



VOICES FOR GEORGIA'S CHILDREN STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY FY2020-2024

Voices for Georgia's Children (Voices) is an independent, non-partisan catalyst for systemic change. Voices speaks for all of Georgia's 2.5 million children – particularly those whose location, family income, race, or family/community circumstances leave them most vulnerable. They are rural and urban and live in all 159 Georgia counties.

Since Voices was founded in 2003, we have worked to make sure that every child has access to the high-quality services and programs they need. Voices promotes data-driven, pragmatic policies that are responsive to the communities we serve.

We enter our 17th year with a staff of 12 full-time professionals led by Executive Director Erica Fener Sitkoff, an experienced child advocate with a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology. The 18-member Board of Directors includes leaders from the business, government, academic, and nonprofit sectors.

OUR VISION AND MISSION

Voices for Georgia's Children (Voices) envisions a state where all children thrive. But with 23% of Georgia children living at or below the federal poverty level, Georgia ranks low on measures of child wellbeing:



Nearly 200,000 Georgia children and adolescents do not have health insurance.



Nearly two-thirds of Georgia children cannot read proficiently by the end of third grade.



Almost one-third of adolescents in Georgia are overweight or obese.



Almost 70% of youth in Department of Juvenile Justice long-term facilities have a mental health diagnosis severe enough to require ongoing treatment.

The inequity is distressing. But Voices has a clear path forward: **We advance laws, policies, and actions that improve children's lives.**

NEW FOR FY2020

Community-Based Advocates

Voices is inaugurating an annual leadership training program called the Child Advocacy and Policy Fellowship (CAPF) that will put more "boots on the ground" in high-poverty rural counties. The first CAPF cohort includes four Fellows – drawn from civic, social service, religious, education, health, media, or law enforcement organizations – from across the state. They will spend seven months studying the interrelated issues that affect child wellbeing, developing advocacy plans, and engaging lawmakers at the Capitol during the legislative session.

2020 Census

Voices is working to ensure that the 2020 Census accurately counts Georgia's children. The Census affects the allocation of billions in federal matching funds for programs like Head Start, Medicaid, and school nutrition. The U.S. Census Bureau acknowledges it has historically undercounted children, and that Georgia is at particular risk.

Voices is developing marketing/communications toolkits to increase Census participation in hard-to-count areas. Trusted messengers such as childcare providers, early education teachers, and health care workers will use the toolkits to explain to community residents why the Census matters.

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FY2020-2024

Voices' Strategic Plan is a blueprint for action over the next five years with three broad goals: (1) Research and Policy, (2) Advocacy, and (3) Organizational Capacity.

Voices' meticulous research is the foundation of our policy agenda. Our advocacy advances the policy agenda by educating politicians, state officials, business leaders, and other child advocates. Strong operational and financial capacity are critical to our ability to lead.

RESEARCH AND POLICY

GOAL: Equip policymakers and advocates with the best and most accurate information about children's needs.

Produce annual updates of (1) the *Whole Child Primer* – Voices' authoritative information and policy resource, and (2) *All About Kids* – a compilation of 50 factsheets covering topics such as early childhood education, healthcare access, and afterschool programs. Voices distributes these documents to all 236 members of the General Assembly, as well as to other policymakers and advocates.

Analyze the constitutional and regulatory implications of potential policy changes.

Evaluate the financial feasibility, sustainability, and scalability of proposed policy solutions.

Conduct research by convening community roundtables, launching pilot programs, and initiating case studies that assess how well the state is implementing its policies.

ADVOCACY

GOAL: Influence and enlist others to act on policy solutions.

Mobilize coalitions to advance policy reforms.

Participate in state-appointed study and advisory commissions.

Consult with state agencies on policy needs and implementation.

Provide expert testimony for legislative hearings.

Convene public policy forums across the state.

Promote Voices' "whole child" agenda at the Biennial Institute for Georgia Legislators, organized by the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government.

Disseminate significant research findings through Voices-authored special reports, news media op-eds, and professional journals.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

GOAL: Build organizational capacity to lead.

Replace a patchwork of old information technology with an integrated system that exponentially increases efficiency and effectiveness.

Amplify Voices' message and increase our visibility through statewide public awareness campaigns.

Facilitate constituent interactions with lawmakers through advocacy alerts, social media, and an enhanced website.

Attract and retain high-performing Board and staff members who thrive in a culture of innovation.

Grow our operating reserve from 4 months to 6 months cash.

Increase revenue from the Big Voice special event, individual and Board gifts, corporate sponsorships, and grants.

OUR IMPACT AREAS

Children’s needs are interconnected. They thrive when they get a solid start in life, have good health, are protected and treated fairly, and receive enrichment beyond the classroom.

Using a whole child approach, Voices helps government agencies, service providers, and community groups across all areas of wellbeing coordinate their efforts and maximize the value of their resources.

We focus our research, policy agenda, and advocacy on five interrelated Impact Areas where public policies affect children.

Impact Area

What Does This Mean?

Research, Policy & Advocacy

A Solid Start

Pre-natal and maternal healthcare, comprehensive developmental screening and early intervention, and affordable high-quality childcare/early education

- Eliminate the waiting lists for Pre-Kindergarten classes.
- Make quality childcare affordable to more low- and moderate-income families by increasing state/federal funding for subsidies.
- Revise quality standards for child care programs to improve nutrition, physical activity, and social-emotional learning.
- Promote healthy eating habits at home by increasing access to nutritious locally grown foods.

Healthy Minds & Bodies

Access to physical and behavioral health services through Medicaid and PeachCare for Kids, clinician training, and innovative ways of delivering healthcare to underserved populations.

- Lower the barriers to enrolling in Medicaid and PeachCare for Kids
- Use Comprehensive School-Based Health Centers and school-based TeleHealth to bring prevention and treatment to children where they spend most of their time
- Broaden the range of mental health services covered by Medicaid/PeachCare for prevention, early intervention, and to meet the unique needs of young children
- Build a robust behavioral health workforce pipeline.

Strong & Stable Families

Proactive policies that help children stay connected to their families and communities as well as reactive policies, when appropriate, to protect children from injury, trauma, abuse, and exploitation.

- Keep children safely with their families and in their communities by coordinating the implementation of new federal laws and aligning child safety, abuse prevention, and healthy development initiatives across all child-serving agencies in Georgia.
- When foster care is necessary, offer adequate reimbursement to foster care providers, improve the retention of DFCS caseworkers, expand access to therapeutic foster care supports, and promote interagency cooperation on child welfare issues.

Fair Treatment

The need for a positive, equitable, and supportive school climate, the use of restorative discipline rather than traditional punishment, and teaching all adults working in schools and child-serving settings about childhood development and trauma.

- Divert truant, disruptive, and runaway children from juvenile detention into more effective community-based interventions by securing funding for Children In Need of Supervision (CHINS) programs.
- Promote positive school climate by increasing funds for alternatives to traditional school discipline, such as Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS), which is centered on restorative discipline, rather than suspension and expulsion.

Quality Out-of-School Time

The benefits of afterschool and summer learning opportunities and the consequences of not increasing high-quality programs and participants.

- Continue to operate the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network (GSAN), a Voices’ program dedicated to advocacy for greater access to high-quality out-of-school time. GSAN also provides technical assistance and training to afterschool and summer programs.
- Persuade the General Assembly to initiate state funding for afterschool and summer learning programs.

HOW WE MEASURE OUR SUCCESS

We know we have succeeded when children are thriving. We advance our Mission by working to ensure that all children have access to high-quality programs and services. For example:

Where We Stand in 2019	By FY2024, we will...
7% of Georgia's children were uninsured.	Decrease to 3%.
11% of eligible low-income families were receiving state/federal subsidies for childcare.	Increase state/federal funding for affordable childcare.
Fewer than 10% of School Resource Officers receive training in child development and trauma.	Increase to 20%.
8% of students had access to a school-based behavioral health program.	Increase to 20%.
60% of four-year-olds participated in Pre-Kindergarten.	Increase to 70%.
There was no dedicated state funding for afterschool and summer learning programs.	Secure dedicated state-level funding.