

Georgia  
Study of  
**Early Care  
and Education**  
**Findings from  
Georgia's  
Pre-K Program**

*Executive Summary*

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Executive summaries and full reports from this study are available at [www.dec.state.ga.us](http://www.dec.state.ga.us).



# Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Findings from Georgia's Pre-K Program

## *Executive Summary*

In 2007-08, 38 states offered pre-kindergarten programs as a strategy for supporting children's school entry skills. Georgia's Pre-K Program—one of the few that serves four-year-olds across all income levels—served 78,000 children or about half of all four-year-olds in the state in 2007–08.<sup>1</sup> Research suggests that participation in state funded pre-k is linked to higher academic and social skills at the start of school,<sup>2</sup> with higher-quality programs linked to greater gains.<sup>3</sup> Thus, ensuring that Georgia's Pre-K classes are of high quality is critical for meeting the program's goal of helping children prepare for school.<sup>4</sup>

## Purpose

The primary purpose of this statewide study was to describe the quality of early care and education and types of services provided to young children throughout the state of Georgia, using a representative sample of child care centers and Georgia's Pre-K Programs.

## Key Findings

**Findings from this study suggest that administrators and teachers in Georgia's Pre-K classrooms are working hard to serve young children and their families.** Almost all of the classes met or exceeded Georgia's Pre-K Operating Guidelines for group size and ratio of children per adult. Most directors/principals and lead teachers had at least a Bachelor's degree. Both lead and assistant teachers reported participating in many hours of training in the past year. Almost all program administrators reported using a curriculum in their program and using assessments to guide instruction. Most also reported providing a range of services and supports to the families they serve.

## Study Description

In 2008–09, FPG conducted a statewide study of 173 randomly selected licensed child care centers and Georgia's Pre-Kindergarten programs, collecting data on the observed classroom quality and program characteristics.

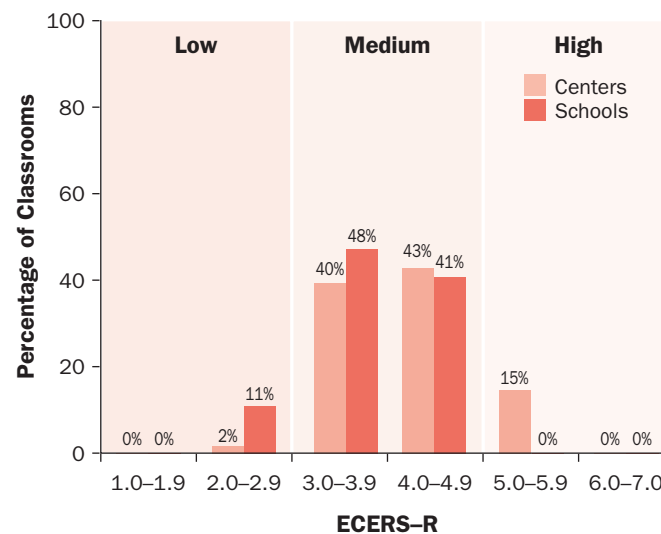
Of the 173 programs in the study, 112 were centers and 61 were public schools. Fifty-three of the 112 centers (47%) and all of the public schools participated in Georgia's Pre-K. This Executive Summary highlights findings from Georgia's Pre-K classes, both in centers and in schools.

Data were collected between September 2008 and May 2009. Data were gathered at the program and classroom levels using multiple methods: observation by an independent data collector, review of written documents, and self-report of directors/principals and teachers.

Study findings about infant, toddler, and preschool classrooms (other than Georgia's Pre-K) in child care centers can be found in a companion report, *Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Child Care Center Findings*.

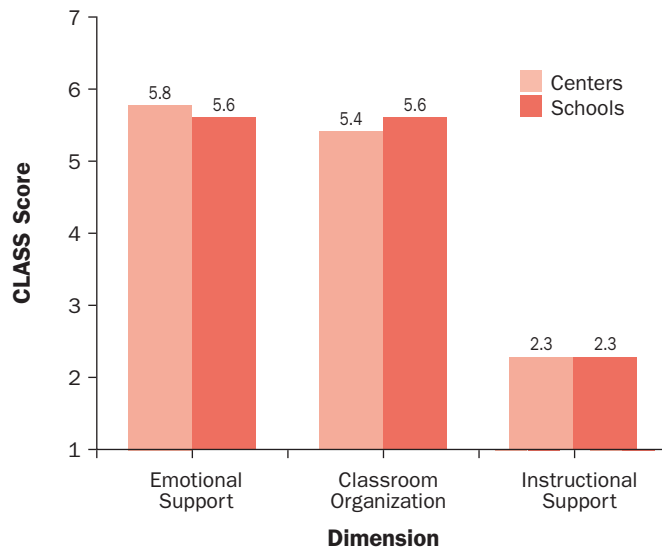
Global quality in Georgia's Pre-K classrooms was at the “medium” level. For Georgia's Pre-K classrooms, the mean total score on the ECERS-R<sup>5</sup> was 4.16 in centers and 3.74 in schools (see Figure 1; scores range from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating higher quality). The ECERS-R measures many different aspects of quality including health, safety, materials, activities, and teacher-child interactions. Medium quality is characterized by a generally safe environment with access to good quality materials, although activities and interactions could be more enriching and purposeful.

**Figure 1. Quality of Georgia's Pre-K Classrooms (as measured by the ECERS-R)**



The quality of emotional support and classroom organization was generally “high”; whereas the quality of instructional support was generally “low” as measured by the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)<sup>6</sup> (see Figure 2; scores range from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating higher quality). The findings suggest that Georgia's Pre-K classes are generally warm, enjoyable places for children, where students are generally well-behaved and are interested and engaged in learning tasks. The “low” scores on Instructional Support suggest that teachers do not offer many activities that promote analysis and reasoning, and they rarely talk with children in a way that expands their understanding of concepts or uses advanced language. Research suggests that many state-funded pre-kindergarten programs across the U.S., not just Georgia's, struggle to provide high quality instructional support.<sup>7</sup> With evidence linking instructional support to children's language and math skills,<sup>8,9</sup> it is important to strengthen the instruction in Georgia's Pre-K classes.

**Figure 2. Teacher-Child Interactions in Georgia's Pre-K Classrooms (as measured by the CLASS)**



## Conclusions and Recommendations

- Additional work is needed to meet the goal of providing high quality care for all four-year-olds participating in Georgia's Pre-K Program.** Georgia was a pioneer in the pre-kindergarten movement in the U.S., and Georgia's leaders have worked hard over the years to move toward a universal, voluntary program that supports children's success in school. It may be easier to provide high quality care with a smaller program, so Georgia leaders should not be surprised that there are challenges in maintaining high quality as the program has grown. Findings from this study suggest that additional improvements are needed to ensure that Georgia's Pre-K Program provides the highest level of quality needed to support children's success in school.
- Georgia's Pre-K Program has many strengths that form a strong foundation on which to improve.** Almost all programs used a curriculum and assessed children as a means to plan instruction. The majority of directors/principals and teachers had a college degree, many with a major in early childhood, which should allow them to take advantage of high-level professional development and technical assistance opportunities. Most classrooms were rated as providing a medium level of global quality and providing an environment that was very organized and supportive of children's emotional development. This means that leaders can focus less on the basics of general care and education and more on the particular aspects of high quality care and education—especially instructional support—that are related to children's school success.

- **Although multiple strategies are needed, professional development (e.g., training and technical assistance) is important for improving the quality of care and education for Georgia's pre-kindergartners.** Even though many of Georgia's Pre-K teachers had a college degree and reported participating in training on a variety of important topics during the past year, their education and training have not yet translated into high quality classroom practices. Thus, Georgia's Pre-K teachers and assistant teachers may benefit from more effective or extensive professional development. Training that includes empirically supported features such as content focus, active learning, and a longer duration may be more effective.<sup>10, 11</sup> Additionally, on-site technical assistance may be useful in providing ongoing support to teachers to ensure that they have the depth of understanding and skills needed to translate knowledge into practice in the classroom.<sup>12</sup>
- **Improving the quality of care will require additional funds.** Although Bright from the Start: Department of Early Care and Education can improve quality by using these study findings to help decide how best to invest state funds, significant improvements in the quality of the program will require additional resources. The estimate of the per-child cost of providing a high quality pre-k program is nearly twice the amount currently allocated in Georgia.<sup>13</sup> A combination of both public and private investments are likely needed to ensure that Georgia's Pre-K Program meets its goal of preparing every child for success in school.

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