



## STATE INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE EARLY LEARNING: NEXT STEPS IN COORDINATING SUBSIDIZED CHILD CARE, HEAD START, AND STATE PREKINDERGARTEN



Center for Law and Social Policy

*By Rachel Schumacher, Mark Greenberg, and Joan Lombardi*

April 2001

# UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO PREKINDERGARTEN:

## *GEORGIA'S EXPERIENCE*

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*For the full report: State Initiatives to Promote Early Learning: Next Steps in Coordinating Subsidized Child Care, Head Start, and State Prekindergarten, or individual descriptions of the studied initiatives in Massachusetts or Ohio, please see our website at [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org), or call (202) 328-5140.*

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## Introduction

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A universal access model of early childhood service delivery has generated increasing interest in recent years. In this model, a state offers early childhood educational opportunities to *all* children in the state, usually limited to a certain age group. The principal focus of this model is most often on school readiness for children, and providing a work support for parents may be a secondary consideration. In order for the state's initiative to be considered truly universal, it must be fully funded and reasonably available throughout the state's geographic regions to all families that are interested in participating. Variations on this model are developing in Georgia, New York and Oklahoma, with Georgia's program the most advanced and only example of this type of initiative approaching universal coverage. Each state is in a different stage of expanding coverage to meet the goal for universal statewide access, with a number of variations in how the model is being implemented.

For example:

- **State Administration:** Georgia created an independent state agency to administer the program, while New York and Oklahoma placed administration within the existing state department of education.
- **Provider Selection:** Georgia administers all the initiative's major funding and policy decisions at the state agency level and makes grants directly to individual providers, while New York and Oklahoma make grants to local school districts allowing them the flexibility to subcontract to private providers if necessary.
- **Funding Mechanism:** Georgia created a state lottery funding stream, while New York and Oklahoma use general state funds.
- **Local Involvement:** The approach in Georgia and Oklahoma includes a locus of planning and policy-making at the state agency level, while New York requires that local school districts create Advisories to conduct planning and implementation of programs.
- **Program Guidelines:** Georgia requires all participating providers to use one of several approved curricula in the classroom, while New York and Oklahoma set more general guidelines for classroom content.
- **Duration of Program:** Georgia's initiative requires programs to operate for six and a half hours a day, while New York requires programs to operate at minimum for two and a half hours a day and Oklahoma allows local school districts to choose to provide either a two and a half hour day or a six hour day. All states require a five day week schedule, and use a school calendar of 180 days a year.

This chapter describes Georgia's experience in creating and implementing its version of the universal access model. The initiative was spearheaded and developed under the leadership of former Governor Zell Miller. It is funded using a dedicated stream from a state lottery that was created by state public referendum. Although the original pilot served only children considered "at-risk," the Georgia Pre-Kindergarten Program (Georgia Pre-K) is now open to all four-year-old children on a voluntary basis. The state offers a school-day, school readiness focused prekindergarten program available to families without cost, and without regard to family income or to whether a parent is engaged in work. A specifically-created Office of School Readiness administers this state-to-local program through grants/contracts to child care, Head Start, and public schools that apply and are able to meet specific and separate programmatic and curriculum standards. The goals of the program are: "to provide a developmentally appropriate preschool program emphasizing growth in language and literacy, math concepts, science, arts, physical development, and personal and social competence."<sup>1</sup> Since 1992, Georgia Pre-K has grown from a pilot program serving 750 children in 20 sites with \$3 million in state funding to a statewide initiative serving 62,500 children in over 1600 sites with \$225 million in lottery dollars in the 1999-2000 school year.<sup>2</sup>

The Georgia experience provides a useful example of the policy choices and implications involved in the universal access model. This chapter includes:

- A brief description of the context of the state's early childhood system, including child care, Head State, public school, and other early childhood initiatives;
- Historical background on the creation and development of Georgia Pre-K; and
- Details on how Georgia Pre-K works including state administration, provider selection, program description, and data and evaluation efforts.

All data were verified as of December 2000.

## I. Georgia's Early Childhood Systems: Some Context

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**B**efore offering a detailed description of Georgia Pre-K, this section provides background on the child care system, Head Start, public school, and other relevant early education policies that provide the context within which Georgia Pre-K operates.

### A. Child Care

In Georgia, responsibilities for different aspects of the child care system are divided among several agencies and departments. Low-income child care subsidies are administered by the Child Care and Parent Services (CAPS) unit in Georgia's Department of Human Resources (DHR). Decisions about spending quality enhancement funds under the federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) are the responsibility of the Georgia Child Care Council, an appointed policy-making body that is "administratively attached" to DHR and was created by state law in 1991.<sup>3</sup> DHR's Office of Regulatory Services conducts licensing and monitoring of child care providers *except* for providers with Georgia Pre-K classrooms, who are licensed by the Office of School Readiness (OSR).

In FY2000, the total budget for low-income child care subsidies under CAPS was \$173.2 million,<sup>4</sup> as compared with expenditures of \$121.2 million in FY 99. Most of the low-income subsidy budget involves federal funding through the CCDF and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The budget has grown substantially in recent years. However, total spending for low-income subsidies is smaller than the state's expenditures for Georgia Pre-K (\$225 million in FY2000).

CAPS subsidies are provided to families receiving assistance, families transitioning from TANF assistance due to employment (during the first twelve months), and other low-income families. To qualify, a family of three must have income below \$2023/month - roughly 175% of the Federal Poverty Level for 1999. Children up to and including age twelve are eligible, as are certain older children who are incapable of self-care or under court supervision. In FY99, the average monthly number of children receiving subsidy was 56,411. A substantial share (45%) were children in families that were receiving, applying for, or transitioning out of TANF assistance, but most were children in low-income working families that had never or not recently received TANF.<sup>5</sup> Since 1991, the number of children served in an average month has more than doubled.<sup>6</sup> However, a waiting list still exists, with 7,433 families on the waiting list as of April 2000.



To establish eligibility for a subsidy a family must apply to the local Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) office. DFCS offices administer the program at the county level, including certificate management and reimbursement to child care providers. Caseworkers determine family eligibility based on need for care (participation in a state approved activity), income, and residence. Eligible parents receive a certificate that they may redeem with an eligible provider of their choice; the system relies entirely on certificates, and no contracts with providers are used to provide subsidies. Eligible providers include both licensed and commissioned (i.e. church-sponsored) centers or group homes, registered family child care homes, legally exempt centers or group homes, and informal (kith and kin) care providers. Only relatives may provide subsidized in-home care. A parent has three service days to locate a provider that will enroll the child and accept the subsidy as payment. Parents may request assistance from their caseworker in finding care, or the caseworker may refer them to the network of resource and referral agencies with whom the Council and CAPS contract to provide consumer assistance.<sup>7</sup> Every six months, caseworkers reassess family eligibility, with eligibility redetermined every twelve months.

Copayments are required from families with incomes above the poverty level based on a sliding fee scale varying according to family size, income, and number of children in care. TANF applicants and recipients, Food Stamp Employment and Training participants, persons needing irregular part-time hourly care, and children in protective custody have no copayment requirement.<sup>8</sup> The State CCDF plan states that the majority of families pay less than 11% of gross income for copayments for child care, but that the state is currently considering restructuring the fee schedule so that parent fees do not increase based on number of children in care.<sup>9</sup>

Georgia conducted a market rate survey in July 1998 from which CAPS derives the reimbursement rate for subsidized care providers. In DeKalb County (one of the twelve counties in Zone 1, with the highest payment rates), the state's payment rate for full-time care for a 3-5 year old child ranges from \$75/week for regulated center-based care to \$42/week for informal, unregulated care, with a maximum \$47/week payment available for before- and after-school care for school-age children and children participating in the Georgia Pre-K program.

As noted above, DHR's Office of Regulatory Services conducts licensing and monitoring of child care providers except for providers with Georgia Pre-K classrooms, who are licensed by OSR. Office of Regulatory Services licenses child care centers (1,276) and group day care homes (231), and registers family child care homes (6,062). Licensed facilities receive at least one unannounced inspection per year. Registered homes are inspected prior to approval, and each year a random sample of 10% are inspected. Informal providers are not required to have inspections, but if they accept child care subsidies, then they must complete a basic health and safety check with an Office of Regulatory Services inspector and pass a criminal background check.<sup>10</sup> In 1999, the licensing budget was \$4 million. According to a General Accounting Office report, in 1999 Office of Regulatory Services licensed 11,207 facilities, employed 49 FTE licensing staff, and had caseloads of approximately 229 facilities per FTE.<sup>11</sup> Most centers are not accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC); as of July 2000, 176 Georgia child care centers serving 20,321 children were NAEYC accredited and an additional 164 were in the self-study process to become accredited.<sup>12</sup>

Staff:child ratio requirements are different for four-year-old classrooms that are part of Georgia Pre-K compared to those that are not. For example, a child care center class licensed by DHR's Office of Regulatory Services but not operating Pre-K programs must maintain a ratio of 1:18 (maximum group size of 36) for 4 year olds compared to a 1:10 (maximum group size of 20) in Georgia Pre-K.<sup>13</sup>

As mentioned above, the Georgia Child Care Council administers the 4% CCDF quality funds (\$6.3 million in FY2000). According to the State CCDF plan for FY2000-2001, some of the funded activities include: consumer education (e.g. resource and referral, information distribution, promoting parent involvement in child care programs, public education campaigns), grants or loans to providers (e.g. small grants to existing providers to improve quality and to new providers to help them open), monitoring, training and technical assistance (e.g. subsidized programs may receive assistance from experts with whom the State contracts, individuals have access to professional development initiatives, workshops on brain development), and compensation for providers (e.g. the Advancing Careers through Education and Training initiative promotes a suggested career ladder for salaries and qualifications, advocacy for support for the state TEACH project. In addition, the Council funds scholarships for early childhood education and school age child care for low-income families with income below 85% of State Median Income and grants for programs to expand to serve infants and other under-served groups.<sup>14</sup>

## **B. Head Start**

In Georgia, thirty-eight Head Start grantee agencies (including eight Early Head Start grantees) are funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Region IV.<sup>15</sup> Head Start services are available in 157 of the state's 159 counties.<sup>16</sup> All federal funds go directly to grantees through a continuation grant process. Grantees include 15 Community Action Agencies (CAA), 14 school systems (public or private), and 9 non-profit agencies (non-CAA).

In FY99, the federal Head Start appropriation for Georgia was \$118.6 million and 20,540 children participated in Head Start (including 581 Early Head Start participants).<sup>17</sup> The Head Start cost-per-child is approximately \$4800. No state funds are directly appropriated for the purposes of augmenting Head Start services. However Head Start agencies are eligible to apply to operate Georgia Pre-K classrooms, and ten grantees do so, with approximately 5000 Georgia Pre-K participants in Head Start settings. In addition, Head Start grantees may contract with DHR and OSR to provide extended day and extended year services for eligible Head Start children.

Georgia's Head Start grantees follow federal guidelines regarding eligibility for services; most families must have income below the federal poverty level. According to the 1998-1999 Head Start Program Information Report (PIR) for Georgia, 19,416 families received Head Start services, the great majority of which (86%) reported annual family income under \$15,000. Approximately 29% of the Head Start families received TANF benefits (down from 40% the previous year). Most (59%) had household heads who were working full-time, part-time, or seasonally, and approximately 5% reported that the head of the household was in training or school. A little more than half (54% or 10,713) of the children served by Head Start were four years old. Three-quarters of the children were African-American. Most Head Start families (70%) had a single parent present in the home.<sup>18</sup>

The PIR also provides data on Head Start program administration and staff. Among Head Start teachers and family child care providers, 13% had a degree in early childhood education and 74% had a CDA. No Georgia grantees run double session half-day programs. Around 55% of the children enrolled were in part-day programs of less than six hours in length, and 45% were enrolled in programs offering six hours or more. None offered summer classes with federal Head Start funds.<sup>19</sup>

The PIR data for the 1998-1999 program year reported that 43% (8,343) Head Start families said they have need of full-day, full-year child care. A minority were receiving such care: 1,648 through a full-year, full-day Head Start program, and an additional 524 through a Head Start program using non-Head Start funds. An additional 4,340 children were experiencing child care arrangements outside of the Head Start agency. Note that the PIR defines full-day at six or more hours, and that children may be counted in more than one category.<sup>20</sup>

A Georgia Head Start Collaboration Office was established in 1993, and is now administered by OSR through a five-year grant (1997-2002) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The director of the project is currently housed at OSR. The Collaboration Office is working toward three main goals:

- To assist all programs and organizations in the state in building early childhood systems and access to comprehensive services and support for all low-income children and their families;
- To encourage broad collaboration between Head Start and other appropriate programs, services, and initiatives and augment Head Start's capacity to be a partner in State initiatives on behalf of children and their families; and
- To facilitate the involvement of Head Start in State policies, plans, processes, and decisions affecting the Head Start target population and other low-income families.<sup>21</sup>

A number of cross-cutting initiatives are emerging in Georgia related to these goals, often with the participation of the Collaboration Office and representatives of the OSR and DHR. Some examples include:<sup>22</sup>

1. **Head Start Extended Services Initiative:** A collaboration between OSR, DHR and the Collaboration Office to increase the capacity of Head Start programs to offer longer duration services to low-income families in work or training.
2. **Head Start Strategic Planning Initiative:** The Georgia Head Start Association developed a statewide strategic plan for Head Start services in Georgia. The four strategic objectives are: professional development, licensing, accreditation, and extended services.
3. **Head Start Licensing Initiative:** Georgia does not require federally funded Head Start programs to meet state child care licensing health and safety standards. This initiative seeks to assist local programs in meeting licensing standards. In 1999, twenty-five Head Start programs became licensed. By December 2000, 171 Head Start programs became licensed.

4. **Joint Training of Family Support Workers:** OSR and Head Start have developed a joint training initiative for each of the programs' family support staff.
5. **Joint Efforts to Increase Professional Development:** OSR, DHR, the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education, and other partners created a Professional Development Initiative to expand access to degree programs for early childhood staff.
6. **Georgia Head Start Quality Initiative:** Since 1994, this statewide training and technical assistance initiative has received funding from the federal Region IV office to help prepare grantees to become accredited with the NAEYC. As of March 2000, 79 Head Start centers were accredited.<sup>23</sup>

### **C. Department of Education (DOE)/Public School Programs**

Georgia's DOE did not have extensive involvement in prekindergarten programs before the beginning of Georgia Pre-K, although some activities occurred through Title I funding. For first few years (1992-1996), Georgia Pre-K was administered by the Early Childhood Division of the state DOE, under the domain of the elected State Superintendent of Schools. In early 1996, the OSR was created as an independent agency to administer Georgia Pre-K.

## II. Historical Background on the Development of Georgia Pre-K

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The Georgia Pre-K program in its earliest stages was a simple idea floated as part of the political platform of gubernatorial candidate Zell Miller, but has now developed into a popular and established statewide early education program.<sup>24</sup> In 1989, gubernatorial candidate and sitting Lieutenant Governor Miller proposed the creation of a state lottery that would fund only education initiatives, including a voluntary preschool program for four year old children. Candidate Miller highlighted Georgia's low ratings for academic expenditures and student achievement as compared to other states. The Lottery for Education figured prominently in the campaign debate, attracting positive and negative attention from the press, pundits, religious and business leaders, and the public. Detractors were concerned about issues such as the implications of state-approved gambling, state involvement in regulating early care, whether a lottery funding stream would be sustainable, and how funds would be allocated. In addition, some public education interest groups feared that lottery funds would displace current state funds. In response, Miller proposed that lottery generated funds would be controlled directly by an independent commission reporting to the Governor, and that some funds would be used to treat compulsive gamblers.<sup>25</sup>

After winning the election, Governor Miller continued to press for legislative approval of a bill to establish a Georgia Lottery for Education. That bill passed in 1991, and a subsequent public referendum (required by state law) establishing the lottery funding stream through an amendment to the state Constitution passed with 52% of the vote in November 1992. The Georgia Lottery for Education officially opened in June of 1993, with funding earmarked for voluntary preschool, technology improvements in public schools, and the Hope Scholarship Program to help students attend post-secondary education.<sup>26</sup>

Like the political process, the development of Georgia Pre-K took time and several stages. Governor Miller authorized Georgia's DOE to develop and implement a plan to carry out his campaign promises. DOE's Early Childhood Division convened an advisory committee of stakeholders in early education to help design a pilot program. In September 1992, the first pilot program opened for enrollment, using \$3 million from the education budget (the lottery had not yet begun). In the first year, the pilot served 750 four year old children in 20 diverse sites. Some of the main pilot program features included:

- ✓ **Eligibility for “at-risk” children only:** At-risk was defined as eligible for Medicaid, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, the Women, Infants, and Children Nutrition Program, other nutrition programs, subsidized federal housing, and other referred families.

- ✓ **Required local coordinating councils:** Councils developed applications, and had to include representation from a parent of a child enrolled in the program, the local DFCS office, health department, and board of education. Councils were encouraged to include other local early care and education providers.
- ✓ **Open competition for program funding:** Applications had to demonstrate community need. Councils were to determine how to serve children among the array of available local settings, including public schools, Head Start, private not-for-profit centers and family child care homes.
- ✓ **Local match requirement:** DOE asked communities to contribute 30% of the cost of care in the first year and 20% in the second year.
- ✓ **No set curriculum, but curriculum was required to be approved by DOE.**
- ✓ **Staffing requirements:** Personnel working with children had to have a high school degree and experience working with children under age five.
- ✓ **Required support services:** Screenings for health and developmental progress for children and parent support services such as literacy, parent education, and job training were required, along with the employment of a Family Service Coordinator.
- ✓ **Flexibility in determining program duration and length of day:** Program guidelines encouraged applicants to consider the child care needs of working parents, but no minimum requirements were articulated.<sup>27</sup>

In the first three years of the program, 1992-1995, DOE monitored implementation, made policy changes, and expanded the program. To encourage collaboration, DOE required Head Start representation on Local Coordinating Councils. As lottery funding became available and grew, the early version of Georgia Pre-K expanded to serve 15,500 at-risk children by the 1994-1995 school session. Cost per child expenditures increased, perhaps in part due to the DOE decision to rescind the local match requirement by the third year of operation.<sup>18</sup> Per child average costs grew from \$4,253 to \$5,032 per child.<sup>28</sup>

Significant changes occurred in 1995, moving Georgia Pre-K from a targeted to a universal program, and from DOE to the independent OSR. Early in 1995, Governor Miller (reelected to a second term) announced that Georgia Pre-K would become open to all four year olds in the state regardless of family income. Lottery funds were greatly exceeding expectations and there was growing interest in the program from parents of children who were not then income-eligible.<sup>29</sup> The Governor and his advisors believed a universal program would secure the future of Georgia Pre-K among a broader constituency. As DOE staff prepared for an influx of new applications from providers and parents, the need for more resources became apparent. Miller proposed that Georgia Pre-K be administered by OSR.<sup>30</sup> As part of this proposal, licensing authority for all facilities receiving Pre-K funds would be moved to OSR as well. The legislature approved the creation of OSR in 1996.<sup>31</sup> The new office was established in April 1996 under the leadership of appointees directly responsible to the governor. In that first year of universal services, Georgia Pre-K went from serving 15,500 to 44,000 children.



Since 1996, Georgia Pre-K has grown to serve over 62,900 children with \$225 million in lottery funds in the 1999-2000 school year. The average cost per child has fallen to \$3,580.<sup>32</sup> OSR has implemented a number of key changes to the Pre-K program, including:

- ✓ Provided for equal access of private providers and public schools to OSR contracts;
- ✓ Concluded ability of family child care homes to receive Georgia Pre-K funds;
- ✓ Eliminated required community coordinating councils;
- ✓ Ended requirement that Georgia Pre-K programs provide family support and screening services, but allowed programs to apply for separate grant funds to do so depending on proportion of at-risk children in the program;
- ✓ Developed standards for teacher qualifications and linked higher state payments to programs with more qualified teachers;
- ✓ Mandated that providers must choose among a set of curricula; and
- ✓ Required a minimum length of day and year.

Georgia's initiative has attracted much attention. In November 1997, Georgia Pre-K won an Innovations in Government Award from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. Current Governor Roy Barnes has pledged continued support for Georgia Pre-K.

### III. Key Dimensions and Choices in Georgia Pre-K Policy

Key Dimension/Choice	Georgia Policy
Which specific age group is included?	Four-year-old children.
Intent to reach all or some of this group?	All children are eligible for services without cost to the parent and regardless of family income.
What is the balance between goals of school readiness for children and work supports for parents?	School readiness is the central goal, with some recent efforts to coordinate with the subsidized child care and Head Start systems to extend hours of care. Required minimum duration of program is 6.5 hours for 5 days a week, 180 days a year.
Principal focus on educational competence and/or comprehensive services?	Educational competence with some providers eligible to apply for additional funding to offer comprehensive services to at-risk families.
How is educational competence enhanced?	OSR sets certain learning goals and quality standards and stipulates that programs follow one of a set number of curricula in the classroom.
What are the state and local roles?	State agency to local program grants.
Relationship to pre-existing Head Start, child care, and public school programs?	OSR makes grants to existing programs that can meet program standards and guidelines. Family child care homes are not eligible.
Relationship of the initiative to other parts of the early education system?	OSR sets its own standards and regulations. OSR provides some guidance and TA to non-four year old classrooms in an approved Pre-K program, but some are concerned about the quality differences between approved classes and non-participating classes.
How is the initiative funded?	State lottery funds of approximately \$225 million in the 1999-2000 school year.

## IV. The Georgia Pre-K Program: How It Works

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### A. State Administration

Georgia Pre-K is administered at the state level by OSR, an independent agency reporting directly to the Governor. Enabling legislation authorizes OSR to administer the operation and management of voluntary prekindergarten, certain necessary preschool and child development programs, and any federal funds relevant to these functions, as well as provide assistance to local units of administration to ensure proliferation of services.<sup>33</sup> Under this authority, OSR oversees Pre-K, licensing of Pre-K providers, federal funding for the Child and Adult Care Food Program and the Summer Food Service Program and a set of other initiatives.<sup>34</sup> In each of these endeavors the agency works directly with local providers to implement state policies and federal funding streams. OSR has developed detailed guidelines to assist participating Georgia Pre-K providers in implementing key policies and procedures.

### B. Becoming a Georgia Pre-K Provider

To become a Georgia Pre-K “child care learning center,” a program must apply to provide Pre-K services and be approved by OSR staff. The application process begins in January of each year, when applications are released and current providers in good standing receive a renewal contract. New applicants and current providers who wish to expand submit applications by late February, and award decisions are made from April to August for the school year beginning in August/September.<sup>35</sup> OSR accepts applications from new providers and previously approved providers who wish to expand. Expansion may occur only in: 1) targeted counties - where less than 50% of four year old children are currently served by Pre-K and Head Start, or 2) counties experiencing rapid growth - as measured by school enrollment, census, or other data.<sup>36</sup>

The application to become a Georgia Pre-K provider has been streamlined by OSR to simplify administrative requirements.<sup>37</sup> It requires applicants to:

- ✓ Describe the content of what will be provided during the 6.5 hours of instructional time, including class activities and schedule;
- ✓ Describe the expectations for participating children at the end of the 180 day program;
- ✓ Include a photo of the proposed Pre-K classroom and the front of the building;

- ✓ Indicate which of the seven approved curricula will be used (or submit a locally developed one for approval);
- ✓ Provide proof of DHR licensure and approved child care space capacity; and,
- ✓ Provide proof of incorporation from Georgia's Secretary of State.<sup>38</sup>

Since OSR receives more applications than may be approved, the following priorities are set in determining funding allocation: 1) Continuation classes; 2) New classes in targeted areas; 3) Expansion classes in targeted areas; 4) Classes in areas of demonstrated need, e.g. areas with waiting lists, population shifts or growth, areas that are geographically isolated; and 5) Classes awarded after school starts and stabilizes.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the agency sets priorities for applications for classes in targeted areas: 1) New programs never having received a Pre-K contract; 2) New site locations by current Pre-K providers who want to open classrooms in another county; 3) Expansion classes by current Pre-K providers in the targeted area; and 4) Current Pre-K providers who have resolved any probation issues and are now in good standing.<sup>40</sup>

OSR weighs these considerations in making awards, along with a few other issues outlined in the application guidelines. For example, OSR takes into account existing programs in the applicants' area of operation, especially Head Start, so that over-funding does not occur in an area. OSR does not usually award expansion grants to Pre-K sites that already have three or more classrooms. First year programs are usually awarded no more than one classroom. Finally, OSR reviews an applicant's record with the regulatory staff at DHR to ascertain whether the program has been compliant with basic health and safety rules.<sup>41</sup>

Upon approval, Pre-K providers must agree to run their classrooms according to their approved plan. In addition, they must sign a list of "assurances" agreeing to a set of basic statements about the program standards.<sup>42</sup> To remain in good standing, providers must meet program and data reporting requirements, maintain full enrollment, and meet child care licensing regulations where necessary.<sup>43</sup> Programs with unresolved issues do not receive an automatic renewal contract in January and must reapply for funds. Lack of program quality, licensing violations, and fraud will prevent a provider from receiving renewal approval. An appeals process is available.<sup>44</sup>

A separate, voluntary process is available for child care learning centers that wish to employ a resource coordinator to provide comprehensive family support and coordinate health screenings for "Category One" families in an approved Pre-K program. Category One children are children eligible for and participating in one of the following programs: Medicaid, TANF, Food Stamps, or SSI. Children who receive free and reduced price meals under USDA funding may also be considered Category One if proof of income eligibility is available and kept in the learning center's files.<sup>45</sup> The resource coordination grants are competitive, and OSR uses the following guidelines to determine awards:

- ✓ Quality of service delivery plan;
- ✓ Linkages to other collaborative initiatives in the community;

- ✓ Education and experience of Resource Coordinator(s);
- ✓ Proposed plan to collect data and evaluate outcomes; and,
- ✓ Budget proposal - Number of children served as compared to expenditures.<sup>46</sup>

## C. Description of Georgia Pre-K Program and Activities

In the 1999-2000 school year, 970 Georgia Pre-K “child care learning centers” enrolled 62,500 children (including 30,000<sup>47</sup> Category One children) in over 1600 Pre-K sites throughout the state.<sup>48</sup> Together, Georgia Pre-K and the Head Start program (with approximately 13,000 four year old children) reached 70% of four year old children in the state.<sup>49</sup> State officials indicate that while there are waiting lists at specific sites, Georgia Pre-K slots are usually available at another site in the area. As a result, some parents cannot get the program location that is their first choice.

According to the Pre-K Providers’ Operating Guidelines for 1999-2000, all approved child care learning centers must operate as follows<sup>50</sup>:

- ✓ **Eligible Children:** All resident Georgia children who are four years old by September 1st are eligible for Pre-K. Enrollment must be open and nondiscriminatory. Category One children receive no preferential treatment in access to slots.
- ✓ **Eligible Service Providers:** Pre-K services are provided by public/private elementary schools, public/private secondary schools, postsecondary vocational technical institutes, private and state colleges, private non-profit and for-profit child care learning centers, DFCS offices, Head Start sites, hospitals, military bases, and YMCA/YWCA’s.<sup>51</sup> Most Pre-K classes are with private rather than public providers (1365 public, 1846 private in the year 2000), and most children attend private settings (27,299 public, 36,921 private as of August 2000). In the Georgia Pre-K evaluation, 41.5% of the original sample of children were in public settings, 7.3% were in non-profit private settings, and 51.2% were in for-profit private settings.
- ✓ **Duration:** All programs offer 6.5 hours of Pre-K, 5 days a week, 180 days a year.
- ✓ **Extended Day/Year:** OSR does not require programs to provide services to extend the duration of the program, however many providers put together funding from DHR and/or Head Start to extend the time they can provide services to low-income parents. Programs may charge fees for services in excess of 6.5 hours a day, which OSR recommends be no more than \$35 - \$70 a week for non-subsidized children. OSR and DHR have agreed that children in Georgia Pre-K who are eligible for subsidy will not have to go on the state waiting list before receiving extended day/year care.
- ✓ **Program:** Educational experiences in the areas of language/literacy development, math, science, music, art, and physical development must be provided for at least five hours per day. OSR has developed a set of “Learning Goals” to describe what is meant by the above categories, as well as a “Best Practices Portfolio” with ideas for specific activities to do in the classroom. Use of a grading system is prohibited.

- ✓ **Class Size:** Classes may have 18 to 20 children, with staff:child ratio of 1:10.
- ✓ **Teachers:** Two adults (one lead and one assistant teacher) are required in each classroom. Lead teachers must be 21 years of age and have certification in Early Childhood or Elementary Education OR a four year college degree in early childhood, education or other approved fields OR a technical institute diploma or two year associate degree or Montessori diploma or a Child Development Associate (CDA) or Child Care Professional (CCP) credential. The state is phasing out the CDA and CCP options by requiring lead teachers with these qualifications to participate in degree programs to reach the next level of higher education by 2003. Teacher assistants must be 21 years of age and have a high school diploma or its equivalent, experience with young children, and “proficient communication skills.”
- ✓ **Teacher Training:** Each school year, all Pre-K project directors, teachers, assistants, and resource coordinators are required to attend at least one OSR sponsored or approved training tailored for their roles in the Pre-K and/or the curriculum used in that classroom.
- ✓ **Curriculum:** Approved choices for classroom instruction are Bank Street, Creative Curriculum, High/Scope, High Reach Butterflies, High Reach Framework, Montessori, Scholastic Workshop, or an OSR-approved curriculum developed at the local level.
- ✓ **Licensing:** All private child care center-based programs must be licensed by the regulatory division of OSR. Local school system programs are not licensed by OSR.
- ✓ **Parent Fees:** No fees are charged for the basic 6.5 hours of instruction per day, but providers may charge Category Two families for food, transportation, or extended hours if provided. OSR recommends those fees be no more than \$35-70 a week for paying parents. Category One families eligible for DHR child care subsidy must pay a fee based on the sliding fee scale for the part of the day that is funded by DHS. Category One children may not be charged fees for food, transportation or any other services provided under the supervision of the resource coordinator.
- ✓ **Parent Participation:** Parents are encouraged to volunteer in the classroom and attend parent-focused activities if organized by the provider; at least two parent-teacher conferences must be offered per school year.
- ✓ **Transportation:** Services may be provided at the provider’s option; OSR reimbursement is available for Category One children at the rate of \$150 a year.
- ✓ **Health Services:** All participating children must be up to date on immunizations and eye, ear, and dental screenings within 90 days of beginning Pre-K. Only providers with a Resource Coordinator receive funding to assist families with Category One children in meeting these requirements.
- ✓ **Resource Coordination Services:** If the provider has a grant, services coordinated include: health, child development, community resources (upon request) and kindergarten readiness. Separate data gathering and documentation requirements apply to these services.



To provide these services, programs receive their grants in ten payments from September to June based on number of children enrolled and the credentials of their teachers. For example, a program will be required to repay some amount if actual enrollment is 10% or more below the projected numbers in the approved plan. Private programs must agree to auditing and accounting requirements. Start up funds for new programs are available in the amount of \$8,000 per classroom.<sup>52</sup> The 2000-2001 annual rates for 180 service days for private and public providers are as follows<sup>53</sup>:

**OSR Annual Payment Rates to Providers Per Child Enrolled (differentiated by public and private<sup>54</sup>, metro and non-metro)**

Lead Teacher Credential	Private Sector Annual Rates Metro Atlanta/Rest of State	Public Sector Annual Rates Single State Rate
Certified	\$3387.60/\$3075.12	\$3020.04
Bachelor of Science/Art	\$3050.28/\$2737.44	\$2589.84
Associate of Science/Art Vocational Degree Montessori Degree	\$2846.16/\$2533.68	\$2385.72
CDA/CCP	\$2642.40/\$2329.56	\$2181.96

In addition, Georgia Pre-K providers are currently required to pay their lead teachers, assistants and full-time resource coordinators<sup>29</sup> a specified minimum salary for 180 instructional days of service as of the 2000-2001 school year. This policy setting minimum salary is in part a response to findings from a 1997-1998 school year evaluation which found evidence of a 45% turnover rate among some teaching staff.<sup>55</sup>

OSR and Georgia Department of Human Resources have developed an annual agreement to assist low-income families needing full-day services. Under the agreement, DHR agrees to waive waiting list policies for otherwise eligible Pre-K families needing before/after school/extended day care, and to reimburse providers for the charge for such care, up to DHR’s maximum reimbursement rates. OSR, in turn, provides funding to DHR which can be used to match federal CCDF funding in order to provide for the funding of subsidy slots for participating families; in addition, OSR agrees to notify Pre-K providers that they should provide interested families with referral information and assist families with completing the form.

In addition to funding requirements, OSR has created several initiatives intended to support and enhance the quality of services delivered both in Pre-K classes and other classes in Pre-K provider sites:

- ✓ **Technical Assistance/On-Site Visits:** OSR consultants are available to assist providers with questions and program design issues, as well as conduct random on-site visits including at least one formal evaluation per year. OSR staff use a protocol “Instructional Visitation Checklist” during the random visits to standardize the key aspects of programs that are reviewed.
- ✓ **Standards of Care Initiative:** OSR staff works with Pre-K providers who also offer care to infants and toddlers to provide technical assistance to staff working with children birth through age three. The agency also released detailed standards for meeting social and cognitive development goals for children in different stages of growth from birth to 48 months, along with suggested activities for caregivers.<sup>56</sup> OSR awards “Centers of Distinction” recognition to outstanding programs. At least 75 learning centers have received this distinction so far, and approximately 400 centers have worked with OSR staff on quality enhancement for services to infants and toddlers.<sup>57</sup>
- ✓ **Training/Education Partnerships:** OSR is working with Head Start and DHR’s Infant-Toddler Initiative to develop partnerships in the area of mentoring. OSR is also working with the Georgia Early Learning Initiative and a host of other state and federal agencies and educational institutions to increase opportunities for child care staff to attain degrees in early education. In addition, OSR is working on several quality enhancement projects through connections with the Head Start State Collaboration project, as mentioned above in the Head Start description of activities.<sup>58</sup>

## D. Evaluations and Data Collection

To capture information that described and assessed the Georgia Pre-K program, the state sponsored an initial study of the 1993-1996 program for at-risk children only. This evaluation was suspended as the program expanded to include all age-eligible children. Currently, OSR is in the midst of a twelve-year longitudinal study of Pre-K outcomes.

Between 1993 and 1996, Georgia State University conducted a longitudinal study of a host of outcome measures of 315 at-risk children as compared to a matched sample of non-enrolled children. At the end of their first year of kindergarten, the children’s ratings as to their development tended to be higher than the matched sample. In addition, ten academic achievement tests were administered on which the Pre-K children outperformed the matched sample. Members of the comparison group also were absent 26% more days than the children in the Pre-K classes. Parents of participating children who were surveyed gave high marks to the experience for their children.<sup>59</sup>

As OSR has rolled out Georgia Pre-K to serve over 60,000 children in the state, the agency has also sought to ensure that certain program and child data be collected. All participating providers are required to track and keep on file information regarding enrollment, their students’ immunization schedules, basic

student developmental progress, and any activities (such as screenings and treatment) provided under the auspices of the resource coordinators.

The longitudinal research began in 1996 and is being conducted by Georgia State University, School of Policy Studies, Applied Research Center. The study is tracking a cohort of over 3,000 children who completed one year of Pre-K participation in 1996-97, with the intent to document any effects of the Pre-K program and subsequent educational experiences on school achievement and attainment.

Reports from the first three years of the study are available, reflecting analysis of data through the completion of first grade for the cohort. The research methodology does not involve random assignment and, to date, has not involved comparison of participants and non-participants. Rather, the researchers collected baseline information concerning the nature of the Pre-K classes and teachers, and will seek to identify how variations in Pre-K and subsequent school experiences correlate to subsequent outcomes. In particular, the researchers have identified distinctions between teachers categorized as “child-centered” or “directive.” Child-centered teachers are described as teachers “who facilitate children’s social and emotional development along with cognitive development by extending the children’s natural interests into learning and growing experiences.” In contrast, more directive teachers “exert greater levels of control over the children’s activities and tend to have more organized activities for the entire class with the teacher leading the activity.” A third category, classified as “conflicted” evidence differences between their beliefs and practices, most often believing in child centered instruction but organizing instruction in a more directive way.

The first report was on Program Implementation Characteristics in the 1996-1997 School Year, with results in the areas of : 1) beliefs and practices of lead teachers and directors; 2) the developmentally appropriate practices of teachers; 3) the curriculum implementation integrity of teachers; 4) the social climate at the Pre-K sites; 5) teacher satisfaction; 6) resources in the classrooms; 7) parent-staff interactions; 8) parent satisfaction.<sup>60</sup> Key findings included:

- ✓ Most lead teachers (85%) had college degrees, and most (74%) had state certification in a relevant early childhood field of study, with an additional 10% holding either a CDA or Child Care Professional credential. (35% of those in private settings, and 3% of those in public settings, were not certified.)
- ✓ A field investigation including on-site observations of facilities, equipment and play areas concluded that “the classroom environment of most Georgia Pre-K classrooms is extremely hospitable to both teachers and children.”
- ✓ Most parents had unscheduled meetings with staff at least once a week; met with teachers during and after school hours at least once a month, and knew the Pre-K teacher’s qualifications. Most parents said that staff discussed an educational activity or strategy with them, and said that the amount of time they spent playing or working with their children increased as a result of the Pre-K program. Most parents said the way they worked with their children changed as a result of Pre-K. Rating Pre-K on a scale from 1 to 10 (with 10 being highest), the average parental rating was 9.06.

In the second year (1997-1998), the researchers analyzed three main areas: 1) characteristics of the kindergarten experiences for former Pre-K children; 2) school readiness and achievement of former Pre-K children in their kindergarten year; and 3) parent perceptions of and experiences with kindergarten. Some key findings were:

- ✓ 99% of the former Pre-K children went on to public school for kindergarten, although 59% of these children had attended private child care learning centers for Pre-K.<sup>61</sup>
- ✓ 44% of kindergarten teachers believed that the presence of Pre-K had enabled them to change their teaching methods.<sup>62</sup>
- ✓ Kindergarten teachers' ratings of children's skills in 15 identified areas according to a seven-point scale improved in all areas over the course of the school year.<sup>63</sup>
- ✓ Kindergarten teachers rated 44% of former Pre-K children as "very good" or "extraordinarily good" in terms of school readiness, and only 16% as "poor" or "very poor."<sup>64</sup>
- ✓ 94% of the former Pre-K children were recommended for promotion to first grade<sup>65</sup>

At the end of their kindergarten year, only 11% of former Pre-K children were rated below average by their kindergarten teachers in terms of first grade readiness.<sup>66</sup>

Key additional third year findings relating to Pre-K<sup>67</sup> included:

- ✓ First grade teachers rated 55% of Pre-K children as above average (good to extraordinarily good) on measures of first grade readiness (considering both academic and behavioral skills), with an additional 21% of Pre-K children rated as average. By the end of first grade, 70.5% of Pre-K children were rated above average, and an additional 13.5% were rated as average on preparedness for second grade.
- ✓ Controlling for other characteristics, the strongest influences on children's skills and readiness in first grade were pre-academic abilities before entering Pre-K. Children who had been taught by conflicted teachers scored less well in readiness for first grade; Children taught by directive teachers demonstrated worse social behaviors than those taught by child-centered teachers, and also performed slightly less well (though not at a statistically significant level) in other skill areas.
- ✓ Having participated in Pre-K with a teacher with a CDA was associated with increased first grade readiness, but the impact declined for CDA teachers with additional years of experience. The impacts of teachers having attained an early childhood education certification as compared to other college graduates were not statistically significant, though certified teachers had more positive effects in classrooms with less advantaged children.
- ✓ Children who transitioned to kindergarten at the same site as Pre-K (i.e., children whose Pre-K and kindergarten settings were both in the public schools) performed better in math and language arts, communicated better, and exhibited more acceptable social behaviors by the end of first grade. These children were also judged more ready for second grade by their first grade teachers.

- ✓ Two years after their child attended Pre-K, 80% of parents agreed or strongly agreed when asked if their child had progressed in school faster as a result of having participated in Pre-K. Most (73%) disagreed or disagreed strongly with the statement that, “Going to prekindergarten did not have much of an impact on my child’s progress in school.”

A separate study conducted by the Council for School Performance during the 1997-1998 year found that Pre-K classrooms earned a mean score of 4.66 on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), a rating scale from 1 to 7. This mean score is below the ECERS “good” rate of 5.00, but it is above the mean ratings developed from other researchers’ samples of non-Georgia Pre-kindergarten classrooms in other studies completed in the early 1990’s.<sup>68</sup> The study found no significant differences in the quality of prekindergarten classroom by region, curriculum or organization type (i.e., public, private for profit, private not for profit).

## E. Other Early Education Initiatives

Under Governor Roy Barnes, the Georgia Early Learning Initiative (GELI) is beginning to articulate a set of goals and strategies to enhance the state’s early learning environments, including those located in homes and informal care arrangements for children birth to age three. GELI is a public/private venture including the resources from the state, the Joseph Whitehead Foundation, United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta, and a number of other foundations and business partners. Soon after Governor Barnes took office in 1999, these partners convened a group of key policy makers and experts in early care in Georgia to discuss initiatives that would enhance brain development and early learning opportunities for young children and better prepare them to be ready to learn by Kindergarten. According to a report issued in September 1999, the GELI initiative recommends six key steps:

1. Raising out-of-home preschool care market standards so that the supply of high quality child care in the state increases as public awareness of its benefits grows (e.g. tiered reimbursement rates for providers, require Head Start programs to be licensed, invest in resource and referral networks).
2. Enhancing professional caregivers’ working conditions and capabilities so that they are as effective as possible as preschoolers’ first teachers outside of the home (e.g. fully fund the state’s TEACH program, enable the provision of health care benefits for early childhood staff, expand opportunities for early childhood caregivers to expand their qualifications).
3. Improving statewide oversight and accountability for all formal preschool care in Georgia so that out-of-home care requirements are consistent, results-oriented and cost-effectively enforced throughout the state (e.g. consolidate management of the components of the system where possible, set outcome and performance measures for preschool, evaluate the need for statewide tracking of preschool services).
4. Enhancing parents’ and informal caregivers’ capabilities so that they are as effective as possible as their children’s primary caregivers and early childhood teachers (e.g. parenting classes in middle and high schools, expand early education resources available through libraries, hospitals and public television).

5. Expanding services that benefit young preschoolers cared for at home so that as many of Georgia's children as possible start school without health problems and ready to learn (e.g. expand existing home visitation program).
6. Supplementing the preschool care system's financial resources so that high quality care can be made available to as many Georgia children as possible as soon as possible (e.g. tax credits for dependent care costs and stay-at-home parents).<sup>69</sup>

It is estimated that the cost of the specific recommendations of GELI would be \$110 million annually. If implemented, the recommendations would most likely have an impact on all other aspects of the early care system, including Georgia Pre-K.



## Endnotes

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6. Georgia Child Care and Parent Services website, [http://www.div.dhr.state.ga.us/dfcs\\_caps/cc\\_funds.htm](http://www.div.dhr.state.ga.us/dfcs_caps/cc_funds.htm).
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8. Ibid, Section 3.5.3.
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22. Unless otherwise indicated, all examples are from information provided by Dr. Robert Lawrence, Director, Georgia Head Start Collaboration Office.
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26. Ibid, Chapter 2.
27. Ibid, 21-23.
28. Georgia Office of School Readiness, *Georgia Pre-kindergarten Program Fact Sheet*.
29. Raden, Anthony. *Universal Pre-Kindergarten in Georgia: A Case Study of Georgia's Lottery Funded Pre-K Program* (Foundation for Child Development: 1999), 33.
30. According to Anthony Raden's case study, *Universal Prekindergarten in Georgia*, Governor Miller proposed moving the Georgia Pre-K program out of the Department of Education also in part due to political reasons. The Governor and the State Superintendent of Schools represented opposing parties.
31. Ibid, Chapter 6.
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