



# Georgia

## Georgia Pre-Kindergarten

Georgia is one of the few states that offers a voluntary preschool program for all 4-year-old children, regardless of income or family risk factors. The “Georgia Pre-K” program is full-day for five days per week and operates during the school year. Fifty-seven percent of children receive services in private settings and 43 percent through public settings. Program funds come from the state lottery.

### Eligibility

**Income:** none

**Age:** 4 years old by September 1 of the school year

**Priority:** none; enrollment must be open and non-discriminatory

### Length of Program

**Hours/day:** six and a half hours per day, five days per week

**Days/year:** 180 days

### Eligible Providers

Public school districts, child care centers, private preschools, Head Start, Department of Defense programs, government entities

### Number Served<sup>1</sup>

68,155 (2003-04): 57 percent in private settings and 43 percent in public settings

### Total Annual Budget

\$250,076,228 (2003-04), from state lottery funds

### Monitoring

The state agency conducts on-site evaluations, including unannounced visits. These visits include assessment according to the Program Quality Assessment (PQA). State agency staff consult with providers and provide targeted technical assistance to programs identified as having difficulty complying with standards. Each program must submit a financial reconciliation report spanning the dates of their yearly contract. Pre-K providers are subject to random, unannounced expenditure reviews by state staff or contract auditors during the program year.

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<sup>1</sup> For updated figures on the program budget and number served, please see the NIEER State Preschool Yearbook at: <http://nieer.org/yearbook/states/>

## Governance

### **How are state pre-k programs integrated into community-based settings?**

Individual providers apply to be a Georgia Pre-K provider, and Georgia's Bright from the Start: Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) contracts for classes annually. The authorizing statute does not specifically require integration with community-based providers, but authorizes DECAL (formerly the Office of School Readiness) to contract with both private and public providers.

### **Are there requirements to integrate the state pre-k and subsidized child care programs at the state or local level?**

At the local level, providers have the option of convening a Local Coordinating Council, but any policy guidelines they develop must be approved by DECAL. State lottery dollars fund the pre-k program, and subsidy dollars fund wraparound services.

At the state level, DECAL administers the state's pre-k program and licenses child care centers. While the state pre-k program does not require integration at the state level, DECAL has the potential to promote better coordination between pre-k and child care.

## Procedures and Supports for Community-based Providers

### **What are the rules/guidelines for notifying and selecting pre-k providers?**

Continuation providers (those currently funded) receive a pre-filled application each year, either by e-mail notification or mail. Providers can request that an application be mailed to them or can access the application via the DECAL website. Application instructions list the counties that are targeted for additional classes.

Providers must complete an application form to become a new Georgia Pre-K provider, with applications due in March and final selections notified between April and November. Failure to keep at least 15 children per classroom, or chronic problems around program quality or program operations can result in termination of the contract.

DECAL awards funding to programs using the following order of priority: prior receipt of grants, new classes in targeted areas, expansion classes in targeted areas, classes in areas of demonstrated need, classes awarded after school starts and classes stabilize. Areas are targeted as: counties serving less than 50 percent of eligible children, counties experiencing rapid growth, and counties serving more than 50 percent but with all slots filled.

A new program or new site will receive a visit prior to award. A child care center must be in compliance with child care licensing and the federal nutrition program, if applicable, before receiving a Pre-K contract. This requirement does not apply to public school and Head Start programs, which are exempt from licensing.

**What resources are available to help providers become eligible to deliver pre-k services?**

Child care services and nutrition staff will work with providers to assist them in meeting rules and regulations. DECAL maintains a staff of consultants available to assist providers.

**Do teachers working in community settings earn comparable wages and benefits once they obtain the same credential as teachers in school-based settings?**

Yes, all teachers of the same credential level are to earn the same minimum salaries, although certified teachers employed by the schools are likely to receive additional funding for training and experience per the legislatively mandated public teacher salary rates. Minimum teacher salary levels according to qualifications are as follows for 2003-04:

Certification	\$24,852 per year	\$21.24/ hour
Four-year degree	\$19,107 per year	\$16.33/ hour
Vocational/A.A.	\$15,769 per year	\$13.48/ hour

**Supports for Working Families**

**Is there any explicit discussion in the legislation or regulations of extending the day, coordinating with the child care subsidy program, or helping working families?**

DECAL and the state child care agency have entered into an agreement to ensure that Pre-K families will not be placed on waiting lists for subsidies, but instead automatically receive a subsidy for extended day child care if they meet eligibility requirements.

**What policies help working families access pre-k and other supports?**

Providers and Resource Coordinators sometimes canvass specific neighborhoods advertising the Pre-K program and soliciting enrollment when there is knowledge of children who are not being served. DECAL has public service announcements available via billboards, television, and radio to inform parents of the program. The Lottery Corporation also provides PSAs for the Pre-K program.

DECAL does not require or provide extended-day services. Extended-day services may be provided at the parent’s choice and expense, or families that are income eligible may apply for child care subsidies.

Transportation services are optional, but programs serving children in targeted high needs areas may receive an additional \$165 per child per year to provide transportation to and from the program.

**Funding**

**What is the per-child payment for the pre-k program?**

The per-child payment reflects the education of the lead teacher, whether the program is in the metro Atlanta area or not, and whether the program is public or private. For a 20-child classroom, the payments are as follows:

Credential	Metro (Private)	Non Metro (Private)	Public
Vocational	\$59,017	\$52,640	\$49,623
4 year degree	\$63,543	\$57,166	\$54,148
Certified teacher	\$71,329	\$64,952	\$64,466

**How does the state pre-k funding affect other potential sources of funds for a provider?**

A child care provider may only qualify for a part day rate from the child care subsidy program to cover the remaining portion of the day. However, a provider may receive a full day rate for the summer months when the Georgia Pre-K program is not required to operate.

Head Start programs can receive a pro-rated Pre-K rate to extend a four-hour Head Start Program to a six and a half-hour Pre-K program.

## Sources

- Interview: 05/21/2004 Marsha Moore, Executive Director (Commissioner of Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning as of 07/01/2004),
- Legislation: Title 20, Chapter 1A, Sections 1-7. New legislation is Georgia SB 456 of 2004.

For information about national trends, read CLASP's *All Together Now: State Experiences in Using Community-Based Child Care to Provide Pre-kindergarten* at [http://www.clasp.org/publications/all\\_together\\_now.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/publications/all_together_now.pdf).