



# Head Start in Rural Georgia

By Leila Schochet and Rasheed Malik      April 12, 2018

Head Start helps fill a critical void in early childhood education and service delivery in Georgia's rural communities. This fact sheet examines the scope of services that the Head Start program provides to Georgia children and families, and highlights the key role that Head Start plays in the state's supply of quality child care.

## Child poverty in Georgia's rural counties

Rural children in Georgia are facing significant and persistent poverty. Forty percent of rural Georgia children under the age of 5 live in poverty, compared with 27 percent of children living in metropolitan areas. In Georgia, there are 59 rural persistent child poverty counties, where the child poverty rate has been greater than 20 percent since 1980.<sup>1</sup>

## Family supports in rural counties

At the same time, access to many of the services that help combat child poverty—such as quality child care and health care—is very limited, particularly for low-income rural families in Georgia. Sixty-one percent of rural families live in a child care desert, where the supply of licensed child care does not meet demand.<sup>2</sup> Ninety-nine percent of rural counties in Georgia are designated as a Health Service Professional Shortage Area, where there is a shortage of primary care, dental, or mental health providers.

## Head Start in Georgia

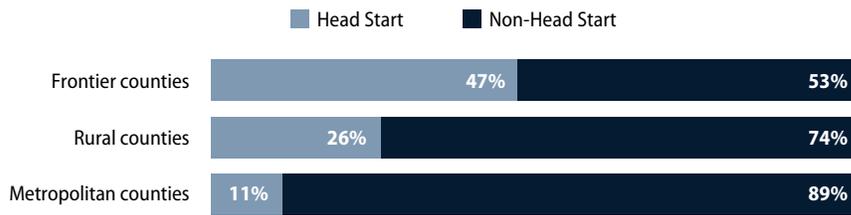
- Across rural Georgia, Head Start operates 292 classrooms in 119 centers.
- Head Start funds enrollment for 26,122 children, 28 percent of whom attend rural programs.
- Head Start employs 6,232 staff, 28 percent of whom work in rural programs.

## *Head Start as a proportion of Georgia's child care centers*

Head Start plays an outsized role in filling Georgia's rural child care shortage. In Georgia, Head Start makes up more than one-quarter of the center-based child care programs in rural counties and nearly half of the center-based programs in frontier counties.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, Head Start represents just 11 percent of center-based programs in metropolitan areas.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Head Start fills a child care gap in Georgia's rural and frontier counties**

Share of child care centers that are Head Start grantees, by type of county



Note: Metropolitan counties have a rural-urban continuum code of 1 through 4; rural counties are coded as 5, 6, or 7; frontier counties are coded as an 8 or 9.

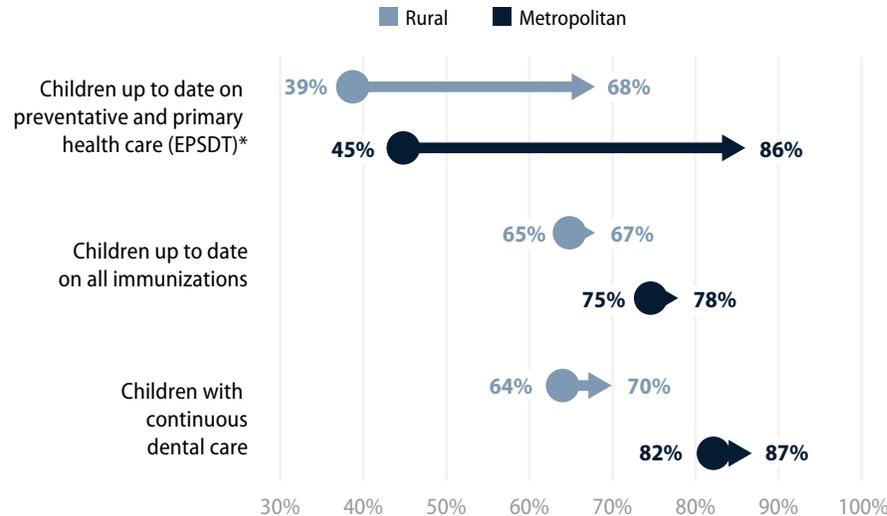
Source: Authors' analysis of Methodology in Rasheed Malik and Leila Schochet, "A Compass for Families: Head Start in Rural America" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2018), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/?p=448741>.

### Head Start health and education service delivery

Head Start delivers health and education services to rural children who may not otherwise have access and makes significant progress in connecting children to these services over the school year.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Georgia's rural children entering Head Start are often behind on health screenings**

Head Start service receipt rates, beginning and end of year



\*Note: "EPSDT" stands for Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment—the Medicaid program's comprehensive benefit for children.

Source: Authors' analysis of Methodology in Rasheed Malik and Leila Schochet, "A Compass for Families: Head Start in Rural America" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2018), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/?p=448741>.

### Head Start provides critical family services to Georgia families

Among families enrolled in Head Start, 57 percent of rural families and 63 percent of metropolitan families in Georgia received some type of family service through Head Start. This includes services such as parenting education, health education, job training, and substance abuse prevention.

### Endnotes

- 1 See Methodology in Rasheed Malik and Leila Schochet, "A Compass for Families: Head Start in Rural America" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2018), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/?p=448741>.
- 2 Rasheed Malik and Katie Hamm, "Mapping America's Child Care Deserts" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2017), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2017/08/30/437988/mapping-americas-child-care-deserts/>.
- 3 Authors' note: Frontier counties are a subset of rural counties and can be understood as the most remote rural counties.