Keeping *the* Promise

A COLLECTIVE INVESTMENT IN
ATLANTA'S YOUNGEST LEARNERS



2018–2026
IMPAACT REPORT

PAACT
PROMISE ALL ATLANTA CHILDREN THRIVE

Our ImPAACT by the Numbers

PAACT: Promise All Atlanta Children Thrive was created in 2018 as a collective impact coalition of public, private, and community partners aligned around one goal: that every child in Atlanta, regardless of zip code, arrives at kindergarten ready to thrive.

Since then, PAACT has grown into a citywide movement to invest in Atlanta's youngest children with a robust network of implementation partners who do the work on the ground. This report captures what that coalition has built across its first eight years, including safer facilities, more affordable care, better-supported educators, and a stronger web of relationships across Atlanta's early learning ecosystem.



$20M+

in historic public-private investment secured through the Mayor's PAACT Commitment



70+

child care facilities improved



6,000+

children now learning in upgraded, safer environments



4,200+

child care slots protected during COVID



1,300+

educators awarded Early Childhood Champions training bonuses



600+

children supported by child care scholarships across two programs



200+

community ambassadors trained



2,500+

families reached annually



40+

cross-sector partners engaged



100%

of PAACT Partners say they would recommend PAACT to a peer organization



A Look Inside

04 **A Letter from Our Director**
Gratitude & Vision

05 **About PAACT**
Mission, History, & Strategy

08 **A Timeline of ImPAACT**
2018–2026

10 **Deep Dives**
Inside Our Core Programs

16 **Story Spotlights**
The Stories Behind the Data

21 **Powered by Partnerships**
Systems Change & Collective Impact

24 **Lessons Learned & What's Next**
Looking Ahead

27 **Join Us**
Call to Action & Acknowledgments

A Letter from Our Director

Dear Friends,

Eight years ago, PAACT: Promise All Atlanta Children Thrive began with a simple but ambitious vision of an Atlanta where every child, regardless of zip code, has access to the opportunities and support they need to thrive. That commitment has grown into a citywide movement powered by a shared belief that young children are our city's most important investment.

PAACT's founding director, Brittany Collins, and GEEARS Founding Executive Director, Mindy Binderman, helped bring that vision to life by laying the foundation for the collective action that continues to define our work today. I've had the privilege of leading this work for the last four years, but this isn't our story—it's Atlanta's story.

Through public and private partnerships, we have leveraged more than $20 million to strengthen Atlanta's early childhood ecosystem and create meaningful change for children, families, and educators. Today, we are proud to share the results of that commitment.

This report celebrates what's possible when a city invests in its youngest learners. It also reminds us how much work remains. Too many families still struggle with child care costs, too many providers face financial uncertainty, and too many educators remain underpaid for work that shapes children's futures. We have built a strong foundation, and we must keep building to ensure every child and family in Atlanta can thrive.

As we build on eight years of momentum, PAACT will continue expanding access to affordable, high-quality early learning, supporting the early childhood workforce, elevating families' voices, and pursuing sustainable funding. Partnership will remain at the heart of this work, because no single organization can do it alone.

To everyone who has contributed to this work, thank you. Your commitment, leadership, and love for Atlanta's children have made this progress possible.

Together, let's continue building a city where every child has the opportunity to learn, grow, and reach their full potential.

With gratitude,

Shawnell Johnson

Shawnell Johnson
Director
PAACT: Promise All Atlanta Children Thrive

Who We Are

PAACT was created by the Atlanta Early Education Leadership Council, which was convened by GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students in 2018. The Council consisted of leaders from both public and private sectors, including local government, state agencies, and business, faith, health, philanthropic, and early education communities. Together, this group developed a shared vision, bold yet actionable strategies, and the citywide commitment needed to "make the PAACT" and work toward an Atlanta in which all children can reach their full potential.

Our Mission

To improve outcomes for Atlanta's children ages birth through five, we develop partnerships to secure commitments from Atlanta's leaders in government, education, community, and business sectors.

Our Vision

Atlanta's families have what they need to ensure that children are healthy, learning, developing, and entering school ready to thrive, succeed, and reach their full potential.

A Note from the United Way of Greater Atlanta

United Way of Greater Atlanta has been honored to serve as a lead funding partner and fiscal steward of investments in PAACT from the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation. Together with our partners, we have helped build a stronger early childhood ecosystem that supports children, families, and educators across Atlanta.

The progress highlighted in this report demonstrates the power of collaboration and sustained investment in our city's youngest children. We are proud of what has been accomplished and remain committed to ensuring that every child in Atlanta has the opportunity to thrive.

Cori Cain
Associate Vice President, Early Learning
United Way of Greater Atlanta

PAACT STAFF



Kristin Bernhard
CEO, GEEARS



Shawnell Johnson
Director



Gbemi Famule
Program Manager



Dawan Barfield
Community Outreach Manager



How We Drive Change

From the beginning, PAACT was designed as a collective impact initiative, a coalition of partners aligning their work around shared goals. GEEARS serves as PAACT's backbone organization, providing strategic leadership, staffing, financial oversight, and coordination. The real work happens through PAACT's implementation partners like Quality Care for Children (QCC), Atlanta Public Schools (APS), Rotary Club of Atlanta, Reinvestment Fund (RF), Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF), Early Learning Property Management (ELPM), Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta (CFGA), United Way of Greater Atlanta (UWGA), and many others.

That work is guided by a shared theory of action—four strategies that guide the collaborative work of our partners, from direct service to systems-level change:

Improve Learning Access

Increase quality, access, and affordability of safe, rich learning environments

Raise Awareness & Engagement

Promote public awareness and stakeholder engagement with early childhood issues

Strengthen Child Health Support

Build capacity to serve the needs of young children

Connect Family Supports Systems

Coordinate and connect systems impacting the well-being of children and families

The Mayor's $20 Million PAACT Commitment

In April of 2022, Mayor Andre Dickens used his first State of the City address to make an historic announcement—a commitment of $5 million to PAACT. He also challenged Atlanta Public Schools to match this amount and charged Atlanta's private sector to double it, amounting to a $20 million investment in Atlanta's early learning ecosystem. At a reception on September 5, 2023, Mayor Dickens announced that the goal had been exceeded.

Three Campaign Pillars

1. **Quality & Capacity**
   Strengthening the physical and programmatic quality of Atlanta's child care and early learning environments
2. **Affordability & Access**
   Reducing financial barriers so every family can access high-quality care
3. **Workforce Recruitment & Retention**
   Investing in the educators who make quality care possible

The $20 million commitment funded three major initiatives:

The Repair and Renovation Grant Program:
Up to $75,000 per provider for facility improvements

The APS Parent-Child Success Scholarship Program:
200+ child care scholarships awarded to APS employees.

The Early Childhood Champions Teacher Bonus Program
Retention bonuses and compensated professional development for early childhood educators

> "PAACT joined my office to make this vision a reality and it continues to be an honor to work with them."
>
> **Atlanta Mayor**
> Andre Dickens



Together, these four strategies and three campaign pillars have shaped every PAACT program since 2018, from emergency grants during the COVID-19 pandemic to the Repair & Renovation, child care scholarships, and the Early Childhood Champions programs funded by the Mayor's $20 million commitment. The pages ahead show what happens when strategies turn into action, and action into impact for providers, families, and educators in Atlanta.

PAACT 2018 – 2026: A Timeline

2018

PAACT is Created: After a cross-sector A cross-sector convening of city leaders produces the PAACT Launch Report. PAACT is created to improve quality, access, and sustainability of early learning and care in Atlanta.

Ambassadors Program Begins: In partnership with APS, the Atlanta Early Education Ambassadors Program launches to improve Pre-K enrollment in targeted schools and early learning centers.

2019

Networks & Partnerships Expand: PAACT deepens alignment with Atlanta Public Schools and expands its network of community and institutional partners.

PAACT Parents Get A BOOST: PAACT launches the QCC Boost scholarship, ensuring more families can access high-quality early care and learning.

2020

Emergency Mobilization: PAACT rapidly coordinates COVID-19 emergency advocacy and connects providers with critical funding and resources.

Fund for Quality Stabilization Launches: PAACT establishes an emergency relief fund to keep providers open, support the child care workforce, and maintain the city's child care capacity.

2021

$1M in Grants to 71 Providers: Nearly $1 million is distributed to 71 providers, including 20 home-based providers. More than 4,200 child care slots are protected.

Building momentum one milestone at a time

2022

Mayor's $20M Commitment Announced: Mayor Andre Dickens announces the unprecedented $20M PAACT Commitment, the largest public investment in Atlanta's child care sector in the city's history.

Repair & Renovation Grant (R&R) Program Opens: The R&R program launches, providing grants for physical infrastructure improvements across Atlanta's child care facilities.

2023

$20M Goal Exceeded & New Programs Launch: The $20M funding goal is surpassed ahead of schedule. The Early Childhood Champions (ECC) Teacher Bonus Program launches and APS employee child care scholarships begin.

2024

Repair & Renovation Program Reaches 70+ Providers Across Atlanta: $6.5M is invested in new HVAC, plumbing, electrical work, playgrounds and other facility upgrades for Atlanta's child care providers.

Summative Evaluations Commissioned: PAACT commissions independent summative evaluations of its key programs, generating rigorous evidence of what works.

2025

20 Educators Honored: At the College Football National Championship, 20 veteran early educators each receive a $5,000 Early Childhood Champions Hall of Fame Award.

2026

First Comprehensive Impact Report: PAACT publishes its first full ImPAACT Report, capturing eight years of investment, lessons, and the stories of those transforming Atlanta's early learning landscape.

PAACT Inspires Policy Change: The success of the PAACT Repair & Renovation program serves as a local spotlight to inspire state capital improvement legislation. (Senate Bill 554)



Deep Dives

From emergency grants during COVID to facility repairs, child care scholarships, community ambassadors, and educator retention, these five programs are where PAACT's strategy meets everyday life for Atlanta's children and families.

When the Pandemic Hit, PAACT Helped



When COVID-19 reached Atlanta in March 2020, the city's child care sector faced an existential threat. Parents stopped sending their children and revenue collapsed overnight. But the rent, utilities, insurance, and costs of keeping a small child care business alive persisted.

PAACT responded swiftly, partnering with Quality Care for Children, the United Way, the Blank Foundation, and the Reinvestment Fund to design and deploy three emergency grant programs with minimal restrictions and accessible applications.

The three emergency grant programs were:

1. **Fund for Quality Stabilization Grant**
   $1 million
   to 62 providers

2. **Family Child Care Relief Fund**
   $240,000
   to 20 home-based providers

3. **Facilities Improvement Program**
   $25,000
   each to 8 providers.

Together, these funds reached 71 providers and protected more than 4,200 child care slots. 80% of providers said funds arrived 'just in time.'

In a survey conducted by Luminary Evaluation, four out of every five providers said PAACT funds arrived "at a good time" or "just in time." Not a single recipient said they would have been fine without the support. Providers also described a feeling of institutional support that shaped their relationships with the broader early childhood ecosystem well beyond the pandemic.

> *At first, I was stressed and afraid that I was going to have to close my program. But the PAACT grant helped me to stay in business.*
>
> **Director,**
> Active Learning Academy

> *The funding went to purchase cleaning supplies and safety items to maintain a safe environment for my clients during COVID. It also helped me to pay my staff on time and take care of their needs during a difficult time.*
>
> **COVID Grant Recipient**

What began as crisis response became the starting point for PAACT Repair & Renovation, detailed on the next page.

A Flip for a Better Future



Deferred maintenance is the norm in Atlanta's child care landscape. Safe facilities are foundational to quality early learning, but major capital projects are out of reach for small programs operating on thin margins.

Launched as part of the Mayor's $20 Million PAACT Commitment, the Repair & Renovation (R&R) offered grants of up to $75,000 for facility improvements — a public-private collaboration funded by the City of Atlanta and private philanthropy, with implementation support from RF, LIIF, ELPM, and QCC. Applications take under 30 minutes, and 91% of applicants rated the process positively.

70+
providers funded

$6.5M
invested in facilities

6,000+
children reached

87%
more confident about their program's future

The program completed 210 scopes of work, most often floor replacement, fencing, wall and ceiling repairs, playground surfacing, doors, and HVAC. 88% of providers pursued multiple improvements within their scope. 95% of grantees also benefited from at least one other PAACT program, reflecting how one entry point opens providers to the full ecosystem of support, and 100% said they're likely to pursue future repairs.

> *Large projects with that type of price tag…those are things that you dream about being able to do, but you likely don't have the operating budget to do.*
>
> **R&R Grant Recipient**

> *We've seen providers really feel empowered. They are breathing new life into their program by giving it a little facelift or a big facelift.*
>
> **R&R Program Stakeholder**

Full findings are in Luminary Evaluation's September 2025 Summative Report.

What Affordable Care Actually Buys a Family



There is a persistent gap in Atlanta's child care ecosystem: too many families earn too much to qualify for subsidized care, yet too little to afford quality early learning. PAACT's scholarship programs bridge that gap.

The **PAACT Scholarship, powered by QCC's BOOST,** serves families below 85% of state median income who don't qualify for state-funded care — committing more than $5.7 million to 416 children and 324 parents across 104 early learning programs.

The **APS Parent Child Success Scholarship** supports APS employees and has committed more than $3.6 million to 203 children and 167 parents, 80% of them first-time users of formal child care.

$9.4M
committed to scholarships.

600+
children served (BOOST & APS).

82%
of providers increased enrollment during COVID.

100%
of APS recipients felt less stressed.

Georgia State University research found that BOOST families experienced less stress, greater resilience, and gains in children's learning and school readiness. Scholarships also helped providers maintain enrollment and retain staff—supporting stronger families and a more stable early learning system.

> *This is a great opportunity to help people who are caught in the middle, who aren't eligible for typical assistance. I am so very grateful for this program because it helped me get back on my feet after a bad separation.*
>
> **BOOST Scholarship Recipient**

> *Receiving this scholarship has had a profound impact on both my education and my family. Financially, it has alleviated a significant burden, allowing me to focus more on my career rather than worrying about costs.*
>
> **APS Scholarship Recipient,**
> Second Grade Teacher

Meeting Families Where They Are

In many Atlanta neighborhoods, accessing quality early education means navigating a system that can feel confusing, expensive, and out of reach. That's where the ambassadors come in.

Founded in 2018, the Atlanta Early Education Ambassadors program trains community members like parents, grandparents, retired educators, and college students, to spread the word about early learning resources, quality child care and Pre-K. They live in the neighborhoods they serve and show up as early learning advocates at church, the grocery store and social gatherings.

The program focuses on APS clusters with historically low Pre-K enrollment. Ambassadors canvass at malls, supermarkets, health fairs, apartment complexes, and community gatherings, advising families on Georgia's free Pre-K and Quality Rated programs.

For ambassadors, the program offers more than stipends. They develop leadership skills, deepen their knowledge of the early education system, and pursue new pathways into the field. Several ambassadors have gone on to work as family liaisons, program coordinators, and early learning advocates.

Eight Years of Impact

200+
ambassadors trained across 8 cohorts

2,500+
families reached annually

500+
community events attended

50%+
yearly decrease in APS Pre-K vacancy rate on average

As a 2024-2025 National African American Child and Family Research Center grant recipient, PAACT partnered with researchers Danielle Wallace and Gbemi Famule on the most rigorous evaluation of the program to date, published January 2026. Three key findings emerged:

1. Ambassadors are effective because they're trusted community members, and outreach works best at high-traffic events and canvassing.
2. Structural barriers like benefit cliffs, demographic shifts, and a multi-step enrollment process require system-level change alongside outreach.
3. The model is replicable with the right training investment and data systems.

Ambassadors prove that trust in the system can't be manufactured, only built, neighbor by neighbor, with time and strategic support.



> *Being able to really serve the community from a holistic perspective has been a tremendous blessing for me.*
>
> **Ericka Smith**
> Lead Ambassador

Investing in Everyday Champions

Georgia's child care workers earn a median wage of $11.71 per hour, two dollars below the national average, yet their work shapes children during the first five years' critical brain development.

Created in 2022 by the Rotary Club of Atlanta in partnership with PAACT, the Early Childhood Champions Teacher Bonus Program offers a $500 bonus for completing state-approved, literacy-centered professional development through the Cox Campus platform, and an additional $500 for remaining employed at the same child care program for a full year.

1,300+
training bonus recipients

795
retention bonus recipients

12,000+
hours of professional development completed

$100K
Hall of Fame awards to 20 veteran teachers





In January 2025, PAACT and the Rotary Club of Atlanta worked with the College Football Playoff Foundation and United Way of Greater Atlanta to honor 20 veteran early educators with $5,000 Hall of Fame Awards, delivered during surprise classroom visits.

PAACT also convenes Literacy & Justice for All, led by the Rollins Center for Language & Literacy at the Atlanta Speech School. The initiative has provided research-based literacy coaching to 638 early childhood educators through Sheltering Arms, the YMCA of Metro Atlanta, and community-based programs.

> *They just don't get the recognition they deserve. The amount of impact that they're making in the communities with our children is just phenomenal.*
>
> **Britton Banowsky,** Executive Director, College Football Playoff Foundation



Story Spotlights

The following pages profile individuals whose lives have been changed by PAACT's investments. These stories serve as a reminder that behind every number is a real person and real impact.



A Provider's Journey From Compliance to Quality

Traci Coleman became director of Grow Montessori in 2020 with a mission to bring Montessori education to Black and brown children historically excluded from the model. She transformed the school's interior with her own resources, but outside, mud, standing water, and a dilapidated entry remained.

Traci initially envisioned a deck to extend classrooms outdoors. Early Learning Property Management helped expand that vision into a bike track, a patio for chalk play and carpool, an awning, a new front deck and ramp, and an egress path that supported Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) licensing compliance. The improvements created a functional, welcoming outdoor learning space. With support connected to her Repair & Renovation grant, Grow moved from "Not Participating" to a Two-Star Quality Rated center.

The grant was Traci's entry point to PAACT, but the support continued. Through Literacy and Justice for All coaching, she is strengthening her leadership. "My coach challenges me to be this different type of leader I always wanted to be, but didn't have the tools for," she says.

Grow's transformation brought together safer outdoor space, a stronger quality rating, literacy coaching, and a community of partners. The bike track is the visible change; the collective impact behind it is what truly changed the school.

> *"When everybody from PAACT showed up, it was like somebody heard us. We didn't have to yell. So there's nothing we can't do now.*
>
> **Traci Coleman,** Executive Director, Grow Montessori







How Ambassadors Transform Pre-K Enrollment

Every year, state-funded Pre-K seats in some of Atlanta's lowest-enrollment clusters sit empty because families may not yet know the opportunities are available. Monica Smith, who manages APS's Pre-K enrollment, has seen this pattern repeat and understands the importance of meeting families where they are.

Working with APS to extend the district's outreach, PAACT deploys early education ambassadors from spring through summer to share Pre-K options, answer questions, and guide families through enrollment. "The ambassadors are the ones out there consistently connecting with families," Monica says. By fall, many of the previously available seats are filled.

Lead ambassadors Ericka Smith and Yeme Thomas joined in 2018 and 2022, respectively. Their outreach extends beyond malls and festivals. On a ride to the airport, Yeme learned that her Uber driver had recently moved from Mississippi and needed care for her four-year-old. Before they reached the terminal, Yeme had searched the Quality Rated site, called three centers, and arranged appointments. Within a week, the child had a seat.

During COVID, Ericka shared PAACT's scholarship with a mother collecting food and books at a church on Fairburn Road. The woman returned with three friends. Through eight years of service, a cancer diagnosis, a pandemic, and a career transition, Ericka has built lasting community trust. Yeme's progression to lead ambassador reflects the same opportunity for growth.

Ambassadors enter knowing their neighborhoods and leave knowing the system, uniquely positioned to connect families to Pre-K and beyond.

> *"It's meeting people where they are. We're going into communities at two, three in the afternoon, and moms have on their bonnets and pajamas—and I'm like, "Hey Mom, I like that color." It's the commonality. Just meeting people where they are, being personable.*
>
> **Yeme Thomas,** Lead Ambassador



A Safer, Brighter Space for a Better Future

Billie Walker's journey with PAACT began on the other side of the table. When her daughter, Bailey, was a student at Hollis Innovation Academy in Atlanta Public Schools, Billie was referred and selected to join a PAACT parent panel. She immediately signed up, lending her voice to early education advocacy and the foundational conversations that helped to launch PAACT in 2018.

Today, Billie is an APS parent, child care provider, and child care advocate. Her family child care home, Westside Early Learning, serves toddlers in the same English Avenue corridor where she advocates as a parent. So naturally, when PAACT launched its Repair & Renovation grant program, Billie applied for that as well. What she received was transformative for her and the families she serves.

PAACT invested $75,000 in Westside Early Learning, including a new roof, air conditioning and heating unit, flooring, rubber safety surface for the outdoor play area, and an expanded wraparound porch.

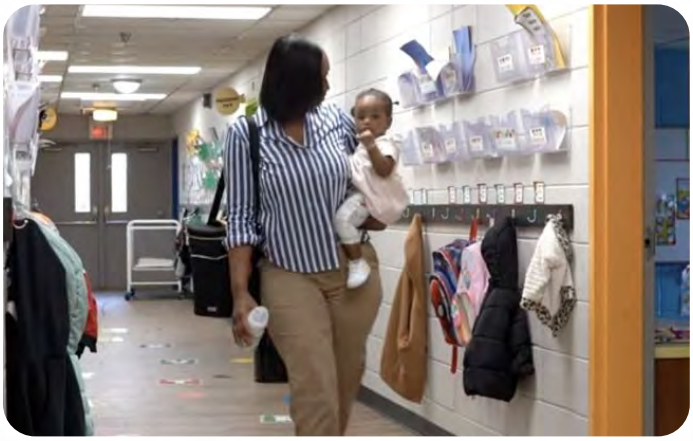
The new porch lets toddlers move freely without using steps. The rubber play surface cushions falls. The roof and HVAC ensure a structurally sound environment. The PAACT Team, in partnership with Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF), guided Billie through the process, ensuring that every dollar was well spent.

Billie has also served as an Atlanta Early Education Ambassador, promoting Pre-K enrollment in her own Westside community. Billie's journey from parent panelist to grantee to ambassador brings PAACT's theory of change to life. Billie first came to PAACT as a parent helping to shape its vision. Today, that vision shows up in her own home and neighborhood, where every child deserves a safe, dignified place to learn and grow.

A Child Care Lifeline for Working Families

> *Now he actually gets the full attention that he needs to learn what he needs to learn. And I don't have to pay anything now. The scholarship covers everything.*
>
> **Lamarcius,** APS Employee





Lamarcius Matthews, an APS Employee at Frederick Douglass High School, is a father of two working toward a bachelor's degree to become a special education teacher. When his son was born, the only affordable child care opening he found was 30 minutes away. Encouraged by the program coordinator to complete his application, he received the APS Parent-Child Success Scholarship. It connected his family to Sheltering Arms, three minutes from home, where his son joined a smaller classroom with two dedicated teachers and an assistant.

Lonisha Brown wanted to be a teacher since tenth grade and became the first in her family to attend college. After her daughter, Demi, was born, quality child care felt unaffordable. An email from Quality Care for Children introduced her to the PAACT Scholarship. With an accessible application and responsive support, she found trustworthy care at Higher Calling Christian Academy. Now Demi runs toward her teachers, and Lonisha has started a 529 savings plan for her daughter.

For Lamarcius, the scholarship brought calmer mornings. For Lonisha, it opened space to imagine her daughter's future. For both children, it meant learning with engaged, present teachers, the kind of stability PAACT's investment in child care access makes possible.

> *If I can show up for work and be fully present without the worry of where my child is or what's happening with my child during the day—that's a lot of stress off of me. But I'm also a better employee.*
>
> **Lonisha Brown,** BOOST Scholarship recipient



Powered by Partnerships: How Partners Solve Problems Together

40+
cross-sector partners

94%
of partners surveyed believe PAACT is an effective convener and backbone for Atlanta's early learning ecosystem

100%
of partners surveyed would recommend PAACT to a peer organization

When asked what being a part of PAACT is like, partners describe progress made possible by connections to the right people, resources, and opportunities. Early Learning Property Management has seen Repair & Renovation projects help providers reopen classrooms, access resources, and remain sustainable. YWCA Greater Atlanta strengthened its facility and workforce, while new connections linked qualified teachers to openings at other providers.

For Jumpstart for Young Children, PAACT connections helped recruit more than 400 volunteers—nearly tripling its FY26 regional goal. Atlanta Children's Day Shelter gained volunteers, grant awards, and ADA renovations. Across the network, PAACT connections have helped partners access licensing support, staff referrals, technical assistance, and workforce pathways.

Partners meet quarterly for collective consultancy, sharing challenges and working through solutions together. Between these gatherings, the PAACT team meets with partners throughout the year to support their organizations and identify opportunities to align resources. These ongoing relationships keep cross-sector work moving toward a shared vision for Atlanta's youngest children.

> *"With so many organizations facing budget cuts and shifting priorities, it is a critical time to align forces to support our youth and families."*
>
> **Tiffaney Renfro,** Senior Associate Director of Programs, THRIVE Research Lab, Emory Rollins School of Public Health

Partnership












































in Action



SEF
SOUTHERN EDUCATION FOUNDATION
Miles to Go:
Fulfilling the Promise of Racial Equity in Education





HARVARD




Black Child Development Institute
ATLANTA



HARVARD

Theodora Boughan Play Park







NAACFRC





ATLANTA
EARLY EDUCATION
Ask me how enroll Pre-K!



WRIGHT WAY
LEARNING ACADEMY


Lessons Learned

Eight years of PAACT have taught us what it takes to lead a collective impact model. These are the lessons that will shape our next phase, and the ones we'd pass on to any city or coalition doing similar work.

1

A ready-to-execute plan unlocks high-profile investment.

PAACT's defined priorities (quality, access, workforce) and ready-to-go infrastructure gave the City of Atlanta confidence to invest. Because PAACT had already built cross-sector relationships, it could speak as one coalition instead of many separate asks.

> **Guidance for peers:**
> Build the coalition first, then bring a ready-to-execute plan with named partners and projected outcomes.

2

The remedy for bureaucracy is relationships.

When the Repair and Renovations program stalled in permitting or compliance review, relationships PAACT had built in advance moved the work forward. Trusted officials inside partner institutions championed the project, applied pressure, and unlocked stuck processes from within.

> **Guidance for peers:**
> Build relationships with champions inside every partner institution and across every level before you need their support.

3

The convener leads without controlling, and sometimes without credit.

PAACT's job as convener is to align the vision, fundraise, and coordinate efforts, which often makes it invisible in the successes it helps produce. Visibility tends to concentrate around the most prominent partner, even when dozens of organizations made the outcome possible.

> **Guidance for peers:**
> Highlight partner names and logos in press releases and public materials. Measure your success by what partners accomplish rather than by your own visibility.

4

Capital- and capacity-building programs are only as strong as the technical assistance behind them.

Facility-improvement grants ran into procurement complexity, contractor timelines, and compliance requirements that funding alone couldn't solve. Providers with hands-on technical assistance navigated these obstacles far more successfully, while TA partners without local experience added to the friction.

> **Guidance for peers:**
> Budget for TA capacity before grant dollars, and match providers with TA partners who already know the local permitting and licensing landscape.

5

Momentum through the "messy middle" requires constant communication and a solutions-oriented mindset.

The Mayor's $20 million PAACT Commitment was a highly visible, catalyzing moment, but sustaining a coalition's energy after that urgency fades is quieter, harder work. A partner's leadership change can reshape priorities mid-project, and processes that looked simple on paper can stall for reasons no single partner controls. What kept PAACT moving through these hiccups was the strength of our coalition, steady partner communication, and a focus on solutions.

> **Guidance for peers:**
> Coalition coordination should be a separate line item on the budget. Make time for regular partner check-ins so momentum doesn't depend on one moment or one leader.

None of these lessons are unique to PAACT. Each one will resurface as PAACT heads into its next strategic planning process.



What's Next

Here's where PAACT is putting our eight years of experience to work over the next two years.

1 Sustainable Public Funding Strategy

PAACT's top priority will be helping Atlanta establish a permanent, dedicated funding stream for early childhood education. Working with the Children's Funding Institute's roadmap, PAACT will support coalitions, research, and policy advocacy to make the case for a Children's Fund that will position Atlanta as a model for other cities.

2 The Next Phase of Strategic Planning

In late 2026, PAACT will launch a formal strategic planning process to shape our next three-to-five-year plan. The process will engage partners, providers, and families with lived experience and address governance, sustainable funding, and PAACT's long-term role within Atlanta's early childhood ecosystem.

3 Continue Scaling Workforce Investments

The Early Childhood Champions program has demonstrated the value of making educators feel supported and recognized. PAACT will work to sustain and expand this investment, orchestrating professional development, retention incentives, and career pathways toward a coordinated workforce pipeline.

4 Repair & Renovation 2.0

The R&R program evaluation yielded clear lessons around simplifying procurement, reducing administrative burden, and recruiting a more diverse contractor pool. PAACT will apply these findings to design a stronger second phase that will reach more family child care homes and build a multi-year renovation pathway.

5 Family Engagement Expansion

The ambassadors program's January 2026 research report points to a next phase with a more rigorous, measurable, community-designed outreach model, and new attention to structural barriers to enrollment, as well as data systems and career pathways for ambassadors.

This path forward doesn't happen without the partners, funders and community members who continue to "keep the PAACT" to ensure a brighter and better future for Atlanta's youngest residents.



Join Us in Keeping the PAACT



The work in this report happened because partners, funders, and community members decided to act. Our success only continues if people and partners like you get involved.

For Funders: Donate to PAACT

Atlanta needs early learning infrastructure that outlasts any single grant cycle. We invite you to invest in long-term systems change—sustainable workforce pipelines, capital programs that can survive beyond a single philanthropic campaign, and the public advocacy needed to secure dedicated children's funding. The evidence in this report makes this case.

For Partners: Join the PAACT Partner Network

The most powerful thing you can do is show up consistently, share your data, and align your work with PAACT's shared agenda. If you are an early learning provider, school system, community organization, or business leader who wants to deepen your engagement, we want to hear from you.

For Families & Providers: Learn more about PAACT

Programs, scholarships, professional development, and coaching are available to you. You don't have to navigate the early learning system alone.

For Policymakers: Learn about GEEARS Policy Agenda

Atlanta cannot sustain this progress on philanthropy alone. We need sustainable public funding, cross-agency alignment, and policies that treat early childhood education as the essential public good that it is.

Together we can all keep the PAACT!



Acknowledgments

The PAACT Team is immensely grateful to the many partners, providers, educators, families, and champions who have made this work possible.

Thank you to the families who trusted PAACT with their children's futures, especially those who shared their stories here. Thank you to the providers who opened their doors, their ledgers, and their hearts to this work.

And thank you to the PAACT team at GEEARS, and all of PAACT's implementation partners, who show up every day for our city's youngest residents. No matter how the Atlanta early learning ecosystem shifts, PAACT will always be powered by partnerships.

Special thanks to Danielle J. Wallace of Manifesting Mind Consulting for bringing the vision for this impact report to life.

Our Funders

- Aetna Better Health
- Around the Table Foundation
- Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation
- AT&T
- Atlanta Hawks
- Bank of America
- Betty and Davis Fitzgerald Foundation
- Carter's Inc.
- Chick-fil-A
- Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta
- Cousins Properties
- Delta Air Lines
- Georgia Pacific
- Invesco Ltd.
- J. Bulow Campbell Foundation
- Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation
- LeapFrog Services
- Mercedes-Benz
- Naserian Foundation
- NCR
- Novelis Atlanta
- PulteGroup
- Reade & Katie Fahs
- Ressler Gertz Family Foundation
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation
- The Coca-Cola Company
- The Home Depot Foundation
- The Sartain-Lanier Family Foundation, Inc.
- Tull Foundation
- United Way of Greater Atlanta
- UPS
- WestRock Company
- Zeist Foundation

Our Partners

Our Advisory Board

Adam Harrell
Nebo Agency

Blythe Robinson
Sheltering Arms

Christopher Demko
Southern Company

Commissioner Amy Jacobs
Department of Early Care and Learning

Cori Cain
United Way of Greater Atlanta

Danita Knight
YWCA Greater Atlanta

Donna Davidson
EasterSeals of North Georgia

Dr. Shavaun Mincey
Atlanta Public Schools

Ellyn Cochran
Quality Care for Children

Eshé Collins
Southern Education Foundation/Atlanta City Council

Fred Jones
Southern Education Foundation

Janean Lewis
Mayor's Office

Lauren Koontz
YMCA of Metro Atlanta

Michele Hill
KIDazzle

Qaadirah Abdur Rahim
Social Sector Executive

Rashida Winfrey
Atlanta Underserved Entrepreneurs

Robyn Wallace
Local Green Atlanta

Ryan James
Atlanta Speech School

Stephanie Blank
GEEARS Board Chair

Sydney Ahern
Consultant

PAACT:
Promise All Atlanta Children Thrive

Improving learning, health, and well-being for Atlanta's youngest children and their families.

CONTACT INFO

press@geears.org
www.paactatl.org

FOLLOW US ON

@paactatl



HELP US KEEP THE PROMISE. MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TODAY.