

Helping children achieve their potential

Young children birth–five have the right to be ready to succeed when they enter kindergarten; but, in nearly half the classrooms (46 percent) across the nation, at least one out of five was inadequately prepared for kindergarten when they started school last year, according to the U.S. Department of Education. United Way supports and implements programs that improve the quality of early care and education to increase school readiness.

Challenges

- Of 50 children who are having trouble learning to read in kindergarten, 44 will have trouble in third grade and children without reading skills by third grade are unlikely to graduate from high school.¹
- The quality of the care children receive makes a difference. Unfortunately, most child care is low quality, with high caregiver turnover, poorly designed programs, or inadequate preparation of staff. Poor quality care can potentially jeopardize a child's health, safety, and development. Children that have warm, supportive caregivers develop greater social competence, fewer behavioral problems, and enhanced thinking skills at school age.²
- The current cost for quality child care per child in Georgia, depending upon age, is \$8,000–\$12,000 per year. Therefore, many parents can't afford to pay for quality child care and have to choose either lower quality care or no child care at all.³
- Of all the children that qualify for Department of Human Resources subsidy, the State of Georgia can only assist 12 percent. These subsidies have been historically inadequate and with the current state budget cuts, this number is likely to decrease.⁴
- There are more than 5,000 licensed/registered child care providers in metro Atlanta. However, only four percent of the centers in Atlanta and less than one percent of family child care providers are nationally accredited.⁵

What we're doing next

- Working to create stronger partnerships between child care providers and elementary schools so that children have a comfortable and happy experience starting kindergarten
- Training and supporting caregivers as they nurture and care for young children in high-quality early learning environments
- Increasing community awareness around the importance of early literacy skills in young children using tools such as "Get Ready to Read!"⁶

United Way believes that early childhood education is critical. We use best practices and research to inform our work.

We know that:

- Quality child care matters
- Literacy is key and begins with pre-literacy skills
- Parent and community engagement makes a difference
- Public policy must be addressed
- Collaborating with partners increases all of our success

¹ Executive Summary, *The Future of Children: Closing Racial and Ethnic Gaps*, vol. 15, no. 1, spring 2005.

² W. Steven Barnett, Jason Hustedt, Kenneth Robin, and Karen Schulman, *The State of Preschool* (Rutgers, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2004); Suzanne W. Helburn, ed., *Cost, Quality, and Outcomes in Child Care Centers* (Denver, CO: University of Colorado at Denver, 1995); *Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships*, Working Paper No.1 (Waltham, MA: National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004).

³ Based on United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta research of local, quality early care and education programs.

⁴ *Child Care & Parent Services (CAPS) of the Department of Human Resources*

⁵ For United Way 13-county metro area BftS as of March 2008 there were 1,499 licensed centers and 2,911 registered family child care providers. There are currently 8,000 NAEYC accredited child care programs in the U.S.

⁶ Smart Start houses the Southeast Regional office of Get Ready to Read! an early literacy program designed to help early childhood professionals and parents ensure that young children are equipped with the skills necessary for learning to read. The goal is to screen children for pre-reading skills before they enter kindergarten and provide skill-building activities to ensure future reading success. It allows early care professionals and parents to take a more intentional approach to building the specific literacy skills their children will need to learn how to read.