

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

December 2009



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Several people worked hard to complete this study and report. The FPG Child Development Institute team included Kelly Maxwell, Principal Investigator, Diane Early, Investigator; Donna Bryant, Investigator; Syndee Kraus, project director; Sara Fuller, research assistant; Katie Hume, research assistant; Gina Walker, administrative assistant; Elizabeth Gunn, Lloyd DeWald, and Michelle Lemon, programmers; Kirsten Kainz and R. J. Wirth, statisticians; and Angelia Baldwin, Joe Jungers, and Dawn Shafar, data entry. Gisele Crawford helped with report writing, and Michael Brady and Gina Harrison helped with report design and printing. We are very grateful to the research assistants in Georgia who worked so hard to collect the data: Elizabeth Crofton, Rachael Lee, Moneesha Smith, Becca White, and Othondra Williams-Hicks. Jenny Rankin also helped collect some data. We appreciate the cooperation of DECAL staff, particularly the assistance of Bentley Ponder. Most importantly, we are very appreciative of the administrators and teachers who welcomed us into their programs and classrooms so that we could better understand the care available to young children across Georgia.

Executive summaries and full reports from this study are available at www.dec.al.ga.gov.

Contents

- Study Description 2**
 - Program Selection 2**
 - Classroom Selection 3**
 - Measures 4**
 - Procedures 6**
- Findings 7**
 - Group Size and Ratios 7**
 - Classroom Quality 8**
 - Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS–R)..... 8
 - Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) 9
 - Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation:
 - Pre-K (ELLCO) 11
 - Georgia’s Pre-K Classroom Activities 12
 - Education and Professional Development 13**
 - Directors and Principals 14
 - Lead Teachers 16
 - Assistant Teachers 18
 - Program Characteristics and Services 20**
 - Curricula and Child Assessments 20
 - Screenings 21
 - Involving Families 21
- Study Limitations 22**
- Conclusions and Recommendations 23**
- References 27**

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

In 2007–08, 38 states offered pre-kindergarten programs, and close to one million 4-year-olds attended a preschool program funded by their state.¹ Georgia has always been at the forefront of the pre-kindergarten movement, starting its first pre-kindergarten program in 1992 and creating the nation’s first state-funded universal prekindergarten in 1995. As a universal program, Georgia expanded its program’s scope from serving only “at risk” children to serving 4-year-olds across all income levels whose families desired pre-k.² Georgia’s Pre-K was established under the leadership of Governor Zell Miller, using funds from a state lottery. The program aims to provide high quality preschool experiences to 4-year-olds in order to help prepare them for kindergarten.³

The number of children served in Georgia’s Pre-K Program has been steadily increasing since the program’s inception. In 2007–08, the program served 78,000 4-year-olds, about half of all 4-year-olds in the state.⁴ Georgia’s Pre-K classes can be housed in various types of facilities including public schools, child care centers, charter schools, and military bases. Classes meet for 6.5 hours per day, 180 days per year, generally following the public school calendar.⁵ The program is offered in every county in Georgia, and the state spends about \$4,200 per year per enrolled child.⁶

Past research indicates that participation in state-funded pre-k is linked to higher academic and social skills for school,⁷ with higher-quality programs linked to greater gains.⁸ 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.

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) has been working to define and promote high quality practices across multiple types of child care settings, including Georgia’s Pre-K. A statewide committee began working in the fall of 2006 to develop indicators to define quality in Georgia’s early care and education system. In the fall of 2007, DECAL contracted with researchers from the FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to help refine the indicators, develop tools to measure them, and plan a study of the quality of care across the state.⁹ DECAL decided that a statewide study would help policymakers better understand the quality of care across Georgia and provide useful information about the types of efforts that could best maximize investments in quality.

“The growing enrollment in state pre-k . . . is valuable to children and the nation only if program quality is high enough to produce meaningful gains in learning and development.”

Barnett et al.,
2008,
p. 2

In 2008–09, FPG conducted a statewide study of randomly selected Georgia's Pre-K programs and licensed child care centers, collecting data on the observed classroom quality and characteristics of these programs. The current report describes the overall study and summarizes findings from Georgia's Pre-K classes in schools and child care centers. 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*.

Study Description

The primary purpose of this statewide study of pre-k and child care was to gather data regarding the range of quality across Georgia. Generally, the study was designed to describe (a) the quality of center-based care and pre-k programs; and (b) types of services provided to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers served by these programs. This section describes the methods used for the entire study, but this report focuses solely on findings from Georgia's Pre-K in child care centers and schools.

Program Selection

The sample of programs that participated in the study was selected to address the study's primary purpose: estimating the quality of care provided across licensed centers and Georgia's Pre-K. Data were collected in 173 programs. A sample size of 173 was determined to have an adequate balance of precision and feasibility, where the mean score on the main quality measures in the sample is within $\pm .12$ ECERS–R/ITERS–R points of the population mean.

To select the sample, DECAL provided a list of all licensed child care centers (including those that do and do not participate in Georgia's Pre-K Program) and school-based Georgia's Pre-K programs. FPG randomly selected programs to be recruited for participation in the study. A simple random selection process was used (i.e., no stratification), and programs were spread throughout the state.

During recruitment, programs that declined or were determined to be ineligible were replaced by additional randomly selected programs from that same list. To achieve the final sample of 173, we contacted 342 programs. Thirty-four were determined to be ineligible (e.g., no longer served children, no longer licensed) and 135 declined to participate. Thus, the overall response rate was 56% (173 participants / 173 participants + 135 declined). The response rate varied by program type, with 48% of licensed centers agreeing to participate (112 out of 235) and 84% of schools with Georgia's Pre-K agreeing to participate (61 out of 73). These response rates are similar to that of multi-state studies of child care (52% in the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study)¹⁰ and pre-kindergarten (78% in the Multi-State Study of Pre-Kindergarten).¹¹

Throughout this report, data are presented separately for centers and schools because of the different response rates in these two groups. However, the study and sampling plan were not designed to examine differences between Georgia's Pre-K Program in centers and schools, so statistical comparisons between the groups are not presented.

Classroom Selection

For each participating program, we randomly selected one, two, or three classrooms to visit, depending on the ages served by the program and whether they participated in Georgia's Pre-K. If the program included infant/toddler classes (serving children less than 2½ years old), we randomly selected one of those. If the program included classrooms serving preschoolers (ages 2½ to 5, not in kindergarten), we randomly selected one of those. If the program participated in Georgia's Pre-K, we also randomly selected one Georgia's Pre-K class. (For the remainder of this report, "preschool" refers to classes that are not part of Georgia's Pre-K Program and serve children between 2½ years and 5 years who are not in kindergarten and "pre-k" refers to Georgia's Pre-K classes). If a class was selected but the lead teacher was absent (n = 22) or did not want to participate (n = 3), a replacement class of the same type within the same program was selected instead. Table 1 shows the number of classrooms visited for each type of classroom configuration. In public schools, we did not visit any classrooms other than Georgia's Pre-K. This report presents findings from Georgia's Pre-K classrooms in child care centers and schools. Information about infant/toddler classrooms and preschool classrooms that are not part of Georgia's Pre-K Program is presented in a companion report, *Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Child Care Center Findings*.

Table 1. Classroom Visits by Program Type

Program Type	Number of				
	Programs	Infant/ Toddler Classes	Preschool Classes	GA Pre-K Classes	Total Classes
Infant/Toddler & Preschool	49	49	49	0	98
Infant/Toddler, Preschool, & Georgia's Pre-K	48	48	48	48	144
Preschool Only	10	0	10	0	10
Preschool & Georgia's Pre-K	2	0	2	2	4
Georgia's Pre-K Only ^a	64	0	0	64	64
TOTALS	173	97	109	114	320

a. Of the 64 programs that have only Georgia's Pre-K, 61 were in public schools. Of the other three, one was at a licensed center and two were child care facilities that were exempt from Georgia's Early Care and Learning licensing. All three of these programs are treated as "centers" for purposes of this report.

Measures

Data were gathered at the program and classroom levels using multiple methods: observations by independent data collectors, review of written documents, and self-report of directors/principals and teachers. Table 2 delineates the measures collected.

Table 2. Program and Classroom Measures

Program Level	Infant/Toddler Classrooms	Preschool Classrooms	Georgia's Pre-K Classrooms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director/Principal Interview • Document Review • Director/Principal Education & Experience Form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ITERS–R • Teacher Education & Experience Form • Assistant Teacher Education & Experience Form • Infant/Toddler Observation Checklist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECERS–R • ELLCO • Teacher Education & Experience Form • Assistant Teacher Education & Experience Form • Preschool Observation Checklist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECERS–R • ELLCO • CLASS • Snapshot • Teacher Education & Experience Form • Assistant Teacher Education & Experience Form • Preschool Observation Checklist

The *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS–R)*¹² is a widely used measure of global classroom quality. It is specifically designed for use in classrooms serving children 2½ to 5 years of age.

The ECERS–R measures the following aspects of classroom quality: Space and Furnishings (e.g., furnishings for relaxation and comfort, room arrangement for display); Personal Care Routines (e.g., greeting/departing, safety practices); Language-Reasoning (e.g., presence/quality of books and pictures, encouraging children to communicate); Activities (e.g., fine motor, art, promoting acceptance of diversity); Interaction (e.g., supervision of children, interactions among children); Program Structure (e.g., schedule, group time, provisions for children with disabilities); and Parents and Staff (e.g., provisions for personal needs of staff, supervision and evaluation of staff). In this study, we did not complete the “Parents and Staff” items on the ECERS–R.

Scores on the ECERS–R can range from 1 to 7 with higher scores indicating higher quality. Total mean scores from 1 to 2.9 are considered “low” quality, scores from 3.0 to 4.9 are considered “medium” quality, and scores of 5.0 or greater are considered “good” or “high” quality.

The *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)*¹³ provides an assessment of the quality of teacher-child interactions. Its ten dimensions are organized into three domains. The Emotional Support domain includes positive climate, negative climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for student perspectives. The Classroom Organization domain includes behavior management, productivity, and instructional learning formats. The Instructional Support domain includes concept development, quality of feedback, and language modeling.

Each dimension is rated from 1 to 7 with 1 or 2 indicating the classroom is “low” on that dimension; 3, 4, or 5 indicating that the classroom is in the “mid-range;” and 6 or 7 indicating the classroom is “high” on that dimension. The observer rated the pre-k classroom and the teacher on 10 dimensions roughly every 30 minutes throughout the observation day. Six 30-minute observation cycles were completed in each room.

The *Language and Literacy Environment Subscale of the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation: Pre-K (ELLCO)*¹⁴ is an observational instrument for examining support for children’s language and literacy development. The ELLCO is designed for use in classrooms serving 3- to 5-year-old children. The Language and Literacy Environment subscale is comprised of Language Environment (e.g., opportunities for extended conversations, vocabulary development); Books and Book Reading (e.g., organization of the book area, use of books across content areas, quality and frequency of book reading); and Print and Early Writing (e.g., opportunities that build awareness of print and purpose of writing, instructional strategies).

Scores on the Language and Literacy subscale of the ELLCO can range from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating “deficient” practice, 2 indicating “inadequate” practice, 3 indicating “basic” practice, 4 indicating “strong” practice, and 5 indicating “exemplary” practice.

The *Emerging Academic Snapshot (Snapshot)*¹⁵ is a measure of children’s involvement in classroom activities and interactions with peers and adults. The observer focuses on four randomly selected children in each classroom and then records information about their activity setting (e.g., free choice/center, whole group time, routine, meals), their engagement in pre-academic activities including literacy, math, social studies, science, aesthetics (e.g., art, music, drama), and motor activities, as well as how much time children spent interacting with adults. For this study, the observer watched the activities and behaviors of each child (generally two girls and two boys) for 20 seconds, once every four minutes. The observation period lasted from the beginning of class until nap time. On average, 234 observations (20 seconds each) were made in classes in centers and 231 observations were made in classes in schools. Observational data from the four children across the entire observation period were summarized to provide classroom-level data regarding how children spent their time.

Procedures

A team of data collectors in Georgia was hired and supervised by FPG. Two people were trained to reliability on the ECERS-R and ELLCO. Two people were trained to reliability on the CLASS and the Snapshot. Data collectors were also trained to use the program-level measures. The reliability standard for the ECERS-R was 80% agreement within 1 point and a weighted kappa of .60 or greater with the trainer. The reliability standard for the CLASS was 80% agreement within 1 point of the master codes across 5 videotaped cycles. The reliability standard for the ELLCO was 85% agreement within 1 point of the trainer. The reliability standard for the Snapshot was a kappa of .60 or greater on each code for both a videotaped observation and a live classroom observation. Supervision was provided at least weekly to all data collectors. Throughout data collection, two data collectors periodically collected data together to ensure that inter-rater agreement was maintained. Follow-up training was provided when areas of disagreement were identified.

Data were collected between September 2008 and May 2009. Data collection in Georgia's Pre-K classes generally lasted two days. On the first day, one individual completed the ECERS-R and ELLCO, while a different individual completed the CLASS. On the second day, one of the two data collectors who had been trained to use the Snapshot returned to complete that measure. To the extent possible, the two data collection days occurred during the same week.

To maximize the inclusion of programs representing a range of quality, we offered the program director/principal and participating teachers incentives in the form of gift cards for educational materials (\$100 gift card for the director; \$25 gift card for each lead teacher; plus a raffle for one \$250 gift card for programs with complete data).

Findings

Of the 173 programs in the study, 112 were centers and 61 were public schools. Fifty-three (53) of the 112 centers (47%) participated in Georgia's Pre-K. Because we only recruited public schools that received Georgia's Pre-K funds, all 61 public schools in the study participated in Georgia's Pre-K. This report focuses solely on the 114 programs (53 centers and 61 schools) that participated in Georgia's Pre-K Program. Many centers include both regular preschool and Georgia's Pre-K classrooms; however, the only classroom-level findings presented in this report are for Georgia's Pre-K classrooms. Throughout this report, findings are presented separately for centers and schools because of the different response rates and because they are different types of organizations.

Of the centers that participated in Georgia's Pre-K, 17% were not-for-profit. Nine percent (9%) of the centers and 8% of the schools reported receiving Head Start funds. Eight centers (15%) were accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), three under the revised accreditation system that started in 2007 and five under the old system that was in place prior to 2007. Centers that participated in Georgia's Pre-K varied in size, with a mean total enrollment of 126.4 children of any age, infant through school age in wrap around care (median^b = 118, range = 31 to 281). The mean enrollment of children younger than kindergarten in the centers was 101.3 (median = 88, range = 18 to 262) and 56.5 in schools (median = 40, range 18 to 320). Seventy-five percent (75%) of the centers and 64% of schools in Georgia's Pre-K Program served children with disabilities. Eighty-nine percent (89%) of the centers served children who received child care subsidies from the Childcare and Parent Services program (CAPS). In those centers that served children receiving CAPS subsidies, the percentage of subsidized children within a program varied from less than 1% to 99% of total enrollment (mean = 17%, median = 10%). Twenty-eight percent (28%) of schools reported that some of Georgia's Pre-K children received CAPS subsidies for wrap-around care (i.e., care before or after the pre-k program).

Group Size and Ratios

The total number of children in a classroom (i.e., group size) and the number of children per adults (i.e., ratio) are important aspects of quality. It is easier for adults to meet the health and developmental needs of each child if there are fewer children and more adults in a group. Small group size and low child-to-teacher ratios may be thought of as necessary, but not sufficient, for high quality care and education. Data collectors counted children and adults present in each classroom at four time periods during each ECERS-R observation morning. Table 3 provides observed mean group

b. Throughout this report, we present the median in addition to the mean and range when some of the values are very high.

size and ratios for Georgia's Pre-K classes in centers and schools. In almost all classes (90+%), the group sizes and ratios were at or below the maximum allowable by DECAL Georgia's Pre-K Operating Guidelines.

Table 3. Group Size and Ratios (Number of Children per Adult)

	Number of Classrooms	Mean	Range	DECAL Allowable Maximum
Group Size				
Georgia's Pre-K in centers	53	17.6	10.0–23.8	20
Georgia's Pre-K in schools	61	18.3	12.0–32.8	20
Ratios				
Georgia's Pre-K in centers	53	9.0	5.0–16.8	10
Georgia's Pre-K in schools	61	9.3	4.8–25.3	10

Classroom Quality

This study included three measures of classroom quality in all Georgia's Pre-K classes: the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R), the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and the Language and Literacy subscale of the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation: Pre-K (ELLCO). Findings from each measure are provided below.

Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R)

The ECERS-R was used to measure the global quality of Georgia's Pre-K classrooms. Of the 53 Georgia's Pre-K classes in centers, 68% served mostly 4-year-olds and 32% served mostly 5-year-olds, not yet in kindergarten. Of the 61 Georgia's Pre-K classes in schools, 64% served mostly 4-year-olds and 36% served mostly 5-year-olds, not yet in kindergarten.

The mean ECERS-R total score in center-based Georgia's Pre-K classes was 4.16 (SD = 0.77, range = 2.56 to 5.56); in school-based Georgia's Pre-K classes it was 3.74 (SD = 0.58, range = 2.20 to 4.72). As evident in Figure 1, most of Georgia's Pre-K classes were rated as having medium quality. The ECERS-R mean subscale scores were consistently in the medium quality range (see Table 4), with the exception of Personal Care Routines.

Figure 1. Quality of Georgia’s Pre-K Classrooms
 (ECERS–R total mean in centers = 4.16; mean in schools = 3.74)

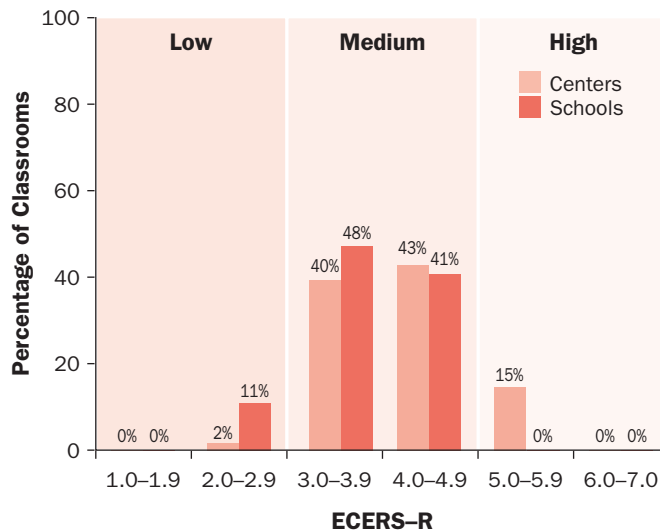


Table 4. ECERS–R Subscale Scores in Georgia’s Pre-K Classrooms

Subscale	Georgia’s Pre-K Classrooms in Centers		Georgia’s Pre-K Classrooms in Schools	
	Mean	Range	Mean	Range
Space and Furnishings	4.77	2.75 – 6.88	3.79	1.88 – 5.38
Personal Care Routines	2.27	1.00 – 4.67	1.71	1.00 – 3.50
Language-Reasoning	4.80	2.50 – 6.75	4.70	2.00 – 6.25
Activities	4.15	1.80 – 6.00	3.78	1.70 – 5.10
Interaction	4.57	2.00 – 6.80	4.96	1.40 – 7.00
Program Structure	4.78	2.67 – 7.00	4.13	2.33 – 5.75

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)

The CLASS measures the teacher-child interactions and yields scores for Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support. Figures 2, 3, and 4 illustrate the distribution of these scores. The mean score for the CLASS Emotional Support was 5.8 in Georgia’s Pre-K classes in centers (range = 3.3 to 6.9) and 5.6 in Georgia’s Pre-K in public schools (range = 3.5 to 6.9). Most classrooms in schools and centers were rated as “high” on Emotional Support.

The mean score for Classroom Organization was 5.4 in Georgia’s Pre-K classes in centers (range = 2.8 to 6.4) and 5.6 in Georgia’s Pre-K classes in public schools (range = 3.6 to 6.7). In both groups, most were rated as “high” on Classroom Organization.

The mean score for Instructional Support was 2.3 in Georgia’s Pre-K classes in both centers (range = 1.1 to 3.8) and schools (range = 1.1 to 3.9), and most classrooms were rated as “low” on Instructional Support.

Figure 2. CLASS Emotional Support in Georgia’s Pre-K Classrooms
 (mean in centers = 5.8; mean in schools = 5.6)

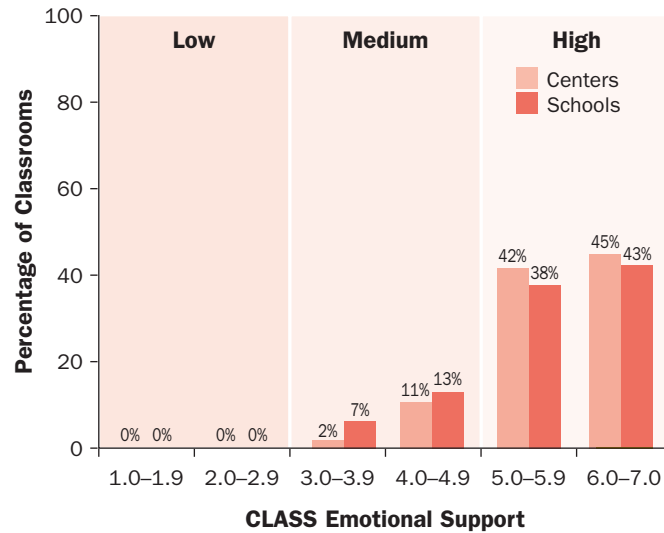


Figure 3. CLASS Classroom Organization in Georgia’s Pre-K Classrooms
 (mean in centers = 5.4; mean in schools = 5.6)

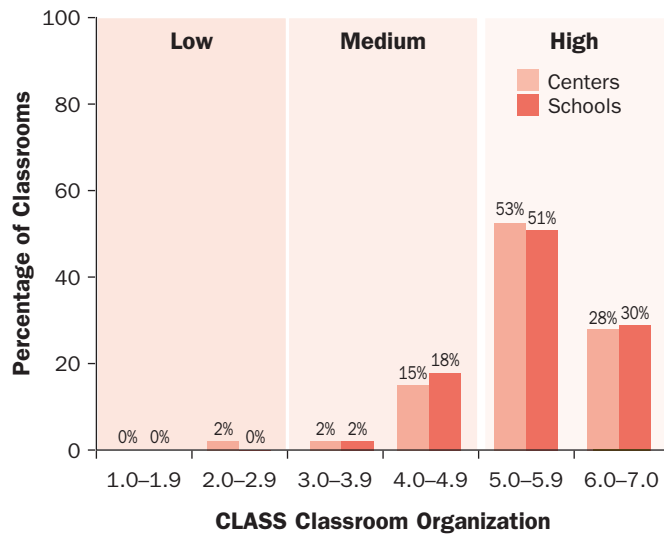
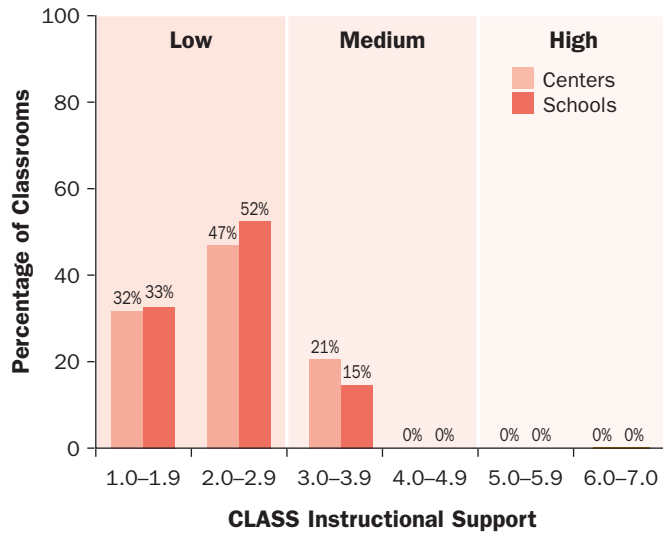


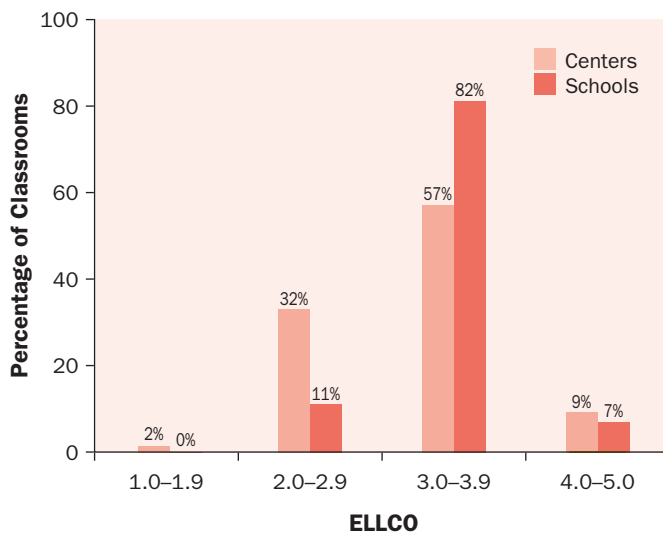
Figure 4. CLASS Instructional Support in Georgia’s Pre-K Classrooms (mean in centers = 2.3; mean in schools = 2.3)



Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation: Pre-K (ELLCO)

The Language and Literacy subscale of the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation: Pre-K was used to measure the early language and literacy environment of Georgia’s Pre-K classrooms. The mean ELLCO Language and Literacy subscale score was 3.2 in centers (range 1.8 to 4.5) and 3.4 (range 2.3 to 4.3) in schools. Over 80% of Georgia’s Pre-K classes in schools and almost 60% of Georgia’s Pre-K classes in centers were rated as having “basic” practice supporting children’s language and literacy skills (See Figure 5).

Figure 5. ELLCO Language and Literacy Environment in Georgia’s Pre-K Classrooms (mean in centers = 3.2; mean in schools = 3.4)



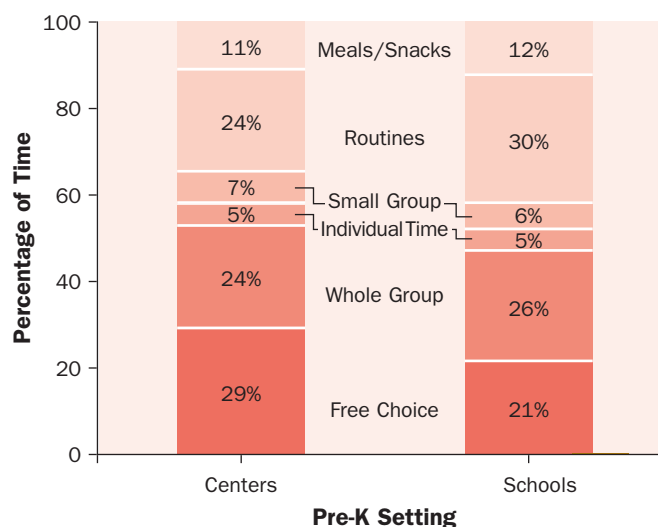
Georgia's Pre-K Classroom Activities

In order to describe a typical day in a Georgia's Pre-K classroom, trained data collectors conducted a day of observation in each classroom, using a modified version of the Emerging Academics Snapshot.

Figure 6 presents summaries of the proportion of time children were observed in each activity setting. Only one activity setting was selected for each 20-second interval. In addition to activity setting, the observer recorded whether children were inside or outside. Activity settings were categorized as one of the following:

- Routines (e.g., toileting, standing in line, waiting between activities)
- Meals/Snacks (e.g., lunch, snacks)
- Whole Group Time (teacher-initiated activities such as singing, calendar instruction, book reading)
- Free Choice/Center (children are able to select what and where they would like to play or learn)
- Individual Time (time assigned by teacher for children to work on their own on independent projects, worksheets, computer work, etc.)
- Small Group Time (small group activities that are teacher-organized and assigned such as art projects or science experiments)

Figure 6. Percentage of Time Georgia's Pre-K Children Spent in Various Activity Settings



Children in center-based classrooms spent 11% of their time outside, and children in school-based classrooms spent 9% of their time outside.

Table 5 shows the proportion of time children were engaged in each learning activity. During a single observation interval, a child could be engaged in one, several, or no

learning activities. Learning activities could occur within any of the activity settings described above (e.g., whole group, free choice) and either inside or outside. Children's engagement in learning activities was coded as one or more of the following:

- Literacy (child is being read to by an adult, exploring books on his/her own or with peers, learning about letters/sounds, or involved in activities where the teacher is trying to build expressive language)
- Math (any activity involving counting, time, shapes, sorting)
- Science (activities involving exploring and learning about the environment, science equipment, animals, body parts, food/nutrition, etc.)
- Social studies (child is talking, reading, or engaged in activities about their world including issues related to culture, family, or their school. Dramatic/pretend play and block play are counted here.)
- Art (child is engaged in art or music activities)
- Fine motor (e.g., stringing beads, completing puzzles, using markers)
- Gross motor (activities involving movement of the whole body)

Table 5. Percentage of Time Children Spent in Various Learning Activities

	Centers	Schools
Literacy	17%	17%
Math	15%	15%
Science	8%	8%
Social Studies	18%	16%
Art	25%	15%
Fine Motor	9%	7%
Gross Motor	7%	6%

Note: Children could be in more than one learning activity at the same time. For instance, if a child were looking at a book about planets, that was coded as both "literacy" and "science." Therefore, the codes in this table should not be added together.

Finally, for each 20-second observation, the data collectors indicated if the target child was individually engaged with the teacher or if she/he was a participant in the group with which the teacher was working. Georgia's Pre-K children interacted with an adult 47% of the time in center-based programs and 48% of the time in school-based programs.

Education and Professional Development

This section of the report provides information about the highest level of education, major, years of experience, and in-service training for program administrators, lead teachers, and assistant teachers. In centers, the "Director/Principal" questions were asked of the individual who ran the program. In schools, the "Director/Principal" questions were asked of the individual who supervised Georgia's Pre-K teachers. This

person was the school principal 84% of the time. Other respondents included a county-level administrator (13%) and school-level administrators other than the principal (3%). Throughout this report, we use the term “principal” to refer to the administrator who supervises Georgia’s Pre-K teachers in schools.

Directors and Principals

- **Education:** In center-based programs that include Georgia’s Pre-K, 43% of directors held at least a Bachelor’s degree. In school-based programs, 100% of principals held at least a Bachelor’s degree (see Figure 7).
- **Major:** Twenty-five percent (25%) of directors of centers with Georgia’s Pre-K and 41% of principals had a degree (Associate’s, Bachelor’s, or Master’s degree) in early childhood education (see Table 6).
- **Experience:** On average, directors of centers with Georgia’s Pre-K reported 15 years of experience working in child care (median = 14, range = 2 to 30). School principals reported 24 years of experience (median = 25, range = 3 to 41).
- **Professional Development Hours:** Directors of centers with Georgia’s Pre-K reported participating in a mean of 27 hours of in-service training in the past year (median = 20, range = 0 to 100). School principals reported participating in a mean of 50 hours (median = 40, range = 3 to 150).
- **Professional Development Content:** The most common in-service training topics reported by directors of centers with Georgia’s Pre-K were health and safety practices; classroom management/discipline; and observing, assessing, and documenting children’s progress and development. Among school principals, the most common topics reported were using a curriculum; observing, assessing, and documenting children’s progress and development; and early language and literacy. Table 7 shows the frequency with which directors of centers and school principals with Georgia’s Pre-K reported participating in various professional development topics.

Figure 7. Education Level of Directors/Principals

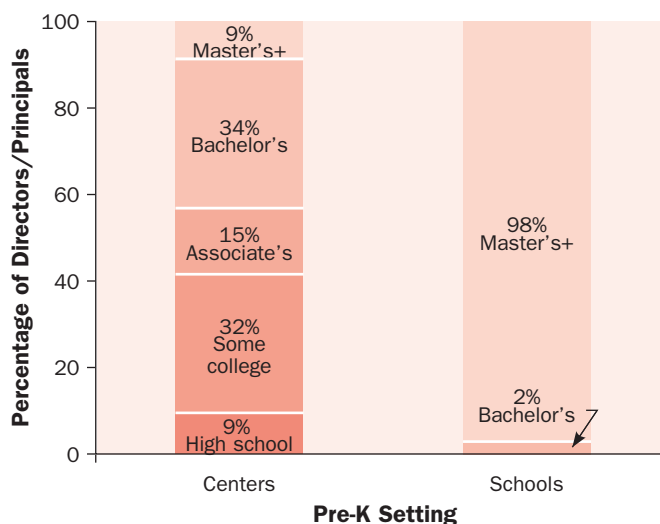


Table 6. Highest Degree and Major of Directors/Principals

	Georgia's Pre-K in Centers	Georgia's Pre-K in Schools
Associate's degree with major in early childhood	8%	0%
Bachelor's degree with major in early childhood	11%	0%
Graduate degree with major in early childhood	6%	41%
Other education major, any degree	2%	57%
Other non-education major, any degree	32%	2%
No Associate's, Bachelor's or Graduate degree	41%	0%

Table 7. In-Service Training Topics for Directors/Principals in the Past Year

	Georgia's Pre-K in Centers	Georgia's Pre-K in Schools
About Children		
Health and safety practices	81%	62%
Classroom management/discipline	85%	62%
Observing, assessing, and documenting children's progress and development	83%	84%
Social-emotional development	74%	48%
Early language and literacy	66%	72%
Using a curriculum	72%	85%
Working with children with special needs	58%	69%
Physical activity	53%	25%
Working with children and families from different cultures and races	51%	44%
Early science	42%	41%
Early math	43%	69%
Working with English Language Learners	23%	38%
About Adults		
Managing conflicts in a professional manner	64%	54%
Nutrition education for employees	32%	21%
Wellness education for employees	23%	33%

Lead Teachers

- **Education:** Georgia's Pre-K Program requires lead teachers to have an Associate's degree. Almost all teachers in school-based Georgia's Pre-K classes (96%) had a Bachelor's degree or higher. In center-based Georgia's Pre-K classes, 72% had a Bachelor's or higher; and 89% had an Associate's or higher (see Figure 8).
- **Major:** Fifty-five percent (55%) of Georgia's Pre-K teachers in centers majored in early childhood education, and 75% of school-based Georgia's Pre-K teachers majored in early childhood education (see Table 8).
- **Experience:** Georgia's Pre-K teachers in centers reported a mean of 9 years of experience working in child care (median = 8, range = 0 to 28), and Georgia's Pre-K teachers in schools reported a mean of 12 years of experience (median = 12, range = 1 to 27).
- **Professional Development Hours:** Lead teachers of Georgia's Pre-K in center-based programs reported participating in a mean of 28 hours of in-service training in the past year (median = 18, range = 0 to 191), while those in school-based programs reported a mean of 45 hours (median = 30, range = 5 to 192).
- **Professional Development Content:** Lead teachers also reported the content of in-service training in which they participated during the past year. The most common topic among Georgia's Pre-K teachers in centers was observing, assessing, and documenting children's progress and development. Among lead Georgia's Pre-K teachers in schools, the most common topic was early language and literacy. Table 9 shows the percentage of Georgia's Pre-K lead teachers who participated in professional development about various topics during the past year.

Figure 8. Education Level of Pre-K Lead Teachers

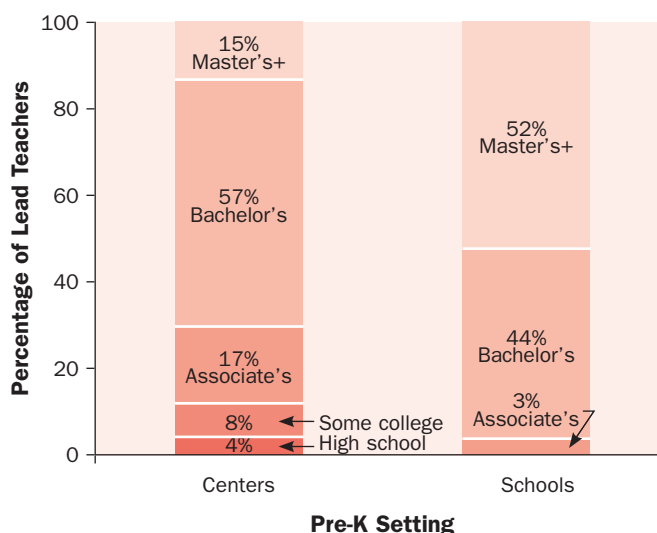


Table 8. Highest Degree and Major for Pre-K Lead Teachers

	Georgia's Pre-K in Centers	Georgia's Pre-K in Schools
Associate's degree with major in early childhood	17%	3%
Bachelor's degree with major in early childhood	30%	36%
Graduate degree with major in early childhood	8%	36%
Other education major, any degree	17%	21%
Other non-education major, any degree	17%	3%
No Associate's, Bachelor's, or Graduate degree	12%	0%

Table 9. In-Service Training Topics for Pre-K Lead Teachers in the Past Year

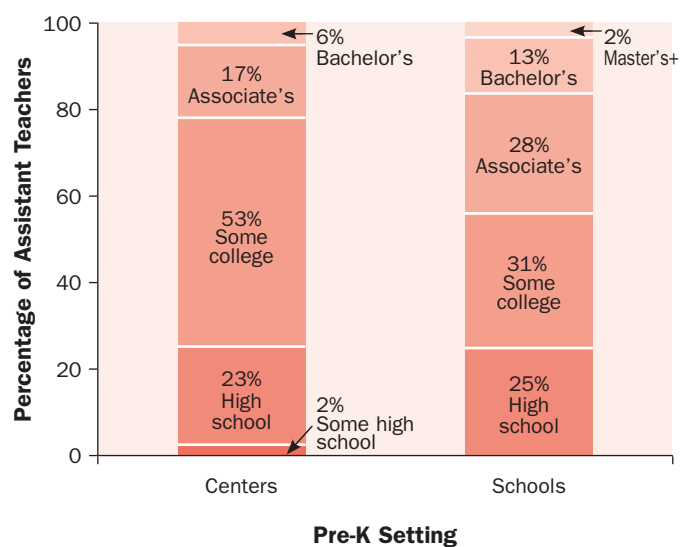
	Georgia's Pre-K in Centers	Georgia's Pre-K in Schools
About Children		
Health and safety practices	60%	46%
Classroom management/discipline	66%	69%
Observing, assessing, and documenting children's progress and development	83%	80%
Social-emotional development	60%	54%
Early language and literacy	74%	87%
Using a curriculum	62%	62%
Working with children with special needs	40%	39%
Physical activity	49%	34%
Working with children and families from different cultures and races	40%	28%
Early science	60%	48%
Early math	64%	54%
Working with English Language Learners	28%	26%
About Adults		
Managing conflicts in a professional manner	32%	21%
Nutrition education for employees	15%	7%
Wellness education for employees	17%	13%

Assistant Teachers

All Georgia's Pre-K classes had at least one assistant teacher.^c A few classes had more than one assistant teacher (2% of center-based classes, and 7% of school-based classes).

- **Education:** In centers, 23% of Georgia's Pre-K assistant teachers had an Associate's degree or higher. In schools, 43% percent of pre-k assistant teachers had an Associate's degree or higher (see Figure 9).
- **Major:** In Georgia's Pre-K classes in both centers and schools, less than 20% of teacher assistants majored in early childhood education (see Table 10).
- **Experience:** Assistant teachers in center-based Georgia's Pre-K classrooms reported a mean of 8 years of experience working in child care (median = 5, range = 1 to 36), and assistant teachers in school-based Georgia's Pre-K classes reported a mean of 11 years of experience (median = 9, range = 1 to 39).
- **Professional Development Hours:** Assistant teachers in Georgia's Pre-K classrooms in centers reported participating in a mean of 32 hours of in-service training in the past year (median = 16, range = 0 to 360), and those in school-based Georgia's Pre-K reported a mean of 43 hours (median = 25, range = 6 to 431).
- **Professional Development Content:** The most common in-service training topic reported among assistant teachers in Georgia's Pre-K classes in both centers and schools was classroom management/discipline. Table 11 shows the percentage of Georgia's Pre-K assistant teachers who participated in professional development about various topics during the past year.

Figure 9. Education Level of Assistant Pre-K Teachers



c. For purposes of this report, we defined 'assistant teacher' as any paid adult other than the lead teacher who was present in the classroom on the day that the observers visited. In cases where there was more than one assistant in a classroom, the education, major, experience, and professional development activities of the assistant who reported spending the most hours in the past week in that class is reported.

Table 10. Highest Degree and Major for Pre-K Assistant Teachers

	Georgia's Pre-K in Centers	Georgia's Pre-K in Schools
Associate's degree with major in early childhood	9%	16%
Bachelor's degree with major in early childhood	2%	2%
Graduate degree with major in early childhood	0%	0%
Other education major, any degree	2%	5%
Other non-education major, any degree	9%	20%
No Associate's, Bachelor's, or Graduate degree	78%	56%

Table 11. In-Service Training Topics for Pre-K Assistant Teachers

	Georgia's Pre-K in Centers	Georgia's Pre-K in Schools
About Children		
Health and safety practices	70%	51%
Classroom management/discipline	81%	82%
Observing, assessing, and documenting children's progress and development	64%	80%
Social-emotional development	70%	69%
Early language and literacy	64%	67%
Using a curriculum	58%	43%
Working with children with special needs	36%	44%
Physical activity	51%	46%
Working with children and families from different cultures and races	42%	49%
Early science	66%	56%
Early math	66%	57%
Working with English Language Learners	25%	21%
About Adults		
Managing conflicts in a professional manner	53%	23%
Nutrition education for employees	19%	8%
Wellness education for employees	23%	20%

Program Characteristics and Services

This section of the report includes additional information about Georgia's Pre-K Program, such as the use of curricula and family support activities.

Curricula and Child Assessments

Georgia's Pre-K classes are required to use a curriculum.¹⁶ Thus, not surprisingly, almost all directors/principals (99% in centers and 92% in schools) reported that a curriculum was used. More than half of the classes in centers reportedly use Creative Curriculum (53%); whereas more than half of the classes in schools reportedly use High/Scope (61%; see Table 12).

Table 12. Reported Curricula Use

	Georgia's Pre-K in Centers	Georgia's Pre-K in Schools
Creative Curriculum	53%	16%
HighReach Learning	17%	5%
High/Scope	19%	62%
A Beka	2%	0%
Pinnacle	9%	0%
Montessori	2%	0%
Scholastic	2%	3%
Blueprint	2%	5%
OWL	0%	8%
Bank Street	0%	0%
Other	9%	5%
None	2%	8%

Georgia's Pre-K Program requires that all classes implement Georgia's Pre-K Child Assessment, which is adapted from the Work Sampling System. Overall, 92% of the center directors and 98% of school principals reported that Georgia's Pre-K classes used some kind of assessment of young children to help teachers plan for or adapt their teaching. Of those who reported using assessments in their Georgia's Pre-K classes, 88% of centers and 100% of schools reported using Georgia's Pre-K Assessment or the Work Sampling System. Additionally, 32% of directors of centers and 92% of school principals with Georgia's Pre-K reported having written documentation of individual children's progress/learning for all children.

Screenings

Some programs have children's vision, hearing, teeth, or general development checked or screened. The program may do this or collaborate with someone from the health department or other community group to come to the center/school to screen children. Table 13 shows the percentage of programs that reported providing these services.

Table 13. Screenings Conducted

	Georgia's Pre-K in Centers	Georgia's Pre-K in Schools
Vision	49%	62%
Hearing	40%	48%
Dental	43%	51%
Learning/Development	36%	33%

Among the 36% of centers with Georgia's Pre-K that conducted learning/development screenings, nearly 56% reported using the Ages & Stages Questionnaire. Among the 33% of schools that conducted learning/development screenings, 45% reported using the Brigance.

Of the 36% of centers with Georgia's Pre-K that reported conducting learning/development screenings, 53% conducted the screenings in the first 3 months of enrollment and the other 47% screened children as needed. Of the 33% of schools that conducted learning/development screenings, 50% conducted the screenings within 3 months of enrollment, 5% conducted them within 6 months of enrollment, and 45% screened children as needed.

Involving Families

In order to learn about the role families play in programs, principals and directors were asked about ways families participate; supports, information, and services programs provide to families; and ways programs and families communicate.

- **Resource Coordination:** Some of Georgia's Pre-K programs receive additional funding, through competitive grants, to provide resource coordination services to families. Programs with a Resource Coordination grant employ a full-or part-time Resource Coordinator to provide children and their families with voluntary access to services that help enable the child to be ready for school.¹⁷ Among schools with Georgia's Pre-K classes, 93% had a Resource Coordinator (62% part-time; 31% full time). Among centers with Georgia's Pre-K classes, 32% had a Resource Coordinator (17% part-time; 15% full-time).

- **Family Participation:** More than 85% of principals/directors in both schools and centers reported that they offered Georgia's Pre-K families an opportunity to read to children in classrooms, eat with their child's class or help at meals, help out in the classroom, and participate in program activities for the whole family. In centers with Georgia's Pre-K classes, 25% of directors reported offering pre-k parents an opportunity to serve as a member of an advisory board; in schools, that number was 69%.
- **Information Provided to Families:** More than 75% of principals/directors reported that in the past year they provided Georgia's Pre-K families with written information about each of the following topics related to their children's development and health: early literacy, overall child development, general safety issues, general health and well-being of children, and dental health. About half of directors of centers with Georgia's Pre-K (55%) and two-thirds of principals (67%) reported providing information about PeachCare for Kids.
- **Services and Supports Provided to Families:** Seventy percent (70%) or more of the directors and principals reported that they provided the following services to families in Georgia's Pre-K Program: help families find community activities, school-age care, social services, mental health services; coordinate community services for families; provide a lending library for families; and send home reading activity packs.
- **Communicating with Families:** Communication among teachers, programs, and families is key to a successful, high-quality experience for children. Most directors and principals reported using various ways of communicating with Georgia's Pre-K families, including phone calls (96% of centers, 98% of schools), program-wide communications such as newsletters (92% of centers, 97% of schools), and parent conferences (100% of centers and schools). Of programs that had conferences, 91% of centers and 98% of schools reported scheduling conferences two or more times per year; 9% of centers and 2% of schools scheduled them annually.

Study Limitations

These data provide rich information with regard to Georgia's Pre-K Program. Information was obtained from many different individuals (i.e., administrators, teachers, assistant teachers) using multiple methods (i.e., observations, interview, questionnaire, review of documents).

The information in this study, however, is not perfect. For instance, some data are from teachers' answers to written surveys where sometimes questions are misread or misunderstood. Likewise, some administrators may not be aware of how programs are funded or managed, possibly leading to some mistakes when reporting on issues such as profit versus not-for-profit or Head Start participation. All data collectors were trained to a high level of reliability on the classroom observation measures. Nonetheless, observational measures always contain a certain amount of observer error.

Child care centers were less likely to participate in this study compared to public schools with Georgia's Pre-K classes. It is quite probable that higher quality programs were more likely to agree to participate than lower quality programs, meaning the findings may be somewhat higher/better than that found in the general population. Assuming better quality programs were more likely to participate, the lower response rate among child care centers might mean that the quality of Pre-K classes in centers in this study is higher than that in the overall population of Pre-K classes in centers. Finally, comparisons between Georgia's Pre-K classes in centers and schools should not be made because of the different response rates and because the study was not designed to evaluate the effects of setting on the quality of Georgia's Pre-K classes. Readers should keep these study limitations in mind when interpreting the findings. Even with these cautions, though, we believe the study provides important information about the quality and services in Georgia's Pre-K Program throughout the state.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This report focuses on the findings from the sample of Georgia's Pre-K classrooms in child care centers and schools that were part of a statewide study of child care and Georgia's Pre-K. A companion report, *Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Child Care Center Findings*, describes the quality of early care and education in center-based child care programs. Please read both reports to understand the quality of early care and education in child care centers and Georgia's Pre-K programs serving Georgia's young children.

Findings from this study suggest that administrators and teachers in Georgia's Pre-K Program are working hard to serve young children and their families.

Georgia's Pre-K Program provides critical services to families and communities by helping prepare young children for school success. Almost all of the programs met or exceeded the DECAL Operating Guidelines for group size and ratio of children per adult. A high proportion of Georgia's Pre-K teachers had at least a Bachelor's degree, most with a major in early childhood education. Lead teachers reported participating in a median of 18 hours of professional development in the past year. Almost all directors/principals reported using a curriculum in their program and using child assessments to guide instruction. Most also reported providing a range of services and supports to the families they serve.

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 was 4.16 in centers and 3.74 in schools (see Figure 1). Almost all of Georgia's Pre-K classes fell within the medium level of quality on the ECERS-R. The ECERS-R measures many different aspects of quality including health, safety, materials, activities, and teacher-child interactions. Medium quality is generally characterized by a fundamentally safe environment with access to good quality materials, although activities and interactions could be more enriching and purposeful.

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) (see Figures 2-4; scores range from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating higher quality). The “high” scores on the CLASS Emotional Support and Classroom Organization scales 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.

Findings from a multi-state study of pre-k provide a context for the low Instructional Support scores. Using two of the three dimensions from the CLASS Instructional Support scale (i.e., concept development and quality of feedback were included in a CLASS Instructional Quality score), only 13% of a sample of about 1,500 pre-k classrooms across 11 states received an Instructional Quality score of 3.25 or higher.¹⁸ In the current study, 11% of Georgia’s Pre-K classrooms (in both centers and schools) received an Instructional Support score of 3.25 or higher. These findings suggest that many state-funded pre-kindergarten programs, not just Georgia’s, struggle to provide high quality instruction for children. Research suggests, however, that of the three CLASS domain scores, Instructional Support is most consistently related to children’s language and math skills.¹⁹ Thus, improving the instruction in Georgia’s Pre-K classes is important to ensure that children are prepared to succeed when they enter kindergarten.

Children in Georgia’s Pre-K classes spent their day in a variety of learning activities, but more time may be needed for age-appropriate instructional activities. Findings from this study suggest that children spent time in both teacher-assigned and child-selected activities and in a variety of learning activities, but less than 20% of their time was spent engaged in language/literacy activities and about 15% of their time was spent in math activities. Georgia’s Pre-K leaders may want to consider increasing time spent on literacy and math while continuing to ensure that children engage in a broad array of activities. Children spent about one-third of the day eating meals and engaged in basic classroom routines (e.g., using the restroom, waiting in line). Although these activities are necessary and important for young children, Georgia’s Pre-K teachers may need support to maximize the learning that takes place during those times. For instance, meals are an ideal time for conversations with adults and waiting in line can be used for songs and finger-plays.

The quality of Georgia’s Pre-K is similar to some aspects and lower than some other aspects of state-funded pre-kindergarten in Tulsa, Oklahoma.²⁰

Tulsa was selected as a comparison for Georgia’s Pre-K Program because Oklahoma’s program also aims to provide a universal, voluntary pre-k program of high-quality and Tulsa has recent data using measures similar to those used in this study.

Comparative information is provided in Table 14. On some measures Georgia scored higher than Tulsa; whereas on other measures Tulsa appeared stronger. Past research has indicated that the CLASS Instructional Support is one of the most consistent predictors of children's academic skills, and Tulsa's pre-k classrooms were rated higher on this dimension than Georgia's Pre-K classrooms.

Table 14. Comparisons between Georgia's and Tulsa's Pre-K Programs

Measure	Georgia	Tulsa, Oklahoma
CLASS Emotional Climate	5.6–5.8	5.2
CLASS Classroom Organization	5.4–5.6	5.0
CLASS Instructional Support	2.3	3.2
Snapshot Literacy Activities	17%	30%
Snapshot Math Activities	15%	17%
Snapshot Science Activities	8%	17%
Snapshot Social Studies Activities	16–18%	13%
Snapshot Art Activities	15–25%	18%

Note: The Tulsa, Oklahoma research project gathered data in almost all of the morning pre-k classes in Tulsa (n = 77). Almost all of the pre-k classes were in public schools. The CLASS and the literacy, math, science, social studies and art learning activity codes for the Snapshot were completed.

Differences in funding levels may at least partially explain the quality differences between Tulsa's and Georgia's Pre-K programs. Although the state of Oklahoma spends only \$3,966 per child in pre-kindergarten, those funds are supplemented with local and federal dollars to bring the total amount spent per child to \$7,484.²¹ Georgia spends about \$4,200 per child for its pre-kindergarten program, and Georgia's Pre-K Program does not have additional local or federal funding. Thus, the total per child expenditure in Georgia is only 57% of that in Oklahoma.

Improving the quality of Georgia's Pre-K Program will require greater investments. As noted above, Georgia spends about \$4,200 per child for its pre-kindergarten program. The estimate of the per-child cost of providing a high quality pre-k program in Georgia is nearly twice that amount (\$7,882).²² Additional resources are likely needed—from federal, state, or local sources—if Georgia's Pre-K Program intends to meet its goal of offering high quality early care and education to four-year-olds in the state.

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. Multiple strategies will likely be needed to raise the quality of Georgia's Pre-K Program. Georgia's Pre-K leaders will need a focused and coordinated set of policies, teacher supports, and resources to improve quality. In-service training and technical assistance are important components of a set of strategies to strengthen the pre-k program.

Georgia's Pre-K teachers and assistant teachers need continued training and technical assistance to support high quality classroom practices that will positively affect children's development and learning. Findings from this study suggest that most Georgia's Pre-K lead teachers have a Bachelor's degree and that both teachers and assistant teachers participate in several hours of in-service each year, covering many topics. Their education and training have not yet translated into consistently 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 sufficient duration may be more effective.^{23, 24, 25, 26} On-site technical assistance also 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.²⁷

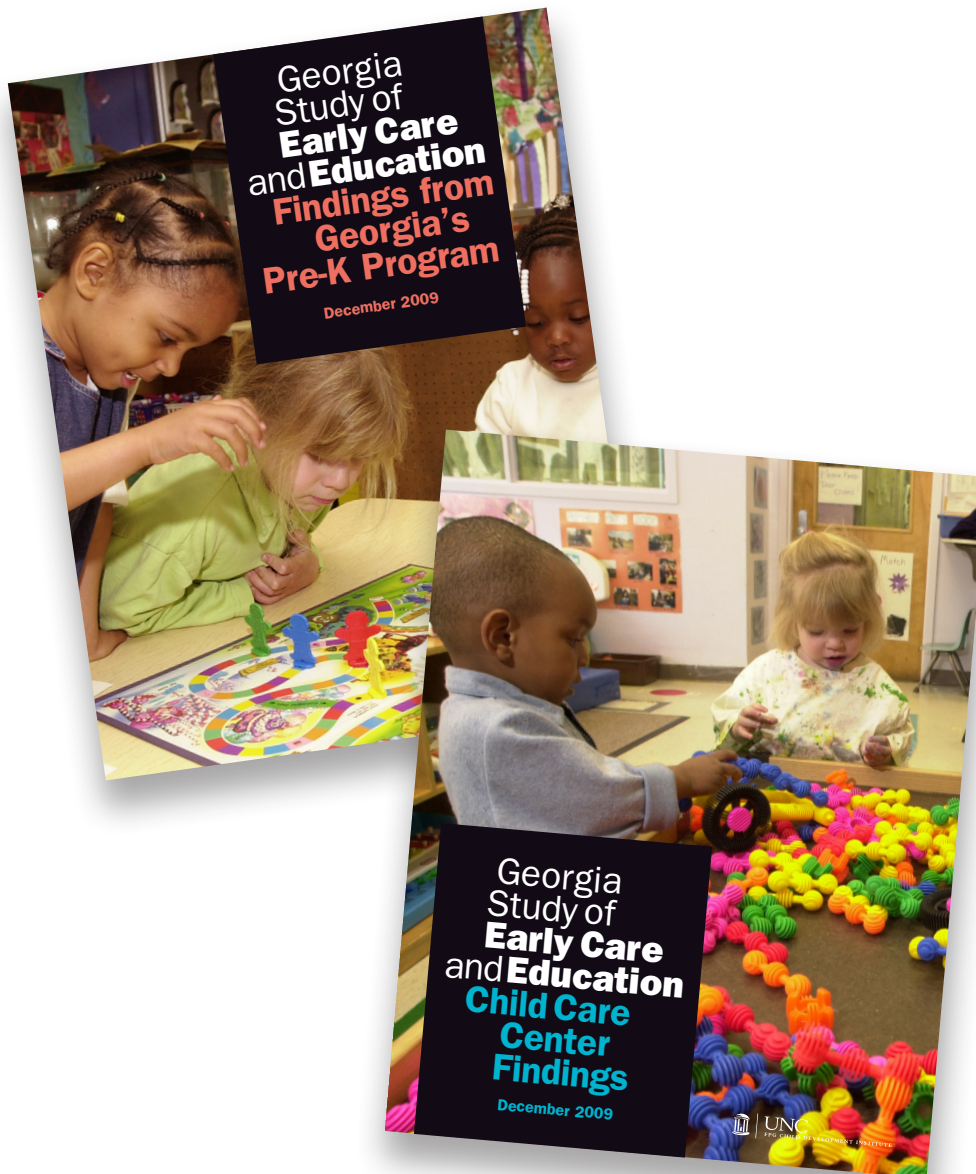
Georgia's Pre-K Program has many strengths that form a strong foundation from which to work. Almost all programs used a curriculum and assessed children as a means to plan instruction. Many schools and some centers had a Resource Coordinator, allowing them to provide additional supports to children and their families. The majority of directors/principals and teachers had a Bachelor's 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 pre-k 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 outcomes.

In closing, Bright from the Start: the Department of Early Care and Learning should be commended for conducting a statewide representative study of child care and Georgia's Pre-K. The study provides objective information about the range of quality in centers and pre-k programs across the state. 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 in a smaller program, so Georgia leaders should not be surprised that there are challenges in maintaining high standards as the program has grown. We hope that these study findings will inform policymakers as they continue to support Georgia's Pre-K Program, particularly in identifying areas of needed improvement and relative strengths on which to build.

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In 2008–09, FPG Child Development Institute conducted a statewide study of randomly selected licensed child care centers and Georgia’s Pre-K programs, collecting data on the observed classroom quality and characteristics of these programs. Findings from this study are described in two reports. The report *Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Child Care Center Findings* describes the overall study and summarizes results for infant, toddler, and preschool classrooms (other than Georgia’s Pre-K) in child care centers. The report *Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Findings from Georgia’s Pre-K Program* describes the overall study and summarizes results from Georgia’s Pre-K classes in schools and child care centers. Please read both reports to understand the quality of early care and education in child care centers and Georgia’s Pre-K programs serving Georgia’s young children.