

Alabama

The Child Care Services Division of the Alabama State Department of Human Resources operates Alabama's EHS-CCP. The Child Care Services Division is responsible for monitoring and licensing child care centers and homes, and it is also the state's CCDF administrator, responsible for the child care subsidy program and quality initiatives, including the state Quality Rating and Improvement System. The state's Department of Human Resources partners with the Department of Early Childhood Education, which oversees a variety of other early childhood programs, including First Class Pre-K, Alabama's First Teacher program, the Head Start Collaboration Office, and the state Children's Policy Council. In addition, the state partners with Auburn University to manage the FCC portion of the EHS-CCP grant. The model operates statewide with a family child care hub and seven program partners. The family child care hub has 48 FCC partners and the program partners have 20 center-based partners.

FAST FACTS

566

Children Directly Benefiting

1,155

Children Indirectly Benefiting

68

Child Care Partners

29

counties

Local Communities Affected

\$10.8M

Total Grant Amount

THE MODEL STANDOUTS

A Focus on FCC: Auburn University's Beginning Education Successfully Together (or "BEST") program manages the 48 FCC homes that are a part of the EHS-CCP. The homes are regionally distributed across the state. FCC providers who are part of the network receive payments for EHS-specific services, additional coaching/mentoring, financial supports for environmental improvements, curriculum materials, access to developmental screenings for all children in care, and additional professional development opportunities. Alabama's EHS-CCP program finds that it is important for parents to have the option to choose FCC. FCC programs can offer continuity of care for children, the ability for siblings to grow up together in the same space, smaller teacher-child ratios, more individualized attention to children, similar cultural values to parents, and the opportunity for children to experience "home life" during their early years.⁸

Co-Locating the EHS-CCP and the CCDF Administration: Having the same state office oversee the CCDF and the EHS-CCP is key to Alabama's success. Co-location enables seamless coordination across various state initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality of child care. It also made it easier to change the state-level rules that were early barriers to the partnership's success. For example, many of the families who apply for the EHS-CCP live far away from the CCDF offices. Prior to the EHS-CCP, families were required to apply for the subsidy in person. The state changed that policy and began to take applications over the phone. This minor but critical procedural change allows maximum efficiency in the recruitment, eligibility, selection, and enrollment process for the EHS-CCP program.

Environmental Improvements: The first step in ensuring children's access to high-quality care is a safe and enriching learning environment. The EHS-CCP funds allow centers and FCC providers to upgrade their spaces so that the children they serve have access to safe environments that promote learning. Playground and outdoor-space upgrades are a significant part of the environmental improvement process, which includes purchasing and installing new fencing, age-appropriate outdoor equipment, and cushioning under the equipment.

Comprehensive Services: Providers and teachers in the EHS-CCP now have access to a family service worker who works with them on building strong partnerships with families, coordinating family engagement activities, and developmental screenings for children. The family service workers also engage directly with families to support their needs through family goals, action plans, and parent education. FCC homes and centers are connected to other state systems to ensure that children have access to comprehensive services, including health and dental health services, nutritious meals, and early intervention when needed. All children are offered a care-coordinating medical social worker who assists families in accessing health care through a variety of methods.

Practice-Based Coaching and Support: Through a partnership with the Department of Early Childhood Education, each provider and teacher has access to a coach to help them enhance the quality of care and the education they offer to children. Coaches use reflective, practice-based coaching and work with providers and teachers to implement a research-based curriculum. Each FCC provider also has a Child



Development Specialist that makes regular visits to the home and helps them meet health and safety standards, address the individual needs of children, and attain professional development goals, including degree completion. Staff at Auburn University supervise and support the Child Development Specialists.

Expanding Opportunities for Higher Education and Supporting Distance Learning: Teachers, providers, and assistants have access to higher education and credentialing opportunities through the state's TEACH (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps) program and/or

Leadership Scholarship program, which cover most if not all of the costs of attendance through the bachelor's degree level. Because the state is so rural, and because it's difficult to get time off to attend school, all FCC providers are given iPad Minis so they can complete their schoolwork online as well as a monthly stipend to offset the costs of purchasing high-speed internet service for their homes. To date, all FCC providers completed their Child Development Associate (CDA) certification or higher. Many are still in school working toward an associate's or a bachelor's degree. All FCC assistants are also either finished with or working on their credentials and higher education.



The state cites the focus on “the whole family” as one of the biggest benefits of the EHS-CCP. They see these benefits as handed from provider to child, from child to parent, and from parent to society—all of which in turn impacts communities and the state more broadly. There are more than 700 licensed FCC programs in Alabama. Less than 10 percent are part of the Alabama EHS-CCP, but all could benefit from the financial support, coaching, and professional development that EHS providers receive.

THE RESULTS

- **67 center-based teachers have attained a CDA or higher credential or degree.**
- **31 FCC providers in the program attained a CDA, and one received an associate's degree.**
- **Nine FCC assistants attained a CDA, and one received a bachelor's degree; 15 FCC assistants are working toward a CDA, two are working on an associate's degree, and one is working on a bachelor's degree.**
- **25 FCC programs received national accreditation by the NAFCC.**
- **Higher education was financially incentivized.** FCC providers with a CDA received \$100 per child per week, those with an associate's degree received an additional \$10, and providers with a bachelor's degree received an additional \$15. And accredited providers received an additional \$25 per child per week. In other words, a provider with an associate's degree in early childhood education who is NAFCC-accredited received \$135 per child per week.



THE TAKEAWAYS

The EHS-CCP program enables providers to access higher education to improve the quality of care and learning they deliver to children. In addition to the progress made by FCC providers, all of the assistants are also working toward a credential. Two providers even decided to work toward a doctorate, and several others are working toward another higher degree.

The EHS-CCP supports quality enhancements across the board—as one grantee puts it: “From self-improvement to home improvements.” In many cases, children have access to an outdoor playground for the first time, which makes a significant difference to their learning experiences.

The training providers receive teaches them new skills and encourages out-of-the-box thinking. In turn, providers are transforming children's learning experiences by providing a more fun hands-on learning environment to prepare them for school.

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Serving children in multiple communities around the state is broadening the knowledge base of this program and its impact on FCC providers, families, and support agencies in Alabama. The statewide nature of this grant can be challenging, but the EHS-CCP truly shines a light on FCC.

