for mental health, developmental disabilities, and addictive diseases. The department oversees most of the state's treatment and support for individuals with persistent mental illnesses, individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, and individuals with substance abuse disorders. DBHDD employs nearly 7,000 people and operates six offices across Georgia and five hospitals in Atlanta, Milledgeville, Augusta, Columbus, and Savannah.³

Priorities

DBHDD has a wide set of priorities from providing treatments and coordinating services to conducting medical research. The vision and mission of DBHDD, presented above, highlight the desire to deliver high-quality, supportive care to individuals. In particular, DBHDD emphasizes the importance of continuity of care and of individuals living in supportive community environments instead of institutional settings. The department has several defined values:

- Mental health care provided at DBHDD hospitals sets the standard and defines the state-of-the-art.
- Security and treatment are integrated to ensure a supportive, therapeutic and violence-free environment.
- Conflict is resolved in an atmosphere of mutual respect and dignity.
- Educational efforts contribute to diminishing the stigma and discrimination directed toward persons living with a mental illness.
- Daily operational processes are shaped and guided by DBHDD's performance improvement system.
- DBHDD employees and community mental health providers work together with the individuals served and their family members.
- DBHDD success is measured by the number of individuals who are safely and successfully integrated back into their communities.⁴

DBHDD also follows the priorities set by the Georgia Behavioral Health Coordinating Council. Like other areas of child spending, mental health services are spread across many agencies. The Georgia General Assembly established the Georgia Behavioral Health Coordinating Council in 2009 to organize the state's mental health efforts. The Council consists of 17 members, including nine state department commissioners, a state representative and senator, and three members of the public with ties to public behavioral health services. Besides DBHDD, the departments represented include Community Health, Community Affairs, Education, Labor, Public Health, Human Services, Juvenile Justice, Corrections, and Community Supervision. The Council chiefly addresses the following:

³ "Careers" section of DBHDD website: dbhdd.georgia.gov/careers

⁴ "About" section of DBHDD website: dbhdd.georgia.gov/about-dbhdd

- recommending funding, policy, and practice changes that address systemic barriers to the delivery of behavioral health services;
- focusing on specific goals designed to resolve issues related to coordination of care for individuals receiving services from at least two member agencies;
- monitoring and evaluating the implementation of established goals; and
- establishing common outcome measures.⁵

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Programs

The Office of Children, Young Adults & Families (OCFY) in DBHDD's Division of Behavioral Health provides mental health and substance abuse support for children in Georgia who are uninsured or rely on supplemental security income (SSI) Medicaid. The office's programs are designed to support community living arrangements and range from assisting with medical service coordination to crisis services and after-school activities.

One of the central OCFY programs is Georgia Apex, begun in 2015, which has three major goals:

- to provide greater access to mental health services for students,
- to provide for early detection of students' mental health needs, and
- to create and sustain coordination between Georgia's community mental health providers and the local schools and school districts in which they reside.⁶

In the 2017–18 academic year, the Georgia Apex program worked with 396 schools to provide over 60,000 in-school services to students. From its

inception through 2018, the program has seen a 42-percent increase in first-time services to students and a 166-percent increase in provided services.⁷

OCFY provides several other support programs for children. Mental Health Resiliency Support Clubhouses help children and their families cope with mental health disorders, and Youth Peer Drop In Centers help children learn skills to transition into adulthood. The High Fidelity Wraparound program aims to divert at-risk youth from admission to psychiatric facilities and keep them in a supportive community environment. Lastly, OCFY provides short-term care options through their Crisis Stabilization program, which provides acute stabilization for behavioral challenges.

Division of Developmental Disabilities

DBHDD provides services for individuals with developmental disabilities as well. The Division of Developmental Disabilities offers in-home, out-of-home, and support coordination services for individuals of all ages (however, the disability must have originated by age 18 for an intellectual disability or age 22 for a developmental disability). In-home services aim to improve an individual's life while remaining a part of the community, such as through behavioral, family, and community living support.⁸ Out-of-home services focus on those individuals for whom independent living in the community is not ideal. These services provide appropriate living situations and aim to keep individuals connected to the community through socialization, self-help, and adaptive skills. The division also provides several support options, from

⁵ Behavioral Health Coordinating Council 2017 Annual Report, p.1

⁶ "Mental Health for Children, Young Adults, and Families" section of DBHDD website: dbhdd.georgia.gov/mental-health-children-young-adults-and-families

⁷ "The Georgia Apex Program: School-Based Mental Health Services, Year 3, August 2017 to June 2018," Georgia Health Policy Center, Georgia State University

⁸ "DBHDD's Developmental Disability Services" section of DBHDD website: dbhdd.georgia.gov/be-compassionate

moving to or remaining in a community living arrangement to aging well with developmental disabilities.

Legal Authority

The authority of DBHDD is principally set in state statute under Title 37. Mental Health of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated (O.C.G.A.). Statutes in O.C.G.A. created the department at the end of FY 2009 (§37-1-4) and describe the obligations of DBHDD in 27 directives about the creation, coordination, and production of mental health and disability services (§37-1-20). O.C.G.A. also details the department's institutional powers and duties (§37-1-21). This statute broadly describes DBHDD's authority to supervise and control mental health-related facilities, institutions, and programs. The General Assembly intends for DBHDD "to provide always the highest quality of diagnosis, treatment, custody, and care consistent with medical, therapeutic, and habilitative evidence based practice and knowledge" [§37-1-21(a)(5)].

Spending Snapshot

In FY 2019, budgeted expenditures for DBHDD exceeded \$1.3 billion. Of this total, 87 percent of departmental revenues came from the state, 10.9 percent from the federal government, and 2.1 percent from other sources. Funding from the federal government stems primarily from Medicaid, Prevention and Treatment of Substance Abuse Block Grants, and Community Mental Health Service Block Grants. The FY 2019 state budget had several notable expenditures for DBHDD. The department received more than \$19 million in funds greater than

⁹ "Budget Highlights FY 2019," Georgia Budget in Brief, Amended FY 2018 and FY 2019

¹⁰ DHS Fact Book, FY 2017, p.4

¹¹ From 1972–2008, DHS was organized as the Department of Human Resources.

the prior year for child and adolescent mental health services, and nearly \$6 million for autism-related crisis services.⁹

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Vision

Stronger Families for a Stronger Georgia

Mission

Strengthen Georgia by providing individuals and families access to services that promote self-sufficiency, independence, and protect Georgia's vulnerable children and adults

Established in 2009, the Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS) "delivers a wide range of services designed to promote self-sufficiency, safety and well-being for all Georgians."^{10,11} DHS is composed of 11 administrative offices and three main divisions: Aging Services, Child Support Services, and Family and Children Services. The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is by far the largest subunit of DHS and is discussed separately below. In FY 2017, the department overall employed more than 9,400 individuals and served approximately 20 percent of the state's residents.¹²

Priorities

DHS strives to continually improve service delivery to Georgia's families, particularly the state's most vulnerable residents. The department has five core values concerning how it delivers services to residents:

¹² DHS Annual Report, FY 2018. Retrieved from: dhs.georgia.gov/sites/dhs.georgia.gov/files/DHS%202018%20Annual%20Report_Inside%20Pages_FINAL.pdf

- Provide access to resources that offer support and empower Georgians and their families.
- Deliver services professionally and treat all clients with dignity and respect.
- Manage business operations effectively and efficiently by aligning resources across the agency.
- Promote accountability, transparency and quality in all services DHS delivers and programs it administers.
- Develop DHS employees at all levels of the agency.

The department is also engaged in reforms, detailed in the Blueprint for Change. The goal of this initiative is to facilitate service delivery through a more supportive framework. Blueprint for Change “supports a strong practice model, developing a robust workforce and continuous engagement with both internal and external constituents” to improve the lives of vulnerable populations.¹³

Georgia Gateway

Social benefits programs for children are spread across several agencies. The state has created Georgia Gateway to improve efficiency and reduce redundancy in determining benefit eligibility. Georgia Gateway provides an integrated eligibility system for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; TANF; Women, Infants and Children; Childcare and Parent Services; and Medical Assistance Programs. Besides DHS and its Division of Family and Children Services, this system is used by the departments of Community Health, Early Care and Learning, and Public Health.¹⁴

¹³ DHS Fact Book, FY 2017, p.4

¹⁴ Ibid.

Division of Child Support Services

The Division of Child Support Services (DCSS) aims to ensure children receive proper financial and medical support by locating parents and facilitating support orders. DCSS follows federal performance guidelines established in the Social Security Act with regard to establishing paternity, locating parents, enforcing fair court support orders, and removing barriers to payment. In FY 2017, DCSS assisted in financially supporting more than 550,000 children in Georgia. DCSS’s administration managed 411,491 child cases involving 370,037 parents.

The division also has a series of community outreach programs to help parents support their children. The Parental Accountability Court program joins DCSS with superior court judges in 31 judicial circuits across the state “to offer an alternative to incarceration and to help chronic nonpayers of child support make regular payments.”¹⁵ DCSS also offers a unique fatherhood program to help unemployed or underemployed fathers access resources to find better paying and more rewarding jobs. Among other resources, DCSS offers GED classes, resume writing, and job coaching and mentoring.

Division of Family and Children Services

Due to the scope and scale of its programs and its quasi-independence from DHS, the discussion of the Division of Family and Children Services is presented as a separate entity in the following section.

Legal Authority

The authority of DHS is primarily codified in the O.C.G.A., Title 49. Social Services. The statutes concerning DHS grant the authority to administer or supervise public assistance programs, state

¹⁵ DHS Fact Book, FY 2017, p.14

charitable institutions, and facilities that support aged adults or individuals with mental or physical disabilities [§49-2-6(1)]. These statutes also grant DHS broad authority to improve and support welfare services in Georgia, including providing services to county governments, liaising with the federal government, and contracting with private institutions. The Georgia General Assembly allows DHS to “provide services as may be appropriate and necessary to strengthen family life and help needy individuals attain the maximum economic and personal independence of which they are capable, including services to applicants and recipients of old-age assistance to help them attain self-care” [§49-2-6(10)].

Spending Snapshot

More than two-thirds of DHS’s total funding is directed to the Division of Family and Children Services. Budgeted expenditures for DHS in FY 2019 exceeded \$1.9 billion, with more than one half—57.4 percent—from federal funds. The state of Georgia contributed 41.1 percent to the department, and 1.5 percent came from other sources.

A variety of grants and other sources make up the federal funds, including the TANF Block Grant, Foster Care Title IV-E funds, and Medicaid. The department’s budget saw an increase of more than \$40 million over the prior year, including \$15.1 million for out-of-home care utilization and \$2.3 million for care coordination for foster children.¹⁶

¹⁶ “Budget Highlights FY 2019,” in the Georgia Budget in Brief, Amended FY 2018 and FY 2019.

¹⁷ Although the Medicaid program is officially administered through the Georgia Department of Community Health, DFCS is

DIVISION OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES

Vision

Safe Children. Strengthened Families. Stronger Georgia.

Mission

We prioritize the safety of Georgia’s children in the decisions we make and the actions we take. We partner with families on their path to independence and build stronger communities with caring, effective and responsive service.

The Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is one of the three divisions within DHS, but the division acts quasi-independently as the DFCS director reports directly to the governor. DFCS oversees the investigation, fostering, and adoption of abused and neglected children, and it facilitates support to families through three federal programs: Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and TANF.¹⁷ In addition, DFCS provides numerous programs to help support families and return parents to the workforce.¹⁸

Across 14 regions in the state, the division investigated 122,344 reports of abuse or neglect in FY 2017. DFCS supervised more than 13,500 children in its care at the end of December 2017, and 1,184 children were adopted in FY 2017. In its federal assistance programs, DFCS oversaw 762,301 households receiving monthly SNAP benefits, 857,410 households receiving Medicaid services, and 9,884 child-only TANF cases in FY 2017.

a closely affiliated agency that oversees many Medicaid applications.

¹⁸ DHS Fact Book, FY 2017

Priorities

DFCS's priorities and strategic goals aim to strengthen families and the state as a whole by ensuring children live in safe, supportive environments. The core values of DFCS focus on providing support to families through professional service delivery, developing DFCS employees' skills, and promoting efficient, effective, and transparent business practices. The division's goals, stemming from the Blueprint for Change detailed above, include:

- Safety: Families and individuals are free from abuse and neglect.
- Permanency: Families and individuals are healthy and stable.
- Well-being: Families and individuals have enhanced capacity to meet their physical, cognitive and educational needs.
- Workforce: The Division's workforce is competent, professional and efficient.
- Stakeholders: The Division and its stakeholders are fully engaged and responsive.

Besides the Blueprint for Change, which takes a three-pronged approach to social service reform through a social services practice model, robust workforce, and constituent engagement, DFCS's strategic plan has introduced a State of Hope (SOH) initiative.

"[SOH is designed] to engage a broad base of community stakeholders to transform the lives of Georgia's most vulnerable residents. It is a shift in thinking for the system that serves families, taking reactive policies and programs and reshaping them

into proactive efforts designed in partnership with families and communities. The goal is to have communities that support individuals, children and families in a way that reduces the risk of harm or abuse and allows them to thrive."¹⁹

SOH aims to bring together government, nonprofits, and private-sector businesses with local communities to strengthen support systems for local families. DFCS plans to build collaborative sites across the state that help improve education, trauma awareness and mitigation, quality caregiving, and economic self-sufficiency for families. DFCS intends to connect people and communities to build long-lasting partnerships to address the goals of SOH.

Legal Authority

§49-2-4 of the O.C.G.A. grants DHS the authority to create DFCS. Several important changes to DHS and DFCS became effective as part of Senate Bill 138 in 2015, stemming from recommendations from Governor Nathan Deal's Georgia Child Welfare Reform Council.²⁰ Most importantly, the bill shifted the organizational structure of DFCS, allowing a governor-appointed DFCS director who reports directly to the governor (codified in O.C.G.A. §49-2-18). Previously, the DFCS director reported to the DHS commissioner. The bill clarified that DHS maintains authority over DFCS's budgeting and appropriations of funds as well as its rules and regulations for operations and management.

Spending Snapshot

Of the \$1.9 billion in total funding for DHS, over \$1.3 billion was directed to DFCS. This amount from state,

¹⁹ State of Georgia 2019 Annual Progress and Service Report, June 2018 (rev.) from Georgia DFCS, p. 9–11

²⁰ Georgia Annual Progress and Services Report – June 2018. Retrieved from:

dfcs.georgia.gov/sites/dfcs.georgia.gov/files/related_files/site_page/APSR%202019_rev_Post2.pdf

local, and other sources included more than \$396 million for child welfare services, \$316 million for federal eligibility benefit services, and \$374 million for out-of-home care.

DEPARTMENT OF EARLY CARE AND LEARNING

Vision

Every child in Georgia will have access to high quality early care and education regardless of family income or location.

Mission

Enhancing children’s early education experience to promote their academic, social-emotional, and physical development in partnership with families, communities, the early care and education industry, and stakeholders

Georgia is one of only three states with an executive branch department dedicated solely to early learning. Bright from the Start: The Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) serves Georgia’s children from birth to age five. Originally overseeing several individual state and federal programs, DECAL now cultivates “a comprehensive system of early childhood programs and services that address the needs of the whole child and family.”²¹

The department partners with the federal Head Start program, licenses child care facilities and the Georgia Pre-K program, and administers the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, among others. DECAL supports 84,000 lottery-funded Georgia Pre-K slots and 4,272 Early Head Start slots, monitors and supports approximately 4,692 child care learning centers and family child

²¹ DECAL Strategic Plan FY 2017-20, p.5

²² DECAL Early Head Start Partnership Annual Report, 2017

²³ DECAL Strategic Plan FY 2017-20, p.8

care learning homes, and provides child care subsidies to 45,000-55,000 children per month.

^{22,23,24}

Priorities

DECAL has well defined priorities, values, and principles to support its mission. The department’s values form the acronym “DECAL” to mirror the department: “Delivering stellar customer service; Exhibiting organizational excellence; Creating positive relationships; Always valuing others; and Leading the way.” The department’s FY 2017-20 strategic plan outlines its four highest-level priorities, with measurable objectives and distinct strategies to reach these goals. DECAL’s priorities emphasize

- contributing measurably to school readiness for children from birth to age five;
- increasing the number of high-quality, affordable child care programs statewide;
- developing, engaging, and retaining a well-trained workforce for the early care and education industry and for DECAL; and
- building a framework that aligns and coordinates DECAL programs and services across regions for children from birth to age eight.²⁵

Early Head Start Program

The Early Head Start program in Georgia is a partnership between DECAL and the federal government. The partnership aims to “[enhance and support] early learning settings to provide comprehensive services that meet the needs of low-income working families; provide access to high-quality care; promote the development of infants and toddlers through strong relationship-based

²⁴ “About Child Care Services” section of DECAL website: dec.al.ga.gov/CCS/About.aspx

²⁵ DECAL Strategic Plan FY2017-20, p.13

experiences and prepare them for the transition into preschool.”²⁶ The partnership administers programs through 14 family child care and learning homes in the Quality Care for Children hub and five child care learning centers in the Sheltering Arms hub.

Legal Authority

State statutes define the structure, powers, and duties of DECAL. §20-1A-1 enables the creation of the department, succeeding the Office of School Readiness and marking it as a separate budget unit. The powers and duties of DECAL are delineated in §20-1A-4. This statute authorized DECAL to administer and regulate Georgia’s Pre-K Program and other child care, preschool, and child development programs. The authority to liaise with the federal government and create a joint collaboration Head Start office is also granted. §20-1A-10 allows for the regulation of early care and education programs, including the licensure, establishment, maintenance, and improvement of programs and centers.

Spending Snapshot

In FY 2019, DECAL received \$820.5 million in funding.²⁷ Approximately one half came from federal resources and one half from state resources. Of the state’s \$428.8 million appropriation, 86 percent came from Georgia’s Lottery for Education funds. More than one half of federal funds came from the Child Care and Development Fund and Child Care and Development Block Grants.

²⁶ DECAL Early Head Start Partnership Annual Report, 2017, p.3

²⁷ “Budget Highlights FY 2019,” Georgia Budget in Brief, Amended FY 2018 and FY 2019

²⁸ “About DPH” section of DPH website: dph.georgia.gov/about-dph

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Vision

A safe and healthy Georgia

Mission

To prevent disease, injury, and disability; promote health and well-being; and prepare for and respond to disasters

The Department of Public Health (DPH) is Georgia’s lead agency in “preventing disease, injury and disability; promoting health and well-being; and preparing for and responding to disasters from a health perspective.”²⁸ While DPH operates at the state level, partnerships with the County Boards of Health in each of Georgia’s 159 counties also play an integral role in the department’s operations. DPH is responsible for crafting state-wide policy and establishing public health standards. The County Boards of Health are responsible for educating the state department on local needs, advocating for the health of their constituents, and providing policy guidance to local officials.²⁹

Priorities

DPH performs a multitude of functions in service of promoting the health of Georgia’s citizens. These functions include

- Health Promotion and Disease Prevention,
- Maternal and Child Health,
- Infectious Disease and Immunization,
- Environmental Health,
- Emergency Preparedness and Response,
- Pharmacy, and

²⁹ “A Guide to Serving on the County Board of Health,” DPH, retrieved from: northcentralhealthdistrict.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/A-Guide-to-Serving-on-the-County-Board-of-Health-2015.pdf

- Nursing.³⁰

While carrying out these functions, the department operates under the guidance of five core values: people, excellence, partnership, innovation, and science.

DPH's FY 2019 strategic plan lays out three primary goals for the agency. The first goal is to prevent disease, injury, and disability. This goal can be accomplished by increasing the physical health of Georgia's student population, eliminating pediatric asthma deaths, reducing the infant mortality rate, and decreasing the number of hospitalizations for diabetes and hypertension. The department's second goal is to promote health and well-being by increasing access to health care and improving the technological infrastructure of health reporting systems. DPH's third goal is to prepare for and respond to emergencies by improving emergency response infrastructure.³¹

District and County Relations

Because of the strong partnerships between DPH, the County Boards of Health, and health districts across the state, the District and County Relations office plays an important role. This office serves as a liaison between the local districts and the state, representing the health interests of these local entities to DPH and other relevant agencies. The office accomplishes its mission by facilitating communication and collaboration between different levels of government concerning issues of public health.

Legal Authority

O.C.G.A. authorizes the Department of Public Health to "safeguard and promote the health of the people of this state and is empowered to employ all legal

³⁰ "About DPH" section of DPH website: dph.georgia.gov/about-dph

means appropriate to that end" (§31-2A-4). DPH has the statutory authority to investigate and correct conditions that could be detrimental to public health, regulate construction sites regarding matters of public health and safety, and coordinate with the Department of Community Health for the purpose of improving health outcomes.

Spending Snapshot

The department's total budget for FY 2019 was \$658 million. Federal funding accounted for \$366 million, approximately 56 percent of the total. These federal funds came from, among other sources, several grants: the Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant, the Preventative Health and Services Block Grant, and the TANF Block Grant. State funding amounted to \$282 million, with the remaining \$10 million coming from other funding sources.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Vision

Educating Georgia's future by graduating students who are ready to learn, ready to live, and ready to lead

Mission

Offering a holistic education to each and every child in our state

Georgia's Department of Education (DOE) oversees the state's K-12 public school system. This system includes 1.7 million students and 114,000 teachers at more than 2,000 schools. In order to manage a state-wide school system of this size, the department divides its responsibilities across a wide array of divisions, programs, and initiatives. Divisions of the department focus on areas such as teaching

³¹ "FY 19 Strategic Plan Update, July 2018," Georgia DPH. Retrieved from: dph.georgia.gov/mission-and-values

and learning, school improvement, technology services, and external affairs. DOE's programs include student, parent, and teacher advisory councils; English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL); and Junior ROTC.

Priorities

The Georgia Department of Education released its Vision 2020 strategic plan that reviews the department's recent successes and sets goals the department would like to reach by 2020. DOE's recent accomplishments include reaching an 81.6 percent graduation rate, the highest rate the state has seen. Georgia has also seen Milestone testing scores improve, and the state's students scored above the national average on the SAT and ACT.

The department has also laid out an extensive set of goals for the future. These goals include reducing the number of high-stakes standardized tests students take, achieving a high-school graduation rate above the national average, improving math and reading proficiency among elementary school students, and ensuring that every elementary and middle school student in the state has access to at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day.

Division of Curriculum and Instruction

The Division of Curriculum and Instruction creates and evaluates Georgia's K-12 education curriculum, with a goal to support "evidence-based instructional practices and strategies for differentiated, innovative, and effective teaching and learning based on the State-adopted standards in support of a balanced curriculum for the whole child."³² The division is composed of K-12 teachers, postsecondary instructors, parents, and

³² "Curriculum and Instruction" section of DOE website: <https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Curriculum-and-Instruction/Pages/default.aspx>

representatives from nonprofits and private-sector businesses.

Division of School and District Effectiveness

The Division of School and District Effectiveness has created a framework for school improvement with the aim of ensuring that every school in the state is equipped to educate students to be ready to live, ready to learn, and ready to lead.³³ The division provides support to schools and districts across the state in their efforts to improve in the form of professional development and collaboration with other entities within the state. While the division provides support to all districts, the primary focus is on districts experiencing unique challenges in the area of student achievement.

Georgia Scholar Program

The Georgia Scholar Program recognizes high school seniors who have exhibited a high level of achievement in school and in their community. Students who receive this award have earned excellent grades, participated in extracurricular activities, and have become active members in their community. The Department of Education's Excellence Recognition Office collaborates with local coordinators to choose the award recipients each year.

Legal Authority

Many of the legal underpinnings of the Department of Education's authority are laid out in the Georgia Constitution. Article VIII of the state Constitution gives every citizen the right to receive a public education: The provision of an adequate public education for the citizens shall be a primary

³³ "Division of School and District Effectiveness" section of DOE website: [gadoe.org/School-Improvement/School-Improvement-Services/Pages/default.aspx](https://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/School-Improvement-Services/Pages/default.aspx)

obligation of the State of Georgia. Public education for the citizens prior to the college or postsecondary level shall be free and shall be provided for by taxation, and the General Assembly may by general law provide for the establishment of education policies for such public education. The expense of other public education shall be provided for in such manner and in such amount as may be provided by law.³⁴

Article VIII of the Georgia Constitution also establishing the elected office of State School Superintendent. This constitutional officer serves as the Executive Officer of the State Board of Education. The State School Superintendent serves a four-year term, and the office is up for election in the same year as the gubernatorial election.

O.C.G.A. provides the details of Georgia’s Quality Basic Education (QBE) funding formula. The QBE formula outlined in §20-2-161 gives each educational program a relative weight and then uses these weights to allocate funds from the state’s budget for K-12 education. The goal of the QBE program is to ensure that every student in Georgia has access to a quality education (§20-2-131). Georgia Code §20-2-132 contains a list of additional goals for the QBE program, which includes increasing job satisfaction for teachers, improving parent and community involvement, and decreasing dropout rates and school violence incidents.

Spending Snapshot

The FY 2019 budget for Georgia’s Department of Education was \$11.9 billion, with the large majority of support coming from state general funds. Approximately \$10 billion of the department’s

budget came from state funds, with an additional \$1.9 billion contributed by the federal government.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH

Vision

To provide Georgians with access to affordable, quality health care through effective planning, purchasing and oversight.

Mission

DCH is committed to a lean and responsive state government that promotes the health and prosperity of its citizens through innovative and effective delivery of quality health care programs.

The Department of Community Health (DCH) is one of four health care departments in the state of Georgia. DCH oversees the Medicaid and PeachCare for Kids programs, both of which receive significant federal funding, as well as the state-funded State Health Benefit Plan. Medicaid and the State Health Benefit Plan provide health insurance coverage to 2.6 million Georgians, and PeachCare for Kids provides coverage to an additional 124,000 children.³⁵ The state of Georgia created DCH in 1999 to subsume a portion of the responsibilities of several other departments focused on health. The department states its purpose as “shaping the future of A Healthy Georgia by improving access and ensuring quality to strengthen the communities we serve.”³⁶

Priorities

The state has laid out two primary goals for DCH: to promote a healthy population and to do so while adhering to the principles of efficient and

³⁴ The Constitution of the State of Georgia, Article VIII, Section 1

³⁵ “DCH Quick Guide: An Overview of the Georgia Department of Community Health,” Georgia DCH, March 2019

³⁶ “About Us” section of DCH website: dch.georgia.gov/about-us

responsible government. DCH expands on these goals with their own list of priorities, striving to:

- improve the health status of Georgians by promoting healthy lifestyles, preventive care, disease management and disparity elimination;
- improve access to quality health care at an affordable price;
- ensure value in health care contracts;
- move health plans administered by DCH toward being financially solvent to meet the needs of the members;
- increase effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of health care programs; and
- ensure DCH has enough workers with the necessary skills and competencies to meet the current and future demand.³⁷

Medicaid

DCH oversees Georgia's Medicaid program, which primarily provides health care coverage to low-income individuals and families. The majority of Medicaid funding comes from the federal government; based on the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) formula for Medicaid, the federal government is required to support 67.62 percent of Georgia's Medicaid program in FY 2019.³⁸ Recipients of Medicaid can use their health coverage for services focused on preventative care, behavioral health, mental health, and substance use.

PeachCare for Kids

PeachCare for Kids is Georgia's branch of the federal Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). PeachCare provides health coverage to uninsured children under the age of 19. To be eligible for the

program, a child's family must have an income below 247 percent of the federal poverty line. PeachCare includes coverage for doctor visits, preventative services, dental care, vision care, emergency room services, hospitalization, and mental health services. Monthly premiums range from \$8–\$36 for children ages six to 18. Children under six years old are eligible to receive PeachCare without a premium cost.

Legal Authority

The authority of the Department of Community Health is primarily codified in Georgia Code section §31-2-1 and §31-2-4. The DCH has the statutory authority to serve as the lead agency for all health issues in the state. The department is also tasked with optimizing the efficiency of Georgia's health care programs, allowing the state to improve its health care infrastructure, and coordinating the health care plans of public employees and retirees. The DCH also has the responsibility of keeping a list of the cost of certain prescription drugs and medical services and making these cost comparisons available to the public.

Spending Snapshot

The Department of Community Health's budgeted expenditures for FY 2019 were \$15.3 billion. Federal funding accounted for the largest portion of DPH's budget at \$7.7 billion, with \$7.3 billion supporting Medicaid and \$461 million supporting PeachCare for Kids. State funds totaled \$3.4 billion, and the remaining \$4 billion came from other sources.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ The FMAP for any state must be at least 50 percent, meaning the federal government contributes at least the same amount as the state.

DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

Vision

Offer youth hope and change: DJJ will lead the nation in preparing young people in its care to develop and sustain productive lives.

Mission

To protect and serve the citizens of Georgia by holding young offenders accountable for their actions through the delivery of services and sanctions in appropriate settings and by supporting youth in their communities to become productive and law-abiding citizens

The Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) includes 26 detention facilities and 96 community offices located throughout the state of Georgia. DJJ helps offenders up to the age of 21 through secure detention and probation services. Georgia's juvenile justice system also operates as its own school district, providing those in its custody with educational programs that allow them to obtain a high school diploma. DJJ also provides youth offenders with medical care and mental health treatment. The agency employs over 4,000 individuals.

Priorities

The Department of Juvenile Justice has laid out priorities and goals that address human trafficking, mental and behavioral health, and gang activity in addition to its primary role overseeing youth detention and probation. DJJ lists its top priorities as

- operating safe and secure facilities and communities;
- enhancing systems of care for mental health;
- gang prevention and intervention;

- effective responses for human trafficking victims and families; and
- recruitment, retention, and succession planning.³⁹

Division of Secure Detention

The Division of Secure Detention is responsible for the operation of the DJJ's 19 Regional Youth Detention Centers. These centers provide temporary care for juveniles awaiting trial or awaiting long-term placement. These facilities provide medical, behavioral, educational, and nutritional services.

Division of Secure Campuses

The Division of Secure Campuses oversees the management of Georgia's seven Youth Development Campuses. These facilities provide long-term care to youth placed in DJJ custody. Youth Development campuses provide physical and mental health treatment, educational programs, vocational training, food services, substance abuse treatment, and family visitation.

Division of Community Services

The Division of Community Services provides a wide range of programs that includes case management, probation services, and reentry services. The case management within the DJJ proceeds with the goal of rehabilitating youth and connecting them with programs within their community that can give them guidance. Probation services focus on creating an individualized plan of supervision for individuals and ensuring that they comply with the terms of their probation. Reentry services supervises a youth's transition from juvenile detention back to their community and works to ensure that this transition is a successful one.

³⁹ "About Us" section of DJJ website: djj.georgia.gov/about-us

Legal Authority

Georgia Code §49-4A-3 creates the Department of Juvenile Justice and lays out the authority and responsibilities of the agency. The main statutory responsibility of the department is to “provide for supervision, detention, and rehabilitation of delinquent children committed to the state’s custody” (§49-4A-3).⁴⁰ This statute also describes additional responsibilities that include developing prevention programs, developing a staff that builds relationships with the children and families in its care, and using evidence-based programs and practices.

This code section also creates the position of the Commissioner of the DJJ. The Commissioner is the chief administrative officer of the department and is tasked with supervising, directing, and executing the functions of the DJJ. This position is appointed by the DJJ Board and approved by the governor.

Spending Snapshot

The total budget for the Department of Juvenile Justice was \$351 million in FY 2019. State funds primarily support the budget with approximately \$343 million, and an additional \$8 million in support comes from federal funds, \$1.5 million of which comes from a Foster Care Title IV-E grant.

⁴⁰ Georgia Code §49-4A-3

THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA

Vision

The University System of Georgia will excel in meeting the needs of our state and economy through universities and colleges that provide an affordable, accessible, and high-quality education; promote lifelong success of students; and create, disseminate, and apply knowledge for the advancement of our state, nation, and world.

Mission

To contribute to the educational, cultural, economic, and social advancement of Georgia by providing excellent undergraduate general education and first-rate programs leading to associate, baccalaureate, masters, professional, and doctorate degrees; by pursuing leading-edge basic and applied research, scholarly inquiry, and creative endeavors; and by bringing these intellectual resources, and those of the public libraries, to bear on the economic development of the State and the continuing education of its citizens.

The University System of Georgia (USG) is composed of 26 universities across the state. These include research universities, comprehensive universities, state universities, and state colleges. As of Fall 2019, more than 333,000 students were enrolled in USG colleges and universities. USG also includes the Georgia Public Library system—a network of almost 400 library facilities—and the Georgia Archives, which gathers and preserves information about the state of Georgia.

Board of Regents

The Board of Regents is the USG’s governing body. The Board is charged with oversight of Georgia’s

colleges and universities as well as the library system and Georgia Archives. Members are appointed by the governor to seven-year terms. The members of the Board of Regents elect a chancellor to serve as the chief executive and administrative officer of the USG. Nineteen members sit on the Board of Regents: five at-large members and one member from each of Georgia's 14 congressional districts.

Economic Impact

The Selig Center for Economic Growth estimated that USG contributed \$17.7 billion to Georgia's economy in FY2017. This impact comes from the over 168,000 jobs created by Georgia's colleges and universities, the operating costs of USG institutions, the spending of students attending the schools, and the multiplier effect of this job creation and spending. The report found that 3.8 percent of all jobs in the state of Georgia are either a direct or indirect result of the USG.⁴¹

Legal Authority

The Georgia Constitution and O.C.G.A establish the authority of the Board of Regents to oversee USG and lay out the responsibilities of the Board. Article VIII of the Georgia Constitution states that "the board of regents shall have the exclusive authority to create new public colleges, junior colleges, and universities in the State of Georgia, subject to approval by majority vote in the House of Representatives and the Senate."

O.C.G.A §20-3-31 expands on the Board of Regents' constitutional authority and lists additional duties. These responsibilities include the ability to elect or appoint professors or other officers at USG

institutions and to make rules and regulations in keeping with the Board's mission.

Spending Snapshot

The educational and general budget is the University System of Georgia's largest budgeting category, totaling approximately \$7.8 billion in FY 2019, with \$2.4 billion in support from state general funds. The majority of USG's budget goes toward educational and general expenditures, such as personal services, operating expenses, travel, and equipment.⁴²

CONCLUSION

Total spending on children is difficult to extract from other spending. Although serving children is a fundamental purpose of many public programs, illustrated by the number of departments in Georgia with an explicit focus on child well-being, no comprehensive method is currently available to measure or compare public spending on children.

Differences in institutional structures and operations, costs of living, and a myriad of other conditions make comparisons incomplete. Furthermore, governmental agencies that work to serve children do so in a complicated landscape of competing priorities and layered authority and restrictions. Overall, agencies serving children must navigate this complicated environment while aiming to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their programs and services.

⁴¹ "Economic Impact of USG Institutions on their Regional Economies in FY 2018," May 2019. Retrieved from: usg.edu/assets/usg/docs/news_files/USG_Impact_2018.pdf

⁴² USG Budget, FY 2019, Appendix I

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ABOUT GEORGIA POLICY LABS

The Georgia Policy Labs (GPL) is a collaboration between Georgia State University and a variety of government agencies to promote evidence-based policy development and implementation. Housed in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, GPL works to create an environment where policymakers have the information and tools available to improve the effectiveness of existing government policies and programs, implement new ideas for addressing pressing issues, and decide what new initiatives should be scaled. The ultimate goal is to help government entities more effectively use scarce resources and make a positive difference in people's lives. GPL contains three focus areas: The Metro Atlanta Policy Lab for Education works to improve K-12 educational outcomes in metro Atlanta; the Career and Technical Education Policy Exchange focuses on high-school-based career and technical education in multiple U.S. states; and the Child and Family Policy Lab applies a holistic research approach to improve outcomes for vulnerable children, students and families in partnership with Georgia's state agencies. In addition to conducting evidence-based policy research, GPL serves as a teaching and learning resource for state officials and policymakers, students, and other interested stakeholders. See more at gpl.gsu.edu