

Child & Family Policy Lab

Georgia Policy Labs

Unmet Subsidized Child Care Demand in Georgia

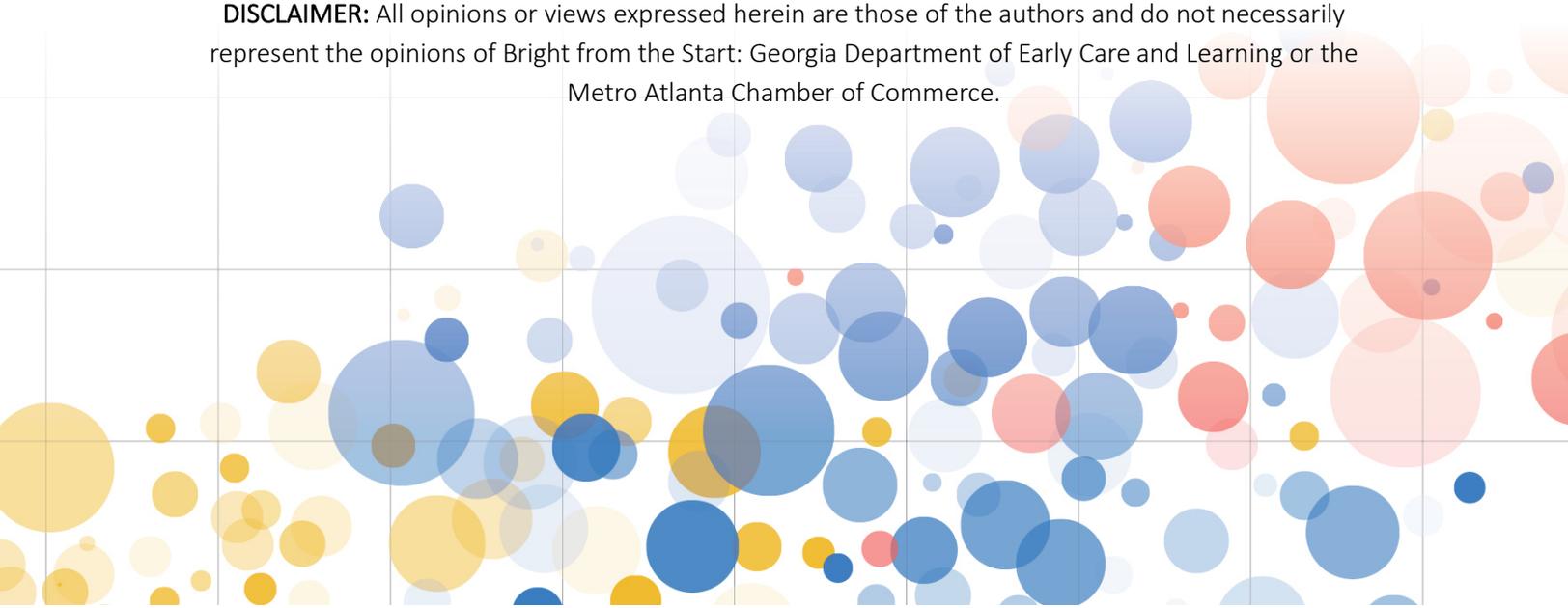
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INTRODUCTION

Georgia’s Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program is operated by Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). The CAPS program is intended to help low-income and other families experiencing vulnerabilities obtain high-quality child care, increase children’s school readiness, and help families become economically self-sufficient by subsidizing child care costs while caregivers work or prepare themselves for work through school or training. The program can play a valuable role in developing Georgia’s workforce for the 21st Century and in achieving positive, equitable outcomes for Georgia’s children; however, its reach is limited. In state fiscal year (SFY) 2019, the CAPS program served just under 76,000 children.¹ Many more children and families could benefit.

This research brief considers the number of children aged zero to five years old who might be reached. It uses SFY 2018 publicly-available administrative data from Georgia’s Cross Agency Child Data System (CACDS) to calculate the number of children who were served and 2018 questionnaire data from the American Community Survey (ACS) to estimate the number of children who might be eligible under different program rules. The brief compares the numbers of children who are served and not served and considers the cost of reaching unserved children.

HOW GEORGIA’S CAPS PROGRAM OPERATES

DECAL operates the CAPS program with state resources and funding from the federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF). In SFY 2018, just under a quarter of Georgia’s spending on child care services came from its own resources and just over three quarters came from federal sources.² The federal government sets several overarching requirements for subsidy receipt. It limits eligibility to families with incomes below 85 percent of the state’s median income (SMI), with the limits adjusted for family size. It also requires (with some exceptions) that parents work or participate in education and training activities. States can impose additional conditions on eligibility but must operate within the federal requirements.

Georgia’s CAPS program eligibility requirements are much stricter than the federal requirements. To keep with the state budget, Georgia restricts eligibility for *new* CAPS scholarships to children ages 12 or younger (or 18 or younger if the child has a disability) who are also part of specified priority groups.

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¹ DECAL, 2019, *2019 Annual Report* decals.ga.gov/documents/attachments/BFTSAnnualReport2019.pdf, accessed December 2, 2020.

² Georgia Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget, 2019, *The Governor’s Budget Report: Fiscal Year 2019*, opb.georgia.gov/document/governors-budget-reports/fy-2019-governors-budget-report/download, accessed December 2, 2020.

Georgia's priority groups include children

- with disabilities;
- in families with “very low income” (defined as 50 percent of the federal poverty guidelines);
- receiving Child Protective Services (CPS), receiving other protective services, or in court-ordered supervision cases;
- enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K Program (which serves four-year-old children);
- in Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) custody (i.e., foster care);
- with caregivers participating in DFCS' Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG) program;
- with minor parents;
- in families experiencing domestic violence;
- who have experienced a natural disaster;
- in families participating in or transitioning from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program; and
- without fixed, regular, or adequate housing.

For all these groups, except children in DFCS custody, Georgia further restricts initial eligibility to families with incomes below 50 percent of the SMI, with the income threshold adjusted for family size. In SFY 2018, the annual income threshold for a family of four was \$35,330 (or 141 percent of that year's federal poverty guideline). Georgia also requires parents to work for 24 hours per week or engage in an equivalent amount of education or training activities—unless the children are in foster care, in GRG settings, or have minor parents. In addition, Georgia has requirements on residency, the child's citizenship or legal immigration status, and immunizations.

Once children begin receiving CAPS scholarships, Georgia does not require them to maintain their priority group status to continue receiving scholarships. It also allows children to continue receiving scholarships so long as their family income remains below 85 percent of the SMI. Moreover, parents who lose their jobs can meet the work activity requirement through job search.

The CAPS program provides families with a scholarship that is paid directly to a qualified child care provider on behalf of their participating child. For the scholarship, the state sets a *maximum reimbursement rate* that differs depending on

- the provider's location (the state has three geographic zones);
- whether the child is less than one year old, one to two years old, three to five years old, or six years old or older;
- whether the care is provided on a full-time, part-time, or before- and/or after-school basis; and
- whether the provider is a child care center, a family child care home, or an informal provider.

The CAPS program requires most families with incomes above a given threshold to pay a *family fee* directly to the provider, with the scholarship being reduced by the amount of the fee. The fee follows a sliding scale that increases with the family's income, and before September 2018, with the number of children with scholarships. In addition to the family fee, providers may also charge families the difference between the maximum reimbursement rate and the provider's published rate. In SFY 2018, the family fee ranged from \$9 per week for families with annual incomes between \$3,601 and \$6,000 and one child

receiving a scholarship to \$200 per week for families with annual incomes above \$60,000 and six or more children receiving scholarships. Since September 2018, the fee is assessed as a percentage of the family's gross income and ranges from 3 percent for incomes between 10 and 50 percent of the federal poverty guidelines to 7 percent for incomes above 100 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. The fee is discounted by 15 percent if the care is provided by a Quality-Rated provider. Currently (as of 2020), the maximum fee that would be assessed to a family of four is about \$92 a week. In addition to the scholarship amount, the CAPS program also pays a bonus to Quality-Rated providers that increases depending on the provider's rating.

Besides the CAPS program, Georgia provides other services that meet families' care needs, including Georgia's Pre-K Program, transitional pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten summer programs, and preschool special education services. Federally-funded Head Start and Early Head Start programs are also available.

RECEIPT OF CAPS SCHOLARSHIPS IN SFY 2018

This brief examines young children's CAPS scholarship receipt in SFY 2018 using data from Georgia's Cross Agency Child Data System (CACDS). SFY 2018 is the latest year for which detailed data are available from CACDS. The brief considers the number of children aged zero to five years old in Georgia who received scholarships.³ It also considers children who receive care in the metro-Atlanta Learn4Life region consisting of Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett counties, and it considers children in each of these counties separately.⁴ For each of these geographic areas, it further considers children in different racial and ethnic groups and children in one-year age groups. Table 1 lists these figures.

In total, 47,220 children aged zero to five years old received a CAPS scholarship sometime during SFY 2018. Of these children, 20,871 (44.2 percent) were from the metro-Atlanta Learn4Life region. Within those counties, Fulton County had the largest number of participating children (6,136), and Cobb County had the fewest (2,805). CAPS served many more Black children than children from other racial or ethnic groups. For the entire state, 72 percent of young CAPS children were Black, and within the Learn4Life region, 84 percent were Black. White children comprised 17 percent of young CAPS recipients at the state level but only 5 percent within the Learn4Life region. Hispanic children comprised 6 percent of young CAPS recipients in the state and within the Learn4Life region. CAPS served fewer infants (children under one year of age) than other age groups and more three-year-olds than other groups. The age distributions of scholarship children at the state level and within the Learn4Life region were very similar.

³ Georgia's CACDS only provides information for children aged five years and younger.

⁴ Learn4Life is a collaboration of many organizations, including the Metro Atlanta Chamber and eight school districts in the metropolitan-Atlanta area, that is dedicated to improving school, career, and life success for the area's children. More information is available at I4lmetroatlanta.org. CACDS records care by the location of the provider rather than the location of the child's residence.

Table 1. Total Unique Children with Active CAPS Scholarships during SFY 2018 in Georgia, the Learn4Life Region, and the Selected Counties by Race-Ethnicity, Age, and Geographical Aggregation

	State of Georgia	Learn4Life Region	Clayton County	Cobb County	DeKalb County	Fulton County	Gwinnett County
Total (Ages 0 to 5)	47,220	20,871	3,411	2,805	5,518	6,136	3,001
<i>By Race/Ethnicity</i>							
Black	33,830	17,564	3,020	2,013	4,964	5,607	1,960
White	7,842	1,071	78	357	112	101	423
Hispanic	2,625	1,261	168	265	197	255	376
Multiple races	1,187	303	42	58	59	47	97
Other race or unknown	1,736	672	103	112	186	126	145
<i>By Age</i>							
Under 1 year	6,214	2,811	462	384	708	888	369
1 year old	7,402	3,260	510	426	866	973	485
2 years old	8,720	3,750	601	468	978	1,173	530
3 years old	9,020	3,902	622	520	1,061	1,170	529
4 years old	8,625	3,876	644	550	1,009	1,084	589
5 years old	7,239	3,272	572	457	896	848	499

Source: Georgia's Cross Agency Child Data System

POTENTIAL CAPS RECIPIENTS

We estimate potential CAPS recipients using 2018 data from the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS is a large ongoing survey of American households that is fielded by the U.S. Census Bureau.⁵ The ACS asks about

- the ages and relationships of household members, which allow us to identify children, parents, families, and foster care arrangements;
- the geographic location of the household, which allows us to identify residents of Georgia and of the five counties in the Learn4Life region;
- the personal incomes of the household members, which allow us to identify families that meet income eligibility criteria;
- the work and school enrollment status of adult members, which allows us to identify parents who are working or in school; and
- the race and ethnicity of household members.

These measures cover many of the CAPS eligibility criteria but not all of them. The ACS data allow us to consider the age criteria, income criteria, whether the parents were working or in school (but not whether they met the 24-hour weekly threshold), and whether children were in foster care (and therefore not subject to income or activity requirements). Except for foster care status, we do not consider whether the children are part of priority groups because we lack the measures for several groups and because

⁵ For more information about the ACS, see [census.gov/programs-surveys/acs](https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs).

almost all the other groups are subject to the income and activity requirements. We also do not have information on citizenship, legal immigration status, or immunizations.

ELIGIBILITY ANALYSIS

We consider five categories of children aged zero to five years old:

Category	Reason
1. All children regardless of potential eligibility status	This group indicates the size and demographic characteristics of Georgia's 0- to 5-year-olds.
2. Children in foster care or families with incomes below 50 percent of the SMI	These children meet Georgia's income eligibility criteria for new scholarships; their parents <i>could</i> meet the activity criteria if they work or attend school.
3. Children in foster care or families with incomes below 85 percent of the SMI	These children meet the federal income eligibility criteria and Georgia's criteria for continuing scholarships; their parents <i>could</i> meet the activity criteria if they work or attend school.
4. Children in foster care or families with incomes below 50 percent of the SMI with parents who work or attend school	These children meet Georgia's income eligibility criteria for new scholarships; their parents already work or go to school.
5. Children in foster care or families with incomes below 85 percent of the SMI with parents who work or attend school	These children meet the federal income eligibility criteria and Georgia's criteria for continuing scholarships; their parents already work or go to school.

Table 2 lists the number of children who are estimated to be in each of these categories for the entire state, the metro-Atlanta Learn4Life region, and the individual counties therein. Table 2 also lists the number of CAPS scholarship recipients aged zero to five years old in the different areas (figures from the first row of Table 1) as a percentage of the number of children in each category. These percentages are approximate estimates of how many children within the category are served by the CAPS program.

We estimate that there were 767,676 children aged zero to five years-old in Georgia in 2018 and that the CAPS program served 6.2 percent of them ($= 47,220/767,676$). The CAPS program served a higher percentage (7.1 percent) of young children in the Learn4Life region. Within the Learn4Life region, it served 12.4 percent of young children—twice the state average—in Clayton County, only 4.0 percent in Gwinnett County, and 5.1 percent in Cobb County.

Just over a third (36.2 percent) of zero- to five-year-old children in Georgia are estimated to have been in foster care settings or in families with incomes below Georgia's new scholarship eligibility threshold of 50 percent of SMI in 2018. Among these children, 17.0 percent were served by the CAPS program. A slightly smaller percentage of young children in the Learn4Life region (32.4 percent) were in foster care or families with incomes below 50 percent of the SMI, but a higher percentage (22.0 percent) were served by the CAPS program. The percentages served ranged from 13.2 percent in Gwinnett County to 29.0 percent in Cobb County.

Table 2. Estimated Numbers of Children Aged Zero to Five Years Old and Percentages Served by the CAPS Program in 2018 in Different Areas and with Different Eligibility Characteristics

	State of Georgia	Learn4Life Region	Clayton County	Cobb County	DeKalb County	Fulton County	Gwinnett County
All children 0 to 5	767,676 6.2%	292,427 7.1%	27,603 12.4%	55,325 5.1%	59,620 9.3%	75,382 8.1%	74,497 4.0%
Children in foster care or families with incomes below 50% of SMI	277,680 17.0%	94,733 22.0%	14,459 23.6%	9,659 29.0%	25,352 21.8%	22,514 27.3%	22,749 13.2%
Children in foster care or families with incomes below 85% of SMI	433,240 10.9%	148,694 14.0%	20,990 16.3%	19,617 14.3%	34,202 16.1%	34,021 18.0%	39,864 7.5%
Children in foster care or families with incomes below 50% of SMI with parents who work or are in school	133,935 35.3%	48,680 42.9%	7,319 46.6%	3,804 73.7%	14,705 37.5%	12,557 48.9%	10,295 29.2%
Children in foster care or families with incomes below 85% of SMI with parents who work or are in school	227,479 20.8%	83,930 24.9%	12,029 28.4%	10,264 27.3%	21,510 25.7%	20,939 29.3%	19,188 15.6%

Note. The top number in each cell is the estimated number of children; the bottom number is a percentage formed by dividing number of children with CAPS scholarships reported in CACDS by the estimated number of children in the category.

Source: Authors' estimates from 2018 American Community Survey; the estimates use the ACS sampling weights

In families with incomes at or below 85 percent of the SMI (the income threshold for continuing scholarships), 10.9 percent of children were served by the CAPS program statewide, and 14.0 percent were served within the Learn4Life region.⁶ The 85 percent threshold is important to consider because it would become the effective eligibility threshold for CAPS scholarship recipients immediately after gaining access to the program.

The CAPS program and other CCDF-supported child care programs require work activities in addition to low levels of income. In Georgia, we estimate that only about one-sixth of children aged zero to five-years old are in foster settings or families with working or enrolled parents with incomes below 50 percent of the SMI. CAPS served just over a third (35.3 percent) of these children who met Georgia's new scholarship

⁶ The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) used a similar approach to estimate that the CAPS program served 14.8 percent of children aged zero to 13-years old in Georgia in families with incomes below 50 percent of the SMI in fiscal year 2016 and 8.5 percent of children in families with incomes below 85 percent of the SMI. The estimates from CLASP are lower because the CAPS program serves a smaller percentage of school-age children than younger children. See CLASP, 2019, *Inequitable Access to Child Care Subsidies*, Washington, D.C.: CLASP clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2019/04/2019_inequitableaccess.pdf, accessed December 2, 2020.

income eligibility threshold and whose parents worked or attended school. The relatively modest percentage of children served occurs because many children do not meet Georgia's other eligibility requirements, especially its "priority group" requirement, and because not all eligible families enroll their children in the CAPS program. The CAPS program serves a higher percentage of young children (42.9 percent) in "work active" income-eligible families in the Learn4Life region than in other parts of Georgia. Within the Learn4Life region, the CAPS program serves an estimated 73.7 percent of young children in "work-active" income-eligible families in Cobb County and 29.2 percent in Gwinnett County.

When we extend the eligibility criteria, the CAPS program is estimated to have served only about a fifth of young children (20.8 percent) in foster care settings or with working or enrolled parents whose incomes are below 85 percent of the SMI. It serves nearly a quarter of young children (24.9 percent) with these characteristics in the Learn4Life region, with the percentages ranging from 29.3 percent in Fulton County to 15.6 percent in Gwinnett County.

DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The brief next considers outcomes for different racial and ethnic groups. Within Georgia, of children aged zero to five-years old, an estimated 42.8 percent are non-Hispanic White, 32.6 percent are non-Hispanic Black, 15.3 percent are Hispanic, 4.9 percent have multiple backgrounds, and 4.4 percent have other or unknown racial and ethnic backgrounds. In the Learn4Life region, the distributions are very different, with 27.2 percent of young children estimated to be non-Hispanic White, 41.6 percent to be non-Hispanic Black, 19.7 percent to be Hispanic, 4.5 percent to have multiple backgrounds, and 7.0 percent to have other or unknown racial and ethnic backgrounds. As the figures in Table 1 indicated, young White children comprise a much smaller share of CAPS scholarship recipients, while young Black children are a substantial majority.

These differences in population and scholarship-receipt distributions might reflect differences in economic and other circumstances that make some children more likely to be eligible than others. Table 3 lists estimates of the numbers of young children by race and ethnicity who are in foster care settings or in families with working or enrolled parents whose incomes are below either 50 or 85 percent of the SMI. Using the figures from Table 1, it also estimates the percentages of children in each group who were served by the CAPS program in SFY 2018. There are relatively few observations for individual counties when the data are disaggregated this way, and many estimates for individual counties become unreliable. Because of this, the brief only reports estimates for the state of Georgia and the Learn4Life region.

For Georgia as a whole, the CAPS program serves 46.2 percent of Black children in "work-active" families with incomes below 50 percent of the SMI, compared to 27.7 percent of White children, 11.0 percent of Hispanic children, 20.1 percent of multiple-race children, and 62.4 percent of other- or unknown-race children. Within the Learn4Life region, the CAPS program serves a substantially higher percentage of Black children in this eligibility group, a slightly higher percent of Hispanic children, and lower percentages of children in the other racial and ethnic categories. Similar patterns appear when the eligibility set is expanded to include children in families with incomes below 85 percent of the SMI, though with lower percentages of children estimated to be served.

Table 3. Estimated Numbers of Children Aged Zero to Five Years Old in Foster Care or in Families with Incomes below 50% or 85% of SMI with Working or Enrolled (Active) Parents and Percentages Served by the CAPS Program in 2018 in Georgia and the Learn4Life Region by Race and Ethnicity

	Children in foster care or families with incomes <u>below 50% of SMI</u> with parents who work or are in school		Children in foster care or families with incomes <u>below 85% of SMI</u> with parents who work or are in school	
	<i>State of Georgia</i>	<i>Learn4Life Region</i>	<i>State of Georgia</i>	<i>Learn4Life Region</i>
Black children	73,217 46.2%	30,048 58.5%	114,800 29.5%	51,463 34.1%
White children	28,265 27.7%	4,781 22.4%	58,748 13.3%	8,812 12.2%
Hispanic children	23,760 11.0%	10,062 12.5%	38,889 6.7%	18,110 7.0%
Multiple race children	5,909 20.1%	2,551 11.9%	10,049 11.8%	3,146 9.6%
Children in other or unknown racial and ethnic groups	2,784 62.4%	1,238 54.3%	4,993 34.8%	2,399 28.0%

Note. The top number in each cell is the estimated number of children; the bottom number is the number of children with CAPS scholarships reported in CACDS divided by the estimated number of children.

Source: Authors' estimates from 2018 American Community Survey; the estimates use the ACS sampling weights

ESTIMATED COSTS OF SERVING MORE CHILDREN

The brief's analyses show that there are many young children who could be potentially served by the CAPS scholarships if additional funding were available and the eligibility criteria could be relaxed. This section of the brief examines the cost of serving different groups of potentially eligible young children. To do so, we used the American Community Survey to estimate the annual value of scholarships and bonuses that would need to be provided to child care providers with a one-star Quality Rating on behalf of all foster children and children with working or enrolled parents with incomes below 50 and 85 percent of the SMI.

To calculate the scholarship amounts for potentially eligible children, we make several calculations. First, we estimated the family fee that families pay to providers. We use the current (2020) formula and apply a percentage to the annual gross applicable income of families. Families with income lower than 10 percent of the federal poverty guidelines and foster parents are assessed no fee; those with an income between 10 and 50 percent of the guidelines pay the weekly equivalent of 3 percent of their annual income; those with incomes between 50 and 100 percent pay the weekly equivalent of 5 percent of their income; and those with incomes above 100 percent of the poverty guidelines pay the weekly equivalent of 7 percent of their income. For families with multiple children, we only apply one fee. Additionally, we discount the fee by 15 percent under the assumption that children attend a one-star Quality Rated provider.

Second, we estimate the maximum reimbursement rate. These maximums vary by the three Georgia zones, the type of provider, the age of the child, and the type of care they receive. The ACS only identifies the children's ages and zone of residence. For each age group and zone, we calculated a weighted average

of the 2020 maximum reimbursement rates with the assumptions that a) 89 percent attended full-time care, 11 percent used before- and/or after-school care, and 0.07 percent used part-time care and that b) 70 percent of children used center-based care and 30 percent used family or informal care. We apply these to each potentially eligible child in the ACS.

Third, we calculate each child's scholarship amount as the difference between the maximum reimbursement rate and family fees. We also add a bonus of 10 percent for quality-rated providers. From these calculations, the average weekly combined cost of a scholarship and bonus was \$90 for foster children and children with working or enrolled parents with incomes below 50 percent of the SMI and \$74 for parents with incomes below 85 percent of the SMI.

Finally, to estimate the costs of a potential expansion, we subtract the costs associated with children who are already participating in the program. We use data from CACDS to calculate region- and age-specific maximum reimbursement rates for each participating child. We also calculate average family fees by region and apply these to the data. We use these figures to calculate scholarships and bonuses for the children who are already participating in the program.

Table 4 lists the total annual cost of extending potential eligibility for CAPS scholarships to all of the children a) in foster care or b) with "work active" parents with incomes below 50 percent of the SMI and below 85 percent of the SMI. For these calculations, we assume that although eligibility would be extended to all the families who meet these criteria, only half would apply and meet the other eligibility requirements. We estimate that it would cost \$198 million to extend potential eligibility to 43,358 zero- to five-year-olds with "work-active" parents with incomes below 50 percent of the SMI and \$340 million to extend scholarships to 90,130 young children with "work active" parents with incomes below 85 percent of the SMI. To give context to these numbers, Georgia spent approximately \$265 million on its subsidized child care programs in FY 2018.

Table 4. Estimated Annual Cost of Serving More Children Aged Zero to Five Years Old in the CAPS Program in Georgia

Additional annual cost of extending CAPS eligibility to all children in Georgia aged zero to five years old in foster care or families with incomes below 50% of SMI with parents who work or are in school, assuming that half the additional families would participate	\$198 million
Additional annual cost of extending CAPS eligibility to all children in Georgia aged zero to five years old in foster care or families with incomes below 85% of SMI with parents who work or are in school, assuming that half the additional families would participate	\$340 million

Source: Authors' estimates from 2018 American Community Survey; the estimates use the ACS sampling weights.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rodrigo Aranda is a postdoctoral research associate with the Child & Family Policy Lab in the Georgia Policy Labs. He specializes in applied microeconomics with a focus on health, environmental, and development economics. His work has centered on measuring the effect that public policies, high-profile events, and a changing environment have on individual behaviors. He received his Ph.D. in economics from Tulane University and worked at the National Council for Social Policy Evaluation in Mexico prior to joining Georgia State University.

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ABOUT THE GEORGIA POLICY LABS

The Georgia Policy Labs (GPL) is a collaboration between Georgia State University and a variety of government agencies to promote evidence-based policy development and implementation. Housed in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, GPL works to create an environment where policymakers have the information and tools available to improve the effectiveness of existing government policies and programs, try out new ideas for addressing pressing issues, and decide what new initiatives to scale. The goal is to help government entities more effectively use scarce resources and make a positive difference in people's lives. GPL has three components: The Metro Atlanta Policy Lab for Education works to improve K-12 educational outcomes; the Career & Technical Education Policy Exchange focuses on high-school-based career and technical education in multiple U.S. states; and the Child & Family Policy Lab examines how Georgia's state agencies support the whole child and the whole family. In addition to conducting evidence-based policy research, GPL serves as a teaching and learning resource for state officials and policymakers, students, and other constituents. See more at gpl.gsu.edu.