

WESTSIDE EARLY CHILDHOOD NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Final Report



JULY 2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Positive experiences during the early years can dramatically change a child's life. Decades of robust research suggest high-quality early childhood programs can reduce opportunity gaps and have substantial impacts on children's academic achievement in school and positive long-term outcomes later in life. However, in spite of increased investments and rapid expansion of early care and education, too many families today do not have access to affordable high-quality programs.



The Westside Future Fund, in partnership with The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation's Education Collaborative, is engaged in an ambitious effort to advance early childhood opportunities in the Westside community. As a key part of this work, a comprehensive assessment was conducted to understand the needs related to early childhood education on the Westside – specifically in the English Avenue, Ashview Heights, Vine City, and Atlanta University Center neighborhoods. The assessment process involved exploration and analysis of key information in order to get a clearer picture of the cultural context on the Westside, highlight where progress is needed for the early childhood supply to meet existing demand, and identify opportunities to improve cost of care, workforce capacity, and program quality. Findings revealed that significant progress has been made across the focal community to support families with pre-K age children, but major gaps exist in fostering high-quality early childhood services for families with infants and toddlers.

To address this urgent need to support the community's youngest learners, insights from the needs assessment were used to guide development of actionable recommendations to increase the availability and quality of early childhood programs serving children under the age of three. Overall, this needs assessment process and the resulting recommendations can serve as the foundation for data-driven decision-making and investment to drive a robust local agenda focused on boosting early childhood education opportunities and creating systemic change for all young children and their families on the Westside.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL BIRTH-TO-THREE AGENDA ON THE WESTSIDE

STRATEGY 1: BUILD ON STRONG FAMILY NETWORKS AND CAPACITY

RECOMMENDATION 1: Increase investments in existing evidence-based home visiting programming

RECOMMENDATION 2: Establish an early childhood-focused family ambassador initiative

STRATEGY 2: INCREASE ACCESSIBLE, AFFORDABLE, HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD OPTIONS

RECOMMENDATION 3: Increase infant and toddler slots in both family- and center-based early childhood programs

RECOMMENDATION 4: Maximize access to subsidy grants and establish scholarships with private funding

RECOMMENDATION 5: Build capacity to improve the quality of early childhood programming serving infants and toddlers as well as family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care

STRATEGY 3: STRENGTHEN COORDINATION AND INVESTMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS

RECOMMENDATION 6: Strengthen data-driven collaborative efforts to increase impact of child & family service organizations

RECOMMENDATION 7: Leverage the impact of reinvestment efforts for young children and their families

ADVANCING EARLY LEARNING ON THE WESTSIDE



The experiences children have during their first few years are critical in setting a foundation for all that follows. Over the past few decades, an expanding body of research has demonstrated the benefits of early childhood education for children’s development. Evidence has shown that high-quality early learning programs can significantly influence children’s development of cognitive, linguistic, physical, and social-emotional skills, providing the solid foundation needed for school and lifelong success. ^{1,2,3,4} Moreover, access to a range of early care and education programs is an important component of a healthy, viable community. Studies show access to early childhood programming provides important work support, helping put families on firmer financial ground, and offers significant return on investments directly related to early learning. ⁵ A robust local system of such programs has social, economic, and environmental benefits not only for children, but for their families and the community at large. However, in spite of increased investments and rapid expansion of early care and education, too many families today do not have access to affordable high-quality programs.

Investors and leaders in community revitalization efforts have an unprecedented opportunity to bring about change by expanding access to affordable, high-quality early childhood education programs and increasing the capacity of programs already in place. The Westside Future Fund (WFF) serves as a catalyst for coordinating and moving revitalization efforts ahead in four neighborhoods located in the Westside area of Atlanta: English Av-

WHY INVESTMENTS IN EARLY LEARNING MATTER



THE POTENTIAL

Young children’s brains are ready for learning

The brain forms as many as 700 neural connections per second before the age of 5

THE OPPORTUNITY

Children who receive high-quality early education are...

MORE LIKELY TO:

- ✓ Show improved reading & math
- ✓ Stay in school longer
- ✓ Graduate from high school
- ✓ Attend a four-year college

LESS LIKELY TO:

- ✓ Drop out of school
- ✓ Repeat grades
- ✓ Be placed in special education

And by age 40, they are...

- 24% more likely to own a home
- 18% more likely to be employed

- 53% less likely to have multiple arrests
- More likely to make higher earnings

Sources: See end notes 1-4



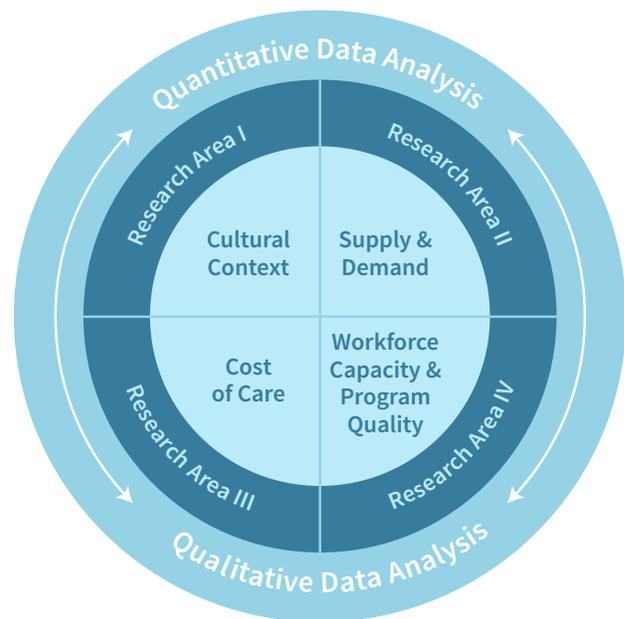
enue, Vine City, Ashview Heights, and Atlanta University Center. WFF serves as the backbone organization for collective impact in the areas of safety and security, cradle-to-career education, health and wellness, and mixed-income communities. Efforts at WFF also seek to align with and additionally contribute to the larger early childhood initiative through The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation (AMBFF). This collective impact initiative brings together a wide range of partners to address community needs in the Westside across five areas of impact: economic inclusion, crime and safety, housing, health and environment, and education and youth empowerment. Increasing the supply of high-quality, affordable slots in early childhood programs on the Westside represents a key strategy across all these efforts. To realize this vision for the community, it became clear that a needs assessment was required to ensure a deeper understanding of the unmet need in the focal Westside neighborhoods and to inform all future planning and action.

THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROCESS

A comprehensive needs assessment of the current landscape of early childhood programming was conducted in the focal neighborhoods of English Avenue, Vine City, Ashview Heights, and Atlanta University Center. To guide the strategic work of WFF, along with AMBFF’s early childhood initiative, four research areas emerged as critical to gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the existing need in the Westside community.

- **Research Area I: Cultural Context** is an exploration of the characteristics, prevailing wisdom, and shared experiences of the community.
- **Research Area II: Supply and Demand** is an examination of the current supply of programs in the focal neighborhoods, analysis of demand by families, and identification of specific areas where there may be a gap in access to services.
- **Research Area III: Cost of Care** is to develop a realistic and complete picture of the cost of care in the Westside area and how it is impacting family choice and program capacity.
- **Research Area IV: Workforce Capacity and Program Quality** is to obtain a deeper understanding of the available resources and existing barriers to accessing professional development and program quality improvement supports.

OVERVIEW OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROCESS



The assessment included a mix of both quantitative data analysis, to understand the numbers behind the early childhood landscape and existing need on the Westside, and qualitative data analysis, to illuminate strengths and gaps in understanding with stories obtained directly from families, providers, and other key stakeholders. Insights gained from the needs assessment were used to inform the development of actionable recommendations to advance early childhood programming in the focal community. The following report provides an overview of key findings from the assessment and resulting recommendations to drive a robust local agenda focused on boosting early learning opportunities and creating systemic change for all young children and their families on the Westside.

WHO WAS A PART OF THE PROCESS?

Stakeholder engagement was a significant component of this assessment process to ensure community values are reflected, strengths are leveraged, and needs are effectively addressed.



WESTSIDE LEADERSHIP TEAM

Composed of leaders from the Westside Future Fund and The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, guided and informed the needs assessment process.



EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

Members of the Westside Education Collaborative ensured actions resulting from the process align with and build on existing efforts established in the community.



40 FAMILIES

The families attended listening sessions to share personal stories of their experiences with early childhood programming in the community and insight into what is still needed.



12 EARLY CHILDHOOD STAKEHOLDERS

They were interviewed to help identify existing gaps and new opportunities to advance early learning on the Westside.



5 EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Participated in in-depth learning tours — involving program leader surveys, interviews, and tours of program sites — to provide a deeper understanding of the existing early childhood landscape and to offer recommendations for strengthening early learning from a provider's perspective.



THE FINDINGS

CULTURAL CONTEXT



Atlanta's Westside neighborhoods are deeply rooted in African American culture and history. They were once home to such Civil Rights luminaries as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Julian Bond, and Maynard Jackson.

The influence of these and many other leaders of black liberation and education live on in the city's cultural venues and in the spirit of the longtime residents of the Westside community. Contributing to the legacy of the Westside as a center of black progress and leadership, the community is also home to Atlanta University Center (AUC), the world's largest and oldest consortium of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), including Clark Atlanta University, Spelman College, Morehouse College, and the Morehouse School of Medicine.

In recent decades, economic strife, crime, and blight have, in some ways, eroded the connection between the community and its proud history. Amid these challenges, however, families have worked with tenacity to protect their children, build character, and pass along a legacy of community pride, knowing that a strong sense of belonging and ownership among Westside's rising generation is a significant part of what it will take to usher in positive change.

"The leaders of the Atlanta University Center placed their family [here] and began to build what was the black culture on the Westside. Of course, Dr. King as an adult decided to move into Vince City. We have a lot of doctors and lawyers there, so that's the culturally significant piece that ties our community to the Civil Rights Movement."



WHAT IS IT LIKE RAISING A FAMILY ON THE WESTSIDE?

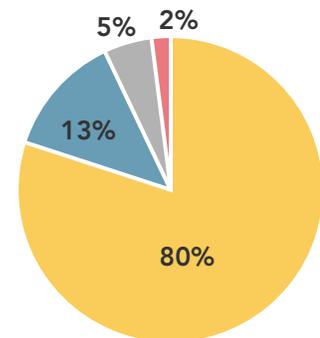
To better understand what it takes to support families in raising healthy, thriving children on the Westside, it is important to have a clear picture of who the Westside's children, families, and community members are and what community factors are at play. This requires a hard look not only at the strengths and virtues of families, but also at the significant barriers that fragmented systems and harsh conditions of poverty present.

The population of children under five years living on the Westside is:

549 ↓

53% OF FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF FIVE

live below the federal poverty line compared to 34% of children in Atlanta as a whole.



The racial and ethnic breakdown of residents on the Westside:

80% are Black or African American

13% are White

5% are Hispanic

2% are two or more races or other

This points to the need for culturally informed and responsive interventions that recognize the strengths of families and prioritize racial equity.



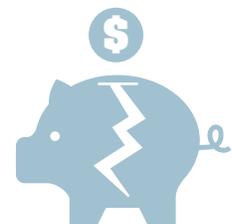
34% of households on the Westside do not have a vehicle.

To access work, resources such as grocery stores, and choices for early learning and enrichment programs, families need options in proximity to their homes, plus reliable public transit.

The median household income for families across the focal community is approximately

\$31,000/YEAR

This is significantly lower than the median household income for families in Atlanta, which averages just over \$45K/year.



These realities highlight the need for systems-level supports to increase economic mobility and promote self-sufficiency.

15% of babies born, on average, suffer from low birth weight

Low birth weight can have significant impacts that can be difficult to overcome. This statistic compares with a rate of 9.5% for the state of Georgia.

THERE ARE ALSO ELEVATED NUMBERS OF PREMATURE BIRTHS IN THE FOCAL NEIGHBORHOODS

Sources: See endnotes 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11



These trends underscore the need for interventions to improve birth outcomes and address health disparities for the Westside's mothers and children.

An estimated **19%** of households are with children (ages 0-18) in the Westside focal neighborhoods



16%

Single parents as heads of household



3%

Married parents as heads of household

SINGLE PARENTHOOD OFTEN PUTS ADDITIONAL FINANCIAL STRAIN ON FAMILIES AND EXACERBATES THE EFFECTS OF POVERTY.



WHAT IS WORKING FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES?

Despite challenging circumstances, the residents of Atlanta's Westside have shown their resilience and persistent hope in many ways. This resilience is reflected in their commitment to supporting their neighbors, their resourcefulness in leveraging supports for meeting the needs of their families, and their optimism that reinvestment might help to restore some of what has been lost.

SIGNIFICANT COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION EFFORTS

Rigorous community planning and development make the Westside a unique and exciting place that stirs the interest of residents, decision-makers, and investors alike. During the listening sessions, several participants shared an optimistic perspective that investments and efforts would be focused on supporting and building capacity in existing local programs. Others described measures being taken in the community to support the retention of current residents by providing opportunities for economic support, including Westside Works, Habitat for Humanity, and other resources. Some families also speculated that shifting economic demographics could bring racial and economic diversity to the Westside and make their neighborhood more reflective of the city and state at large. These participants regarded community revitalization as an opportunity to strengthen and support the existing community while ushering in positive changes to become a community of choice.

Key Findings to Consider

- There is a significant amount of interest and political will around reinvestment.
- Strong family and community networks create deep resiliency and promote positive values.
- A variety of programs and opportunities currently exist for early learning and enrichment, and to support families' basic needs.
- Current efforts are focused on aligning and connecting these resources to better support families.



STRENGTH IN FAMILY CAPACITY AND NETWORKS

Throughout the listening sessions, a recurring topic was the important and intersecting roles of family and the community to support one another through adversity and raise strong, thriving children. Indeed, where discrimination and poverty work to undermine the healthy development of children of color, their families have the unique capacity to offer hard-learned healing and coping strategies that build children up and protect them through adversity. The strength of Westside's families lies in their expansive and supportive family systems, deep relational bonds, tenacity for academic achievement, and strong connections to religion and spirituality.

In the Westside community, where historical inequities and discrimination have eroded the effectiveness and trust-

worthiness of traditional institutions of support, such as schools and public agencies, families have survived and rallied through the formation of elaborate family and social networks.

A SYSTEM OF SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND THE COMMUNITY

A variety of factors impact each child's ability to learn, grow, and thrive. Children and their families come into contact with multiple programs and systems designed to create opportunities for early learning, health and wellness, family development, and more. These programs and systems often overlap, interact, and influence one another. With the necessary coordination and alignment leveraged through collective impact, these systems and programs can work together to provide a streamlined network of support that responds to the strengths and lived experiences of families and the individual needs of children. For that reason, it is important not only to understand and maximize each component of the early childhood system with which young children interact directly, but also to address factors within the larger ecosystem impacting the physical, social, and economic climate in which children are living and growing. On the Westside, the early childhood system consists of programs that impact young children and their families directly, as well as programs that work to create healthier, more stable communities in which young children can safely learn and grow.

"It's all about the role models that are familiar, the role models that surround a child. I went to college because my dad went to college, it was just continual learning."

"We don't have a family that we serve on the Westside, who all they want to do is take advantage of this early learning opportunity. It is, 'I need housing. I need you to help me find a job. I need utility support. I'm about to be evicted.' And so it's not that Mom doesn't care and that education isn't important, life is happening to her."



Early Learning Programs

Early learning on the Westside consists of a variety of settings where children learn and are cared for outside of their homes. This includes Georgia Pre-K, Early Head Start, and Head Start sites available at no cost to families, as well as private child care learning centers for which parents can pay to enroll or use Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) benefits as they are eligible based on need. (For more details about early learning opportunities on the Westside, see the section on “Supply and Demand.”)

Early Intervention and Special Education

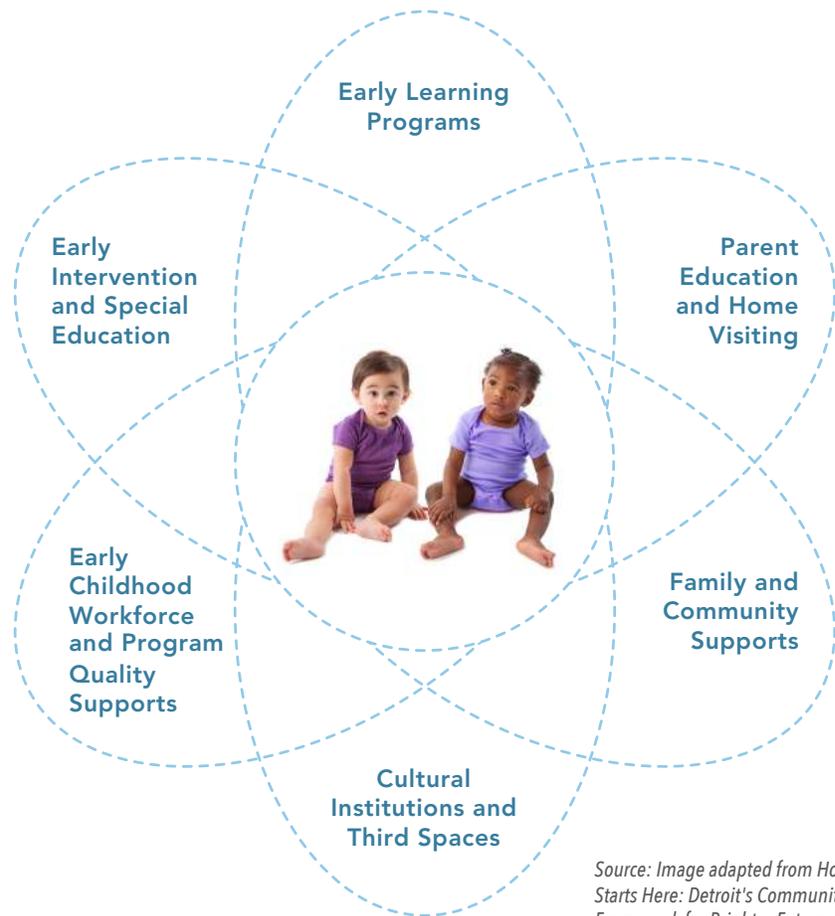
Funded through Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), early intervention is designed to identify developmental delays and other disabilities in infants and toddlers, and provide related services to children and their

families. Services continue as needed for children through special education, typically starting at three years and beyond, to ensure that all children continually have the opportunity to maximize their potential for learning and growth. Locally, the Georgia Department of Public Health houses the state’s early intervention services through the Babies Can’t Wait program, which works to support families and caregivers to meet the needs and maximize the developmental potential of each young child with developmental delays and disabilities through coordinated services identified in Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP). Special education services are provided through Atlanta Public Schools (APS).

Parent Education and Home Visiting

A variety of publicly and privately funded programs exist to support families in their efforts to raise healthy, thriving children. Home visiting and other parent education programs offer resources to build parenting capacity, open doors for adult learning and personal development, and facilitate positive interactions between parents and young children. These services can occur in group settings or through home visitation. Locally, home visitation and other parent education programs are offered through Early Head Start, the United Way, Families First, and others to support young children and families on the Westside. Often, these opportunities are provided through peer mentorship, emphasizing the importance of cultural and community match between peer mentors and participating families.

SYSTEM OF EARLY LEARNING SUPPORT ON THE WESTSIDE



Early Childhood Workforce and Program Quality Supports

To achieve positive outcomes for young children, the preparedness of early childhood teachers and staff and the quality of early learning environments are two of the most critical factors. For that reason, programs such as the United Way’s Early Learning Career Pathway and the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) Scholars program work alongside the local resource and referral agencies and higher education programs to prepare and advance an effective early childhood workforce. More locally, the Rollins Center provides professional development for teachers of children from birth through age eight, using a synthesis of research-based practices to prepare teachers to support language development, vocabulary, critical thinking, and comprehension with a particular focus on preparing teachers to educate children most at risk of



illiteracy due to systemic educational disparities. Meanwhile, DECAL engages providers in the statewide quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) and partners with programs to increase and demonstrate quality based on a series of research-based indicators. (For more information, see the section on “Workforce Capacity and Program Quality.”)

Family and Community Supports

In recognition of the impact of family and community conditions on young children, a variety of programs and services on the Westside focus on improving family and community outcomes, such as employment, health and safety, housing, and more. The Westside Future Fund (WFF) acts as the backbone organization for a collective impact partnership to improve community conditions and quality of life. Westside residents have access to employment support through Westside Works, economic stability planning through On the Rise Financial Center, and youth development opportunities through the At-Promise Community Center. In addition, Atlanta Housing Authority, the Salvation Army, Habitat for Humanity, and the United Way all offer programming to improve the stability and vitality of the Westside community.

Cultural Institutions and Third Spaces

Other important assets in the community are the opportunities for enrichment, recreation, and social connection. The Atlanta Beltline’s Westside Trail and the recent investments in Cook Park will increase residents’ access to green space for physical activity and enjoyment. The Performing Arts Center, where children can take music and art classes at no charge, and sites where children can receive free meals during the summer months are also of high value to children and families. To support school readiness on the Westside, the Atlanta Children’s Museum partners with schools and community organizations to conduct outreach to families, visit classrooms to provide enrichment activities, and deliver professional development for early childhood educators at the local schools and YMCA Head Start programs. To help connect Westside families with enrichment opportunities in their community, Atlanta’s Access It! program works to expand access to a variety of museums and enrichment opportunities—including the Atlanta Children’s Museum—by defraying the cost of admission for qualifying families.

WHAT STANDS IN THE WAY?

It is important to note that even with these opportunities and networks of support, the challenges that families on the Westside face are significant. These challenges are related to the broad-based, intergenerational poverty that enfolds the community and is the result of decades of segregation, discrimination, and divestment. Residents struggle to find and maintain adequate, self-sustaining employment; navigate social service programs; and attain self-sufficiency. Poverty has also led to a high prevalence of crime and other concerns, further undermining residents' quality of life. During the listening sessions, it was clear that for some Westside residents, it is difficult to imagine a safer, more prosperous Westside as a result of reinvestment.

THE FLIP SIDE OF REINVESTMENT

On the topic of reinvestment, several residents offered a cautionary perspective and shared suspicions about changing demographics and conditions in the community. Chief among these was the concern that with the arrival of middle-income white families could come pressure for current residents to move out. For many communities like the Westside, this experience can send the unfortunate message that positive changes happening around the community are not for the community, and reinforce the prevailing suspicion that positive change may be associated with people who do not look, speak, and live as they do.

One key informant shared this sense of pause, pointing out that there is evidence of the intent to retain the current population while attracting middle-income families, and yet wondering how realistic and well-supported that vision is. She raised important questions about the long-term sustainabil-

Key Findings to Consider

- Residents have concerns about being “pushed out” or excluded from the benefits of reinvestment.
- Disconnected and unresponsive systems and other community factors limit families' access to supportive programs and services.
- A high number of families are facing poverty or near-poverty conditions.
- Low birth rate, food insecurity, poor access to healthcare and other public health concerns undermine well-being.
- Violence, drug and sex trafficking, and overall blight create unsafe conditions and a lack of viable public spaces for children and families.



ity of a mixed community and what support might be needed and available for people who come from different social and economic backgrounds to live, work, and go to school together successfully. She cited other Atlanta communities where legacy and trusted community-based programs have eventually been pushed out despite the initial intent to retain these important pillars of the community. To ensure that current Westside families are the primary beneficiaries of positive change, community members emphasized the importance of listening and responding to the community through all phases of reinvestment, and of continually engaging the community in finding solutions.

“Doing a community assessment requires focus groups and looking at the population . . . annually, so that it’s not something that, ‘Okay, we’re going to put forth this idea,’ then five years down the road it looks totally different, or the intention is different, or the goal is different, but nobody knows it because we stopped paying attention.”

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING PROGRAMS

While a variety of programs exist to support children and families, many families referenced the complications of navigating these systems, and conveyed a sense of confusion about where to turn and how to qualify for services. Although local collective impact efforts have made important gains in creating supportive and navigable networks of support, key informants expressed that there is still work to be done to advance partnerships and support service providers in making the most appropriate connections for families.

In addition to information gaps, families’ access to programs and supports is often further limited by transportation challenges. Immobility presents an often insurmountable barrier when it comes to attending choice schools and early learning programs, and accessing public spaces, such as parks, museums, libraries, and other resources outside the immediate community. By some families’ assessments, public transit can be unreliable in their community, further complicating this issue. These realities demand that as child- and family-focused programs seek to expand their reach on the Westside, special attention must be paid to ensure that families are able to access them.

“We have a lack of communication. A lot of things are happening, and only certain people may know about what’s going on.”

“[The train] just sits there. But if that train was in another neighborhood, and we were another color, that train would not be just sitting there on the track. It’s an inconvenience. It’s an inconvenience to those who don’t have cars.”

ECONOMIC HARDSHIP AND RELATED RISK FACTORS

Overwhelmingly, families participating in listening sessions shared how difficult it can be to afford necessities, such as rent, food, and upkeep of their homes. Taking into consideration that the average median household income across the four focal communities is just over \$31,000 a year, it is not difficult to imagine the impact of these challenges.¹² Families also shared their frustrations related to limited economic mobility, citing a lack of jobs and steep cutoff points for income-based services.

Overall, families attribute these economic hardships to the lack of investment in their community. According to community members, local, family-oriented businesses have struggled to thrive on the

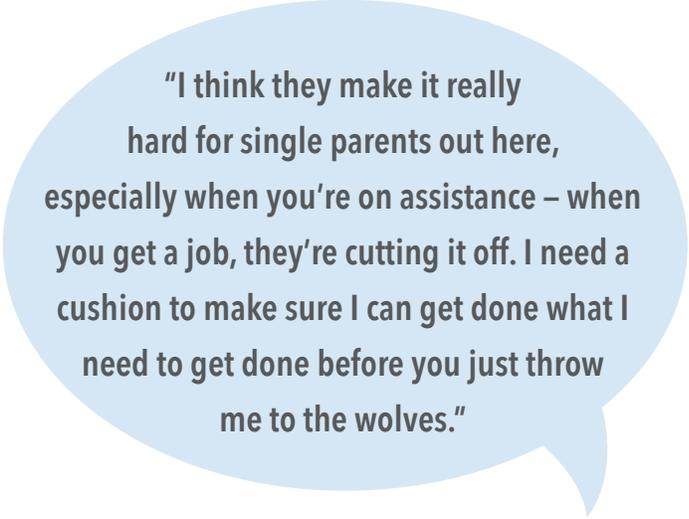
Westside, which has degraded the job market in the community, contributing to a nearly 9% unemployment rate across the focal communities (compared with 6.7% in Atlanta, and 5.3% in the state of Georgia).¹³

For young children, the impacts of poverty begin early and accumulate quickly. In fact, children on the Westside are more likely to be born prematurely or with low birth weight than children born in Atlanta as a whole.¹⁴ Delays in health-care services and poor health education further undermine children's health outcomes. Unstable housing, caregiver drug abuse and mental illness, poor nutrition, and overall family hardship can cause toxic levels of stress in young children, which can have lifelong physical and cognitive consequences.¹⁵

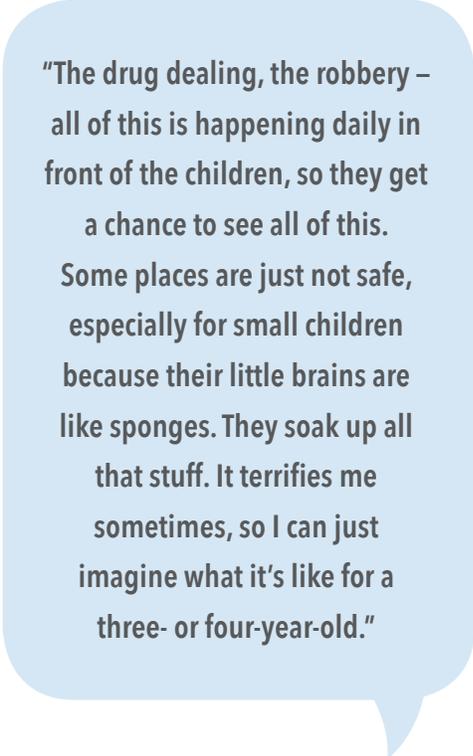
SAFETY AND SECURITY CONCERNS

As children grow, the odds do not appear to improve. Parents participating in listening sessions voiced that the prevalence of crime on the Westside gives them reason to fear for their children's safety. Data suggest there is a significant concentration of violent crime in the focal communities, and instances of aggravated assault and robbery are especially high.¹⁶ Drug and sex trafficking occur in the same spaces where children play, and public spaces are littered with trash and drug paraphernalia. For many Westside parents, the prevalence of these community issues confounds their efforts to protect their children both physically and psychologically.

Additionally, the lack of safe, welcoming public spaces for children often requires families to leave the community in order to have even the most basic opportunities for play and enrichment. While many families pointed to museums, cultural venues, and play spaces in other communities as viable opportunities, some shared regrets that there are not more opportunities for enrichment within the borders of the Westside community, and frustration about how far the community has to go to truly become a community of opportunity for families.



"I think they make it really hard for single parents out here, especially when you're on assistance – when you get a job, they're cutting it off. I need a cushion to make sure I can get done what I need to get done before you just throw me to the wolves."



"The drug dealing, the robbery – all of this is happening daily in front of the children, so they get a chance to see all of this. Some places are just not safe, especially for small children because their little brains are like sponges. They soak up all that stuff. It terrifies me sometimes, so I can just imagine what it's like for a three- or four-year-old."

WHAT MAKES SENSE FOR FAMILIES?

Like all families, those who participated in focus groups want their children to experience a high quality of life. Families desire safer communities where they can allow their children to play outside without worrying that they might be harmed or negatively influenced.

Overwhelmingly, families made it clear that they don't want their children to be limited by or to the community in which they currently live. Rather, they shared the belief that the community should open doors for children and provide them with a strong foundation. Families described wanting their children to have opportunities to broaden their perspectives, communicate with diverse others, and be successful in learning and in life.

Families felt strongly about their role in educating and instilling positive values in their children and expressed a strong sense of purpose around supporting and advocating for their children's learning. Along with owning this responsibility, parents expressed their desires for access to well-resourced schools, where investments in their children may reflect the investments made in children from more affluent communities. Specifically, they want their children to attend schools and participate in programs that are prepared to nurture the children's innate creativity and curiosity and provide the breadth and depth of experiences that they deserve.

Along with enthusiasm about taking part in planning and informing efforts, community members shared their impressions that lasting change on the Westside will come from ongoing and personal engagement at the community level. They shared a view of community residents both as beneficiaries of supportive services and as partners to continually promote widespread change.

To create viable opportunities for families on the Westside, it will be important to consider strategies

"I just don't want my kids to go outside and have to live with fear. I want them to go outside and be able to play with kids their age, but I don't want them to have to worry about somebody is going to kidnap me or I'm going to get shot today or anything like that."

"I think they need just some direction, some structure, something that will entertain their mind and get them excited about life and learning."

"You can't sit around and wait for the school to give your child the education he needs. You have to take the initiative yourself as a parent."

that address both the early learning needs of young children, and the complex economic and social barriers that exist for families and the community as a whole. A strong network of early learning programs focused on holistic programming for children and families would be well positioned to serve as a coordinated and responsive system of early care and education on the Westside, and to lend stability and sustainability to reinvestment efforts in the Westside community. It is critical that reinvestment efforts recognize and build on the strengths of families and the community, address the difficult realities that they face, and work to co-create with the community the inspiring possibilities that can be realized through aggressive investment and responsive programming. These are likely some of the most important keys to sustainable reinvestment, and to the overall success of Westside's youngest residents.

"All it takes is one person to have an opportunity – one person to have a positive experience so that someone else can be like, 'Oh, they did that for you? Let me go and see what they can do for me.' That's all it takes."



SUPPLY AND DEMAND



To further understand the strengths, opportunities, and barriers that exist on the Westside in supporting young children's learning and development, a more complete picture of families' needs and access to early childhood programming is key. This requires an intentional examination of both the current supply and the demand for early learning programs in the community. Understanding **demand** can help to shed light on where children are on the Westside, along with other factors influencing the need for child care, such as commuting patterns and families' workforce characteristics. Moreover, understanding demand can help to uncover some of the underlying considerations driving families' decisions about care. Gaining a deeper understanding of **supply** offers an opportunity to examine the existing capacity of early childhood providers in the community and identify potential gaps in families' access to these services. With this crucial information, WFF and AMBFF, in partnership with other early learning stakeholders, can help inform decision-making and target robust investments to reduce gaps, advance early childhood programming, and better meet the needs of children and families on the Westside.

WHERE ARE YOUNG CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ON THE WESTSIDE?

BASELINE DEMAND ESTIMATES

In order to get a grasp on the potential need for early childhood support on the Westside, it is important to first understand where children and families are located in the community. Census estimates reveal that a majority of children in the focal area reside in Vine City (35%) and Ashview Heights (29%), followed by English Avenue (25%) and Atlanta University Center (11%). Age distribution estimates suggest approximately 61% are infants and toddlers (children under three years old), making up the larger proportion of young children under age five in the focal community. Preschool-age children (three- and four-year-olds) account for the other 39%. When considering approaches to meet the needs of families with young children on the Westside, the key takeaways are that there may be more demand for early childhood services in Vine City and Ashview Heights, and that there is a significant need for supports focused on infants and toddlers as there are for preschoolers.

Key Findings to Consider

- The largest percentage of children under five in the focal area live in Vine City (35%) and Ashview Heights (29%), followed by English Avenue (25%) and then Atlanta University Center (11%).
- Infants and toddlers (children under three years old) make up the larger proportion of young children under five in the focal community (61%), compared with preschool age children (39%).
- Commuting patterns of families could shift the distribution of need for care, potentially resulting in a 215% increase in Atlanta University Center from 61 children to 192 children.
- Vine City is growing by the fastest rate each year (2.3%), closely followed by Ashview Heights (1.6%) and English Avenue (1.2%), with Atlanta University Center (0.4%) having the slowest annual population growth.

Figure 1. Estimated Number of Families and Children Under Age 5 by Westside Neighborhood

	CHILDREN UNDER 5		INFANTS & TODDLERS	PRE-K
English Avenue	138	25%	84	54
Vine City	194	35%	120	74
Atlanta University Center	61	11%	44	17
Ashview Heights	156	29%	89	67
FOCAL AREA	549	100%	337	212

Source: Reinvestment Fund, ATL ACCESS Map

MORE ESTIMATES AND PROJECTIONS

Understanding where children and families are living in the community is one piece of the puzzle. But what about the parent who commutes into the area needing child care to be able to go to work? And how might demand for care be changing over time? To fully understand the potential demand, it’s important to consider other factors that may influence the need for early childhood programming in the community.

Two possible realities offer additional insight into the potential extent of demand on the Westside: (1) commuter-adjusted demand factors in the impact of commuting patterns and workforce characteristics of families; and (2) projected demand looks at how the number of children may be growing over time to predict future need. Overall, these estimates provide for a more comprehensive picture of what may be the true need for child care on the Westside.

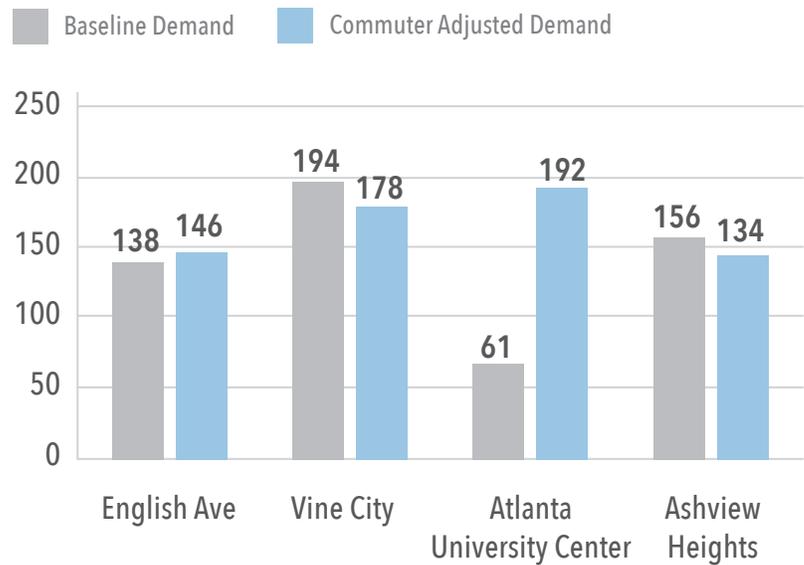
Commuter-Adjusted Demand

A recent study by the Reinvestment Fund of supply and demand for the five-county metro Atlanta region (Fulton, DeKalb, Clayton, Cobb, and Gwinnett Counties) offers a comprehensive picture of demand that accounts for journey-to-work-related patterns. The baseline demand of the number of children under the age of five, the commuting patterns of parents, and the workforce characteristics of parents were all integrated into the commuter-adjusted demand calculation. Based on study estimates, demand increases by 18% across the four neighborhoods when working patterns of families are taken into account. Using this rate of change as guidance, the data suggest that there would be approximately 650 children under age five in the focal area after adjusting for commuting.



When honing in on the four focal neighborhoods, some differences appear in how demand could be impacted when accounting for these additional factors. The most apparent is the significant increase in Atlanta University Center from 61 children (baseline demand) to 192 children (commuter-adjusted demand) — a 215% increase. This potential change may be a result of the neighborhood being home to several higher institutes of education, which are large employers and major commuter locales on the Westside. Overall, taking these factors into account could point to shifts and increases in demand above what can be seen by looking only at baseline data for children under age five.

Figure 2. Estimated Baseline and Commuter-Adjusted by Westside Neighborhood



Source: Reinvestment Fund, ATL ACCESS Map

Projected Demand

Along with understanding the existing level of demand from Westside children and families currently living and working in the community, it can be just as important to examine how children and families are growing over time to anticipate and effectively meet the need for child care both now and in the near future.

Looking forward, census estimates suggest the total population in the focal area will continue to grow at an average rate of 1.4% annually, similar to the estimated population change of 1.5% for the larger Atlanta metro area.¹⁷ Comparing across neighborhoods, the population in Vine City (2.3%), Ashview Heights (1.6%), and English Avenue (1.2%) may be increasing at a faster rate than in Atlanta University Center (0.4%).

Projecting this rate of change and continuing to apply demand estimates from the Reinvestment Fund, it can be further estimated that the number of children under age five living in the community might increase from 549 to 644 within 10 years — making for a total of 95 additional children. When adjusting for commuting patterns, there could be an increase of 94 children — from 650 to 744 — over the course of the 10-year span.

Continuing this projection to the neighborhood level ultimately sheds light on where additional capacity may be needed in the near future.

Figure 3. Projected Population Growth for Children Under Five on the Westside

	BASELINE DEMAND	COMMUTER-ADJUSTED DEMAND
2017	549	650
2022	595	695
2027	644	744
	+95 children	+94 children

Source: Reinvestment Fund, ATL ACCESS Map; Esri 2016–2021 USA Population Growth Estimates



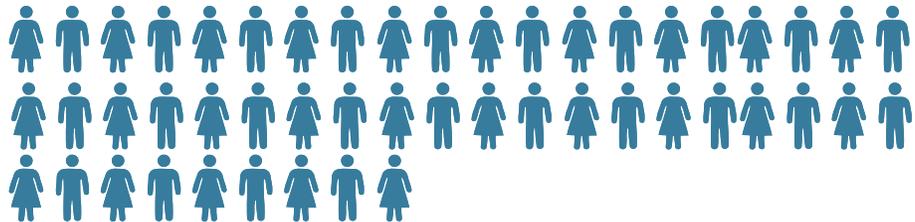
OVER THE NEXT 10 YEARS...

ENGLISH AVENUE



(increase of 18 children)

VINE CITY



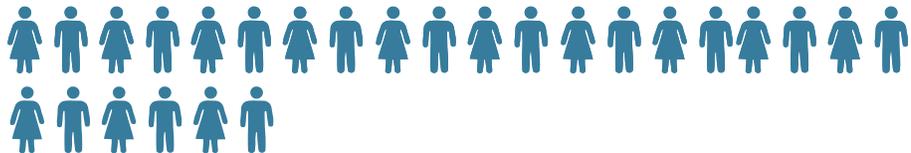
(increase of 49 children)

ATLANTA UNIVERSITY CENTER



(increase of 2 children)

ASHVIEW HEIGHTS



(increase of 26 children)

*Neighborhood level population projections are based on Baseline Demand estimates for children under five
Source: Reinvestment Fund, ATL ACCESS Map; Esri 2016–2021 USA Population Growth Estimates

It is important to note that publicly available data were not found to capture recent neighborhood changes due to community reinvestment efforts. Therefore, this analysis does not account for the potential shifts in the population and demographic characteristics of young children and families moving in or out of the focal neighborhood and the impact on supply and demand estimates. This is a key point of consideration that should also be factored into decision-making when developing plans to advance early childhood opportunities on the Westside.

WHAT DO FAMILIES WANT?

Analysis of data that numerically reflect demand is helpful to estimate where families are and project the level of effort required to meet their care needs in the future. But what it does not portray is the range of other factors that influence families' decision-making, ultimately impacting the ability of early childhood programs and other systemwide efforts to fully meet the needs of Westside families. Capturing family voices to tell the stories behind the numbers contributes to a more robust understanding of the underlying considerations and lived experiences driving families' decisions when choosing early childhood programming. Listening to families can also help to uncover additional services that families desire for their young children but that are not yet available in the local community. What is it that families really desire when choosing care?

FAMILIES ARE LOOKING FOR... AFFORDABLE OPTIONS

Above all, cost seems to be the major driver for families in choosing care. Overwhelmingly, families participating in listening sessions voiced how important it is to have affordable options for early childhood programming. When families were asked, "What matters most to your family when deciding on care for your child?" affordability ranked at the top of most families' lists. At the same time, families said that high costs were also a significant barrier in accessing care. These sentiments fall in line with what is widely known from national studies and local needs assessments of the cost of care for families — it is expensive.

For example, a recent national report of child care cost ranks Georgia as 11th in the nation when comparing the average annual cost of full-time center-based child care.¹⁸ To put this in perspec-

Key Findings to Consider

- **Affordability is a major driver for families in choosing care. Significant cost-related barriers exist due to limited access to affordable child care and challenges in qualifying for financial assistance. Family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care is often being used as an alternative.**
- **Accessibility is a high priority — families prefer care located in close proximity to where they live. Lengthy wait-lists, limited spaces for infants and toddlers, and unreliable transportation contribute to a lack of accessible options for families on the Westside.**
- **Quality is a key factor for families who are looking for trusted early childhood programs in the community to provide safe, engaging learning experiences for their children.**
- **Families portray early childhood programs as an important work support and partner in providing them with programs, classes, and resources to support their children's growth and learning. Barriers, such as limited hours of operation, lack of wraparound services, and the need for more culturally responsive programming, get in the way of meeting families' needs.**
- **Reliable information about early childhood programming is shared primarily through "word of mouth" as families depend on their strong social networks to learn about care for their children.**



"I think cost is the first barrier. There are places I want to send my kids to, but I can't because I can't afford it. That's always the number one thing. Are they in my price points? I'm not going to be looking further if they aren't in my price point. That's number one."

tive, the average cost of infant center-based care in Georgia is more than the annual cost of college tuition at a four-year college or more than a year of mortgage payments.¹⁹ Even when early childhood programming is located directly in their community or right across the street — if families can't afford it — child care is out of reach.

In order to afford child care, families in the focus groups shared their need to seek out financial assistance and the challenges they face with qualifying for and navigating systems to access these supports. Stories were shared among parents about the constraints of CAPS, a program designed to support low-income families with affording child care so they can go to work or school. For example, taking advantage of employment opportunities to pull in more resources for their families requires balancing the risk of becoming ineligible and losing this child care assistance (which is needed to continue working). Moreover, once families exceed income eligibility thresholds, there are a lack of financial supports, impacting families' ability to afford care that meets their needs. In addition to barriers due to income requirements, families also spoke of the limitations with CAPS in supporting educational advancement. Georgia is one of eight states where low-income families are not able to receive assistance to offset the cost of child care if enrolled in a four-year college program or two-year associate degree program.²⁰ Currently, the CAPS program only supports low-income parents if attending a technical or vocational school, or a minor parent (under 21 years of age) attending school or in a GED program — although there has been recent movement to improve this policy by including associate's degrees.

"We need an affordable daycare center, we've been in a community where you basically have on the ground of this community a daycare center, but we don't have our kids there."



Families additionally spoke of the significant benefits of free early childhood programs, such as the Georgia Pre-K Program and Head Start. At the same time, families did not express a wholly positive orientation toward no-fee services. While these programs offer support in many important ways, some families described a stigma associated with using them, plus the assumption that they shouldn't expect no-fee services to also be high quality. Although there was mention of families making a point to challenge this viewpoint, in the end, this perception may be impacting these programs' ability to connect with children and families in the community, particularly with the low-income families that they are designed to serve.

The use of family, friend, and neighbor care (FFN) was referenced often as an alternative care option when center-based care was found to be too costly or did not meet families' other needs, such as hours of operation, location, and quality. Families seemed to also gravitate toward FFNs to provide care for their young children as a safe and trusted resource – a valuable commodity in a community where this is not always an aspect of available care. At the same time, families reflected on the potential learning and social-emotional drawbacks of children being cared for in an environment where there may be less of a formalized focus on cognitive development and interactions with peers.

"Family, friend, and neighbor care is always going to exist. It doesn't matter what's put in place, there will always be an aunt or a neighbor or a grandmother who live there in a community, who takes care of kids because she doesn't want to work outside her home, there might be some other barriers presenting itself where she cannot work outside a home, or because child care is now so expensive for some families that they will never be able to afford it, so they go to an informal provider because it's more reasonable, or even free."



FAMILIES ARE LOOKING FOR... ACCESSIBLE SPACES

Accessibility and availability seemed to go hand in hand when families reflected on their needs for their children's care. When choosing early childhood programs, families spoke about placing high priority on location and preferred care settings that were in close proximity to where they lived.

Transportation barriers were mentioned as a significant contributor driving families' desires for early childhood programs in the local community. As previously stated, nearly 35% of families in the focal area do not have access to a vehicle. Additionally, challenges with the reach and reliability of the Metro Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) makes public transportation a less than ideal option for travel. Families additionally discussed the overlap between transportation challenges and the demographics of caregivers in the community — a significant number being young mothers and grandparents. Families expressed that transportation barriers may be even more significant for this segment of the population, placing even more importance on care being located in the local neighborhood.

Moreover, Westside families find themselves faced not only with limited accessibility to care, but also with a lack of available spaces for children in local early childhood programs. Families voiced their frustration with the lack of capacity to serve families that were searching for care and at being put on lengthy wait-lists. As previously mentioned, families may often be left with little choice but to stay home with their children or to find alternative care arrangements with family, friends, or neighbors. Families particularly discussed the limited availability of infant and toddler spaces and the heightened difficulties of navigating an under-resourced system for their youngest children.

"I think that they should have a bigger selection of early childhood education. It doesn't make sense that kids have to go on a waiting list and then the time passes them by, and they never had the chance to experience what school was before they hit Kindergarten. There should always be a slot. They should not go on waiting lists. It should always be a slot where these kids could attend this program."

"If you want to really prepare them, put the center in the community that needs it, make it free and provide quality education. Those three things will solve the problem."

"That transportation piece is just really vital, especially for younger mothers, even grandparents that are raising children who don't have transportation. That's really hard when you see the older grandmothers and [grand]fathers walking with their grandbabies and trying to get them to school. That's really hard on them."

FAMILIES ARE LOOKING FOR... QUALITY PROGRAMS

Various aspects of quality early childhood programming were shared by families as another key factor in deciding on care for their young children. The term “quality” holds a lot of weight in the early childhood field, yet there is no consistent definition that has been accepted across the board. Significant efforts, as with Quality Rated (Georgia’s Quality Rating and Improvement System), have resulted in the identification of indicators to help clarify what quality means for both early childhood programs, as well as for families in the state. But what exactly does “quality” mean to families in the Westside community?

Quality means safety. Families in the listening sessions described several features of structural quality (e.g., health and safety, class size, adult-to-child ratios, and staff qualifications) as important when choosing early childhood programs. Families also shared disheartening stories of what it feels like having to choose a place for care that did not feel safe and examples of young children who have been physically and emotionally afflicted — stories that all convey the real danger families on the Westside perceive their children may be in on a daily basis.

Quality means trust. Very much aligned with safety, families are looking for programs or people they can entrust with the care of their children. Families reflected on the fragility of young children and the importance of the early years as further confirmation of the importance of finding trusted care. Warm interactions with teachers along with continuity in care were lifted up as important factors in building trusting relationships with families. Some parents discussed how they had to seek out support from trusted family members, friends, and neighbors in their community to provide care for their children when more formalized care options did not meet their needs.

Quality means engaging learning opportunities. Families referenced the importance of early childhood programs to support children in developing cog-

“I’m looking is it clean? Does the facility look nice? Do they have good teachers that are there? Is it being run well, management, the reputation? Are they certified? ‘m looking at some of those qualification points.”



nitive skills, such as those related to language and literacy (e.g., “recognize letters and know letter sounds,” “being able to read,” and “being able to write their name”); and mathematics (e.g., “being able to count up to 100”). Development of social, emotional, and communication skills was also significant to families who described wanting their children to have opportunities to spend time “together in groups of kids.” Programs using a curriculum also played a role for families in feeling their children’s development is effectively supported to prepare them for school and future success. Further, families spoke about the connection between cost of care and the early learning experiences provided to children in programs —

where the higher-cost programs equate to higher-quality opportunities. With these more costly programs feeling out of reach, families are not able to access the level of care and education they desire for their children now and the benefits it will have for their future.

Quality means diverse experiences. As previously mentioned, families overwhelmingly made it clear that they do not want their children to feel limited by or to the community in which they currently live, but that the community should open doors for children and provide them with a solid foundation. This feeling was no different when families spoke about their desires for their children’s care. Families discussed the importance of being exposed to cultural institutions, such as libraries, museums, the zoo, and theaters, as an essential part of what they hoped for their children’s education. Families also reflected on the lack of racial/ethnic and linguistic diversity in the local community. While wanting to simultaneously instill pride in their children for being of color and a part of the historic Westside community, families acknowledge the benefits that come from being exposed to the range of diversity reflected by the outside community. Moreover, families voiced their frustrations at the inequities they faced with the lack of enrichment opportunities currently available to their children in the local community, further reinforcing for some the prevailing feelings of distrust of those in decision-making power.

“I really prefer that I can afford to put them someplace where they’re actually going to learn, and they’re going to be set up for success in Kindergarten... That is my biggest frustration when I look at the difference between one place versus another place, and it all comes down to do you have money or not.”

“I just feel like living on the Westside, they’re treating our kids poorly because they feel like they shouldn’t have to expose our kids to things when they should. All kids should be held equally and have equal accessibility to everything, and they don’t.”



FAMILIES ARE LOOKING FOR... SUPPORT AND PARTNERSHIPS

Emerging from listening sessions was a clear emphasis on the role of families as leaders in supporting their children's healthy development, learning, and future success. "Parents are a child's first teacher" was a phrase echoed often. From being volunteers in early childhood programs to reinforcing learning at home, families reflected on the benefits — both academic and social — of being actively involved in their children's education. Additionally, families discussed the need for and impact of strong, engaged parents serving as advocates for their children. Families taking on leadership roles and becoming actively involved in early childhood program and communitywide decision-making can be a powerful force for change.

"It's up to the parent first. We are our child's first teacher. If we're not the ones advocating for them... nobody will."

When faced with significant barriers to access care, families also shared impassioned stories of how they have had to take matters into their own hands to educate their children at home. With resilience and determination, families described their ability to leverage the limited resources in the community, such as with online resources and phone apps, to support their children's development.

Although many reflected on the importance of the early years, there is a perception that not all families in the community fully understand to the same extent the potential impact and benefits of early learning and related programming. Solutions were offered by families (and key informants alike) about the importance and need for additional programs, classes, and resources to strengthen parenting skills and provide families with developmentally appropriate strategies to support their children's growth and learning. At the same time, some parents expressed the potential stigma or judgment associated with families receiving parenting support. These responses point to the significance of offering strengths-based and culturally responsive programming that builds on families' "funds of knowledge," or values, experiences, and skills.

"So now we're in situations where we can't go to the job because we don't have the child to go to the school... we have to wait five years of our lives."

"There's people who have alternative work schedules. Daycare is 9 to 5... There isn't proper or a nice place where you can send your kid that has that kind of alternate hours. That is a huge gap."

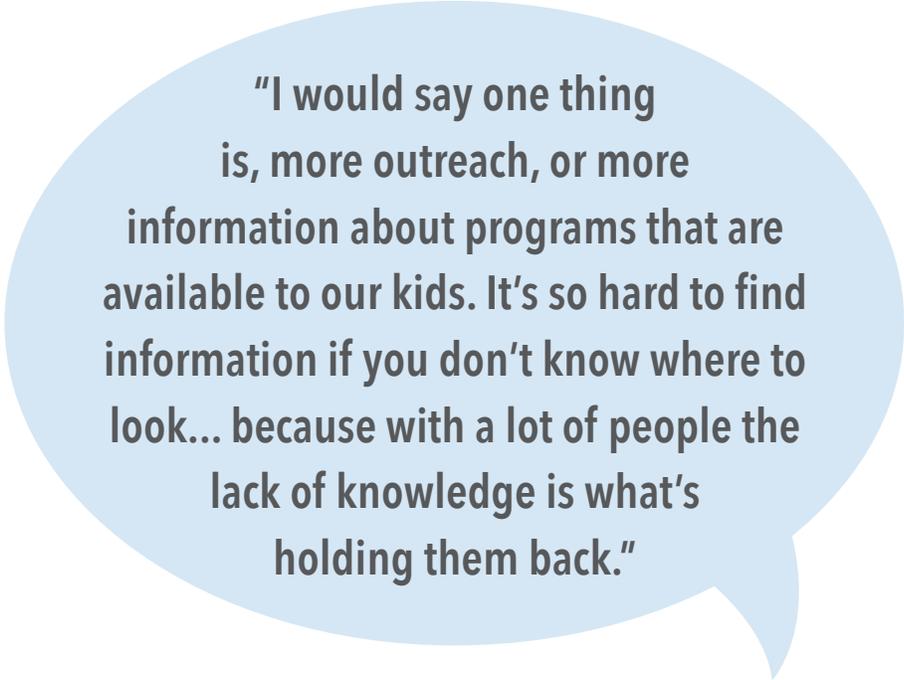


Families additionally spoke of early childhood programs as a critical support needed for them to go to work and financially support their families. Research confirms this statement, with a recent economic analysis estimating the annual earnings of families supported by the availability of early childhood education in Georgia to total \$24 billion.²¹ Families discussed the significant impacts that limited access to care for their children has on their ability to obtain and maintain employment, impeding their ability to secure the resources needed to care for themselves and their families. To add some context, a recent national report reveals, “45% of parents report being absent from work due to childcare breakdowns, resulting in an average of approximately 4.3 days of work missed every six months. That translates to \$28.9 billion in wages lost by families that do not have access to paid leave and affordable child care.”²² This predicament becomes even more complex for families with nontraditional work hours. During the listening sessions, families discussed the considerable need for care that is flexible and provides support for families outside of the typical program day and school year. As families are faced with balancing work schedules and care for their children, programs providing options for wraparound support (i.e., before- and after-school programs), 24-hour care, and summer programming become even more valuable.

“Parenting classes. Not just regular parenting class, but the leadership that’s going to impact the entire family. We’re not just going to deal with the parents, we’re going to deal with the children too, and everybody is in the same place together. It builds on that family unit. That’s how it’s supposed to be. Some people may not know what that looks like, but you can set the stage and show them what that looks like. The kids are not just going home all powered up and lose it, but the whole family is being impacted. We have to do something.”

FAMILIES ARE LOOKING FOR... RELIABLE INFORMATION

“Word of mouth” was lifted up as the main source of information for connecting families with early childhood programs along with other supports in the community. Many families additionally underscored the importance of receiving information in person and from a trusted source. Moreover, parents shared about how supportive family networks and generational ties are used to pass down information. Pairing this with programs that have historically been trusted centerpieces of the community makes for a continual pipeline of support on the Westside.



“I would say one thing is, more outreach, or more information about programs that are available to our kids. It’s so hard to find information if you don’t know where to look... because with a lot of people the lack of knowledge is what’s holding them back.”

Finding power in strong personal networks, families also talked about leveraging this approach to overcome existing barriers in communication. For example, while there are various child- and family-focused services available in the community, many parents discussed the disconnect with information about programming often not reaching families. To that end, elaborate familial and social networks are being used by families to compensate for a system that hasn’t figured out the best approaches to successfully reach them.

Flyers were additionally mentioned as an extension to the “word of mouth” approach. Comments from families during the listening sessions suggested that flyers alone may be a helpful tool when shared in places families frequent. However, flyers may become even more effective when coupled with a trusted voice from the community.

Some mentioned inadequate supports for families whose native language is other than English as a specific barrier to accessing information about early childhood supports. Although a majority of children and families on the Westside are English speakers (89%), there do exist pockets of families who are native Spanish speakers (4%) or speak another language to their children at home (7%).²³ And as a result of systems geared toward the majority language in the community, these linguistically diverse families are potentially being excluded from helpful information-sharing and outreach strategies.

Online platforms — such as social media, web searches, and email — emerged as another method of information sharing. At the same time, limited access to technology was mentioned as a significant barrier, resulting in some families being disconnected from the same networks others greatly benefit from. Describing the impact of this isolation, families continued to underscore the importance of in-person and community-focused outreach.

WHERE ARE THE EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS?

As Georgia continues to be a national leader in administering a mixed-delivery approach to publicly funded early childhood education (i.e., serving young children with public funds in public schools, private for-profit providers, private non-profit providers, Head Start programs, colleges and universities, and military bases), it has allowed for local communities to leverage the capacity of all sectors to provide early care and education and for families to choose programming that best meets their needs.²⁴ Child care learning centers, school-based pre-K programs, and Early/Head Start programs make up the assortment of regulated child care options for young children and their families on the Westside. But what exactly does this mean? With this mix of supports, are there enough slots in programs in the community (supply) to meet the varying needs of families (demand)?

SUPPLY ACROSS THE FOCAL AREA

Based on reported capacity, there are a total of 449 slots in regulated programs across the focal community. There are 341 slots located in Ashview Heights and another 108 spaces located in Vine City. Just as important as understanding where the slots are is understanding where they are not. Although baseline data show that approximately 199 children reside in the English Avenue and Atlanta University Center neighborhoods, there are currently no regulated early childhood program options for families in those neighborhoods.

To add to this context, 45% of families in the state of Georgia live in what is referred to as a “child care desert” — a similar concept to the commonly used term “food desert.” This terminology, adopted recently by the Center for American Progress and Child Care Aware of America, offers a working definition to identify areas with little or no access to quality child care. Their analysis defines child care deserts as follows:

“neighborhoods or communities that are either lacking any child care options or have so few child care providers that there are more than three children for every licensed child care slot.”²⁵

Key Findings to Consider

- There are a total of 449 slots in regulated early childhood programs – 341 slots are located in Ashview Heights and the other 108 spaces are in Vine City.
- There are no regulated early childhood program options for families in the English Avenue and Atlanta University Center neighborhoods.
- Gaps in supply – approximately 200 slots or 30% of unmet need – are seen when considering commuter-adjusted demand for the focal neighborhood.
- Reported enrollment suggests high utilization rates of slots in programs (average of 92%), although pockets of available space do exist, potentially signaling the need for additional support to families and programs.
- Data reveal significant gaps in available slots serving infants and toddlers, as well as opportunities to increase access for families by reducing barriers with transportation and hours of operation.

DEFINING EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

For the purposes of this report, the term “early childhood programs” refers to all licensed or regulated early care and education programs serving children ages birth through five.

Child care learning centers are programs operated by a person, society, agency, corporation, institution, or group that receives pay for group care. The child care learning center cares for 19 or more children under the age of 14 for less than 24 hours per day.

Family child care learning homes are programs that operate in a private residential home less than 24 hours per day and provide care for three to six children under the age of 14 for pay.

Georgia’s Pre-K Program is a voluntary, universal educational program for Georgia’s four-year-olds to prepare children for kindergarten. The program is funded by the Georgia Lottery for Education. Georgia’s Pre-K classrooms are housed in public schools and in private child care learning centers.

Early Head Start and Head Start sites are federally funded programs that provide comprehensive early childhood and family development services to children from birth to five years old, pregnant women, and families.

Nonlicensed, nonregulated care or “FFN care,” such as care provided by grandparents, other nonparental relatives, friends, or neighbors, is not included in the quantitative supply analysis, as there is no direct measure of this capacity.

Private schools, which are also nonlicensed, nonregulated providers of early care and education, are not included in this supply analysis.

Source: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning Report, Economic Impact of the Early Care and Education Industry in Georgia: <http://www.decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/EconImpactReport.pdf>.

Key findings in national reports reveal that urban areas where the median family income is below average — as seen with Westside demographic data — are disproportionately the location of child care deserts. This suggests that the Westside community may be contending with challenges mirrored across the country.

A comparison of the total capacity of 449 slots with existing demand suggests there is not an adequate number of slots to meet the baseline demand, with 549 children under age five across the focal community. And accounting for commuter-adjusted demand, there is an even larger gap, with approximately 200 of 650 total children without access to an early childhood program — meaning that 30% of need is unmet. (It is important to note that while data suggest that significant differences exist when comparing supply and demand, it may not be necessary to fully bridge the 30% gap; some families, even with access to early childhood programming, will still choose to care for children in their homes. However, public data are not available that accurately quantify families’ decision-making in the community regarding selecting self-care by choice and not necessity. Overall, it is clear from the data, coupled with the anecdotal stories from families about lengthy wait-lists for programs, that a considerable level of need is going unmet in the Westside community.)

Figure 4. Early Childhood Programs on the Westside by Neighborhood, Program Type, and Capacity

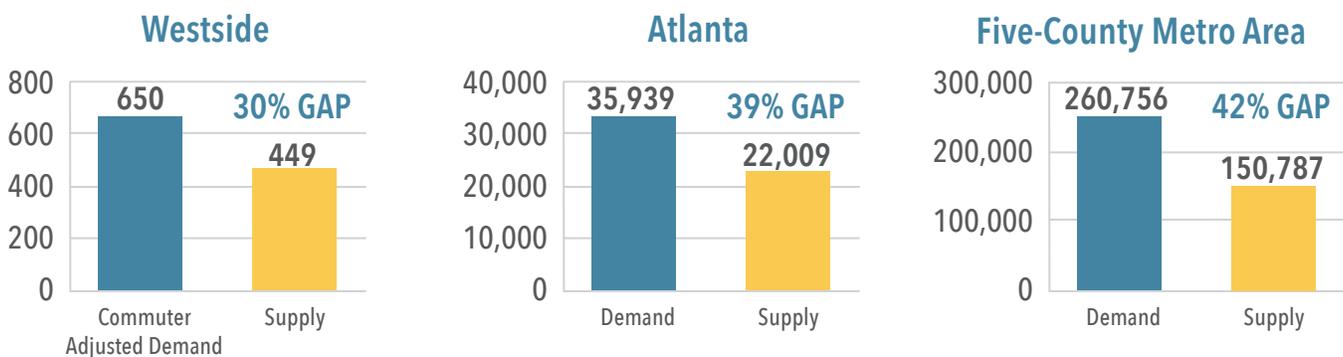
PROGRAM NAME	NEIGHBORHOOD	TYPE OF PROGRAM	REPORTED CAPACITY	REPORTED ENROLLMENT	I/T SLOTS	PRE-K SLOTS
KIDazzle Child Care - Lowery	Vine City	Child Care Learning Center	(60*)	---	---	---
Hollis Innovation Academy	Vine City	Local School System	40	35		40
Grandma's Child Development Center	Vine City	Family Child Care Learning Home	(6*)	---	---	---
Northwest Youth Power at Magnolia	Vine City	Child Care Learning Center	68	41	36	32
Grow Montessori School	Ashview Heights	Child Care Learning Center	29	29	12	17
M. Agnes Jones Elementary School	Ashview Heights	Local School System	40	38		40
Dean Rusk YMCA Head Start Academy	Ashview Heights	Child Care Learning Center	447	272	32	240
FOCAL AREA			449	415	80	369

*Capacity for the child care learning center and family child care learning home are based on licensed capacity. This capacity is not being factored into total supply, as reports suggest these early childhood programs are closing or do not have children currently enrolled.

Source: DECAL's Bright from the Start Database; Reinvestment Fund, ATL ACCESS Map; Westside Early Childhood Needs Assessment Program Leader Survey

Unmet need is a challenge that is not unique to the Westside and is an alarming trend seen locally in Atlanta and across the Five-County Metro Area.

Figure 5. Estimated Supply and Demand on the Westside, Atlanta and Five-County Metro Area



Source: Reinvestment Fund, ATL ACCESS Map; Westside Early Childhood Needs Assessment Program Leader Survey

Furthermore, reported enrollment in Westside early childhood programs offers a snapshot in time to improve understanding of how families may be accessing the available slots in Westside programs. Across all early childhood providers, utilization is generally high, with an average of 92% of existing slots being filled and a range of utilization across providers. Although most early childhood programs are operating close to or at capacity (90% and above), data reveal pockets of available space to further enroll children. This analysis points to opportunities to strengthen supports for families to enroll their children in these spaces (e.g., improving outreach strategies, reducing barriers to access, etc.) and supports for programs (e.g., improving accessibility, affordability, quality, etc.) to ensure available space is being maximized in the community. This analysis also points to the benefits that could come from centralizing capacity, enrollment, and utilization data to share this information in an ongoing way as a strategy to monitor progress toward closing gaps in supply and demand.

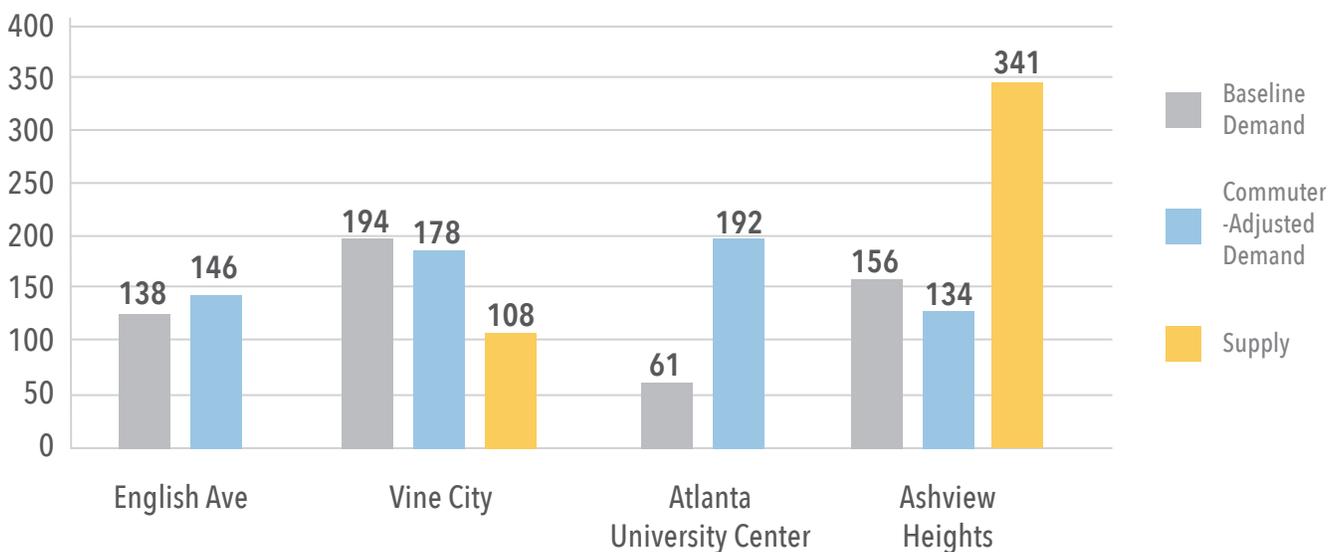
SUPPLY BY NEIGHBORHOOD

Looking closely at the neighborhood level, disparities become even more apparent. As previously mentioned, families living in English Avenue and Atlanta University Center are left without access to regulated early childhood programs in their local communities, which clearly fit the definition of a child care desert. In other words, 36% of children in the focal area must travel outside of their neighborhood to participate and benefit from these formalized early learning supports. Early childhood programs located in Vine City offer some capacity to serve young children and their families; however, estimated supply data suggest it may not be enough. Comparing the highest projected demand of 194 children in the neighborhood with the 108 slots for care results in a difference of 86 children, meaning 44% of need is unmet.

Significant progress will soon be made in closing this gap with the establishment of the YMCA of Metropolitan Atlanta Leadership and Learning Center in Vine City, projected to be completed early in 2019. The Center will serve between 70 and 90 children in Head Start, state-funded pre-K, and traditional fee-for-service preschool. Priority for these spaces will be given to children and families living in Vine City, English Avenue, Castleberry Hill, and other Westside neighborhoods. The Center will additionally serve as a regional innovation and training lab, providing support for YMCA early childhood programs and more than 1,500 YMCA staff throughout the southeast. Members of the surrounding communities, along with local nonprofits, will also have access to the facility.²⁷

As home to a large YMCA Head Start site plus one of Atlanta Public Schools' Georgia Pre-K program sites, Ashview Heights becomes the only neighborhood in the focal area where the existing capacity may be meeting the demand of children and families in the community. In all demand scenarios, the 341 existing slots meet and supersede the potential need for child care in the area. These estimates suggest that the distribution of slots across the community may be slightly skewed. And although there may be additional capacity to serve young children in Ashview Heights, barriers (e.g., transportation challenges, competing family demands, etc.) might preclude families from outside this neighborhood from accessing and benefiting from these slots.

Figure 6. Estimated Supply and Demand by Westside Neighborhood



Source: Reinvestment Fund, ATL ACCESS Map; Westside Early Childhood Needs Assessment Program Leader Survey

OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF SUPPLY

Examining other characteristics of supply can also offer a deeper understanding of early childhood program accessibility and the extent to which families’ needs are being met on the Westside.

Infant and Toddler Slots

In listening sessions, families shared stories of the difficulties they face in finding early childhood programming, particularly for their infants and toddlers. Reported capacity data further confirm the significant gaps in slots serving children under three. Breaking supply and demand data down by age, estimates reveal that there seems to be abundant capacity to serve children of pre-K age — most likely a result of the major commitment to public pre-K in the state of Georgia. More attention may need to be paid to the distribution of slots and need for additional supports to reduce barriers to access for families. At the same time, data suggest that slots in early childhood programs are able to serve only 24% of infants and toddlers in the community. This finding highlights the immediate need to increase the availability of Westside programs serving infants and toddlers with the same sense of urgency and intentionality as has been done with public pre-K.

Figure 7. Estimated Supply and Demand by Age of Children and Westside Neighborhood

	I/T CHILDREN	I/T SLOTS	+/-	PRE-K CHILDREN	PRE-K SLOTS	+/-
English Avenue	84	0	-84	54	0	-54
Vine City	120	36	-84	74	72	-2
Atlanta University Center	44	0	-44	17	0	-17
Ashview Heights	89	44	-45	67	297	+230
FOCAL AREA	337	80	-257	212	369	+157

Source: Reinvestment Fund, ATL ACCESS Map; Westside Early Childhood Needs Assessment Program Leader Survey

Transportation

Families also mentioned transportation barriers as a major factor impacting access to early childhood programs in the local community. More than half of the providers on the Westside have added transportation services to their available supports for families, but these services are not consistent across all programs. With the distribution of slots across the community being skewed, especially in Ashview Heights, examining opportunities to reduce this significant barrier for families could greatly contribute to increasing access to early childhood programming for more young children on the Westside.

Hours of Operation

As an important work support, families additionally discussed the need for care with operating hours similar to families’ hours of employment. A clear strength on the Westside is that all providers offer full-time care of at least six hours per day of programming. In addition to the core program day, all providers also offer before- and after-school options during the school and work week. This is a significant benefit for families, making it easier for them to obtain and maintain employment. At the same time, families mentioned the need for child care options for those with non-traditional work hours, such as during the evening, overnight, and weekend hours. Workers from low-income communities — like many families on the Westside — are more likely to have nonstandard work hours and have to bear the brunt of the associated challenges. Typically, care for these families is provided by family child care learning homes or FFNs.²⁸ With reports suggesting that the family child care learning home in the focal area is no longer enrolling children, the only option for Westside families working nonstandard hours is to find a trusted family, friend, or neighbor to care for their children. In working to advance early learning opportunities for children, strengthening supports for both family child care learning homes and FFNs may help to ensure all families have the support they need to be productive contributors to the workforce and community.

COST OF CARE



The cost of care is a significant factor and potentially the biggest barrier to families in accessing available care. On the Westside, families shared stories of the major challenges they face in finding affordable early childhood programs in their community. And while some families are eligible to receive publicly funded financial assistance, barriers exist in qualifying for and navigating systems to access these supports. This predicament is not unique to the focal neighborhoods but is an alarming trend seen across the state and nationally. Taking a closer look to determine the extent to which cost of care is impacting families on the Westside and identifying gaps in available supports could yield helpful information to maximize actions and investments on the Westside.

WHAT IS THE COST OF CARE FOR FAMILIES ON THE WESTSIDE?

Research on the cost of care in the state of Georgia confirms that it is very expensive for families. For pre-K age children, annual child care costs are roughly \$6,500 per year and increase to more than \$7,600 for center-based infant care. This translates to child care being one of the largest expenses families face — with infant care costing almost as much as average rent and more than tuition for a four-year public college.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), “child care is affordable if it costs no more than 10% of a family’s income.”²⁹ By this standard, typical families with the state’s median income of \$55,411 would spend 14% of their annual salary on care for their infant. And families with two children face steeper costs with child care for an infant and four-year-old costing \$14,144 — 26% of the salary of a family making the median income.³⁰

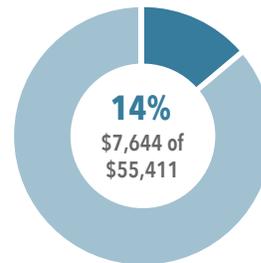
On the Westside, child care is even less affordable, as the median income for families is considerably less at \$31,408.³¹ This means families would be spending 24% of their annual salary on care for their infant, and 45% of their income on care for two children. Moreover, census estimates suggest that more than half (53%) of families with children under five are at or below the poverty line on the Westside, as compared with 31% in the state. And of these families, minimum wage workers, who are those considered to be in deep poverty making closer to \$15,000, would be required to spend 51% of their annual income on infant care.

Moreover, reported child care rates for Westside programs reveal that actual costs for families can range up to \$11,200 a year for pre-K age children and \$12,400 a year for infants and toddlers, putting early childhood programming further out of reach for many families. In all scenarios, finding affordable child care is a clear challenge for a majority of families with young children in the focal community.

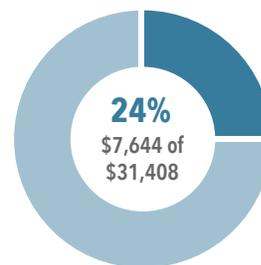
HOW COSTLY IS CHILD CARE FOR FAMILIES?

Infant care costs as share of income on the Westside and in Georgia

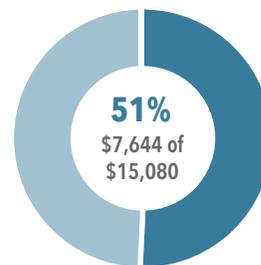
Current HHS affordability standard



For family with median income in Georgia



For family with median income on Westside



For minimum wage worker

Source: Reinvestment Fund, ATL ACCESS
Map: Economic Policy Institute

WHAT COST-RELATED SUPPORTS ARE AVAILABLE?

Publicly funded supports are available for families to make use of as financial assistance to access care, and at the same time for early childhood providers to fund operation of their programs. Information collected during this needs assessment suggests the following federal and state funds are being utilized on the Westside.

PUBLICLY FUNDED SUPPORTS

Early Head Start and Head Start

Early Head Start and Head Start are federally funded comprehensive early childhood programs serving children from birth to age five from low-income households, including children with disabilities. Early Head Start serves children from birth to age three and pregnant women to increase healthy prenatal outcomes, support young children's early development, and promote health family functioning. Head Start serves children age three to five years. Together, Early Head Start and Head Start promote school readiness through a set of comprehensive services, including supports for education; medical, dental, and mental health; social and emotional well-being; disabilities; nutrition; and family engagement. Program participation is free for children and families meeting eligibility requirements. Federal Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines, updated annually, are used to determine income eligibility; families must be at or below the federal poverty level (FPL) to be eligible for program participation. A family is also categorically eligible for Early Head Start or Head Start if the child is homeless, in foster care, or receiving public assistance, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).³² On the Westside, Early Head Start and Head Start are offered through the YMCA with a mixture of traditional program sites (Dean Rusk), partnership sites with community-based centers (Northwest Youth Power), and APS school partners (Hollis Innovation Academy and M. Agnes Jones Elementary School).

Key Findings to Consider

- Publicly funded supports are available for families and programs through Early/Head Start, Child Care and Parent Services, and Georgia Pre-K Program.
- Restrictive income eligibility requirements make it challenging for families to be employed without losing financial assistance.
- Even if eligible families are able to successfully navigate the system to connect with financial supports, limited funding for federal and state programs results in not all families being served.
- Few options are available for financial assistance when the income of families rises above eligibility thresholds, particularly for families with infants and toddlers.
- Programs are required to negotiate regulatory differences among multiple funding streams to adequately fund programs and keep costs low for families.



Child Care and Parent Services (CAPS)

As the state agency responsible for meeting the early care and education needs of Georgia's children and their families, DE-CAL administers the child care program for low-income families funded by the federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). In Georgia, the CCDF-funded child care assistance program is known as Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS). The purpose of CAPS is to provide access to high-quality and affordable early learning environments for families who are considered low income; support DE-CAL's efforts in increasing positive school readiness outcomes; and assist families in achieving and maintaining self-sufficiency



by providing financial supports for child care costs. Financial assistance is offered to eligible families through vouchers that help to subsidize child care costs so that families are responsible for only a portion of the total amount. To be eligible, families must meet income and state-approved activity requirements, such as participation in paid employment and enrollment in an education program.

Beginning on August 1, 2016, Georgia instituted a statewide funding restriction for the CAPS program to ensure that it is able to follow the new federal guidelines as mandated for CCDF. In order to maintain the state's CAPS funding without terminating financial assistance to families currently in the program, it was necessary to prioritize new families enrolling in CAPS based on need. As of that date, new families applying need to both meet eligibility requirements and be a member of a priority group as defined in CAPS to be eligible for child care assistance. To that end, families must fall into one of the following priority groups to receive CAPS funding:

- Child Protective Services (CPS) and court ordered supervision cases
- Children enrolled in a Georgia Lottery funded Pre-K class
- Children in Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) Custody
- Children with special needs
- Families with very low income as defined by CAPS (currently 100% of FPL)
- Grandparents raising grandchildren (GRG)
- Minor parents
- Persons experiencing domestic violence
- Persons who are considered homeless
- Persons who have experienced a natural disaster
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) applicants or recipients, or families transitioning from TANF ³³

On the Westside, CAPS funding plays a major role in supporting the early learning opportunities available to children. Many families are potentially eligible to apply for this financial assistance, particularly as estimates suggest that 53% of families are either at or below FPL. Additionally, almost all programs are accepting vouchers from families in order to provide early childhood programming and/or wraparound services to children in the local community.

Georgia Pre-K Program

The Georgia Pre-K program is a partnership between DECAL and public schools or child care learning centers. The program is a state lottery-funded school readiness educational program serving children who are four years of age on September 1 of the current school year and who are Georgia residents. Georgia Pre-K programs are funded to offer a full 6.5-hour instructional day, five days a week, 180 days a year. Participating programs are also required to meet standards related to program quality, such as choosing an approved curriculum to use along with the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS), as a guide for high-quality instruction in classrooms.



The Georgia Pre-K program is free to all four-year-old children, regardless of parental income. According to DECAL, since participation in Georgia Pre-K is voluntary for programs, there may not be enough spaces in every community for all four-year-olds who wish to enroll. Due to the limited number of seats, many participating providers use a lottery process to manage waiting lists and fill slots in their programs.³⁴ On the Westside, most providers also choose to participate in the Georgia Pre-K program, including APS (Hollis Innovation Academy and M. Agnes Jones Elementary School) and child care learning centers (Dean Rusk YMCA and Northwest Youth Power).

MAJOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PUBLIC FUNDING SOURCES ON THE WESTSIDE

PROGRAM	FUNDING SOURCE	ELIGIBILITY	DESCRIPTION
Early/Head Start	Federal (with optional state supplement)	Family income must be at or below FPL or categorically eligible	Funds child care slots for children from birth to five from low-income families in addition to comprehensive health and family services
Child Care and Parent Services (CAPS)	Federal and State	Families must meet income and activity eligibility requirements and be a member of a priority group as defined in CAPS	Provides financial assistance to low-income families to access child care so they can work or attend a job training or educational program
Georgia Pre-K Program	State	Children must meet age and residency eligibility requirements: four years of age on or before September 1 of the school year and must be a resident of Georgia	A voluntary, lottery-funded educational program for Georgia's four-year-olds to prepare children for kindergarten

Sources: DECAL, Bright from the Start Website

BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Triangulating the identification of publicly funded supports being used on the Westside with additional information about eligibility and demographics of families in the community reveals the potential barriers and opportunities that exist. Based on income eligibility, estimates show that half of the families on the Westside (53% or 188 families) would be eligible for Early/Head Start, CAPS, and Georgia Pre-K. The other 47% of families (169 families) are also eligible for Georgia Pre-K and for CAPS, if they both meet the income and activity requirements and fall into another priority category (outside of the low-income designation).



Figure 8. Families' Access to Publicly Funded Support for Early Childhood Programming Based on Income Eligibility*

	WITH AN INFANT AND TODDLER	WITH A PRESCHOOLER
FOR FAMILIES ABOVE FPL: 47% of Families with Children Under Five (169 families)	No Public Assistance	Georgia Pre-K
FOR FAMILIES BELOW FPL: 53% of Families with Children Under Five (188 families)	Early Head Start CAPS	Head Start CAPS Georgia Pre-K



FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL
(e.g., \$25,100 for a family of four)

*Information included in the table is based on income eligibility for publicly funded support. Families that fall into other priority categories, such as with children experiencing homelessness, with special needs, in foster care, or receiving other forms of public assistance, can qualify for programming at higher income thresholds (i.e., CAPS) or even regardless of income (i.e., Head Start).

Source: Reinvestment Fund, ATL ACCESS Map; DECAL, Bright from the Start Website

These findings, along with insights from listening sessions, point to a few considerations as efforts move forward to advance early childhood opportunities in the focal area and across Georgia.

Restrictive Eligibility Requirements

As previously discussed, families shared that barriers exist in accessing the available publicly funded supports. The stories shared uncovered the major challenges faced, with low income eligibility requirements making it difficult to be gainfully employed without losing financial assistance. Progress has recently been made on the state level to expand opportunities for families. Effective May 30, 2018, the maximum income limit for families in the very low-income priority group was expanded to 100% of FPL (\$25,100 for a family). Prior to the policy change, the maximum income limit for families to meet priority status for CAPS was 50% of the federal poverty guidelines (\$12,300 for a family of four).³⁵ As work continues on the Westside and across the state, there may be opportunities to continue to expand income eligibility for families, as well as address the other more restrictive eligibility requirements, such as for those in higher education degree programs, those actively seeking employment, and with the new priority categories.³⁶ At the same time, there may also be opportunities to further support families in accessing financial assistance as eligibility requirements shift. Considering more than half of families are estimated to be at or below FPL, further efforts to connect families to these resources could ensure existing public funds are being maximized to support young children and families on the Westside.

Limited Funding for Federal and State Programs

As a result of limited funding for federal and state programs, even if eligible families are able to successfully navigate the system to connect with these supports, there is often not enough funding to serve all families that would like to participate. For example, even with significant investment in Georgia of more than \$6 billion in state lottery funds over 25 years to the Georgia Pre-K program, demand still outpaces supply, with between 5,000 and 8,000 children sitting on the waiting list every year.³⁷ A similar story can be told about Early/Head Start and CAPS funding. Recent changes have been made, however, on the federal level, such as passage of this year's omnibus spending bill, which includes increases to both funding for Early/Head Start and CCDF programs.³⁸ As a result, as increased investment is seen with federal and state funding, opportunities may exist for local efforts to maximize the impact on the Westside community.

Cliff Effect for Families Above FPL

The benefit of many publicly funded supports is their ability to foster families in achieving and maintaining self-sufficiency. However, when families' income rises above eligibility thresholds, there is no phase-out provision for continuing child care services. Families experience a cliff effect and are faced with having to figure out how to afford the high cost of child care on their own. This is the reality for the 47% of families on the Westside who make above the FPL. For families in this population with pre-K age children, the only publicly funded support available is the Georgia Pre-K program (unless they also fall into another priority eligibility category for Head Start and CAPS). For families with infants and toddlers, there is no financial assistance option. The choice many families are often left with becomes foregoing job advancement to keep under eligibility limits, withdrawing from the workforce to stay home with their child, or finding FFN care. This suggests that additional local investment targeted to this segment of the population may help to effectively increase early childhood program access to children and supports for families on their journey to self-sufficiency.

"It is very discouraging to see that there are not more resources available, especially when you start getting into that space of being barely middle income... You don't qualify for anything anymore when you get to that bracket and then, all of a sudden, you're getting half-way better services, but you really can't afford to get to that next place of getting really better services.

The cost is the burden."

Barriers with Use of Multiple Funding Streams

Cost-related barriers also impact Westside providers. Program leaders are challenged with securing adequate funding to support operations, keep costs low for families, and provide high-quality early childhood programming. Because no single federal, state, or local funding source alone is enough to meet the needs of young children and families, programs must maximize public and private sector investments by combining funds from two or more funding streams. Strategies such as "blending" and "braiding" allow programs to integrate and/or align existing funding streams to broaden the impact and reach of the early learning services provided.

On the Westside, programs use a combination of publicly funded Early/Head Start, CAPS, and Georgia Pre-K, as well as private funding sources from fee-for-service slots and philanthropy dollars. As each of the existing sources is guided by varying intents, regulations, and funding approaches, the result is often discontinuity, with uneven standards for program quality, variable hours of coverage, incongruent eligibility requirements, and competing demands for accountability.³⁹ Additional support for Westside programs to negotiate regulatory differences among funding streams and maximize existing and new investments may be a beneficial contribution to increasing access to affordable, high-quality care for children and families in the focal community.

WORKFORCE CAPACITY AND PROGRAM QUALITY



Understanding issues of supply and demand on the Westside is an important first step in ensuring children and families in the area have access to the programs they need. However, while the research is clear that early care and education programs can have important and long-lasting impacts on young children’s learning and development, research also confirms that access is not enough.⁴⁰ To ensure positive outcomes, children need to be participating in programs that are high quality and staffed by well-qualified and well-compensated professionals. This section will explore these two important components of early care and education on the Westside — examining program efforts to build and sustain high quality services and to support the development and advancement of an effective early care and education workforce.

WESTSIDE PROGRAM LEARNING TOURS

Providers operating on the Westside have been instrumental in informing an understanding of program and workforce quality in the area. Program leadership and staff from three community-based early childhood programs (Dean Rusk YMCA, Northwest Youth Power, and Grow Montessori) and from Atlanta Public Schools (APS) participated in interviews conducted for the purpose of developing a nuanced and “on-the-ground” look at conditions and contexts impacting program and workforce quality in the area.



WHAT IS IT LIKE BEING AN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONAL ON THE WESTSIDE?

Research confirms that classroom teachers and others who have direct responsibility for children have the greatest impact on children’s school success.⁴¹ For programs to be high quality and for learning outcomes for young children to be positive and long-lasting, we know programs must be staffed by professionals who are well prepared, well compensated, and well supported. To ensure children and families on the Westside have access to high-quality early learning programs, it is critical to focus on the capacity of the existing early childhood educators and what it will take to build and sustain a well-qualified and effective workforce.

Key Findings to Consider

- Opportunities to pursue early childhood degrees and credentials are available to providers in the Atlanta area.
- Access to higher education training programs is perceived to be limited by a lack of financial and other supports needed to navigate the system.
- A number of local agencies and institutions offer entry-level training for CDA and other early childhood certifications, as well as supports for those wishing to open new child care facilities in the area.
- DECAL offers an early childhood scholarship program to providers in the state that provides incentives, counseling, tuition support, and bonuses.
- Opportunities to support ongoing professional learning are available from both state- and local-level sources.
- A focus on the use of job-embedded training tied to coaching may help deepen teacher expertise and reduce the number of coaches currently offering supports in classrooms.
- Professional learning opportunities that focus on working specifically with infants and toddlers could strengthen programming for this special population.

QUALIFICATIONS

While a national debate on the importance of degree status for early childhood educators continues, there is growing consensus that requiring a bachelor's degree (BA) with specialized training in child development and early care and education holds the most promise for both professionalizing the field and ensuring positive learning outcomes for children.⁴² Today, the federal Head Start program and most publicly funded state pre-K programs require BA degrees for all or some percentage of lead teachers. Figure 9 summarizes survey results from two programs (out of the five) on the Westside, providing some insight into degrees and credentials currently held by the early childhood workforce. (This table does not include data from the two APS sites, where all lead teachers in pre-K programs must hold bachelor's degrees and teacher assistants must hold an associate's degree (AA), a child development associate (CDA) credential, or a technical certificate.)

Figure 9. Snapshot of Workforce Qualifications on the Westside

DEGREE STATUS	TEACHERS & ASSISTANTS	PROGRAM LEADERS
Master's Degree (MA)	3	3
Bachelor's Degree (BA)	2	2
Associate's Degree (AA)	1	--
Child Development Associate (CDA)	2	--
Some College	1	--
High School/GED	2	2
No High School	--	--

Source: Westside Early Childhood Needs Assessment Program Leader Survey

These numbers are well aligned with national data collected by the National Survey of Early Care and Education that indicate that, in 2015, more than half (52%) of all center-based providers surveyed held an AA degree or higher, 32% held degrees with a major focus on early childhood education, 17% had attained a CDA credential, and 22% held state-approved certificates or credentials.⁴³ As the required level of qualifications for early childhood professionals continue to advance, it may be important that efforts on the Westside explore local opportunities to further connect educators and leaders with the supports needed for degree attainment and career advancement.

DEGREE ATTAINMENT AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT

While recognition of the importance of teacher quality and “upskilling” the current early childhood workforce grows, two parallel national discussions are taking place: (1) What will it take to support the career advancement and educational attainment of the current and future workforce? (2) What will it take to adequately compensate and support teachers meeting new requirements for training and degree status?

Providers on the Westside recognize the importance of supporting teachers’ ongoing career advancement and degree attainment, but uniformly recognize cost as the biggest barrier. As a result, staff wishing to access additional post-secondary training are assuming the costs, as well as navigating higher education systems themselves in order to enroll in programs. Some providers also stated that current staffing patterns and low profit margins make providing staff with leave time to attend classes and hiring substitutes to maintain ratios a significant barrier.

A number of early childhood degree and credentialing programs are available in the Atlanta area through universities, community colleges and the Georgia Technical College System. To support career advancement, DECAL’s Scholars Program offers incentives, counseling, scholarships, and bonuses for educators pursuing degrees and credentials. Programs on the Westside could potentially benefit from additional information on available financial and other resources offered through DECAL and currently available in the area.

Community-based supports for increasing the supply of entry-level teachers and providing CDA training to incumbent teachers with no prior early childhood training is available to Westside providers through the United Way of Greater Atlanta, Westside Works, Quality Care for Children, and the Sheltering Arms Georgia Training Institute.

“Well, the ongoing professional support is one thing. The credentialing of folks who have a CDA or completed some college work is another whole challenge because that is a much more intensive investment of time and resources. I’m talking thousands and thousands of dollars to get that kind of credential. [We have] some who have a CDA and no college experience. So, I’d like to be able to help them get credentialed. But again, it’s just that it’s a significant investment.”

- **The United Way’s Early Learning Centers Pathways Training** provides an intensive teacher preparation class focused on child development and appropriate teaching practices. Offerings include state-required training in CPR and first aid, as well as job search tips, continuing education, and CDA training. The program was originally designed to increase the number of qualified substitutes and build local supply of qualified educators with the knowledge and ability to open family childcare centers in the area.
- **Quality Care for Children** provides online CDA training and coaching to assist with the CDA attainment process, including support for course content and development of the Professional Portfolio and Competency Statements.
- **Westside Works** offers a range of adult workforce development supports and training opportunities including assessment, resources for meeting training prerequisites, placement, and other employment services. CDA training through Westside Works is offered by the Metro Atlanta YMCA, which requires a CDA credential for those participating in on-the-job training in its early learning centers.
- **Sheltering Arms Georgia Training Institute (GTI)** serves as a hands-on laboratory modeling best practices in child development and family support. GTI training includes CDA, Strength-based Family Worker (SFW) Credential, Child Health Consultant certificate, and implementation training for the Center for the Study of Social Policy’s Strengthening Families approach.

COMPENSATION

Workforce compensation on the Westside represents a microcosm of conditions and challenges across the country. Salary levels for the early childhood workforce are among the lowest in the country — often falling below the FPL. According to a 2016 study conducted by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, low wages can undermine educators’ ability to provide for their own families, as well as their ability to provide children with the high-quality early learning experiences they need to excel in school and in life.⁴⁴ In Georgia, latest findings on compensation for the early childhood workforce statewide illustrate the challenges providers face.⁴⁵

“I think there was this recognition that if we are saying that early childhood is a key priority, we are saying that it’s really important, then we need to acknowledge that by compensating these teachers the same way and also holding them to the same standards.”

Figure 10. Earnings by Occupation in Georgia

OCCUPATION	MEDIAN WAGE
Child care worker	\$9.53
Preschool teacher	13.42
Center director	\$19.07
Kindergarten teacher	\$30.92
Elementary teacher	\$31.73
All workers	\$16.85

Earnings by Occupation

- In 2017, the median wage for child care workers was \$9.53, a 1% increase since 2015.
- For preschool teachers, the median wage was \$13.42, a 4% decrease since 2015.
- For preschool or child care center directors, the median wage was \$19.07, a 3% increase since 2015.

Source: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018

As requirements for advanced degrees have increased, so too has the call for compensation or wage parity. (Compensation parity is defined as parity for salary and benefits for equivalent levels of education and experience, adjusted to reflect differences in hours of work, and including payment for non-child contact hours, such as paid time for planning.⁴⁶) Compensation parity is primarily available to lead teachers in state-funded pre-K programs located in public schools. APS now requires BAs and certification of lead teachers in pre-K programs and pays them according to the district salary schedule for K–8 teachers. While the switch originally resulted in some turnover as some teachers opted not to pursue advanced degrees, over time the policy is expected to minimize turnover as teachers achieving BAs no longer leave programs for higher paying K–12 positions. While this major advancement means that teachers at APS are more likely to retain their positions in pre-K classrooms, the story for programs outside of the public schools is a little different.



For community-based programs on the Westside, providers are operating on thin profit margins with a more limited capacity to reward teachers as they attain higher degrees. As a result, program leaders expressed frustration and regret that they were not able to compensate teachers at a more equitable level. When asked what they saw as the biggest barrier to recruiting and retaining qualified staff, community-based providers all identified low salaries — citing competing demands for limited funds and desires to keep program costs low for families as significant challenges.



As states and communities work to find solutions to the compensation gap for early childhood professionals, a number of policy options have been explored. Efforts to increase compensation fall into two broad categories: (1) supplementing salary through stipends or bonuses, or (2) increasing base salary. Both approaches have benefits, although policies and practices that directly increase ongoing salary schedules will have the biggest impact on efforts to move toward parity.

Tax credits for teachers and administrators are one policy approach that has been successfully implemented in a number of states, most prominently in Louisiana. Another effort gaining attention from other states is Georgia's Quality Rated Subsidy Grant program, designed to increase and stabilize revenue for child care providers accepting CAPS subsidies by providing guaranteed subsidies at a higher rate for a predetermined number of slots to qualifying providers. This program not only increases continuity of care for children and families, it frees up revenue that can be used to increase salaries. Georgia has recently been engaged in a pilot of this subsidy grant program for providers serving infants and toddlers, which requires a percentage of increased revenue to be used for staff salaries. This work holds potential to effectively begin to address compensation issues statewide.

Approaches to supplementing salaries through stipends or bonuses, usually tied to career advancement, include the national WAGE\$ program, as well as state programs that offer graduated financial bonuses at various points along a career trajectory. The DECAL Scholars program is an example of a program that ties bonuses to degree attainment. While efforts to supplement salaries are seen as an important resource for supporting wages, the general consensus is that ultimately large investments of public and/or public-private dollars will be required to reach adequate compensation levels.

"We pay all of our employees at least a living wage. So, I try to keep salaries as competitive as we possibly can to retain qualified staff, to maintain a high level of equipment and furnishings and site maintenance, all of these things, and receive children who can pay \$100 to \$150 a week. It's just really hard to stay viable and solvent that way."

ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Looking beyond degree status to ensure educators have the ongoing support needed to meet the sophisticated learning needs of young children from birth to age eight is key. In a seminal report released by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, the authors stated that all early childhood professionals need the “ability to access and engage in ongoing professional learning to keep current in their knowledge and continuously improve their professional practice.”⁴⁷

Programs on the Westside offer teaching staff a number of professional learning opportunities, including training, coaching, and support for developing individualized improvement plans. All programs contributing to this report indicate they are offering program-specific learning opportunities, as well as meeting both state and Head Start requirements for staff training and development. Providers have access to a list of state-approved trainings and trainers made available through DECAL. DECAL also offers a menu of online training modules that can be used to meet state training requirements.

A few examples of program-specific professional learning opportunities include the following:

- **YMCA Head Start** (for its traditional sites, like Dean Rusk, and its community-based partners) offers an intensive summer training institute, as well as ongoing professional learning sessions throughout the year. Head Start program leaders work with center directors, teachers, and consultants to identify high-priority training topics. Head Start programs also provide classroom coaching to their centers and community partners.
- **Grow Montessori** has prioritized the provision of services for children with developmental disabilities and delays. Educators are supported through specialized trainings and ongoing in-class support.
- **APS** is reexamining its current early childhood professional development programming and beginning to implement an approach that includes more intensive subject-matter training linked to ongoing classroom coaching. According to district leaders, use of this job-embedded approach — which provides fewer, more targeted training topics and links those directly to coaching — holds real promise for improving instructional practice and positively impacting child outcomes.



Training resources and supports offered through DECAL include the recently revised Georgia Workforce Knowledge and Competencies (WKC) framework designed to inform the development and delivery of quality professional learning opportunities and provide a common set of guidelines for trainers, coaches, and other professional learning specialists.⁴⁸ DECAL also offers online training on a variety of topics and direct technical assistance from content area specialists, such as training focused on supporting infants and toddlers and dual language learners. Specialized resources for social-emotional development and early identification of developmental delays or disabilities are also available online.

To support programs and individual educators in designing career development plans that align with state-level requirements, DECAL has developed the Career Levels Framework and Georgia Professional Development System (GaPDS), which tracks and stores documentation for educational attainment, ongoing professional learning, and experience working with young children.⁴⁹

The use of coaching to support classroom instructional practices is common across programs on the Westside. In fact, in some cases, educators may be receiving coaching from a number of coaches supporting discrete content or instructional areas. While one-on-one support through coaching is generally recognized as an effective strategy for impacting teacher practice, having input from multiple sources can be confusing for educators and disruptive for children. As a result, APS has been working to coordinate coaches in their pre-K classrooms. A closer look at how instructional coaches are being engaged and integrated into programming — especially in programs offering both Head Start and Georgia Pre-K programs — could help to develop a more systematic approach to leveraging this potentially powerful quality improvement resource on the Westside.

With regard to available training topics, support for teachers working with infants and toddlers was identified as a need, with many training opportunities focused on supports for preschool-age children or focused broadly across the continuum from birth to five.



“Specifically for our age group, meaning the zero to three age level: A lot of times people will cover us but they’re always more focused on the three to six and older. We’re laying the foundation for these children. A lot of times when it comes to developing curriculum, coming up with different types of materials, you have to think outside the box because someone is giving you ideas for an age level that is not yours. I’d say the thing that would help the most would be having people who are speaking more towards our age level.”

HIGHLIGHTS OF COMMUNITY SUPPORTS FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ON THE WESTSIDE

Rollins Center at the Atlanta Speech School

The Atlanta Speech School is the nation's most comprehensive center for language and literacy. The four schools, five clinics, summer programs and professional development center all share one common mission: to work within each program and collaborate across all programs to help each person develop his or her full potential through language and literacy. The Rollins Center is a professional development center at the Atlanta Speech School for teachers of children from birth through age eight. The primary goal is to increase access to quality literacy and language instruction, to increase the number of students reading on grade level by fourth grade and break the cycle of poverty. The Rollins Center trains teachers in language development, literacy skills, comprehension, and critical thinking. To remove physical and financial barriers, the Rollins Center additionally launched the Cox Campus portal at www.readrightfromthestart.org to make its research-based training available to all teachers. Funded by a generous grant from the James M. Cox Foundation, the online campus is composed of coursework for teachers of children birth to 5 (and soon for kindergarten through third grade) featuring video footage from real-world classrooms using strategies developed by the Rollins Center and is available at no charge. Training through the online campus qualifies for Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning continuing education credits for Georgia preschool and Pre-K educators. Rollins Center also supplements training offered through the Cox Campus with eCoaching support. All educators who take advantage of training on the Cox Campus has access to highly trained Rollins facilitators who provide ongoing mentoring and coaching. Rollins staff respond to questions from teachers with fidelity to the research, making professional development through the Cox Campus even more effective, and creating lasting change in teacher performance and child outcomes. **To learn more:** <https://www.atlantaspeechschool.org/rollins>

Sheltering Arms Georgia Training Institute

In addition to certification training, the Institute offers training in facility development and design, program administration, food service management, Early Head Start model classroom seminars, and on-site consultation. **To learn more:** <http://georgiatraininginstitute.com/earlyChildhoodTraining.php>

Best Practices Training Initiative

Best Practices Training Initiative is a collaborative endeavor between Bright From the Start at DECAL, Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education, and the Child Development Program at Georgia State University. The program offers hands-on demonstrations of activities that match the way children learn, teaching tips about managing and organizing classrooms, practical information regarding child development and learning, online courses and podcasts to supplement training, opportunities to share ideas with other teachers, a list of skills appropriate for each child's age, and access to Best Practices staff for follow-up support. **To learn more:** <http://bestpractices.gsu.edu>

Online Library Learning Initiative (OLLI)

OLLI – a partnership between DECAL and Georgia State University – is a collection of online learning modules and video podcasts for early childhood educators to access web-based professional development opportunities designed to enhance the quality of education for Georgia's youngest students. **To learn more:** <http://decals.ga.gov/Training/OLLI.aspx>

Quality Care for Children Online Training

This regional childcare resource and referral agency partners with ProSolutions Training to offer online CEU training covering a broad number of content areas and topics for teachers and program administrators. Through the Georgia Alliance, program administrators have access to workshops focused on business management and supervision and to peer support groups. **To learn more:** <https://www.qualitycareforchildren.org/training>

WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT PROGRAM QUALITY ON THE WESTSIDE?



Family voices captured during listening sessions revealed a deep understanding of and strong convictions about what a quality early learning program means. Families envision programs that offer engaging learning experiences informed by the use of appropriate curricula; safe and healthy environments; and qualified teachers who provide children with warm, responsive interactions and diverse learning opportunities and who offer families support and partnership as their children's first teacher. These same elements are supported by research and best practice and in many cases are being implemented by programs currently operating on the Westside.

EVIDENCE-BASED CURRICULA

Research supports the use of curricula aligned to learning standards and assessments that can be used to track children's progress and inform teaching practices.⁵⁰ On the Westside, providers utilize a variety of curricula, including those aligned with the state's recently revised Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) and approved by DECAL.

Key Findings to Consider

- The use of DECAL approved curricula ensures programs are using approaches that support the Early Learning Standards (GELDS).
- Increased use of developmental and behavioral screening helps identify potential delays early and accurately.
- Programs benefit from technical assistance to support them in the Quality Rated approval process and in gaining higher ratings.
- New CAPS regulations requiring programs be Quality Rated will put many programs operating on narrow margins at risk for not meeting quality requirements.
- The physical condition and location of facilities in the Westside area do not provide options for meeting basic health and safety requirements required for licensing.
- Providers value opportunities to partner with community-based organizations and institutions to enhance learning opportunities and boost program quality.
- Families and providers alike on the Westside see the need to increase children's exposure to cultural and other learning experiences inside and outside their neighborhoods.

Currently, programs are utilizing two DECAL-approved curricula: (1) Opening the World of Learning (OWL), being implemented in Georgia Pre-K classrooms operated through Atlanta Public Schools; and (2) Creative Curriculum, being implemented in Head Start programs operated by the YMCA and its community partners. Additional specialized early learning curriculum models are also being implemented in programs to support children's school readiness and improve skills and knowledge in specific developmental or content areas. These include:

- **Read Right from the Start (RRFTS)**, developed by the Rollins Center for Language and Literacy at the Atlanta Speech School. This online program provides teachers with evidence-based strategies and tools to build children's early language skills.
- **Start for Life**, providing children with daily physical activities designed to build strength, endurance, cardiovascular fitness, and flexibility. In addition to building physical skills, this program includes activities designed to improve important self-management skills.
- **STEAM**, offering project-based learning opportunities in content areas including science, technology, engineering, and arts.

The Grow Montessori program is also operating on the Westside. Staff come primarily from the Atlanta-based International Montessori Training Institute, training teachers based on the original approach developed by Dr. Maria Montessori. The Institute is accredited through the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI), which oversees course content and teacher preparation.

SCREENING AND ASSESSMENT

Ensuring that children are making progress has been identified as an important indicator of overall program quality. The regular use of formative assessment tools provides teachers with important information that can be used to guide planning and instruction and support individualized and child-centered teaching. Research supports the use of assessments that measure what is taught and are aligned to curricula and instruction.⁵¹ An important element of effective classroom-based assessment is the teacher's ability to maintain fidelity to the administration protocol.



Assessment tools, such as **Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG)**, aligned with the Creative Curriculum and used by Head Start programs on the Westside, provide teachers with ongoing child progress data that can be linked directly to related curriculum goals and activities. APS programs on the Westside utilize a number of tools to track progress in specific content areas. These include the **Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS)** and the **STAR Early Literacy Assessment**. APS program administrators report teachers' use of STAR data to inform ongoing planning. **The Work Sampling** system aligned to the GELDS and state mandated for all Georgia Pre-K programs is currently

utilized in the two APS sites on the Westside. Teachers use the Work Sampling portfolio-based system to assess children throughout the year, tracking their progress across seven domains of learning, and use the results to individualize instruction and provide feedback to families. In addition, Work Sampling data is shared with kindergarten teachers to support children's transition.

To assess early development and identify potential learning delays or disabilities, a number of programs on the Westside also conduct early developmental screenings using the parent-based **Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ)** and **Ages and Stages Social-Emotional (ASQ/SE)**. Grow Montessori provides extensive special education services and utilizes a number of specialized screening instruments focused on speech and language development and motor development. As part of Head Start's commitment to providing comprehensive services, all Early Head Start and Head Start children are screened at program entry. Head Start programs on the Westside also use the **Brigance Inventory of Early Development/Head Start and Early Head Start Screens**, designed specifically to meet all federal guidelines for screening and linked to the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework. This formative assessment system includes curricular guidance tied to ongoing assessments and provides take-home activities for families.

Increased use of early developmental and behavioral screening tools could be an important benefit for the Westside. Repeated observations by providers and other key stakeholders interviewed for this needs assessment indicate it is likely that many young children in the area are not being identified for developmental delays or are being misdiagnosed due to both a general lack of understanding of children's development and under-utilization of screening tools both in early education programs and among other neighborhood child and family-serving agencies.

More effective and efficient use of assessment data has also been identified as a potential quality improvement focus. Researchers at Georgia State University recognized that although information was being collected at many levels and by many programs and institutions across the Atlanta metropolitan area, the data were not being used effectively at the classroom level to inform teaching and learning, nor at the administrative level to support informed decision-making. In addition, data collected at the pre-K level were not being mapped onto K–3 data — resulting in lost opportunities to create a more aligned system across early learning and the early grades. To address these challenges, Georgia State has launched a three-year project to create a unified data system spanning the years from preschool through grade three (Atlanta 323). Working with Georgia pre-K providers across the Atlanta area, this project has the potential to impact both program quality and teacher effectiveness.

"I think that there is a real lack of understanding of the critical role that early education plays in the trajectory of children... I think coupled with that there's a lack of awareness of a lot of the early warning signs for developmental delays and autism and a lot of behavior that gets misidentified as bad behavior when in fact it's related to a sensory processing disorder or autism, developmental delay, any of those things."

QRIS AND ACCREDITATION

Meeting nationally or regionally developed program quality standards and receiving accreditation constitute an effective way for programs to communicate status to the general public as well as provide a level of uniformity across programs. A number of standards, tools, and policies have been developed and are currently in place and used across the country to monitor and demonstrate program quality. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) was an early leader in efforts to define quality and recognize programs that met quality standards. NAEYC's accreditation process is based on a set of ten standards that have helped to create a unifying framework for quality aligned with research and best practices.⁵² Westside programs contributing information for this report have attained accreditation through NAEYC (Dean Rusk) or through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (APS programs).

Participation in a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) has been identified as an effective strategy to ensure programs remain focused on continuous quality improvement. Research also indicates programs that include ongoing assessments of their quality practices and policies and have access to a QRIS are more likely to sustain high levels of quality.⁵³ Georgia's QRIS, Quality Rated, is administered through DECAL and uses a three-star framework to measure program quality and assign a quality rating to early and school-age care and education programs that meet defined program standards (see Figure 11).

Georgia's Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies offer free technical assistance to programs applying for or participating in Quality Rated. Targeted technical assistance includes training on topics such as Environment Rating Scales, Early Learning Standards, Family Involvement, and Health, Safety and Nutrition. State-funded consultants work closely to support providers throughout the application and rating process.

DECAL has recently taken steps to expand participation in Georgia's QRIS, mandating that, by 2020, all programs receiving subsidies through the CAPS program must be enrolled in Quality Rated. To support programs in increasing

Figure 11. Georgia's Three-Star Rating System



Source: DECAL, *Bright from the Start* Website



quality ahead of the CAPS policy change, DECAL has instituted a bonus program that makes cash awards based on star level for programs to make improvements, including furnishing, classroom materials, and investments in professional learning.

Solely focusing on Quality Rated, programs on the Westside tend to be at the lower star levels. Of the eligible programs in the community, one was in the process of being rated for Star 1, one was at the Star 1 level, and one was intending to begin the process for becoming a Star 2 program. (APS programs are not eligible to participate in Quality Rated.) All community-based Westside providers contributing to this report are utilizing Quality Rated coaching and consultation resources provided by the local resource and referral agency, Quality Care for Children (QCC). Providers on the Westside report that while the rating process is complicated and time-consuming, all felt it was a worthwhile effort, and all reported that working with coaches or consultants was an important and appreciated support. While a number of important supports are in place to facilitate participation in Quality Rated, given descriptions of the status of physical facilities in the area and narrow operating margins for many programs, it may be important to monitor quality improvement needs and identify potential local resources that could be leveraged to engage more providers and move those already engaged in Quality Rated to higher levels.

"I mean it's really challenging to find a location. And part of that's just the building stock over here is just not great. There aren't a lot of places. A lot of them are older. A lot of them have deferred maintenance issues. There's a lot of industrial buildings. There's a lot of commercial stuff along and things like that, but they're really not places where you would want to drop off your kid, just major thoroughfares or plots of abandoned stuff around them and don't have a cozy neighborhood feel to them."

EDUCATIONAL ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Providers on the Westside are accessing a number of community-based enrichment activities that enhance overall program quality. And at the same time, these learning opportunities reflect the values Westside families have placed on exposing children to diverse educational and cultural experiences.

The national **Jumpstart** program provides language, literacy, and social-emotional learning opportunities for children in two Westside early learning centers. Georgia State University student volunteers work in area early childhood programs to deliver a child-centered curriculum that emphasizes important early literacy skills. On the Westside, Jumpstart programs are currently offered at the Dean Rusk and Northwest Youth Power centers.

Through **Connected Learning Connected Communities (CLCC)**, an outreach program offered through the Children’s Museum of Atlanta and supported by AMBFF, children, families, and educators in the Vine City and English Avenue neighborhoods have access to a variety of play-based enrichment and education experiences, including monthly school visits from the “Imaginators” (the museum’s professional troupe of actors and educators), free admission to the museum for field trips, and free transportation on the Museum’s “Imagine It Express.” CLCC programming began with a series of neighborhood focus groups to collect input on what residents desired most.

Other enrichment partnerships described during listening sessions with area providers include the **APS–Alliance Theatre** partnership, providing teacher training, mentoring, and residencies that integrate language, literacy, and social-emotional development into creative dramatics; the **Dogwood Library**, sending librarians to the Northwest Youth Early Learning Center for story time and literacy-related learning activities; and the **Truly Living Well Community Garden**, providing resources and learning opportunities to the Grow Montessori program located in the neighborhood.

Given comments from families and providers made during listening sessions, expanding access to valuable cultural and educational resources could be an important way to enrich the lives and learning opportunities of children within the focal neighborhoods. Families and providers alike expressed concern that many children in the area do not have easy access to cultural experiences and institutions in the Atlanta area. For these providers who see exposing children to diverse enrichment experiences as an integral part of their role as educators, a major challenge is a lack of affordable and reliable transportation. As one provider expressed: “We’d love transportation for field trips for our classrooms because they really would love to be able to go to the actual Children’s Museum and play like all the other kids get to do and be able to go to the zoo and see the animals. So that would definitely be great for us personally, is to be able to have transportation and have buses to be able to take them places.”

“It’s amazing how so many children are right here in Atlanta. And you talk about Dr. King during the Black History Month. And who was that? Right here. But they don’t have the opportunity to just go right down Auburn Street. Or they don’t have the transportation... They don’t have the funding to get in. So it’s things like that for these children, where we can expose them to so many different things, but there are so many different obstacles and barriers. But if the funding was there and we had the transportation and those weren’t issues, then we could really expose them to so many more things.”

BRIGHT SPOTS OF PROGRAM QUALITY ON THE WESTSIDE

Grow Montessori

Grow Montessori has prioritized serving children with special needs and has integrated that focus into its deep commitment to remaining a resource and support for the immediate community. By combining early intervention and community responsiveness, Grow Montessori has built staff capacity, leveraged local supports to provide much-needed resources for families and children with developmental delays and disabilities, and established itself as a valued community partner. The program has made a significant investment in a staff position dedicated to improving communication and building partnerships with families, as well as serving as a content expert and in-class support to teachers. Program leadership routinely participate in specialized training that is then shared with the entire staff to ensure all teachers have the access to latest information, best practices, and promising research-based interventions.

Dean Rusk YMCA

YMCA programs are valued institutions in the community. Dean Rusk has taken that position to a higher level by establishing an array of community partnerships that support the families they serve, expand and enrich the learning opportunities of the children in their programs, and support the continuous development of their teaching staff. Through its strategic partnerships, Dean Rusk is committed to making “families whole” and ensuring the Westside community is moving in the “right direction” for its children. Program leaders and staff place the highest priority on meeting the immediate needs of children and families, and to that end are continually interacting with and listening to families in an effort to provide them with whatever information, resources, supports, or training they may need. From job training to parenting classes, to emergency housing and food and clothing drives, the staff at Dean Rusk have taken the role of first responders and are leveraging strong community partnerships to ensure families and children have what they need. By maintaining ongoing, positive relationships with community partners, Dean Rusk has been able to help families navigate systems and build capacities to support themselves and their children.

Northwest Youth Power

Located within a neighborhood housing complex, Northwest is a well-established intergenerational program dedicated to meeting the needs of young children, youth, families, and seniors. Within this unique environment, the early learning program is working to create a space and an integrated and holistic approach to supporting children and families. Staff at Northwest are building programs and advocating for seniors needing transportation and access to healthy food; for youth who need out-of-school and summer enrichment and development opportunities; for families who may need employment information, job training, or support to navigate state and city family service systems; and for children in the early learning center who need access to quality learning experiences and well-qualified teachers. By recognizing opportunities inherent in this setting, Northwest has focused efforts on creating a community within a community that can support the growth and well-being of all its residents.

Atlanta Public Schools

Atlanta Public Schools has taken a bold move to address the problem of high staff turnover and low pay in its Georgia Pre-K programs by requiring lead teachers to be certified and hold bachelor's degrees and by compensating lead teachers at the same rate as their peers teaching in the higher grades. This important decision not only has slowed the movement of teachers with BAs out of preschool classrooms and into kindergarten and the early elementary grades, where they can demand higher salaries, but also has served to deepen the understanding of school leaders about the importance of preschool for later school success and of ensuring preschool children are being taught by teachers who are well-trained and prepared. By instituting compensation parity, the district is helping to support a chronically underpaid workforce and making it possible to successfully attract and retain high-quality early childhood teachers for the children it serves.

ALL THE DETAILS: METHODOLOGY

Data were collected according to the neighborhoods identified by the Westside Future Fund as the focus of their community revitalization efforts – and, as a result, the primary focus for the needs assessment – English Avenue, Vine City, Atlanta University Center, and Ashview Heights. This needs assessment builds on data from the recent study by the Reinvestment Fund to examine supply, demand, and gaps related to child care in Metro Atlanta. As a result of the study, the Reinvestment Fund in partnership with local experts developed an interactive web-based mapping tool – ATL ACCESS (Atlanta Child Care and Early Learning Supply Status) – that “combines multiple child care supply sources to provide a comprehensive measure of supply, adjusting residential demand to account for journey-to-work-related patterns, and modeling gaps at the block group level.” Block groups used for this analysis were defined using 2010 Census geographies and as identified by the custom reporting tool within the ACCESS ATL Map.

Data presented in the needs assessment summarize the following block groups as identified by the ATL ACCESS mapping tool – 131210118002, 131210038001, 131210025001, 131210039001, 131210025002, 131210039002, 131210043001, 131210041001, 131210023002, 131210042001, 131210023001, 131210118001, and 131210037001 – and include data weighted by 50% for each of the following additional block groups to cover the entire WFF focal area* – 131210118003, 131210026001, and 131210036001.

For indicators where block group data were not available, the following census tracts were used – 13121011800, 13121002500, 13121003800, 13121003900, 13121004300, and 13121003700.

According to these parameters, data from the ATL ACCESS mapping tool were analyzed to examine population demographics (e.g., age distribution, family income, household status, educational attainment, etc.) and child care demand estimates to depict the local context and existing need for early childhood programming specific to the Westside community. See ACCESS ATL Map Data Directory for more information on indicators and data sources. This information was also merged with census estimates and information from other publicly available data sources (e.g., DECAL’s Bright from the Start website and GEEARS Community Compass tool) further assess the early childhood landscape.

For population projections, Esri estimates of 2016–2021 USA Population Growth provided at block group levels were used to project annual population growth across the focal area. These estimates were derived from examination of current events and past trends to offer the following data sets: 2016 total population, 2021 total population estimate, 2000–2010 annual population growth rate, 2010–2016 annual population growth rate, and 2016–2021 annual projected population growth rate. The annual population rate of change for the neighborhoods of focus was applied to ACCESS ATL map demand estimates (baseline, commuter-adjusted, and maximum potential demand) to project the level of potential child care need in the near future, over 5-year and 10-year intervals. See Esri’s Statement for more information on methodology.

For the qualitative portion of the needs assessment, stakeholder engagement was a significant component of the process to ensure the values, strengths, and needs of the community were being accurately captured. Five listening sessions were conducted with 40 total families with young children across the focal area. Twelve interviews were completed with early childhood stakeholders from the state, city, and local levels with connections to the early learning landscape on the Westside. A series of program tours was also conducted with all operating early childhood in the focal area to include Dean Rusk, Grow Montessori, Northwest Youth Power, and APS schools (M. Agnes Jones Elementary School and Hollis Innovation Academy). Program tours involved program leader surveys, interviews, and tours of program sites. To analyze the qualitative data, SRC coded transcripts from recorded listening sessions and interviews using a coding scheme based on the guiding questions developed for this effort, and then reviewed the coded data to identify overarching themes that would be used to inform recommendations. The use of multiple sources allowed for triangulation of the data to help corroborate themes and phenomena that arose during the analysis.

** Custom boundaries are used to define the WFF focal community for their collective impact efforts and thus have been used to guide this needs assessment analysis. The boundaries are based on a combination of the City of Atlanta’s official neighborhood boundaries and major dividing thoroughfares and therefore not aligned with census tracts or block groups. To that end, the focal community contains a mixture of block groups that are located fully within the area along with a series of other partial block groups. Including those partial block groups in the analysis provides for a localized approach to examine data and derive estimates for the focal community. Block groups were weighted by 50% to account for the segmented portion that falls within the WFF focal area boundaries and makes the underlying assumption that the population is homogeneously distributed.*



THE RECOMMENDATIONS

MOVING FOWARD

Early childhood programs can lead to important benefits for young children, families, and the wider community. However, not all families have access to the high-quality early learning programming that research tells us makes a difference — particularly children of color and those living in low-income communities. WFF and AMBFF are engaged in an ambitious effort to change this reality and advance early childhood opportunities in the Westside community. As a key part of the work, this needs assessment aims to provide a comprehensive look at the existing early learning landscape and to identify opportunities to increase access to high-quality early learning supports. Accordingly, insights from this needs assessment process have been used to develop the following recommendations as a foundation for data-driven decision-making with regard to guiding ongoing and future efforts on the Westside.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WESTSIDE

The findings from the needs assessment suggest significant progress has been made across the state and in the focal community to support families with pre-K age children. To strengthen the system of early childhood services for families with children from birth through age five, fostering high-quality early childhood services for families with infants and toddlers is now the most significant gap and therefore the highest priority. There is urgent need and ample space for the Westside to take the lead in advancing a local agenda to support these youngest learners through maximizing existing resources and targeting additional investments. Therefore, recommendations focus on building upon current efforts and strengthening the capacity of the local early learning landscape to increase the availability and quality of programs **servicing children under three**.



For robust, sustainable change to take place, progress must occur simultaneously across all the levels that impact early childhood opportunities. To that end, the proposed recommendations center upon three key strategic areas: (1) recommendations for families; (2) recommendations for programs; and (3) recommendations for the local system of early childhood supports on the Westside.

Furthermore, it is vital that future actions also consider early childhood initiatives occurring at the city and state level that impact the Westside. The proposed recommendations incorporate and build on the extensive existing infrastructure and upcoming plans for Atlanta and the state of Georgia to increase alignment, reduce duplication, and capitalize on opportunities to collectively strengthen early learning on the Westside.

The following recommendations offer a set of actionable strategies to consider as part of a local agenda for WFF, and the larger early childhood initiative by AMBFF, to build a stronger continuum of early childhood programming setting the Westside's youngest children on a path to succeed — starting at birth.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL BIRTH-TO-THREE AGENDA ON THE WESTSIDE*

STRATEGY 1: BUILD ON STRONG FAMILY NETWORKS AND CAPACITY

RECOMMENDATION 1: Increase investments in existing evidence-based home visiting programming

RECOMMENDATION 2: Establish an early childhood-focused family ambassador initiative

STRATEGY 2: INCREASE ACCESSIBLE, AFFORDABLE, HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD OPTIONS

RECOMMENDATION 3: Increase infant and toddler slots in both family- and center-based early childhood programs

RECOMMENDATION 4: Maximize access to subsidy grants and establish scholarships with private funding

RECOMMENDATION 5: Build capacity to improve the quality of early childhood programming serving infants and toddlers as well as family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care

STRATEGY 3: STRENGTHEN COORDINATION AND INVESTMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS

RECOMMENDATION 6: Strengthen data-driven collaborative efforts to increase impact of child & family service organizations

RECOMMENDATION 7: Leverage the impact of reinvestment efforts for young children and their families

** These recommendations are not presented in priority order. As this needs assessment is focused on the Westside community, recommendations begin with those that are the most locally focused, and proceed to those that are program focused and finally to those strategies that would improve the ecosystem for children and families on the Westside.*

STRATEGY 1

BUILD ON STRONG FAMILY NETWORKS AND CAPACITY

Families have the greatest impact on children reaching their full potential. Experiences within nurturing families — particularly during the first three years of life — contribute to shaping a child’s brain and providing a strong foundation for all later development. Programming, resources, and guidance to support families in this critical role have been emphasized as integral to advancing early childhood opportunities in the community. A key strength of the Westside lies in its supportive family systems and deep relational bonds within social networks. Opportunities exist to build on these assets, to expand the reach of early learning opportunities for young children on the Westside. Creating space for families to take on leadership roles and active involvement in early childhood program decision-making and community-wide decision-making can be a powerful force for change.

The following recommendations prioritize building on strong family networks and capacity as an approach to strengthen early learning opportunities for young children on the Westside:

RECOMMENDATION 1.

Increase investments in existing evidence-based home visiting programming

RECOMMENDATION 2.

Establish an early childhood-focused family ambassador initiative

RECOMMENDATION #1

Increase investments in existing evidence-based home visiting programming

WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

Gaps exist in providing information and access to services that foster families as key supporters of their children's development and learning.

WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

Through the needs assessment, analysis of relevant data and insights from the community suggest:

- There is a perception that not all families in the community have been provided with the information needed to fully understand the potential impact and benefits of early learning and related programming.
- There is a need for additional programs, classes, and resources to strengthen parenting skills and understanding of developmentally appropriate strategies to support children, and expanding peer networking to build on the social capital available to families on the Westside.
- Barriers such as transportation challenges exist for families in accessing programming, and as a result significant importance is placed on supports and services being located near where families live.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Because learning begins as soon as children are born, families are children's most influential teachers, with countless opportunities to influence and build the foundation needed for all future learning. Home visiting programs match parents and caregivers with trained professionals who provide support and information to families during pregnancy and their child's first years – a critical time of development. By focusing on strengthening parenting skills, building understanding of developmentally appropriate strategies to support children, providing developmental screenings, and linking families with important social services, home visiting programs are an effective method for delivering family support and child development services.

Research shows evidence-based home visiting programs can lead to:

- **Increased school readiness.** Studies have shown positive impacts on children's development, including higher IQs, school achievement, and graduation rates from high school.
- **Enhanced abilities of families to support their children's development.** Programming supports families in increasing their knowledge of child development and promoting positive parenting skills, such as engaging in more responsive interactions and early language and literacy activities (e.g., reading, singing, telling stories, etc.).

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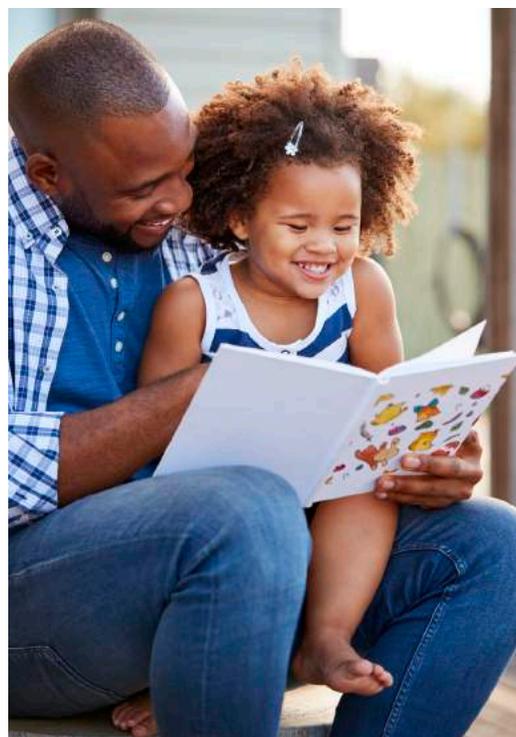
- **Improved child health and development.** Studies suggest home visiting programs support children's healthy growth and development, beginning in the prenatal period. Data show programs have a positive impact on birth outcomes and breast feeding and immunization rates, as well as lower depressive symptoms and stress. For children, programming can result in reduction in mental health and behavioral challenges and increased mental development by age six.
- **Improved family economic self-sufficiency.** Research shows families in home visiting programs are more likely to be working, to participate in education or training, and to have higher monthly incomes. Home visiting programs play a role in helping families enroll in educational programs and pursue employment, along with mitigating the negative impacts of economic insecurity and poverty.
- **Return on investment.** Research suggests that for every \$1 invested in home visiting, there is a \$3–5 return on investment.⁵⁴

These positive outcomes have a cumulative effect, interact with and build on one another to not only improve child and family outcomes, but also lead to important benefits for society. Programming has been shown to reduce rates of child abuse and neglect, substance abuse, juvenile delinquency and crime – resulting in fewer children in social welfare, mental health, and juvenile corrections systems. When incorporated as a part of a comprehensive and coordinated early childhood system, evidence-based home visiting becomes a particularly effective method of reaching and supporting young children and families.⁵⁵

WHAT COULD THIS LOOK LIKE ON THE WESTSIDE?

With available programming, there is ample opportunity to expand on the use of existing evidence-based home visiting to meet families where they are in the focal neighborhoods and provide parenting and health education, child abuse prevention, and early intervention supports — particularly for families with infants and toddlers. Current home visiting efforts taking place across Fulton County could be expanded to reach additional families with young children on the Westside.

The largest home visiting program in the area is Atlanta Healthy Start at the Center for Black Women's Wellness, which focuses on providing services to pregnant women and families with children from birth to two years old. Through this initiative, families have access to home visitation and perinatal health education, as well as linkages to needed health and social services and monthly self-help groups. The areas currently served by the program partly overlap with sections of the focal neighborhoods in zip codes 30310 (Atlanta University Center and Ashview Heights) and 30318 (English Avenue).⁵⁶



Families First uses the Parents as Teachers model to offer three different programs, which provide personal home visits, health screenings, community connections, and play-and-learns with other children. Stemming from a grant from

AMBFF, the Parents Encouraging Promise (PEP) program works with families with children from birth to five years old through home visitations twice a month to focus on parent-child interactions and school readiness for pre-kindergarten, as well as connecting families to community resources. PEP currently serves the focal neighborhood of Vine City (along with Washington Park).⁵⁷

Lutheran Services of Georgia provides a continuum of services, from parenting education for all parents of young children, to more intensive services for families at risk for intervention, through their A+ Parents Program. For families at risk of coming to the attention of the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), the A+ Parenting Program focuses on preventing family issues from escalating to the point of requiring Child Protective Services (CPS) intervention and/or out-of-home placements. Being incorporated as a key component of the program is SafeCare, an evidence-based parenting home visiting program that addresses both physical abuse and neglect of young children (ages birth to five).⁵⁸

Figure 12. Home Visiting Programs in Fulton County

AGENCY & PROGRAM MODEL	AREA SERVICE	TARGET POPULATION	HOME VISITING FREQUENCY	DURATION OF SERVICE	MAX CAPACITY
Center for Black Women’s Wellness – Atlanta Healthy Start	Fulton County serving the following area codes: 30310, 30312, 30315 and 30318	Pregnant women and women with children ranging from newborns to age two	<u>Basic</u> (bi-monthly visits and two phone calls), <u>Moderate</u> (one home visit and two phone calls per month), and <u>Intensive</u> (two home visits and one phone call per month)	Duration of pregnancy through child’s second birthday	250
Families First – Parents as Teachers	Fulton and Gwinnett Counties	Families with children prenatal to five years old; ELL parents with children from birth to five	Minimum two home visits a month	Minimum two years, maximum five years	40
Lutheran Services of Georgia – SafeCare	Fulton County	Families at risk for maltreatment	One or two times per week; 18-20 visits total	Families with children from birth to five	N/A

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Center for Black Women’s Wellness – Atlanta Healthy Start: <http://cbww.org/atlanta-healthy-start-initiative/>

Families First – Parents as Teachers: <https://www.familiesfirst.org/early-learning/>

Lutheran Services of Georgia – SafeCare: <https://www.lsga.org/family-intervention>

Source: Georgia Department of Public Health, Home Visiting Resource Center - Evidence-based Models

STRATEGY FOR INVESTMENT

When considering options for home visiting expansion, Parents as Teachers provides a model that is (1) designed to support families with home visits, referrals to community resources, health and child development screenings, and group connections; (2) currently being implemented in the focal community; and (3) recognized as an evidence-based home visiting model by the statewide Georgia Home Visiting Program and the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program – suggesting that it will lead to positive outcomes for young children and families.

To expand home visiting options for families, WFF could invest in the existing Parents as Teachers model in partnership with AMBFF to expand services with the initial goal of reaching the estimated 188 families with children under five in poverty in the focal neighborhoods.

Expansion efforts would involve expanding capacity to serve approximately 148 additional families. In addition to targeting investments to meet the needs of children living in low-income households, outreach and engagement would also ideally prioritize the most underserved population – families with children from birth to three years old.

ESTIMATED COST

Estimates of cost per family for twice-monthly home visits (the level of intensity required for families with two or more high need characteristics) are between \$2,575 and \$6,000 per year.⁵⁹ Based on these estimates, investment needed to expand programming could fall between \$380,000 to \$890,000 per year.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

SHORT-TERM

- Increased children and families receiving home visits
- Increased screening and referrals
- Increased family connections to community resources

LONG-TERM

- Improved child health and development
- Reduced rates of child abuse and neglect
- Increased school readiness
- Increased parent involvement in children's care and education

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

With this recommendation, the following are implementation suggestions, potential policy priorities, or advocacy directions to consider when working to drive change.

Examine other opportunities to expand evidence-based home visiting within the existing early childhood landscape on the Westside. With Head Start being one of the major early childhood funding and programming options in the community, there may also be space to explore the potential of implementing the Early Head Start – Home-Based Option. This program option provides for another model to examine that is both evidence-based and targets low-income pregnant women and families with children birth to age three.



Identify new funding streams to tap into focused on expansion and sustainability of home visiting programming. MIECHV is one of the largest federal investments that was established to provide funds to states to support evidence-based home visiting services for families with young children. Home visiting programs are being funded in 12 counties across the state by MIECHV, but Fulton County is not currently one of these counties.⁶⁰ Opportunity may exist to tap into this federal funding stream to support programming county-wide and on the Westside. In addition, other financing models more recently being explored by states for sustainable financing of home visiting programming — such as Medicaid, Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and private-public partnerships like the Pay for Success model — could be examined as drivers for policy and advocacy agendas.⁶¹

Support efforts focused on linking local home visiting programming to larger statewide infrastructure. Home visiting programs can be most impactful when embedded into larger systems of support. The Georgia Home Visiting Program (or Great Start Georgia) was developed as a statewide approach to “create a community culture of care, encouragement, and support for all families before and after the birth of a child.” Through this initiative, the state provides a centralized intake system to connect families with services that support maternal and child health (such as Children 1st, Babies Can’t Wait, Children’s Medical Services, and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants & Children (WIC); home and child safety; community and family safety; school readiness; family economic self-sufficiency; and home visiting. Seventeen counties across the state are also being funded to implement this approach on a local level. As a Great Start Georgia community, Fulton County is able to leverage this state-supported infrastructure to effectively implement evidence-based home visiting models; leverage professional development and quality assistance opportunities; secure sustainable funding; and link to other community efforts focused on promoting optimal early childhood health, learning, and development.⁶² Generating continued support and expansion of this infrastructure creates space for local home visiting programs, like those on the Westside, to make effective use of system-level opportunities to strengthen and improve coordination of services provided to young children and families in their communities.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Establish an early childhood-focused family ambassador initiative

WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

Current outreach strategies are not effectively reaching and connecting families to existing early childhood programs and services.

WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

Through the needs assessment, analysis of relevant data and insights from the community suggest:

- Although various child- and family-focused services are available in the community, information about programming doesn't always reach families, particularly those most at risk of being disconnected (e.g., young parents, linguistically diverse families, and families living in deep poverty).
- Elaborate familial and social networks are used by families to pass along information and compensate for a system that hasn't figured out the best approaches to successfully reach them.
- The impact of strong, engaged families to serve as advocates for their children is a key strength of the community; families taking on leadership roles and active involvement in early childhood program and community-wide decision-making are a powerful force for change.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Social support can be a powerful force. Studies show that through diverse social networks, families are able to effectively collaborate and communicate on behalf of their children.⁶³ Black families – the majority of the population on the Westside – in particular have been able to make further use of these assets to “overcome oppressive policies and systems to ensure educational equity for their children, schools, and communities.”⁶⁴ For this reason, the use of peer-to-peer outreach has been identified as an effective strategy in connecting families to an array of community supports. Prior efforts in the early childhood field specifically provide important insights into how best to tap these important social networks in order to communicate and connect families with young children to services – particularly those in marginalized populations, who are often required to navigate various disconnected or inequitable systems of support.

Those who contribute to successful peer-to-peer programs, like family ambassadors, can:

- Make use of existing relationships in their communities that can often be leveraged to connect with additional families
- Tell personal stories from their own lived experiences with early childhood programming
- Share information and offer valuable assistance to other families in navigating the early childhood system

CONTINUED

- Dispel common myths in the community regarding early learning and offer support to those who may be impacted by their negative school experiences or fear of entering the “system”
- Reinforce the importance of early education by communicating the evidence-based benefits with other families and the wider community
- Collaborate as leaders to collectively advocate on behalf of their children, families, and the community – for example, by participating in advisory groups, taking active roles in coalition building, and interfacing with policymakers and other key decisionmakers to drive positive change for early learning programming.⁶⁵

Overall, developing such programs can be an effective strategy to leverage robust networks of communication and support to ensure young children are linked to early childhood services and families’ voices are informing any actions taking place in their own communities.

WHAT COULD THIS LOOK LIKE ON THE WESTSIDE?

Although not specific to the Westside, networks between families and connecting to the larger community are valued as effective approaches for communication and linkages to important early childhood programming. Family ambassador efforts have been established as a significant element of city- and statewide early childhood efforts. For example, GEEARS in collaboration with APS recently developed an Early Education Ambassadors program. The stipend-based program looks to engage 20–40 parents, family, and community members with a two-fold goal: (1) to attend a series of workshops to learn about early learning, recruitment, and enrollment processes, and (2) to commit to spreading the word through advocacy efforts, like door-to-door canvassing.⁶⁶ And the Quality Rated Parent Ambassador program is a state-supported network of families who contribute their time to individually and collectively promoting Quality Rated child care to friends and families who may be in or outside of their networks.⁶⁷



In addition to valuing families as expert communicators, a solid foundation of programming exists to support families in their role as leaders and decision-makers to guide early childhood efforts. For example, the United Way was awarded an Investigating in Innovation (i3) grant to implement Partners Advancing Childhood Education (PACE) – a comprehensive program based on the theory that “equipping parents, families and teachers with knowledge and leadership skills to work together can improve the development and education of high-need students in grades pre-K through third grade.”⁶⁸ PACE offers a leadership component to the initiative, which includes strategies to support families in advocating on behalf of their children, taking on leadership roles at school and in the community, and offering opportunities to attend conferences and training.⁶⁹ And, building on the opportunity that exists with families as effective communicators and leaders, the Quality Parenting Leadership Program at the Satcher Health Leadership Institute employs the Smart and Secure Children’s Curriculum to increase quality parenting as a means to strengthen families raising children from birth through five who may have been exposed to the negative impacts of poverty. The program uses an innovative delivery design: parent leaders (supported by parent mentors) facilitate conversational learning sessions that provide education on evidence-based, quality parenting strategies, which in turn may improve their children’s brain development and behavioral health.⁷⁰

STRATEGY FOR INVESTMENT

When considering options for investment, space exists to build on these broader city- and statewide efforts to target support for families on the Westside.

WFF could invest in a comprehensive early childhood-focused family ambassador initiative to build capacity specifically on the Westside. Either in partnership by leveraging existing programming or through development of a new program, the opportunity would support families as trusted advisors in the community to:

- Take on leadership roles in outreach to increase community knowledge of the importance of the early years;
- Support families in navigating and accessing early childhood programming; and
- Contribute to important decision-making impacting young children and families in the community.

The initiative could work to ensure full representation from all of the focal neighborhoods, and a variety in perspectives and voices, including parents with children across the full range of age from infancy to pre-K, grandparents, and other caregivers. Ambassadors would also reflect the diversity of cultures, languages, and abilities of children and families in the community.

Although the initiative would be designed to benefit all families with young children, there could be a specific focus on reaching and connecting families who have been historically underserved in the community – particularly families with infants and toddlers, and low-income households.

To support families in this role, the initiative would include:

- Training for families to learn about child development and the importance of early education, to understand specifics for navigating the early childhood system in the community, and to strengthen leadership and advocacy skills
- Funds to adequately compensate families for time and expertise
- Supportive management structure to coordinate and provide ongoing assistance to families

ESTIMATED COST

Estimates of cost per family ambassador may be about \$9,400 per year (based on average of three days a week for four hours and mirroring city commitment in raising minimum wage to \$15^{71,72}). Based on these estimates, investment needed to support 20 family ambassadors (at least 5 for each focal neighborhood) could be approximately \$190,000 per year plus administrative and training costs.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

SHORT-TERM

- Increased family & community knowledge of early development & learning
- Increased child enrollment in early childhood programs
- Increased families reached and linked to early childhood supports
- Increased families in advocacy and leadership roles for early childhood efforts

LONG-TERM

- Increased school readiness
- Increased parent involvement in children's care and education

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

With this recommendation, the following are implementation suggestions, potential policy priorities, or advocacy directions to consider when working to drive change.

Leverage established family ambassador network as a collective body for change. The importance of partnering with families in the Westside is reflected through their participation on a multitude of advisory tables driving early childhood efforts on the Westside. In order to further strengthen the voice of families of young children, this family ambassador network could act as an additional grassroots-level leadership advisory council that could provide key guidance to strengthening early childhood practice, policy, and investments in the Westside community.

SPOTLIGHT FROM THE FIELD [MIDWEST] ILLINOIS



As the Westside works to improve access to high-quality early childhood opportunities, exploring innovative practices used in other communities can provide helpful inspiration and ideas for local efforts.

Healthy Parents & Babies Program

The Ounce of Prevention Fund (the Ounce) is a private-public partnership dedicated to providing all children – especially those from low-income families – with high-quality early childhood experiences from birth to age five. With community-based partners, the Ounce of Prevention Fund offers voluntary home visiting services to nearly 1,900 families in Chicago and throughout Illinois. The Ounce’s Healthy Parents & Babies Program is a home visiting program that offers support and coaching to pregnant women, young parents, and children from birth through age three. As part of this program, doulas are available to support mothers during pregnancy and the first few weeks of their child’s life. Families then transition from a doula to a home visitor who helps them continue building strong relationships with their child, create a safe and stimulating home environment, develop healthy eating routines, and connect to health care resources. Other components include prenatal and parent group meetings; events to socialize and interact with other children and parents; literacy events; male involvement groups; and services for children with special needs.

Significant benefits as a result of the program include:

- Subsequent birth spacing
- Teen moms staying in school
- Breastfeeding
- Maternal efficacy
- Father involvement
- Increased knowledge and healthier relationships
- Proactive identification of needed services
- Better health outcomes
- Parents reading to children⁷³

In addition to this program, the Ounce provides technical assistance and training for a skilled early education workforce through its Birth-to-3 Institute, annually holds the National Summit on Quality in Home Visiting, facilitates related peer learning communities, and offers online professional development specifically for home visiting professionals nationwide through their Achieve OnDemand platform. *To learn more:* <https://www.theounce.org/>



Early Learning/Head Start Ambassadors

Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI) is a 20-year-old Chicago-based nonprofit organization that supports families as leaders in improving life opportunities for children and families through its innovative community organizing model. Early Learning/Head Start Ambassadors is a project in which trained parent leaders – 98% of them African American and Latinx – work in teams to engage parents of young children in 33 of Chicago’s lower-income neighborhoods. The goal of this work is to support families in accessing high-quality early childhood programming, and in developing their leadership capacity to ensure they have a full voice in the decision-making and policies impacting their communities.

The project is the product of three recognitions: (1) Participation in high-quality early education is critical to the school and life success of children – particularly those living in low-income communities. (2) Knowledge and practical barriers to program participation persist due to systems that do not understand and are not responsive to the needs of families in low-income communities. (3) Parent-to-parent outreach works better than standard marketing campaigns to support families’ understanding of the importance of early learning and supporting their access to quality programs.

Using this approach, Ambassadors have referred more than 10,000 young children of color living in low-income communities to quality early learning programs, and helped to rewrite the City of Chicago’s and the State of Illinois’s early learning system policies on parent outreach and engagement. COFI is committed to helping others replicate their Ambassador model. Through their Institute for Family Focused Organizing, COFI has created a platform to share their parent leadership and organizing model (Family Focused Organizing, underlying the Early Learning/Head Start Ambassadors program) and has developed a number of communications to encourage replication and adaption of their work.

To learn more: <http://www.cofionline.org/>

STRATEGY 2

INCREASE ACCESSIBLE, AFFORDABLE, HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD OPTIONS

Available spaces, affordable options, and quality programming — all are characteristics Westside families have defined as key drivers in decisions regarding their children’s care. A deeper understanding of the range of underlying factors and lived experiences that influence families’ decision-making when choosing early childhood programming is a valuable blueprint to inform expansion of early childhood opportunities in a way that responds to and best supports families on the Westside.

The following recommendations prioritize increasing accessible, affordable, high-quality program options as an effective approach to strengthen early learning opportunities for young children on the Westside:

RECOMMENDATION 3.

Increase infant and toddler slots in both family- and center-based early childhood programs

RECOMMENDATION 4.

Maximize access to subsidy grants and establish scholarships with private funding

RECOMMENDATION 5.

Strengthen quality of early childhood programming serving infants and toddlers, as well as family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care

RECOMMENDATION #3

Expand infant and toddler slots in both family- and center-based early childhood programs

WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

An unmet need for infant and toddler care exists, with fewer than 25% of children under the age of three being served by existing programs.

WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

Through the needs assessment, analysis of relevant data and insights from the community suggest:

- English Avenue and Atlanta University Center could be considered “child care deserts,” where zero regulated early childhood programs exist, despite the number of slots surpassing estimated demand for three- and four-year-olds in the focal area.
- Families shared the considerable need for care from trusted providers in their local neighborhood, along with providers that offer support for families outside of the typical program day and school year, such as wraparound support (i.e., before- and after-school programs), 24-hour care, and summer programming.
- Existing child care providers with demonstrated interest in program expansion have been met with challenges, including finding appropriate space and funding for capital improvements and the higher costs associated with providing infant and toddler care (relative to care of three- and four-year-olds).

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Families with infants and toddlers need access to high-quality early care and education programs that support child development, promote parents' engagement in children's learning, and allow parents to work or go to school. However, access to quality child care slots for children age birth to three can be both difficult to find and unaffordable for many families. The issue is two-fold: lower required adult-to-child ratios and group sizes mean the cost to serve infants and toddlers far greater for providers than the cost to serve three- and four-year-olds. That disparity in turn forces providers either to charge higher rates for care, putting services out of reach financially for many parents, or to replace infant and toddler slots with preschool slots, driving down the availability of care for this important population of young children.

Nationally, approximately 45% of center-based child care programs and 50% of regulated home-based child care providers do not serve infants and toddlers. As a result, families are left with few options and difficult financial decisions with regard to balancing work and family priorities. In addition, because families with infants and toddlers often have unique and diverse child care needs, it is important that they have access to a range of care settings. Preferred child care arrangements for infants and toddlers can vary

significantly from those for preschool-age children. Families of very young children tend to choose smaller care settings – such as child care learning homes – where they feel their children will receive more attention and individualized care. Moreover, for those families working nontraditional hours, there is a need for options for safe and supportive child care during these hours. As new investments in early care and education are made in the field, priority is being placed on increasing availability of infant and toddler care to ensure that programs meet families’ daily needs for out-of-home care and also respect their beliefs and values about the settings they prefer.

WHAT COULD THIS LOOK LIKE ON THE WESTSIDE?

Analysis of supply and demand data could provide for two options for expansion.

For one, baseline demand estimates (for children under five who live in the focal neighborhoods) can be triangulated with projections for population growth and estimated supply to reveal the gap that may exist for infants and toddlers over the next 10 years: more than 300 children under three without access to care. It may not be necessary to fully bridge this gap, as some families with access to early childhood programming will choose to care for children in their homes. Public data are not available that accurately quantify families’ decision-making in the community regarding selecting self-care by choice and not necessity. If it is estimated that at least 75% of families may choose to participate, there will need to be an **increase of 240 additional slots over the course of the next 10 years** to meet the existing and projected demand for child care.

Figure 13. Expansion Option #1 – Baseline Demand

	AGE RANGE	# OF CHILDREN	Y5 PROJECTED GROWTH	Y10 PROJECTED GROWTH	Y10 PROJECTED # OF CHILDREN	ESTIMATED SUPPLY	+/-
English Avenue	I/T	84	+5	+6	95	0	-95
	Pre-K	54	+3	+4	61	0	-61
Vine City	I/T	120	+14	+16	150	36	-114
	Pre-K	74	+9	+10	93	72*	-21*
AUC	I/T	44	0	+1	45	0	-45
	Pre-K	17	0	+1	18	0	-18
Ashview Heights	I/T	89	+7	+8	104	44	-60
	Pre-K	67	+5	+6	78	297	+219
Focal Area	I/T	337	+26	+31	394	80	-314
	Pre-K	212	+17	+21	250	369	+140*

*Will include an additional 70-90 Head Start, Georgia Pre-K, and fee-for-service slots with the addition of a new YMCA site.

Source: Reinvestment Fund, ATL ACCESS Map; Esri 2016-2021 USA Population Growth Estimates Westside Early Childhood Needs Assessment Program Leader Survey

Another option — commuter-adjusted demand estimates (for children under the age of five who live in the focal neighborhoods and account for commuting patterns and families’ workforce characteristics) can also be triangulated with projections for population growth and estimated supply to reveal the gap that may exist for infants and toddlers over the next 10 years: there will be almost 400 children under the age of three without access to care. If it is estimated that at least 75% of families may choose to participate, there will need to be an **increase of 300 additional slots over the course of the next 10 years** to meet the existing and projected demand.

Figure 14. Expansion Option #2 – Commuter-Adjusted Demand

	AGE RANGE	# OF CHILDREN	Y5 PROJECTED GROWTH	Y10 PROJECTED GROWTH	Y10 PROJECTED # OF CHILDREN	ESTIMATED SUPPLY	+/-
English Avenue	I/T	89	+6	+6	101	0	-101
	Pre-K	57	+4	+3	64	0	-64
Vine City	I/T	110	+13	+15	138	36	-102
	Pre-K	68	+8	+9	85	72*	-13*
AUC	I/T	138	+3	+3	144	0	-144
	Pre-K	54	+1	+1	56	0	-56
Ashview Heights	I/T	76	+6	+7	89	44	-45
	Pre-K	58	+4	+5	67	297	+230
Focal Area	I/T	413	+28	+31	472	80	-392
	Pre-K	237	+17	+18	272	369	+97*

*Will include an additional 70–90 Head Start, Georgia Pre-K, and fee-for-service slots with the addition of a new YMCA site.

Source: Reinvestment Fund, ATL ACCESS Map; Esri 2016–2021 USA Population Growth Estimates Westside Early Childhood Needs Assessment Program Leader Survey

In addition to understanding the gaps in demand (i.e., where and how many slots?), it may be just as important to consider the delivery system (i.e., who is providing care?) when planning for what expansion may look like on the Westside. Families in the focal neighborhoods echoed their desire for flexible care that best supports their varied programming needs. Currently, there are center-based options — Early Head Start and child care learning centers — for infants and toddlers in the focal neighborhoods. Family child care learning homes provide an alternative option for families. However, recent reports suggest that family child care learning homes are currently not an option on the Westside, although there has been some capacity in the recent past to provide this type of care. Future actions would ideally be responsive to this stakeholder commitment and pressing need of families to ensure a balanced approach to delivering and expanding infant and toddler care across settings.



STRATEGY FOR INVESTMENT

When considering options for investment, a responsive expansion strategy for families would involve building capacity and expanding the services of established early childhood programs in the community to provide safe, engaging learning experiences for children on the Westside.

To improve access, WFF could offer capital improvement and expansion grants to both family- and center-based early childhood programs willing to either convert existing spaces to infant and toddler slots or expand their programs in the focal neighborhoods. This strategy should be prioritized over the establishment of new partners, as local programs have established relationships within the community, deep knowledge of family strengths and areas of need, and a history of providing culturally responsive care to children and families within the Westside.

With expansion efforts, additional capacity should be prioritized to reduce the most significant gaps in the community. Initial work could be focused on the two neighborhoods – English Avenue and Atlanta University Center – where there are zero regulated early childhood slots, and then move on to Vine City, where there is potentially a large unmet demand for infant and toddler care.

This type of grant program – currently in Philadelphia and being replicated in Washington, DC – could allow for providers on the Westside “to apply for planning grants to support organizational planning and project predevelopment to ensure a successful and high-quality expansion project. Based on successful completion of the planning phase, providers will be eligible to apply for capital grant awards and/or loan funds to support their expansion projects. Awardees benefit from the advantages of larger scale business operations, and in turn, will be instrumental in reducing the overwhelming unmet demand for high-quality early care and education services.”⁷⁴

Planning efforts to advance early childhood opportunities across the city of Atlanta have proposed developing this proven investment model.⁷⁵ In implementation of this recommendation, WFF could potentially leverage the creation of this city-wide infrastructure by investing in the larger effort to increase funds to be of use on the Westside and in similar communities. Alternatively, WFF could examine the possibility of piloting this approach by building a neighborhood-based grant program to meet the needs of the local focal community and sharing lessons learned to inform the broader work happening across the city. With either option, alignment between these two efforts could be key to maximizing resources for expansion of early childhood programming for families on the Westside and in Atlanta as a whole.

ESTIMATED COST

Funding secured for the established grants:

- \$3.8 million in Early Learning Quality Fund in Washington, DC, for 625 high-quality early learning seats in Wards 7 and 8 by 2020⁷⁶
- \$15 million in Fund for Quality in Philadelphia for 2,500 high-quality learning seats by 2020⁷⁷

Based on these estimates, a similar program on the Westside may range from \$1.4–\$1.8 million, taking into account the two potential expansion options.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

SHORT-TERM

- Increased child enrollment in early childhood programs
- Increased knowledge and capacity of business operations by providers
- Increased work support for families

LONG-TERM

- Increased school readiness
- Increased employment growth in community

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

With this recommendation, the following are implementation suggestions, potential policy priorities, or advocacy directions to consider when working to drive change.

Increase CAPS reimbursement rate for infant and toddler slots. Providing care for children under three is much costlier for early childhood providers due to factors such as required lower teacher-to-child ratios. In many states, including Georgia, funding under CCDF provides reimbursement rates that are often far from what is needed to truly provide care — especially for infants and toddlers. This disparity can create a disincentive for center-based and family-based programs to serve the youngest children. Advocating for policy change to increase CAPS rates may help to attract more programs to increase spaces for infants and toddlers, and act as another strategy to reduce gaps in supply on the Westside.⁷⁸

Leverage other existing public dollars. Head Start funding plays a large role in supporting the existing programming on the Westside — particularly for infants and toddlers. Many of the available slots currently blend or braid funding between CAPS and Early Head Start to provide full-day care for children under three. With boosts in federal Head Start funding with the omnibus FY2018 appropriations bill, additional public dollars may be made available to expand Early Head Start and Early Head Start/Child Care Partnerships.⁷⁹ Examining the potential for maximizing this funding (along with subsidy dollars) may also help to advance strategies focused on increasing access and sustaining early childhood program options for young children and families in the community.

Maximize capacity and early learning opportunities by supporting transportation in focal neighborhoods. In the process of expansion and in order to continue to maximize current capacity, addressing transportation barriers for families to access and participate in programs outside of their local neighborhood could be beneficial. For one, supply estimates suggest that there are enough pre-K seats to meet the estimated demand in all scenarios. However, regulated early childhood programs are currently available only to families in Vine City and Ashview Heights, which suggests that the distribution of slots across the community is skewed. And although there may be ample capacity to serve three- and four-year-olds, families that have to travel outside of their immediate neighborhoods to access these slots are being met with transportation challenges. The needs assessment revealed some providers in the community have added transportation services to their available supports for families, but not consistently. For example, adding transportation services might be especially impactful to increase access to Dean Rusk in Ashview Heights — the largest provider in the focal community — which currently does not offer a transportation option. Examining the potential for shared service agreements between the providers that do and those who do not yet offer transportation services could work to reduce a significant barrier for families and facilitate expanding the reach of early childhood programs to additional young children on the Westside.

Moreover, increasing the ability to transport children also may enable providers to take advantage of other educational enrichment opportunities within the city. Families discussed the importance of being exposed to cultural institutions, such as libraries, museums, the zoo, and theaters, as an essential part of what they hoped for their children's education. To that end, supporting the expansion of transportation services may be an effective strategy to improve both access and the early learning experiences available to young children in the community.

RECOMMENDATION #4

Maximize access to subsidy grants and establish scholarships with private funding

WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

Families face significant barriers in accessing the financial supports needed to afford early childhood programming on the Westside — particularly for infants and toddlers.

WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

Through the needs assessment, analysis of relevant data and insights from the community suggest:

- On average, Westside families potentially spend 24% of their annual salary on care for infants and 45% of their income on care for two children — making affordability a major driver and barrier for families in choosing and accessing child care.
- Families are faced with navigating complex systems and challenges in meeting low-income thresholds among other limiting requirements to qualify for financial assistance and free public programs, such as with CAPS, Early/Head Start, and the Georgia Pre-K program.
- Families who do not qualify for financial assistance or publicly funded programs — particularly those with infants and toddlers — are left with the options to withdraw from the workforce to care for their child, seek non-regulated care, or find some way to pay for child care.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Child care in the United States is expensive, often costing more annually than in-state college tuition. For families with infants and toddlers, costs can be significantly higher than what families pay for their preschool-age children, making them most vulnerable to associated financial insecurity and least likely to be able to afford care at all. In Georgia, infant care can cost more than 50% of a minimum wage earner's annual salary, equaling more than 45.7% of the average rent in the state.⁸⁰ Issues of affordability stem from the high costs of providing care for infants and toddlers, which are often passed on to families. The result: access to care can be out of reach for those families who may need it the most, forcing them to make difficult choices, including whether or not to seek employment or remain at home with their children or whether to compromise on lower-quality care they can afford. A lack of affordable, quality childcare has a significant impact on workforce participation and is a drain on U.S. employers' bottom lines.



**CHILD
CARE
OFTEN COSTS
MORE THAN
IN-STATE COLLEGE
TUITION ANNUALLY**

Child care assistance has been identified as a key support that can help enable low-income families to provide their children with the quality early experiences they need. In fact, without assistance many families in low-income communities are not able to access care. Subsidies can also play an important role in boosting the quality of programs that families are able to access. With a growing population of young children under three in the United States today, coupled with the fact that children are spending more and more time in out-of-home settings so their parents can work or go to school, ensuring child care options for this demographic through adequate funding and other financial supports will have long-term impacts on our nation's economy and the well-being of its children and families.⁸¹

WHAT COULD THIS LOOK LIKE ON THE WESTSIDE?

There is an urgent need to maximize existing avenues for financial assistance and invest in new approaches with private dollars to help reduce gaps for families, especially for those living just above the FPL and not eligible for publicly funded support.

Recognizing the challenges families with infants and toddlers are facing in finding affordable care, increased investments are being made at the state level to reduce these affordability gaps and improve access to high-quality early childhood programs, particularly for children living in low-income households. Of these efforts, DECAL's Quality Rated Subsidy Grant program is open to early childhood providers actively serving 10 or more infants and/or toddlers that have received a two- or three-star rating through Quality Rated. The program was designed to test a new model where families are able to apply for subsidies at the early childhood program with onsite eligibility determination, increasing accessibility and reducing transportation barriers for families. Participating providers are issued grants (as opposed to the usual child care subsidy vouchers to individual families) and reimbursed at a higher rate for subsidies — approximately the 90th percentile of the market rate for child care as compared to the typical subsidy base rate of about the 25th percentile.⁸²



With the success of this grant program, momentum is continuing to grow to expand this pilot to reach additional providers. Efforts on the city level involve plans to mirror this initiative and fund subsidy grants for quality rated child care centers and family child care networks across Atlanta. While working to advance early childhood options on the Westside, being able to leverage both these state- and city-supported grants could have an outsized impact for both providers and families. For one, supporting families in applying directly at the program for subsidies increases accessibility and ability to maximize publicly funded financial assistance. And with higher reimbursement rates, early childhood programs become more affordable. Gaps decrease between the reimbursement rate and the cost of tuition — reducing the amount families need to pay for care. As an additional benefit, higher reimbursement rates also allow for grant resources to support a higher quality of care, and often higher compensation to education professionals. To that end, tapping into these ongoing efforts could contribute to and have important benefits for increasing access to affordable, high-quality programs on the Westside.

STRATEGY FOR INVESTMENT

In addition to maximizing early childhood provider participation in the subsidy grant program, WFF could also consider targeting private investments in the form of scholarships to support families accessing affordable care.

Similar to other models in the early childhood field, the scholarships could be funded by philanthropic dollars from individuals, foundations, and businesses to extend early childhood programming opportunities to families whose incomes are above the FPL and who are not eligible for publicly funded financial assistance. The use of private investments could be an effective strategy to initially fund and drive efforts at a faster pace for the community, although with the intention of phasing out the use of philanthropic support as public funding ideally increases with expansion of income eligibility and adjustments to the other more restrictive limits for families.

Planning efforts to advance early childhood opportunities across the city of Atlanta have also proposed developing such scholarships to cover the gap between 10% of a family's income and the average cost of child care.⁸³ In implementation of this recommendation, efforts by WFF could align with development of the city's child care affordability gap scholarships by either investing in this effort – initially intending to support families making 50% or below of the state's median income (SMI). Or considering the benefits of implementing this approach on a local level, WFF could pilot the scholarships in the focal community to expand eligibility on a larger scale and potentially at a faster rate and share lessons learned to inform future progress of the city-wide initiative.

ESTIMATED COST

Estimated cost to cover the gap between 10% of the income of an adult making 50% of SMI is an average of \$7,350.⁸⁴ On the Westside, data suggest that there are about 170 families with children under the age of five with household incomes over the FPL. Taking into account the existing Georgia Pre-K seats and families that may not choose regulated care, it could be generally estimated that an initial 100 scholarships could help to significantly close the gap for families in finding affordable care. Data are not available to predict the specific gradations of income for families in the focal community. An approximate investment could be \$735,000, using the average of \$7,350 – although it would likely be a lower amount as the gap between income and average cost of child care will reduce as family income increases and as a result reduce the needed scholarship amount.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

SHORT-TERM

- Increased child enrollment in early childhood programs
- Increased use of CAPS funding
- Increased work support for families

LONG-TERM

- Increased school readiness
- Increased employment growth in community





OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

With this recommendation, the following are implementation suggestions, potential policy priorities, or advocacy directions to consider when working to drive change.

Advocate for adjustments to CAP eligibility requirements. In addition to the more local approaches of program grants and scholarships for families to help bridge the affordability gaps, a long-term goal may be to advocate for larger-scale changes to the CCDF state plan that sets eligibility requirements for CAPS funding in Georgia. Recommendations by advocates in the state include increases to income eligibility limits for families above the current 50% of SMI – federal legislation allows eligibility up to 85% of SMI. As infants and toddlers are under-represented groups in CAPS, DECAL could consider children under the age of three a priority population in a similar way that children in the Georgia Pre-K program are deemed eligible. Additionally, the limitations on educational advancement could be expanded. Currently, the eligibility policy for CAPS allows families to participate if they are attending a technical or vocational school, or if a minor parent (under 21 years of age) is attending school or in a GED program – but the educational program cannot be leading toward a college degree. More recently, there has been movement to improving this policy; DECAL has stated it would be changing the definition of job training to include associate’s degrees.⁸⁵ However, there is still room for growth as Georgia remains one of eight states where low-income families are not able to receive assistance to offset the cost of child care if enrolled in a four-year college program, in addition to the two-year associate degree program.⁸⁶ By incorporating adjustments to CAPS eligibility requirements into policy and advocacy agendas, it can help to create the conditions for more families to be able to access affordable, high-quality care on the Westside and throughout the state.

RECOMMENDATION #5

Build capacity to improve the quality of early childhood programming serving infants and toddlers and family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care

WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

Stronger alignment and coordination of quality improvement supports is needed to cultivate a well-prepared workforce and improve early learning opportunities across all settings that serve infants and toddlers.

WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

Through the needs assessment, analysis of relevant data and insights from the community suggest:

- Quality is a key factor for families looking for care; families look for trusted early childhood providers in the community that offer safe, engaging and diverse learning experiences for their children.
- Families seek support from family members, friends, and neighbors in their community to provide care for their children as an alternative to formalized care.
- In lieu of a common definition of quality on the Westside, there are multiple ways to gauge program quality, such as star level in Quality Rated (Georgia's Quality Rating and Improvement System), the achievement of nationally recognized accreditation, and the ability to meet and maintain early childhood program standards (e.g., Head Start Program Performance Standards and Georgia Pre-K Program Operating Guidelines).
- Providers in the focal neighborhoods have benefited from available professional development supports (e.g., scholarships, coaching, training, and other professional learning opportunities); however, few options exist for infant- and toddler-focused education and training compared with pre-K, and lack of coordination of supports presents a barrier to access.
- Barriers to adequately compensate educators for their qualifications across all sectors remains a significant challenge, even with APS's progress toward this goal.
- There is a need for programs to use common child outcome measures to determine program impact and track progress over time. Current work is addressing the integration of data in the P–3 space (e.g., development of a longitudinal database linking school readiness and achievement data from preschool through 3rd grade via the Atlanta 323 initiative).



WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

The research is clear: in order to promote positive outcomes for young children, programs must meet a set of quality standards now generally recognized and supported through research and best practice. Commonly identified components of quality programs include the use of appropriate curricula and assessments linked to standards; engaging interactions with educators leading to high-quality instruction; small class sizes and low child-adult ratios; comprehensive services; and so on.⁸⁷ Programs serving infants and toddlers must also demonstrate a specialized set of quality elements that reflect the unique needs of very young children. Findings from early brain development show that infants are far more capable of making sophisticated connections and responses to their environments than previously understood.⁸⁸ These findings have important implications for both the quality of the experiences offered and the capacity of those caring for very young children.

The supports that exist for educators and other caregivers play a central role in fostering the early learning experiences that are known to lead to positive outcomes for young children. Enhancing the capacity of the early learning workforce through highly effective teacher preparation programs and through effective professional development opportunities for educators currently in the field is key to children's success.⁸⁹ Moreover, in order to attract and retain qualified teachers, these expectations must be aligned with adequate compensation – still not available to the majority of educators in the field today.⁹⁰ In addition to educators in early childhood programs, care provided by family members or trusted friends (often referred to as family, friend, and neighbor care, or FFN) is a significant segment of the early childhood landscape – particularly for infants and toddlers, for whom more formalized early childhood programming options are not often accessible. Based on an understanding of the importance and prevalence of FFNs, efforts focused on creating stronger systems of early care and education are finding ways to include these informal care providers in quality improvement efforts. Overall, to ensure that all children, regardless of setting, are engaging in high-quality early learning experiences, there must be an intentional focus on providing ample support to those who are caring for children and ensuring the quality of environments in which children are growing and learning.⁹¹

WHAT COULD THIS LOOK LIKE ON THE WESTSIDE?

Findings from the needs assessment suggest that future actions could leverage the solid foundation of local, city and state level initiatives by using a two-pronged approach to further support the early childhood workforce and improve the quality of early learning opportunities in the focal community — particularly those reaching infants and toddlers.

1. Support for early childhood programs serving infants and toddlers

Quality improvement efforts should consider the range of regulated programming options for children under 3 — including both family- and center-based programs. All programs on the Westside reported developing various robust partnerships with local child- and family-serving organizations and linking to city- and state-level initiatives to support educators and enhance the quality of programming. For example, the YMCA of Metro Atlanta has formed partnerships with almost all of the early childhood programs in the community to provide comprehensive services to young children across the birth-to-five continuum and professional development opportunities to educators. The YMCA has also developed partnerships with other community-based organizations — such as with the Rollins Center at The Atlanta Speech School — to link providers to important workforce supports, such as workshops, seminars, coaching, mentoring and online learning. Further, with the new YMCA headquarters being constructed in Vine City, it will additionally serve as a “regional innovation and training lab” to provide training for all YMCA early learning classrooms, YMCA staff throughout the southeast, and members in surrounding neighborhoods and local nonprofits.⁹²



Quality Care for Children offers another example of a state-level partner organization for programs on the Westside to access various supports, including those focused on child care programs and professionals (i.e., provider training, consulting to advance in Quality Rated, shared services program, and technical assistance and comprehensive services for Early Head Start); family supports (i.e., child care referral services, child care scholarships, emergency child care, and family engagement supports); and nutritious meals (i.e., summer and child care food programs via CACFP).⁹³ This existing capacity to provide a range of workforce and program quality support is clearly a community asset. At the same time, findings from the needs assessment suggest that next steps should include improved coordination to facilitate access and maximize the benefits of these efforts.

2. Support for family, friend, and neighbor care

Moreover, in addition to regulated early childhood programming, findings suggest there are a significant number of young children being served in family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care — particularly children under three. Whether placement of children in FFN results from gaps for families in accessing care that meets their needs or a preference for providing care for their children in the home of a family member, friend, or neighbor, this sector is a major factor in the provision of care for young children in the focal community and important to consider in quality improvement efforts. As with regulated early childhood programs, there is established programming focused on supporting FFN care on the Westside. For example, the United Way Learning Spaces program is a community-based strategy designed to meet the developmental needs of young children and support FFNs who care for them. Weekly play-and-learn sessions are facilitated using a curriculum incorporating learning themes, cultural aspects and values, and are held in community spaces that FFNs frequent, such as libraries, barbershops, and within the faith-based community.⁹⁴ Locating programming directly in community spaces and public gathering spots is an effective strategy for overcoming barriers, such as transportation challenges, to meeting and providing services for families and children where they are. The United Way also developed the Quality Time program to provide support for interested FFNs to attend training on early childhood–related topics and to receive guidance on how to become a licensed family child care provider — a supportive strategy to create a pipeline for caregivers in the community to tap into public funds (e.g., CAPS) and other quality improvement services. Future efforts to increase access to positive early learning experiences for young children could involve expansion of such programs.

STRATEGY FOR INVESTMENT

When considering options for investment, WFF efforts could build on the solid foundation of available programming to establish a neighborhood-based quality improvement hub for both family- and center-based early childhood programs serving infants and toddlers. Hubs could be modeled on successful efforts in similar communities to establish shared service networks and on Early Head Start–Child Care Partnerships focused on boosting quality. Services offered by the hub would coordinate the provision of existing assets in the community, such as these:

- Providing comprehensive services, including strengthening linkages to early intervention and infant and early childhood mental health services (IECMH)
- Offering job-embedded professional learning in the form of coaching and staff development opportunities
- Facilitating partnerships with community services
- Coordinating technical assistance to meet quality standards, such as in advancing star ratings with Quality Rated; meeting requirements of Head Start Program Performance Standards for serving infants, toddlers, and their families; etc.

Services could also address additional challenges that emerged as barriers in the needs assessment on the Westside to include:

- Providing enrollment support to maximize program capacity (e.g., support with conducting eligibility intake, coordination of enrollment data, and support to conduct outreach and enrollment activities)
- Ensuring access to healthy food (e.g., offering support for participation in CACFP)
- Offering incentives to reduce gaps in compensation (e.g., managing salary stipends for educators)
- Conducting ongoing quality monitoring and coordinating data reporting (e.g., monitoring and coordinating integration of data to inform quality improvement in programs and across the network)

The investment strategy could also include providing funds to expand existing programming, such as Learning Spaces, in all four focal neighborhoods to support family, friend, and neighbor care on the Westside. These resources would ideally be focused on expanding access to engaging early learning opportunities in community spaces and public gathering locations throughout the community. Resources could additionally be focused on establishing a supportive pipeline for FFNs within these spaces to navigate licensure and become part of the regulated early childhood landscape on the Westside.

Planning efforts to advance early childhood opportunities across the city of Atlanta have proposed expanding the Learning Spaces initiative.⁹⁵ In implementation of this recommendation, WFF could explore alignment between these two efforts to maximize resources for efficient expansion of such programming in the local community, as well as city-wide.



ESTIMATED COST

To support quality improvement in DC, hubs were initially awarded \$900,000 in grant funding to serve seven center-based programs (supporting 332–370 infant and toddler slots) and \$365,000 to serve 12 family-based programs (supporting 66 children).⁹⁶ Based on this information and the general estimate that at least 75% of families with children under three may choose to participate in a center-based option, a hub on the Westside may involve a similar level of annual investment.

For FFN support, estimates for Learning Spaces are \$20,000–\$25,000 for initial start-up costs and ongoing annual costs of \$15,000 per site.⁹⁷ To establish four sites in each of the focal neighborhoods on the Westside, it would approximately cost \$160,000 for year 1 and \$60,000 per year in ongoing costs.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

SHORT-TERM

- Increased children accessing comprehensive services
- Increased participation and star ratings of providers in Quality Rated
- Increased provider connections to community resources
- Reduced turnover rate for educators

LONG-TERM

- Increased quality of early childhood programming
- Increased school readiness

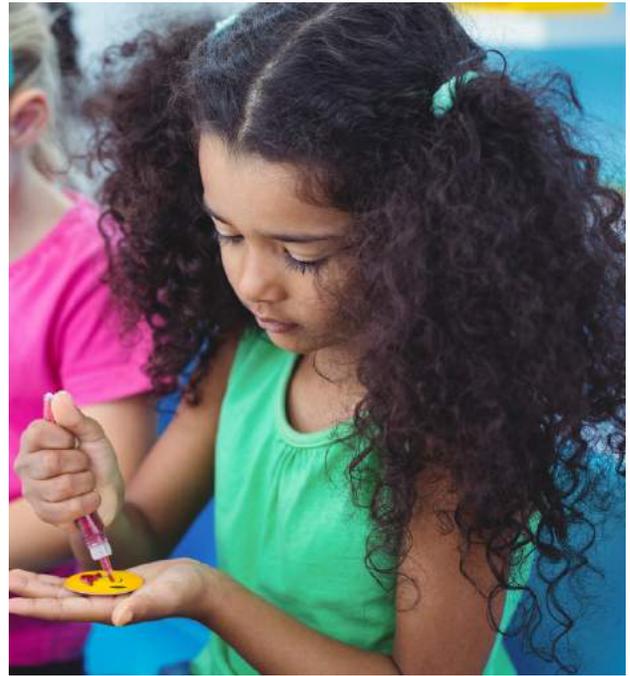
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

With this recommendation, the following are implementation suggestions, potential policy priorities, or advocacy directions to consider when working to drive change.

Incorporate into professional development opportunities offerings on topics related to culturally responsive and trauma-informed practice. Insights from the community indicate that benefits would occur from expanding early childhood program access to training on culturally responsive and trauma-informed care to best meet the needs of diverse children and families in the focal neighborhoods. Either within the hub model or as part of larger quality improvement efforts on the Westside, a range of topics could be embedded into existing professional development opportunities, including best practices to support children who are racially/ethnically diverse, dual language learners, and children who are experiencing poverty, homelessness, and so on. Partnerships with higher education institutions or professional development organizations (e.g., Black Child Development Institute) could be expanded in order to build capacity to offer these specific opportunities, and to ultimately ensure early childhood programming is responsive to the unique strengths of all children and families in the community.

Strengthen connections to larger state-wide infrastructure supporting workforce capacity and program quality for infant and toddler programming. Momentum is continuing to build with increasing investment of resources to support infant and toddler programming across the state. For example, the **DECAL Scholars** program provides scholarships for educators to obtain a higher degree or credential in early learning, along with salary bonuses for the length of time (i.e., tenure) in a position. One-time bonuses or “awards” are also being provided to early learning professionals who complete advances to their education, including incentives for educators who have earned an infant-toddler credential.⁹⁸ A statewide network of **Infant and Toddler Care Specialists** is available to provide targeted technical assistance and resources to early childhood programs designed to increase nurtur-

ing, responsive relationships and high-quality supportive environments. Additionally, **Early Language and Literacy Classroom Grants** are being awarded statewide to foster responsive relationships between teachers and infants and toddlers to develop critical early language and literacy skills. Programs participating are connected with an Infant Toddler Specialist to assess the needs for each classroom involved and purchase materials and supplies to enhance the classroom environment. Grant funds support intensive professional development activities, including monthly literacy forums focused on mentoring and responsive supervision; quality early language and literacy institutes; and individualized coaching. Funding additionally supports the salary for one infant toddler teacher to serve as a mentor to other teachers and help to apply new knowledge to classroom practices.⁹⁹ In efforts to increase workforce capacity and improve program quality on the Westside, leveraging these system-level opportunities and advocating for expansion of this infrastructure provides further support and resources for providers on the Westside to best meet the needs of young children and their families.

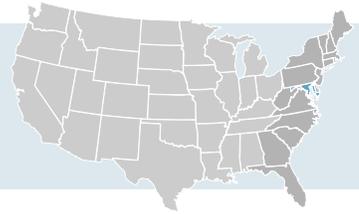


Contribute to comprehensive efforts to increase compensation for early childhood professionals. The use of bonuses or other financial incentives, such as those offered in the DECAL Scholars program or incentives that could be provided through use of the proposed hub model, is an important first step in finding ways to compensate early childhood professionals adequately. However, these are often not long-term solutions and not at a scale to fully address existing gaps. National data on the early childhood workforce reveal educators earn a low median hourly wage of \$10.72 — impacting early childhood educators’ well-being and ability to meet the basic needs of their families. The situation is even more dire for infant and toddler teachers; at every level of educational attainment, they earn on average \$2 less per hour than their counterparts who teach preschool children. Furthermore, disparities across sectors, with public school educators typically earning higher incomes than educators in community-based programs (as also reported on the Westside), contribute to turnover and uneven distribution of educators with higher credentials as they seek out or leave positions for higher pay.¹⁰⁰ With the clear connection between quality and an adequately compensated workforce, it is key that efforts to advance opportunities on the Westside involve support for more comprehensive policy and investment strategies focused on ensuring adequate compensation — including both higher wages and benefits — for the early childhood workforce.

Explore opportunities to leverage data on early childhood programming serving infants and toddlers. With use of a hub model, opportunity exists to collect and examine available data across the early childhood landscape to gain a better understanding of programming serving infants and toddlers on the Westside. Data can be used to determine resources needed to support the local early childhood workforce and improve program quality. And if made available, information could also be useful in informing more systemwide decision-making with collective impact efforts in the community. In future, opportunities may exist to also link to more comprehensive data collection efforts to integrate infant and toddler data into development of the longitudinal database happening in the P–3 space to get an in-depth, comprehensive view of the status and impact of early childhood programming for children from birth.

SPOTLIGHT FROM THE FIELD

[EAST COAST] DC & MARYLAND



As the Westside works to improve access to high-quality early childhood opportunities, exploring innovative practices in other communities can provide helpful inspiration and ideas for local efforts.

Early Learning Quality Fund & Early Learning Quality Improvement Network

The Bainum Family Foundation is a private operating foundation with the mission of funding educational programs and projects supporting children and youth, from early childhood through post-secondary education, primarily in the Washington, DC, and Baltimore metro areas. The Foundation focuses investments in three areas – Early Learning, Wrap-Around Support and Knowledge Building. For Early Learning, the Foundation’s work is targeted specifically on increasing the number of high-quality early learning seats for infants and toddlers in areas of concentrated poverty, Wards 7 and 8 of the District of Columbia. Here are some examples of the work carrying out the Foundation’s birth-to-three agenda:

- The **Early Learning Quality Fund (ELQF)** is a program for licensed child development programs serving children in DC’s Wards 7 and 8. It is designed to help them improve their facilities to provide safe, high-quality early environments for infants and toddlers. Recognizing that facility upgrades for home providers can be particularly complex, time-consuming, and costly, the ELQF provides both technical assistance and financing to help providers make the necessary improvements. These upgrades provide otherwise inaccessible supports and resources that will help providers serving children in the District’s lowest-in-come and underserved areas to increase quality by meeting the highest level of quality in the DC’s new Capital Quality rating system, as well as Early Head Start Standards.
- The **Early Learning Quality Improvement Network (QIN)** is a neighborhood-based program designed to improve and expand the quality of infant and toddler care in Washington, DC. The goal is to ensure more children and families are benefiting from early, continuous, intensive, and comprehensive child development and family support services. The QIN is funded by a federal Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Grant, child care subsidy dollars, and a significant local investment. Run by DC’s Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) with additional support from the Foundation, QIN uses a series of neighborhood hubs to provide various supports to participating providers. For example, providers are assisted in meeting quality standards and providing children with comprehensive services, including educational, health, nutritional, behavioral, and family support. Providers also receive higher reimbursement rates and full reimbursement based on enrollment, as well as job-embedded professional learning and career advancement supports for staff.

In addition to those projects, the Foundation supports efforts to increase the availability of high-quality early learning seats by investing in expansion of two established nonprofits to build new early childhood centers; delivering coordinated comprehensive services for children and families through establishing the Early Childhood Innovation Network to expand health supports for families in pediatricians’ offices and the home; and building a comprehensive policy agenda to sustain quality efforts through a Birth-to-Three Policy Alliance.

To learn more: <https://bainumfdn.org>

CONTINUED

Working Parents Assistance Program

The Working Parents Assistance (WPA) program, funded by the government of Montgomery County, Maryland, was designed to increase access to financial assistance to families with young children. The goal of WPA is to promote family self-sufficiency by serving families who fall just outside the state eligibility income guidelines for receiving child care subsidies. The WPA Trust Fund, a volunteer-run public-private fund, solicits support from individuals, foundations, and businesses to secure private funds to extend the number of families served by the WPA. As a result, additional eligible families are able to receive child care subsidy vouchers so that they can access high-quality care for their children, while working or attending school.

To learn more: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/>



STRATEGY 3

STRENGTHEN COORDINATION AND INVESTMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEMS

A solid foundation of child- and family-focused programming exists on the Westside. Opportunity exists for enhanced coordination between programs to create a comprehensive system of supports for children and families, including early learning, family leadership and support, health, mental health and nutrition, and special education services. At the same time, significant investment is also being directed to the local community, creating the conditions for bold change. Upcoming revitalization efforts are being met with a combination of optimism and apprehension as a result of a complex history related to investment and divestment in the community. This mixed reception points to the importance of embedding ongoing listening opportunities and responsive actions that reflect and meet the evolving needs of the community through all phases of advancing early childhood and reinvestment.

The following recommendations prioritize strengthening coordination and investment in early childhood systems as an effective approach to advance early learning opportunities for young children on the Westside:

RECOMMENDATION 6.

Strengthen data-driven collaborative efforts to increase impact of child and family service organizations

RECOMMENDATION 7.

Leverage the impact of reinvestment efforts for young children and their families

RECOMMENDATION #6

Strengthen data-driven collaborative efforts to increase impact of child and family service organizations

WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

Lack of coordination and siloed data across the early childhood system can impede access to important supports for children and families, and lead to duplication and ineffective use of resources.

WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

Through the needs assessment, analysis of relevant data and insights from the community suggests:

- A strong commitment of state, city and local, public and private entities to young children is evidenced by the number of child- and family-focused programs available to Westside residents.
- Collective impact work on the Westside is gaining momentum and includes early learning as a focus area, through the WFF-led partnership for local reinvestment efforts that includes a cradle-to-career impact area and AMBFF's collaborative structure with an early childhood–focused working group.

As a result of the collective impact work, efforts have been made to coordinate services for families on the Westside, however insights from key stakeholders and families in the community suggest there is still a significant need for better alignment.

- Increased coordination would enable the collective impact efforts to meet the needs of families in more efficient ways, reduce duplication, and streamline the sharing and prioritization of resources.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

The notion of collective impact as a more effective way to bring about change has been the driving force behind a number of successful collaborative initiatives that represent a departure from earlier, more siloed change efforts. For collective impact efforts to reach the individuals they are designed to support, they must include targeted strategies to involve multiple sectors and services.¹⁰¹ For initiatives focused on families and children, the first step is often recognizing and addressing the disjointed nature of services and supports that make up early childhood systems. Addressing this situation requires a comprehensive and aligned approach that can effectively reach across all sectors, including health, mental health, and nutrition; family leadership and support; and early education and special education. In this work, having access to current and useful data is a linchpin to success, as it helps to inform effective planning and decision-making regarding service delivery. Overall, by aligning services, improving communication and collaboration among stakeholders, and fostering data-driven actions at the local level, leaders can reduce duplication and improve outcomes for families and their children.

WHAT COULD THIS LOOK LIKE ON THE WESTSIDE?

Programs and supports for families with children from birth through age three do not stand alone. These programs and supports operate as part of a continuum of early learning, alongside other programs and systems that promote the overall well-being of children, families, and the community. The youngest residents of the Westside will be best supported and have the best chances to thrive when all programs and systems act in complementary and mutually reinforcing ways with a deep commitment to coordination and data-based alignment across programs.

The development of a strategic plan for the collaborative initiative coordinated by AMBFF represented an important step toward this critical alignment of early childhood services by establishing shared priorities and metrics of success. As one of many components that will enable the implementation of the strategic plan, this needs assessment report adds important data to contextualize and reflect on the current status of early childhood programs and conditions on the Westside. As the resulting findings represent a point-in-time snapshot of the community, a critical next step may involve expanding upon this assessment by creating a comprehensive system for ongoing data collection and data-driven decision-making. This could include both formalized agreements to share data across collaborative organizations, and a process to ensure continuous data collection of other metrics identified in the plan. In this way, key data points (e.g., enrollment and capacity, utilization trends and gaps, relevant child and family outcomes, etc.) could be used to identify service gaps, pressing needs, and opportunities for deeper collaboration and resource sharing in the local community.



As a result of reinvestment, key data points may also radically change in a way that is different from what can be predicted based on past trends. Therefore, another important role of this work may be to collect and analyze the data over time to gain a better understanding of how recent investments are impacting demographics and related needs of the community. For example, as changes are occurring in the focal neighborhoods, existing methods to measure displacement risk, such as the Reinvestment Fund's Displacement Risk Ratio (DRR), could be beneficially used to understand implications for longtime residents — including young children and their families.¹⁰² Analysis of such data can help to inform planning to ensure adequate infrastructure exists to specifically support current families with young children and to manage the potential influx of new residents into the community. Data can also help to ensure programs and services are able to adapt to potential changes in demographics, such as supporting the currently established early childhood programs in the community to successfully operate in a more mixed-income environment by incorporating funding and other supportive programmatic strategies.

With this ongoing information collection process, the development or use of an existing data platform (e.g., dashboard, progress map, etc.) to store, analyze, and share these important data points could be a valuable tool. This platform could be used by the collaborative initiative to surface important opportunities to eliminate duplication, invest in and expand effective programming, and strengthen partnerships to address gaps and disparities. The platform could also be used to measure progress over time to examine the outcomes as a result of collective impact work. Further, the platform could be used to lift up and communicate successes and important lessons learned from local implementation with external stakeholders to drive larger-scale efforts across the city and beyond.

STRATEGY FOR INVESTMENT

When considering options for investment, WFF could leverage their current data management capacity to contribute to development of an enhanced, continuous data collection process and platform for the collaborative initiative as an extension of this needs assessment effort. This work could involve investing staff time and expertise in the initiation and periodic management of the data system, and building leadership for data-based collaboration into their existing partnership development work.

ESTIMATED COST

Costs associated with this recommendation would be related to assembling the appropriate data management team within the Westside Future Fund staff, and allocating time to this effort. This may require initial work to develop a new or revamp an existing data platform to include key data points from the current needs assessment and program outcomes metrics, plus committed ongoing staff time for regular maintenance and oversight of the data platform.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

SHORT-TERM

- Increased enrollment and utilization rates for child and family programming
- Decreased duplication of services across programs

LONG-TERM

- Increased well-being of children and families across a variety of indicators

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

With this recommendation, the following are implementation suggestions, potential policy priorities, or advocacy directions to consider when working to drive change.

Work to align efforts of multiple collaborative groups across the Westside community. There is a current opportunity to intersect and coordinate with collaborative groups that currently exist on the Westside and are working in parallel. When possible, it may be beneficial to align strategies among the multiple tables focused on advancing early learning in the community in order to reduce duplication of efforts and maximize resources. Also, with additional funding flowing into the Westside with reinvestment, there is the potential for expanded or new programs to become established. To avoid re-creating silos, work could also be focused on creating a clear pipeline for organizations to enter into these partnerships on the Westside.

Continue to leverage collective impact initiatives to inform decision-making on city and state levels. As decisions are being made at the city and state levels that will impact children and families in early learning and related subsystems, local leaders have an important role to ensure that these decisions, and their implementation in the local community, are beneficial to Westside's young children and families. These leaders, along with early childhood providers, can lead the development of a policy agenda that puts young children at the center, elevates the voices and interests of the local community, and leverages the collective impact of partnerships to take a unified stance on forthcoming policy and action.

RECOMMENDATION #7

Leverage the impact of reinvestment efforts for young children and their families

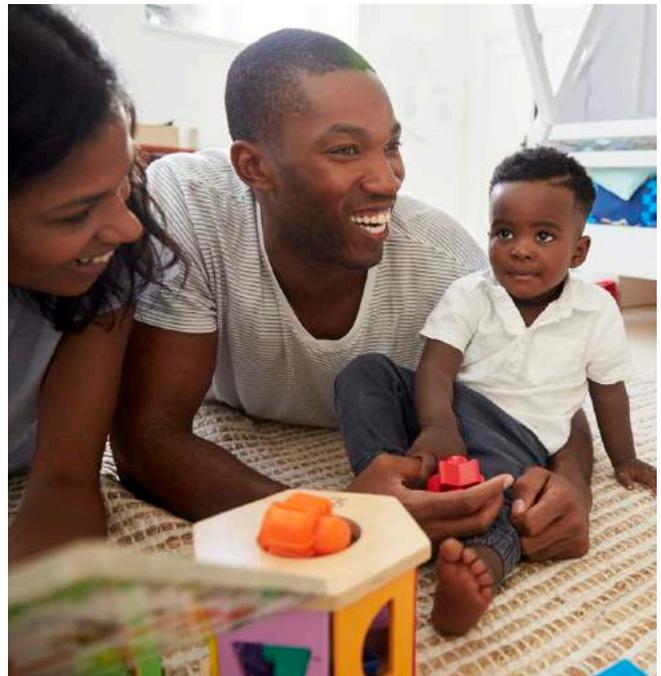
WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

Concern exists in the community that reinvestment efforts will not reflect the priorities of families with young children and result in displacement and silencing of their voices.

WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

Through the needs assessment, analysis of relevant data and insights from the community suggest:

- There is significant public and private sector interest in advancing a revitalization approach that avoids the displacement and improves the quality of life for current Westside residents.
- Community residents and service providers on the Westside recognize the need for global and parallel efforts across Westside's four impact areas (i.e., cradle-to-career education, safety and security, health and wellness, and mixed-income communities) to improve the quality of life for Westside residents and affect the ability of young children to thrive.
- Families have a strong desire to be involved as active participants throughout the reinvestment process. Families view reinvestment with hope and optimism, but also expressed deep concerns that legacy residents could be displaced or overlooked, as has occurred during reinvestment in other communities.



WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

The most successful revitalization efforts include an intentional focus on both young children and families. Effective approaches often involve strategies that support children's healthy development, well-being, and school readiness, while at the same time supporting families' access to affordable housing, employment opportunities, and food security. Research suggests the potency of programs and policies established through revitalization efforts is augmented when they also strengthen the collective efficacy of families and the community at large.¹⁰³ Community revitalization efforts that use this more comprehensive, two-generation approach have had proven success in driving impactful and sustainable change in neighborhoods.¹⁰⁴

At the same time, a key component influencing the effectiveness of this work is the ongoing engagement of families and other residents as important advisors to inform efforts in the community. Establishing both formal and informal structures for routinely collecting input and capturing community voices, as well as actively including local residents in decision-making processes will help ensure changes are responsive to the needs and values of the community. And just as important, such feedback loops can help to ensure that efforts are not having the unintended consequence of marginalizing certain sectors of the population – with tendencies to often disenfranchise people of color and those living in poverty. As revitalization can be a powerful tool for realizing population-level change, leaders of this work must be diligent in ensuring efforts continue to serve as a positive source of support for those who live in the community – including its youngest residents and their families.

WHAT COULD THIS LOOK LIKE ON THE WESTSIDE?

The current public and private sector commitment to reinvestment on the Westside marks a critical opportunity to create sustainable change in the community. This will require coordinated efforts across multiple sectors to transform conditions on the Westside, creating a community of choice and opportunity for current and future Westside residents. Support to improve local early childhood programs and systems is a key focal point for reinvestment, and part of a broad and complex vision for community revitalization. For that reason, each collaborative of early childhood experts and advocates that takes part in the Westside's larger early childhood initiative has an important role to bring early childhood issues to the forefront of the reinvestment conversation, ensuring that children and families are continually prioritized in local investment decisions.



As an essential part of this, leaders and investors in community revitalization also have an important role to ensure the intentional and ongoing elevation of family and community voices. Specifically, it will be important for the Westside Future Fund and its partners to bring to the table their understanding of the communities they serve, and their knowledge about how early childhood programs and subsystems function and interact with one another. This would also include creating and advocating for opportunities for families to speak for themselves in informed ways about what is best for them and their families, ensuring that all important opportunities are considered, and family and program realities are well understood by local leaders and investors.

STRATEGY FOR INVESTMENT

To invest in the necessary alignment of early childhood efforts to the broader aims of reinvestment, WFF, AMBFF, and other lead partners should continue to build capacity to guide investment in early childhood-focused programs and services. Important areas to inform include:

- Decision-making among executive leadership and governing boards
- Oversight of an early childhood grantmaking strategy
- Applying an early childhood lens to all reinvestment and strategic partnership development efforts
- Effective ongoing external communication between investors, local leaders, and community residents

With additional early childhood capacity, WFF, AMBFF, and lead partners could build on this needs assessment by implementing an ongoing reflection and feedback cycle to ensure actions resulting from new early learning investment continue to meet the needs of the community over time. Established communication platforms, such as the Transform Westside Summit, could be utilized or other potential venues could be explored to foster family and community engagement.

ESTIMATED COST

The suggested investment in expanded early childhood capacity would be determined by the specific scope of responsibilities and intended level of effort that would be considered beneficial and complementary to the existing capacity.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

SHORT-TERM

- Increased grant-making focused on early childhood programs and services
- Increased family engagement opportunities to inform child- and family-focused efforts

LONG-TERM

- Increased presence of early childhood as a key strategic objective across reinvestment and development efforts
- Increased family and community engagement in overall reinvestment strategy

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

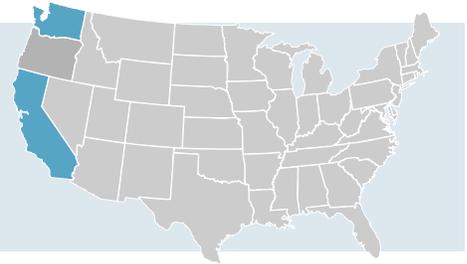
With this recommendation, the following are implementation suggestions, potential policy priorities, or advocacy directions to consider when working to drive change.

Incorporating additional early childhood data points into community data dashboards and progress maps.

Because the early childhood system is one component of a much larger ecosystem that impacts all aspects of life for children and families, early childhood data should be positioned and discussed alongside other important community indicators in order to have a more complete picture of children and family well-being on the Westside. In addition, it will be important to track metrics for all of the recommendations from this needs assessment that are chosen for investment. Tracking could involve an update to existing community data dashboards and progress maps to illustrate how progress with reinvestment efforts contributes to a safer, healthier, and more stable environment for young children.

Continue to use storytelling as a tool for change. As a significant part of this work, WFF and AMBFF have created opportunities to incorporate the stories of children, families, and long-standing residents, and capture important lessons learned through reinvestment. Continued effort to collect and share a dynamic narrative that positions up-to-date qualitative and quantitative data alongside a clear vision for ongoing revitalization of a community can be an effective approach for attracting new investment and opening doors for innovative community solutions. Ultimately, the work on the Westside has the potential to act as a state and national example of sustainable and equitable community revitalization by not only moving the needle on child, family, and community well-being, but also elevating this work through effective storytelling.

SPOTLIGHT FROM THE FIELD [WEST COAST] CALIFORNIA & WASHINGTON



Hayward Promise Neighborhood

The Hayward Promise Neighborhood (HPN) located in South Hayward, California, represents a partnership among the school district, city and county agencies, local institutions of higher education, and public and private health and family support programs. To address the needs of all residents and create a system of collaboration that could effectively leverage contributions from multiple partners, the neighborhood focused on creating structures that would allow for coordination across agencies and institutions engaged in the focal area. To that end, neighborhood leaders created three networks focused on early care and education, community health and well-being, and cradle-to-career school reform. The Early Learning Network grew out of the realization that the supply of licensed child care providers and early learning slots was insufficient to meet the neighborhood's demand. The lead agency, working in partnership with a number of funded and unfunded partners, brought together existing agencies to develop a common framework designed to help families find services and identify gaps. The effort has an intentional focus on utilizing data to inform those inside and outside of the community of their progress, as well as using the data to improve the work of HPN. *To learn more: <http://www.haywardpromise.org/>*

White Center Community Development Association

In 2001, the residents of White Center, outside Seattle, Washington, founded the White Center Community Development Association (CDA), which continues to convene collaborative partners and lead efforts to support family self-sufficiency, school readiness, and authentic engagement of residents in family strengthening and community revitalization efforts. The CDA built on the efforts of a group of partners – including local and state government representatives, service providers, grassroots community organizations, and resident leaders – that had come together to think about the conditions they wanted to change in White Center. A decision-making structure evolved over time as partners worked to align their interests relative to White Center's results agenda. Partners also formed agreements with each other around sharing data and then analyzed the data to make decisions about aligning existing strategies and developing new ones. Residents formed a group of "trusted advocates" that worked to influence institutional partners about the needs of their community and to ensure that residents were trained and supported as full partners in the work. A central value of the CDA continues to be the belief that the community itself must be the leader of any community change effort. The CDA has instituted several different mechanisms for ensuring accountability to the community for both the services it provides and whether results are being achieved. *To learn more: <http://www.wccda.org/>*

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The needs assessment builds upon the goals of the strategic plan developed for the Early Childhood Working Group of the Westside Education Collaborative to assist in their efforts to advance early childhood opportunities on the Westside. We would like to extend our gratitude to all the Early Childhood Working Group members for their ongoing input and support throughout the planning process.

The findings within this report were informed by local leaders from:

Atlanta Board of Education	Jumpstart
Atlanta City Council	Mosaic Group
Atlanta Public Schools	Northwest Youth Power
Children's Museum of Atlanta	Primrose Schools
Families First	Quality Care for Children
Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS)	Rollins Center for Language & Literacy
Georgia State University	United Way of Greater Atlanta
Georgia's Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)	YMCA of Metro Atlanta
Grow Montessori	

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Finally, we would like to express a sincere thank you to the many families and community partners who shared their insights in listening sessions, participated in interviews, and provided meeting space to contribute to the successful completion of this needs assessment.



This report was prepared by School Readiness Consulting. As a consulting firm focused exclusively on early childhood, SRC partners with cities, districts, states, foundations, and nonprofits to develop and implement systemwide strategies that improve outcomes for children in school and life. SRC believes that improving early childhood and affirming the right for all children to thrive represents the greatest opportunity to create a just society.

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