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Institute of Government  
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA**



**APPENDIX A: Bright from the Start: The Georgia Department of Early  
Care and Learning**

**Focus Group Report on Pre-K Directors' Perspectives on Georgia's Pre-  
K Enrollment**

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## Executive Summary

In 2018, Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) contracted with the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government (Institute of Government) to study lottery-funded Georgia's Pre-K waitlist. The study comprised two parts: (1) a series of focus groups with Georgia public and private Pre-K directors to better understand their perspectives on Georgia's Pre-K enrollment in local communities and (2) a survey of parents and caregivers of children currently on Georgia's Pre-K Program waiting list. This report describes the findings from the exploratory focus groups and the survey.

## Focus Groups

The Institute of Government held five focus groups with a total of 39 public and private Georgia's Pre-K directors. The majority of these participants (35) were from private centers, but three of the five focus groups included at least one public-school Pre-K program director. There were four categories of findings from the focus group interviews:

1. Georgia's Pre-K in the local community: provider perceptions
2. Access and demand: influences on Georgia's Pre-K enrollment
3. Data collection and reporting
4. Suggestions for improvement: strategies and perceived needs for Georgia's Pre-K

### **GEORGIA'S PRE-K IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY: PROVIDER PERCEPTIONS**

The perception that public-school settings are preferred over private center-based settings permeated the discussion of Georgia's Pre-K enrollment. Many of the groups discussed situations in which a local public school will have a long waitlist, while nearby private center-based settings will have open slots. In focus group discussions that included both public and private Pre-K directors, it was clear that collaboration between the two is key to addressing such situations. Public-school system participants, who all stated they were full with large waitlists, attempt to notify parents of private centers with openings. This collaboration requires private Georgia's Pre-K centers to reach out to the public schools to notify them of openings in their classrooms. Public-school systems then share this information with parents, maintaining both confidentiality and parental choice in placement.

## **ACCESS AND DEMAND: INFLUENCES ON GEORGIA'S PRE-K ENROLLMENT**

Participants unanimously agreed on the issues affecting access and demand for Georgia's Pre-K. Issues of access and demand were intertwined in participant responses. Discussion generally focused on the following areas that affect Georgia's Pre-K enrollment: waitlists, parent and caregiver perceptions, location and saturation, transportation, siblings, and the level of collaboration between public and private Georgia's Pre-K centers.

### **Waitlists**

Participants agreed that when parents and caregivers place their children on waitlists, the majority place them on multiple waitlists, for two primary reasons. Some prefer a specific center or school, so they are "holding" a place in the hope that a slot will open up. Others are less concerned with the specific location and want to ensure that their child is enrolled in a program; they place their child on multiple waitlists to ensure enrollment.

### **Parent and Caregiver Perceptions of Georgia's Pre-K**

Participants believe that parents think that public-school systems provide higher quality education than private child development centers. Participants agreed this is due to a lack of knowledge of Georgia's Pre-K standards; parents and caregivers are not aware that the standards, requirements, and quality are meant to be comparable in all Georgia's Pre-K classrooms. Similarly, participants stated that this perception of quality leads to a stigma against private Georgia's Pre-K versus the public-school system, as parents and caregivers perceive private centers to be "daycare" rather than having staff trained specifically in best practices for early care and learning.

Participants also said that some parents and caregivers are misinformed about the cost of Georgia's Pre-K. They may think that Georgia's Pre-K in the public-school systems are the only free programs, not understanding that Georgia's Pre-K is free in both public and private settings.

### **Location: Proximity, Convenience, and Saturation**

According to participants, parents and caregivers tend to select a Georgia's Pre-K provider based on its proximity to their home or workplace. Additionally, if parents and caregivers already have children enrolled with a particular program that offers Georgia's Pre-K, participants believe they are more likely to enroll their children or place their children on a waitlist at that same facility.

Participants also said that oversaturation in the market influences Georgia's Pre-K enrollment. Private providers stated that enrollment in their Georgia's Pre-K classrooms is influenced by how many other providers are located nearby. Similarly, the location of public elementary schools with Georgia's Pre-K program influences enrollment, causing private centers to lose enrollment.

## **Transportation and Siblings**

Participants stated that for some parents and caregivers, transportation affects the choice of Georgia's Pre-K setting. For families with multiple children, parents and caregivers may choose a Georgia's Pre-K site at the same site attended by their other children so that they only have one drop-off. Additionally, for working families, transportation to before and after care strongly influences their choice of Georgia's Pre-K programs. Due to cost and liability issues, private Georgia's Pre-K centers are not always able to provide transportation, making public Georgia's Pre-K locations a better option for some parents and caregivers.

## **DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING**

Participants described three data concerns in the focus groups: (1) a lack of awareness of how the Work Sampling Online (WSO) system is used; (2) confusion about how waitlist data are used by DECAL and questioned waitlist accuracy, such as out-of-date waitlists, lack of access to waitlist data by Georgia's Pre-K directors, and use of waitlist information to determine Georgia's Pre-K locations; and (3) the number of screenings required to attend Georgia's Pre-K (e.g., immunizations, vision), which can be onerous for some parents and caregivers.

### **Work Sampling System**

Participants were not aware of how WSO is being used, and they reported that the data are not being transferred with the child into kindergarten. Participants are concerned that data collected are not being used as intended in kindergarten.

### **Access to Waitlist**

Participants expressed confusion over how waitlist data are used by DECAL and questioned waitlist accuracy. There were three areas of waitlist concern: inaccurate or out-of-date rosters, lack of access to the waitlist itself by Georgia's Pre-K directors, and use of waitlist information to determine Georgia's Pre-K locations.

### **Screening**

Across all groups, public and private Georgia's Pre-K participants stated that the number of screenings required to attend Georgia's Pre-K, such as immunization records and vision screenings, can be difficult for some parents and caregivers to provide.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT: STRATEGIES AND PERCEIVED NEEDS FOR GEORGIA'S PRE-K**

Participants across all groups stated a desire for joint professional development, waitlist sharing and access, and greater community collaboration. Participants regularly stated that they miss the resource coordinator position, which had formerly helped with many of the above concerns about Georgia's Pre-K access and enrollment.

## Introduction

In 2018, Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) contracted with the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government (Institute of Government) to study lottery-funded Georgia's Pre-K waitlist. The study comprised two parts: (1) a series of focus groups with Georgia public and private Pre-K directors to better understand their perspectives on Georgia's Pre-K enrollment in local communities and (2) a survey of parents and caregivers of children currently on Georgia's Pre-K Program waiting list. This report describes the findings from the exploratory focus groups. Appendix E contains the results from the survey.

In August 2018, the Institute of Government held five focus groups with a total of 39 public and private Georgia's Pre-K directors. Participants were asked to discuss their perceptions of Georgia's Pre-K enrollment, including issues of access and demand for Georgia's Pre-K in local communities, what works in terms of enrollment procedures, and suggestions for improvement to enrollment procedures.

There were four categories of findings from the focus group interviews:

1. Georgia's Pre-K in the local community: provider perceptions
2. Access and demand: influences on Georgia's Pre-K enrollment
3. Data collection and reporting
4. Suggestions for improvement: strategies and perceived needs for Georgia's Pre-K

## Methodology

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In August 2018, five focus group sessions were held in Chatham, Fulton, DeKalb, Clayton, and Rockdale/Newton/Walton counties. This study presents the data collected during these focus group discussions.

Prior to this period, Institute of Government staff examined previous studies to identify questions for further research and consulted with the following Georgia's Pre-K experts at DECAL: Susan Adams, deputy commissioner of Pre-K and instructional supports; Dr. Bentley Ponder, senior director of research and policy analysis; Faith Duncan, director of Pre-K field operations; and Shayna Funke, research and policy analyst. Questions identified centered on Georgia's Pre-K enrollment, including access and demand, data collection, and procedures. See Appendix B for the focus group protocol.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study was qualitative in nature. To examine a shared phenomenon (i.e., Georgia's Pre-K enrollment), focus group interviews and observations were employed as the main qualitative techniques. As the experiences of public and private Georgia's Pre-K directors may differ by community, homogenous focus groups were conducted by location to cultivate a comfortable environment of trust and rapport. Additionally, these techniques encouraged discussion among participants to promote a sense of comradery regarding this topic.

## **SAMPLE**

Participants were defined as public and private Georgia's Pre-K directors. Public-school Georgia's Pre-K directors work in local public elementary school systems, and private Georgia's Pre-K directors work in privately owned center-based early care and learning facilities. DECAL maintains a database of Georgia's Pre-K providers and shared a list of public and private Georgia's Pre-K directors by county (Chatham, Fulton, DeKalb, Clayton, Rockdale/Newton/Walton) with the Institute of Government research team. A total of 159 public and private Georgia's Pre-K directors were invited to participate in the focus groups. Thirty-nine participants attended one of the five focus groups held in August 2018. Although the majority (35) of participants represented private centers, three of the five groups had at least one public-school participant.

A DECAL representative was on-site, located outside of the focus group space, to answer any questions or concerns from participants. Participants were informed of the presence of a DECAL representative prior to the start of the focus group and were given the opportunity to remove themselves from the discussion if there was any discomfort. No participants expressed discomfort prior to or after the focus groups.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

Data collection took place in August 2018. Table 1 shows the date and location of each focus group interview as well as the number of attendees and the gender breakdown of each group. Focus groups were held in Chatham, Fulton, DeKalb, Rockdale/Newton/Walton, and Clayton counties. Two Institute of Government staff conducted the focus group interviews. Typically, one researcher facilitated the focus group interviews, and the other recorded supporting notes and observations. The interviews lasted up to two hours. Participants were primarily female; only two of the 39 participants were male.

**Table 1. Timeline and Representation of Focus Groups**

<b>Focus Group</b>	<b>Location and Date</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Gender*</b>
Chatham County Pre-K Directors	Coastal Georgia Center	11	Female 11
	Savannah, GA		Male 0
	August 6, 2018		
Fulton County Pre-K Directors	Loudermilk Center	8	Female 8
	Atlanta, GA		Male 0
	August 13, 2018		
Rockdale/Newton/Walton County Pre-K Directors	Georgia Piedmont Technical College	6	Female 5
	Covington, GA		Male 1
	August 15, 2018		
Clayton County Pre-K Directors	Clayton State University	8	Female 8
	Morrow, GA		Male 0
	August 16, 2018		
DeKalb County Pre-K Directors	Georgia Piedmont Technical College	6	Female 5
	Decatur, GA		Male 1
	August 17, 2018		
<b>Total:</b>		<b>39</b>	<b>Female 37 Male 2</b>

\*Note: Gender was not asked during sign-ups; therefore, these numbers reflect the researchers' perception of the participant's gender expression, not necessarily their gender identity.

### **Focus Group Interviews**

Participants were asked guided, open-ended questions during the focus group interviews, which each lasted approximately two hours. The focus group protocol consisted of seven open-ended questions and guiding commentary (see Appendix B). This thematic structure allowed the facilitator to follow conversational threads yielding fruitful data, not just focus on collecting the data prescribed by the protocol. Additionally, as Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest, "A good interviewer is a good listener rather than a frequent speaker." As such, where possible, the facilitator remained quiet, allowing the conversation to flow.

### **CREDIBILITY, TRANSFERABILITY, AND CONFIRMABILITY**

Techniques to establish credibility are prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and member checking. Thick description of the findings allows for transferability, that is, applying the research to another

setting. Techniques for establishing confirmability include triangulation, audit trails, and reflexivity to address issues of researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Credibility**

Credibility of the research is enhanced through prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Five focus group interviews were held over the course of several weeks, giving the research team time to recruit and contact volunteers for participation. While the focus group interviews were being planned and carried out, the researchers regularly attended meetings with the DECAL team and held bi-weekly phone calls to confirm that the research was staying on task.

The researchers engaged in peer debriefing after each focus group. Immediately following a focus group interview, the facilitator and note-taker took a census of themes that they identified during the session.

No incentives were given for participation in this research. Written informed consent was given at the beginning of each focus group interview, and the researchers explained the purpose and future dissemination of the research. Participants were given the opportunity to leave at any point and were told that their confidentiality was one of the researchers' paramount concerns. Participants were given a copy of the written consent document and the business cards of the researchers (Appendix B). A DECAL representative was on-site, located outside of the focus group space, to answer any questions or concerns from participants. Participants were informed of the presence of a DECAL representative prior to the start of the focus group and were given the opportunity to remove themselves from the discussion if there was any discomfort. No participants expressed discomfort prior to or after the focus groups.

### **Transferability**

To claim transferability, the research must have thick, descriptive data (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While this report provides thick descriptions of the data, it is unlikely that this research is transferable to another setting. Georgia's Pre-K is grounded in the local communities, so generalizing outside of Georgia is difficult. However, portions of this research may be nationally transferable, specifically those data that support other studies on lottery-funded Pre-K.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability requires the establishment of an audit trail, triangulation, and reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail consisting of process notes, raw data, and analysis notes was used, allowing for transparency of the process (Creswell, 1985). The audit trail also included documentation of research activities, such as the observations, interviews, transcripts, and coding during data analysis.

Triangulation was not used, as this portion of the research was focused only on focus group interviews; however, investigator triangulation was used throughout the research, as each focus group was attended by two Institute of Government researchers. Additionally, the researchers individually analyzed and coded the data, which assisted with the rigor of the data analysis by establishing inter-rater reliability.

### **SATURATION**

By the third focus group, similar themes and terminology across groups were beginning to appear. Later focus groups had a few surprises, but by the third focus group interview, researchers were reaching saturation.

### **HUMAN SUBJECTS/ INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

All research activities were reported to the University of Georgia Human Subject's Office Institutional Review Board (IRB). The research was designated exempt; however, researchers chose to use consent forms during the focus group process to build trust and rapport with participants through transparency of the research process. The researchers also provided participants with a contact for feedback, complaints, or further questions or comments. No issues arose during or after the focus group sessions.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

Constant comparative coding was the primary method of analysis. The research team used both a priori and secondary codes. The data consisted of focus group interviews, notes, and observations. Data were collected and analyzed simultaneously in the field. By using the constant comparative method, data collection and analysis took place alongside each other, constantly compared throughout the research process as codes were developed (Creswell, 2007; Grinell & Unrau, 2010). Rigorous coding analysis took place after the final focus group, when two Institute of Government staff individually coded the data. After coding of the five transcripts was completed, the researchers compared codes and themes to confirm inter-rater reliability.

### **DATA PREPARATION**

The first step in data preparation was transcribing the recorded focus group interviews. To maintain participant confidentiality, no names or identifying details, such as business names, were recorded in the transcripts. Interviews were printed in a double-spaced format, leaving a wide margin for codes and notes. The text was separated line by line, as it was difficult to isolate the interviews into paragraphs. Coding was done by hand, in the margins and over the text itself. The Institute researchers analyzed each interview, annotating and coding each focus group transcript before starting the next one.

## ANALYSIS AND CODING

All transcripts were hand-coded to ensure rigor of analysis and researcher immersion in the data. The researchers used two sets of codes. First, the research team developed a priori codes before examining any of the transcripts. These were derived from the research questions, focus group protocols, and prior research into Georgia's Pre-K. As they analyzed the transcripts, the researchers looked for focus group data that fit or did not fit these a priori codes. Due to the specificity of the research questions and because the focus groups were conducted with definite issues in mind, the development of a priori codes was crucial; the data could not be approached as if it were totally "emergent" data. Following this step, the research team used open coding, which was as open as possible and not necessarily attached to research questions or the focus group protocols.

After a priori coding was completed, the coding consisted of four steps. First, cycle coding consisted of line-by-line coding for descriptive data, such as roles or years of experience; topical data, which included what is being discussed in a passage of data, such as types of business engagement activities; and analytical data to determine possible underlying meanings to the data. A second round of cycle coding involved coding for patterns by grouping data together across interviews, or reducing and collapsing codes. Next, thematic coding consisted of looking at the data in a grouping manner. Themes were developed after examining each code for overarching themes. For example, the "access and enrollment" theme consisted of the following codes, among others: saturation, waitlist, transient, quality versus quantity, geography, and transportation. Finally, findings were created after thematic coding, drawing on the data and the research questions.

Findings are presented in the next section.

## Thematic Findings

This section presents thematic findings; there is no ranking to the findings of the study. As much as possible, the language of the findings emulates the language of the participants, and selected quotations are presented as fully as possible to support the participants' various perspectives on Georgia's Pre-K enrollment. Where necessary to protect the confidentiality of participants, identifying information has been removed (noted with "REDACTED").

*Please note that these findings provide participants' subjective views, opinions, and perceptions of Georgia's Pre-K enrollment. These views are not representative of the larger population of Georgia's Pre-K directors, teachers, staff, and administrators; they present the perceptions of these participants only. These perceptions do not necessarily reflect DECAL's actual policies and practices.*

There were four categories of findings from the focus group interviews: (1) Georgia's Pre-K in the local community: provider perceptions; (2) access and demand: influences on Georgia's Pre-

K enrollment; (3) data collection and reporting; and (4) suggestions for improvement: strategies and needs for Georgia's Pre-K.

## **THEME ONE. GEORGIA'S PRE-K IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY: PROVIDER PERCEPTIONS**

Participants were asked to describe their perception of Georgia's Pre-K enrollment in their local community. According to these participants, public-school settings for Georgia's Pre-K are favored over private center-based settings, except when the private center has been located in the community for several years and has a positive reputation for early care and learning.

### **Community Collaboration**

Overall, collaboration appears key to addressing issues of access in local communities. Directors of public and private Georgia's Pre-K programs with established relationships expressed success in addressing waitlists and filling open seats in their communities. Public Georgia's Pre-K participants, all of whom were full with large waitlists, attempt to notify parents of private centers with Georgia's Pre-K openings. These directors rely on private Georgia's Pre-K centers to reach out to the public schools to notify them of openings in their classrooms. Public-school systems share this information with the parents, ensuring confidentiality and parent choice in placement. One participant with multiple locations across Georgia described the difference in working with communities with local collaboration versus working in other communities:

What it looks like in one community is not necessarily what it looks like in another community. It just all depends. One of the things that we do though would like to address is that public/private collaboration where [REDACTED COUNTY] is fine, but there [are] counties out there that is like pulling teeth to get the schools to work with the private sector. We're not asking for specific referrals to [REDACTED], but there is lots of privates out there who struggle because parents have that misconception that [it] is only in the public-school section where we get the quality, and we certainly have the quality on the private, but they don't get that sometimes. Even if the public would allow a list of private providers that, once they start with that waitlist, they can just hand it and say there are other providers in the area and they could choose from those without being endorsing any one particular product.

Other private Georgia's Pre-K participants reach out to the public-school system to help fill empty slots in the community at large. As one private Georgia's Pre-K participant stated,

Both of my classes are full, but I feel so bad when those parents come in and everybody in the community is full. Where do they go? What do we do with those kids that are on that waitlist? I agree with [REDACTED] that the waitlist with the public schools is useless because we can't access [it]. What I started doing was I started going to the elementary schools and letting them know. Here's my information, giving them flyers, giving them discounts or making things really pretty for the kids. Doing little treat bags.

They have kids that come in that they need Pre-K. I try to communicate with all the care providers in that area, so we can say we have openings. We do a lot of that, just picking up the phone, calling. The database is not out yet because the roster is not due until the 7th; the count is not due. You don't know who has what, so we created a listing at [REDACTED]. We just called everybody and said, "Do you have openings? Do you need someone?" Just to try and get the kids somewhere that they need to go.

Another private Georgia's Pre-K director also described partnerships with public schools as key to filling empty spots in Georgia's Pre-K classrooms:

I've got to fill those spots. What I try to do is partner with the two elementary schools that are the feeder schools. They know that my kids are coming. They know what we do, how we teach. The administration there has been very good about letting me come up and put flyers out, put postcards out. They know if I have a slot available. They will send people to the center, but that's just every now and then. It's not that constant we have five kids on the waiting list we're going to send them to [REDACTED]. We have to constantly stay on it. I've had luck with partnering with the other centers that if they don't have Pre-K they really want their infants in preschool that fill up. We just go back and forth on referring kids and try to work it.

Other private Georgia's Pre-K participants discussed partnering with other agencies in their communities to offer resources that are limited or difficult to provide in center-based care, such as transportation to and from the facility. They also rely on partnerships to provide community education and outreach about Georgia's Pre-K and to offer families assistance in completing the screenings and paperwork required for Georgia's Pre-K enrollment. As one participant stated,

[REDACTED] is our Pre-K coordinating person for [REDACTED] County. She's typically really good about reaching out to providers, giving them the waitlists, the schools and all that good stuff—if you ask her for it. She won't just do it, but if you ask her for it, she'll get it to us. Then United Way has been a help, too. United Way, they've invested a lot inside our community, in [REDACTED] County, giving us extra funds to help with outreach, parent engagement. I'm a believer, like many of you, that parent engagement does help with enrollment and is a predictor of child and student success.

### **Perceptions of Private Versus Public Georgia's Pre-K**

Participants unanimously agreed that parents and caregivers favor public Georgia's Pre-K over private Georgia's Pre-K centers. Private Georgia's Pre-K participants were concerned about reports that publically funded three-year-old classrooms were opening in certain counties in Georgia. Private Georgia's Pre-K participants stated that they believe early care and learning is slowly shifting to the public-school system entirely and will eventually put private centers out

of business. The perception is that Georgia is shifting to a Department of Education model of early care and learning.<sup>1</sup> One participant stated,

Now, in [REDACTED] County this summer, and they started this fall with a program of 200 three-year-olds free. It's been called Early Pre-K in [REDACTED] County. They said in the article, and I looked at the article on TV, that if this is successful, which it will be, they will be doing this in other counties. In the next few years, before I retire, DECAL will be serving all the three-year-olds. There will not be three-year-olds or four-year-olds in daycares or Head Starts. We're constantly converting our program over to Early Head Start, which is pregnant moms, up to age three. That's going to be the future of daycares, too.

In a different group, participants brought up the issue of transitioning from public and private early care and learning to entirely public-based early care and learning, as illustrated in the following exchange:

**Participant A:** I've been doing this, this is my 25th year with Georgia's Pre-K. I've seen the shifts. I think it's also concerning when we talk about private Pre-K and public Pre-K. Aside from the teacher salaries that are trying to get back on par, we're seeing now across the country where the public schools are trying to get more into the public schools. We see in [REDACTED] County where they're now taking three-year-olds. They have [REDACTED] last year, or several years, whenever [REDACTED] came to visit, that has a free three-year-old program. Now you see [REDACTED] County has their program. I talked to the superintendent for [REDACTED] County: "What are your plans for getting three-year-olds?" "We're going to have it by 2025 with SPLOST funding." More and more kids are getting taken from ... This is what we do best. We're early providers. We know the industry best, so you're seeing, I'm not going to say it's an animus relationship with public schools, but this is our industry. This is what we know.

**Participant B:** I really do actually believe they are trying to take them and put them in public school period. I know I heard something on the news last year. I know I called the owner. I was like, "Did you hear what they're talking about?"

**Participant C:** Yes, it's true.

**Participant B:** They're truly trying to take these kids out of daycare—

**Participant A:** Not daycare! We are not daycare! Early learning centers.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that any addition of three-year old publically funded classrooms is a local school system decision, not a Georgia Department of Education decision. This statement reflects the participants' *perceptions* only.

**Participant B:** Early learning, okay, but they're trying to take them out of our centers and put them in public school, and they were really talking about Georgia's Pre-K. After so many years, they want them all in public schools.

Additionally, participants in both public and private Georgia's Pre-K programs perceived a mission shift from an intervention-based model intended for families and caregivers of low socioeconomic status to that of serving all children. As a result of this shift, participants expressed differing views on how Georgia's Pre-K classrooms should be selected. One participant stated that while more classrooms may be needed in one area of the community, the historical mission of Georgia's Pre-K means that classrooms will not be removed from low-enrollment areas where there is a higher perceived need to high-waitlist areas in more affluent communities. As one participant explained,

They make these decisions about where we're going to open classes. I can tell you now, internally we would love to open another class in [REDACTED] because we have so many kids that we want to serve. The philosophy behind Pre-K is that it's an intervention. It's going to be most successful for kids who need the most support, which I can agree with. However, I also feel like in Georgia's Pre-K, it's for all children. It's not only for those who are needy. Of course, we want to make sure we provide interventions for those kids, but I just feel like wherever the demand is, we should meet that. We're internally forced to open additional classes in areas where the schools are struggling. Those are the ones that are the hardest to fill. We have a hard time finding kids to fill those slots for a number of reasons. Like she said, it's a high transient population. [In] most of our needier schools, we have a partnership with Head Start... It's a lot of challenges and factors around supply and demand, but like everybody was saying, even in the private providers, I don't think that DECAL does a good job of really figuring out where we have programs, where we need to lose them—looking at average waitlist trends over time to figure out where it looks like we might have more kids. I really don't know how they make those decisions, but it's just like...

Other participants expressed different experiences with classroom placement, stating that the mission of Georgia's Pre-K has shifted from supporting families in the most need to serving all of Georgia's Pre-K-aged children. As one participant stated,

The parents that have not enrolled their child at this point are the parents that need the most support. DECAL is not giving that support. While it started as a program that was there to help low-income families, they pulled away all of those pieces that would help that. I can tell you, today, if I put out a sign that said transportation provided, I would be full. The bottom line is, I can't afford to do transportation because DECAL funds you \$150 a year per child for transportation. Those things would certainly help with getting enrollment. Again, there is no funding there. You really have to make the decision to go

into the hole to keep your classes. I've done that, trust me, I did it last year. We went and picked up 10 or 11 kids because, again, those are the parents that need the most help.

### **Other Community Influences**

According to participants, birth rates and military populations can influence rates of enrollment, depending on the county or region. One participant stated,

A couple of years ago, some years ago now, two years ago, the four-year-old population had decreased because, four years prior to that was one of the lowest birth rates in the US. We see that fluctuation of four-year-olds according to what the birth rates looked like. Also, a lot of these cities across Georgia, there is a lot of military communities. It all also depends on how many units are being deployed, how many are coming back, what the influence of that is. It certainly is one of those areas that sends that.

## **THEME TWO. ACCESS AND DEMAND: INFLUENCES ON GEORGIA'S PRE-K ENROLLMENT**

Participants unanimously agreed on the issues affecting access to Georgia's Pre-K and demand for Georgia's Pre-K. Issues of access and demand were intertwined in participant responses. Discussion generally focused on the following areas that affect Georgia's Pre-K enrollment: waitlists, parent and caregiver perceptions, location and saturation, transportation, siblings, and the level of collaboration between public and private providers.

### **Waitlists**

Waitlists were a concern for all participants across all five focus groups. Participants agreed that when parents and caregivers place their children on waitlists, the majority place them on multiple waitlists, for two primary reasons. First, some children currently enrolled in a Georgia's Pre-K program remain on other waitlists because the parent or caregiver prefers a specific school or center. Second, other parents and caregivers only care about being enrolled and are not as selective about the center or school; their children are on multiple waitlists to ensure enrollment. As one participant stated,

I know for us, too, we have schools that have really long waiting lists, and again I can sign off on what you said too. I feel that in our higher achieving schools there is a draw for Pre-K in those places. Even though a lot of times those parents are drawn to schools that are higher achieving or whatever, a lot of those schools don't have space so they're probably never going to get a class. Unless the enrollment trends change. That being said, I also have some schools that do have high enrollment. They only have one Pre-K class so of course, that waiting list is going to be really long. For us, it's very political. In my school district it's a very political issue, and so every school on the [REDACTED] ... In [REDACTED], all those schools have Pre-K classes. They either have one or two classes in those schools. In [REDACTED], which is [REDACTED] and then [REDACTED], they all have two or three classes of Pre-K. Our board members will not

allow me to move. This whole thing of taking away from kids in need in those schools that are needed to put classes in areas of [REDACTED], where there is a demand, it's just not going to go. Also, because we have inclusion classes in which our special needs kids get to experience Pre-K with their peers. That is very important for us, so most of our classes that we open up north that might have one class up north get an inclusion class. Which is only going to be 14 spaces for these kids in these communities, because we have to have so many with IEPs [individual education plans]. It's like you say you have it just to have it in those cases, but it does at least offer an opportunity. It still creates a higher demand situation. I'm not necessarily saying that the barrier for us is the political piece, but it's a real part of what we have to deal with. The constituents in those communities into getting upset and they go directly to their board members when we decide we're going to move a class or close a class or do anything. I really have to weigh, one, is. Two, is there a demand or need. Three, what are the ramifications of me taking away from a school in need to give to a school that may not have as much academically. It sounds like everyone in this room is trying to fulfill the needs of kids in need in this area. Again, back to what [REDACTED] was saying when it comes to getting them in the door and requiring them to be there, I don't know that they're always up to doing that.

All public Georgia's Pre-K participants reported full enrollment and long waitlists; enrollment and waitlists at private Georgia's Pre-K centers varied. Many participants in private Georgia's Pre-K centers with waitlists had long-standing status in their community, suggesting that community awareness influences enrollment. Participants agreed that involving the family helps generate community awareness. One participant stated,

The family is very important, especially the parents. Because if the parents don't show a vested interest in the child's education, children are not going to learn. In the public-school system, parents pull up to the door, get the kids and they're gone. In the Pre-K setting, they physically have to go to the classroom and sign that child out. My teachers interact and say, "Little Johnny is doing this. Little Johnny is doing that." If we observe or get an idea that they're having some kind of other problems, it's my job to go out and find those different resources. Once the families are helped, then that child is going to be helped, that child is going to learn. But in the public-school system, you don't have, like I said, that nurturing family environment and everybody communicating. They just pick up the kids and go. If the child acts out in the public-school system, "Hey, come and get your child."

Another participant similarly described this family connection as a driving force behind keeping enrollment numbers high:

I think that's with us, too. We always say we're family-oriented. Once my kids come in at 6:00, we stay until 7:00. I still have kids that are in middle school, they're now in

middle school. That connectivity of being able to connect with the parent and not just—I always tell people that I am a “working director.” So I know everybody in the family, I know the grandparents, I know [unclear audio], everybody that picks up, so it’s a personal feel and to let them know that we’re more than just a child care center that provides child care, we’re a family and so, we support every aspect of the family. I think that’s a driving force that we have, the reason we don’t have any problems with enrollment. And you have to create your brand where your parents will be loyal and so when you’re loyal to them and you’re supportive of all of their needs and you discipline them in love. Then it draws them to you, so it keeps your facility heavily vested with children.

Another participant stated that the look of the private Georgia’s Pre-K center influences enrollment and leads to positive word-of-mouth:

I find the aesthetics of the whole. When we had open-house, the cleanliness, the whole look of the Pre-K classroom draws that parent in. They want their child to be there. The majority of children that are Pre-K this year, I knew the parents from previous centers or just working in the streets. “I didn’t know you were here.” Then they would come in that way. Initially, it’s the whole look of the classroom. That’s probably what’s gotten us 90% of the ones that we have now. The teachers started back on the 27th. The new teachers that I have this year are so hot and ready to go. They came in, set up the classroom, which is beautiful, and just the whole look of the playground, just having something new, that whole fresh look, the young teachers that are energized. All of those things. After our open house, I think we had three others, because it was word-of-mouth. That’s what helped us a lot.

In the three groups with both public and private Georgia’s Pre-K directors, participants discussed misperceptions about waitlists. The majority of private Georgia’s Pre-K participants initially described an environment where public Georgia’s Pre-K programs were taking children away from center-based care and not sharing waitlist information with centers that had openings.

Over the years, we have just learned we cannot compete with the school systems. Eventually, in my opinion, I don’t think it’s going to be that long, all of the Pre-K’s will be in the school system. I’m right there at the line so I get both from both locations, but my issue is I lose kids to the public schools. I’ve lost five so I’m at 16 kids in my Pre-K program, no waiting list. They all went to public school. They all got a spot. They called and they finally ended up with a spot in the public-school system, so that’s what I struggle with. We just closed a classroom in [REDACTED] because we could not keep an enrollment. Every time we would get our enrollment up, the school system would recruit children out of our classrooms. A long time ago, when Pre-K started, it was a no-

no, and the school system was supposed to share with us. If we had slots open and they had a waiting list. They were supposed to share those things with us. That has long gone. It's not being enforced at all now, and they actively are taking children from our classrooms...It used to be that if they were enrolled somewhere, they were not to take them. They were supposed to share their waiting list with us. Now, none of that happens. They don't care whether they're enrolled in a daycare or anywhere else.

Private Georgia's Pre-K participants in other groups echoed this statement, as shown in the following exchange:

**Participant A:** We currently have four slots open. We have also three to four elementary schools that have Georgia's Pre-K. [REDACTED] this year, they actually were maybe about two miles away from me. They only had one Georgia's Pre-K, but they built them a new school and now they're offering two Georgia's Pre-K classes. I started out with 44 kids, but then I had the same hiccup with them being with the siblings. They just evidently opened up another class recently —

**Participant B:** And then snatched them out.

**Participant A:** And snatched them. For the most part, we work with our supporting schools that we pick up from, and they pretty much give us their waiting lists or they'll refer the students to our facility. We have a good working relationship with our schools that we pick up from. I think with that new school, [unclear audio] and put those Georgia's Pre-K babies in there. They're trickling out of our private programs to fill the public need.

When public Georgia's Pre-K participants were present in the focus groups, they described the steps they take to address the public-school system's long waitlists for Georgia's Pre-K. All of the public-school system representatives stated that they attempt to maintain a list of private Georgia's Pre-K centers with openings. Due to confidentiality, public Georgia's Pre-K providers cannot share the parent or caregiver's information with the private centers, but they can share center openings with the parents. Similar discussions occurred in all three focus groups with public and private participants, leading to networking and support among participants. In some cases, the private centers must contact the public school and notify it of openings in their classrooms. Participants stated that this public-private collaboration varies by community and school system. One public Georgia's Pre-K participant stated,

I know with the waiting lists, with the openings in Pre-K, our waiting list is typically 150 or 60 students on our waiting list alone. Waiting for spots to become available. What we've done over the years to counteract that, when we hold registration to enroll kids into Pre-K, we create an information pamphlet for the parents at registration. We gave them the list of all the private daycares off of the Georgia lottery Pre-K program. The

director's name, contact number, the address, and things of that nature as an alternative. When we filled everything on our end and there was no more availability, then we would redirect them in that direction to try to help fill the gaps on the private sector as well as we possibly can. I know there are times when some of the daycares will call us directly and say, "Ms. [REDACTED], we have availability." We're on it and we just let them know this particular site said they have availability. We highlight on the pamphlet, hand it to the parents. They do want alternatives, so right now we have at least four Pre-K slots available at one of the schools. That's simply because of the 10-day marker. Yesterday was day number 10 for those who didn't show up as no-shows. Those names were sent to me, and then I began to fill from that roster. I'll call the parents and, in most cases, they'll say, "My child is at this daycare that was recommended. They're comfortable there. They're acclimated there. I don't want to move." I say that's fine. They just decline and we just keep the list going. We try to work like that to help enrollment.

### **Misconceptions about Georgia's Pre-K**

Participants stated that several misconceptions, discussed below, influence enrollment and parental selection of Georgia's Pre-K providers. Participants agreed that these misconceptions largely affect private Georgia's Pre-K centers.

Participants unanimously agreed that parents and caregivers favor public Georgia's Pre-K over private Georgia's Pre-K classrooms. Public-school systems are perceived to provide higher quality education than private child development centers. Participants agreed this belief is due to a lack of knowledge about Georgia's Pre-K standards; parents and caregivers are not aware that the standards, requirements, and quality are intended to be comparable in all Georgia's Pre-K classrooms. One participant stated, "They think that it's different in public schools. They think it is better. Like I tried to explain to some of my parents when they're trying to choose, it's the same thing. Pre-K is teaching the same thing. The quality is the same thing, and they're just thinking school and its better."

Participants stated that educating parents about the costs and quality of Georgia's Pre-K is key to addressing issues of enrollment. As one participant stated,

Again, it goes back to educating parents, or reassuring parents that their child is still going to get good quality Pre-K experience at these privates. It's always been about parent choice. Even if parents will start their children there instead of having them sitting at home, we will deal with if they decide to pull them later. We hope that we're delivering enough experience for that child that the child, the parent, is happy and wants to stay. We're always going to have some that are going to go to public school because of the convenience.

Similarly, participants stated that this view of quality leads to a stigma against private Georgia's Pre-K versus the public-school system, as parents and caregivers perceive private centers to be "daycare" rather than having staff trained specifically in best practices for early care and learning. One participant said,

Making them [parents and caregivers] understand that, because it is in a daycare setting, that it is still going to be good quality. We still have qualified teachers. We still are regulated by the same agency that's going to regulate the public school. Those kind of things. We find that in our areas that we really worked with some of the other providers with that, with public that we have that strong collaboration with that we're seeing fruition of that. We're seeing more and more parents feeling at ease about going to a private sector. The ones I saw were in our school from birth to three. That's not an issue.

Other participants stated that quality is the most important thing private Georgia's Pre-K classrooms can develop or maintain, as other enrollment issues like transportation are not as malleable. As one participant stated,

I preach to a higher quality versus quantity. We have to maintain that quality. We do. We can't overcome those other things for parents, like about the transportation. We have a few sites that do transport, but not many. It's just too much of a regulation from the state for transportation. If we're doing the right thing, and if we're—it's that making the child feel secure and welcome and feel wanted there. I can't stress that enough, because that is a large part of a child's Pre-K experience, is that security. Especially for those who this is their first time ever away from mom or grandma or things like that. Then word-of-mouth gets out big time when their child feels. Miss so-and-So, my child just loves her or Mr. So-and-So.

Participants said that some parents and caregivers are misinformed about the cost of Georgia's Pre-K. They may think that Georgia's Pre-K in the public-school systems are the only free programs and do not know that Georgia's Pre-K is free in both public and private settings. According to participants, some of this misunderstanding could be related to before and after care as well as to private child care facilities advertising pre-K programs that are not Georgia lottery-funded. For example, one participant stated,

I do get that question a lot from parents, with the private daycare they're going to charge me for Pre-K. That's why we reiterate to them as long as it says Georgia lottery Pre-K program, [it] is free. Even if it's in the public or private sector, it has to say Georgia lottery program, Georgia lottery Pre-K funded program. That, in itself, is free. I tell them it's the same consultant, it's the same training, and it's the same layout. Everything is the same. I tell them the way it deviates from the public sector and the private, with the private if it doesn't say Georgia lottery, then it's not free. You're going to pay for those services. I also share with them too the way that you would possibly

incur some type of cost if its Georgia lottery funded .... It has nothing to do with Georgia lottery Pre-K if you need before care. Where if your child has to come through at 6:00 and whenever the instructional time starts at 7:00. From 6:00 to 7:00, you've got to pay for that before care. If your child has to stay there until 7:00 that day and instructional time ends at 2:10, or from the time it ends until the time period you have them, then you pay on that end. The program itself, that window for Georgia lottery Pre-K program, it is a free program. We always reiterate that the parents so they'll be clear that if it's Georgia lottery it's free.

Other participants stated that siblings raise cost and convenience concerns for parents and caregivers, particularly in regard to transportation. As one participant stated, "They cannot afford to put their sibling in our school. Rather than have their kids separated at two different places, they do try to find other more affordable situations."

### **Location: Proximity, Convenience, and Saturation**

Participants stated that location affects Georgia's Pre-K enrollment. In general, parents and caregivers are more likely to choose a Georgia's Pre-K provider close to their home or workplace.

Convenience is one thing. You're close to where mom works or dad works or close to whoever is going to be picking the child up afterward. The after care helps a lot of time because they don't have to worry about getting their child from one place to another for after care. It still boils down to that good quality and consistent care.

Participants also described perceptions that market oversaturation influences Georgia's Pre-K enrollment. Directors of private centers believe that their Georgia's Pre-K enrollment is influenced by how many other providers are located nearby. In some affluent communities, the waitlists are long because there are fewer classrooms; some less affluent communities have many openings because there are more classrooms but lower demand. Participants believed this is due to the original mission of Georgia's Pre-K to provide for underserved communities. One participant stated,

Unlike [REDACTED], but very much like [REDACTED], we're finding issues with enrollment. Not being able to access waitlists. In my perspective, what could be considered an oversaturation of Pre-K classes in our community. Maybe within a two-mile radius, I can account for as many as six or seven schools with Pre-K, none of whom have full classes. So that's really an issue that we face.

Private Georgia's Pre-K participants also stated that the location of public elementary schools influences enrollment. If a private provider is located near an elementary school that begins to offer Georgia's Pre-K, enrollment numbers are likely to drop, according to several directors.

We do face challenges in trying to recruit our children. One of the biggest challenges, because where we're physically located. We're surrounded by other providers who have been in the Pre-K program much longer than we have. Of course, we have competition, you have the Y right down the street, and we have the public-school system. Recently, they just opened up the three [REDACTED] county school system, the three-year-old academy. We have a three-year-old class, which is a great feeder for us. However, now we're facing competition with [REDACTED]. There's a new three-year-old [classroom], so we noticed a drop in the three-year-old enrollment to try out the new school. We're seeing that. Then, piggybacking on what the young man was saying, when we open up for registration, we have a large number, but when the public schools around us open and start, I assume, accepting applications, then our parents let us know, "We've been accepted at [REDACTED]." "We've been accepted at [REDACTED]," or the surrounding schools around us, and that's creating competition and it's drawing from us. But the biggest one I noticed, draining out three-year-old programs is the new school that they have at [REDACTED].

Another private Georgia's Pre-K participant described similar concerns:

We got Georgia's Pre-K in 1994. We got one class in 1995; then the next year we added another class. We've been quite successful with filling our slots until this year. It scared me to death because a month out we needed 23 more children. I thought, what in the world is going on? Normally, my preschool classes will spill on over into Pre-K. You think you're sitting pretty if you've got 18 kids in preschool, and then that means that you've got your one class filled. This time, the children who were in preschool went to the elementary school, because they opened up so many elementary schools in the neighborhood. The parents had older siblings; they wanted those two children to go together. Out of the little 18 I did have, five or six of them left me. I call it abandoned me. I had them from babies. You nurture them from the baby room, and then they walk off and they leave you. Then, for me, I'm sitting right next door to [REDACTED] Elementary School. [REDACTED] does not have Pre-K, because I don't think they've got room for it. That was like a blessing for me. Until they gave the Pre-K to a center on the corner down the street from us. Those kids, I normally would have gotten. You can understand how nervous we were. We started sending out flyers, putting it at the church, a website. Just going into the community and doing it. Somebody told me, "Why do you keep worrying? Every year you worry, and you know you fill up." We filled up the day before school opened, so I was blessed that we got the 44. It was shaky to me. They don't think about the private centers so much when they open up the Pre-K for the schools. We get pushed aside, although we're providing quality care, too. We're doing the same Pre-K program. If you're doing it right it's not anything different from what they're getting in the elementary schools. Being biased as I am, we do better than them. I am biased. I do think that we do better in the private .... We know the children. They

come in there blind. They don't really know what those kids could do until they start testing them or do whatever they do. If I got them, I know what they can do. That's all I got to say about the matter.

Finally, participants stated that transient parents and caregivers influence enrollment, though this is not an issue in all communities. Participants attributed this issue to socioeconomic factors such as rent costs or seasonal employment. As one participant stated,

Yes. We have 45 elementary schools. We have a total of 85 classes, so over 1,700 slots in our school system. We do have pockets of places like the whole [REDACTED]. There's a whole strip of everything on [REDACTED] where we go to one school there's a waiting list of 20 kids. We go down the street and we're barely full. Some of our elementary schools where we have a lot of ... What I'm thinking is that we have a high mobility rate in some of our elementary. In our departments where people are just moving all around all the time, they're not going to commit to one location until they know. The other thing is that they move a lot, so they take rent specials. When that special is over, then they're jumping to another rent special. People are constantly in motion with trying to find a place. The other piece is, and I don't know this to be true or not, I'm not required to put my kid in Pre-K. I don't really want to be dealing with you telling me I have to bring my kid to school on time every single day. Then you're calling me if they're not here, and you're worrying me about them being tardy. I don't know when you think about the life issues that people have. I'm not sure if they necessarily want that intrusion, depending on what's going on. That's another research project for another day. It's my little hypothesis about segments of our community where they just have other things going on. You're right, I know that they're constantly moving. Or they have the other thing of they have a smaller child in a child care center; they want to go there because they want one drop-off. Then they have other kids in elementary school, so they want to be at the school for one drop-off. It's just a lot that goes into it, and it's difficult to try to merge all of that stuff together and help people find the best placement when we're all just individualized.

Another participant stated that because transient families move frequently, it is difficult to track families' needs, such as transportation, screenings, or attendance.

I don't take infants, and I don't do transportation. I partner out and contract out for transportation because it's so expensive. There are two centers that they have transportation and they take infants. There is a Pre-K kid that comes in. There's an infant sibling, so we just barter and go back and forth in the transportation. Also, they pick the kid up for afterschool. I've done that for the past two years just to keep those classes filled so we won't lose that class in that community. There are only a handful of us now. Every year I see somebody else losing Pre-K or them dropping out. These kids are in

dire need and I believe that the transition, what I find is I have kids and we don't even know they're living in hotels, living in special rent programs. My center is right across the street from [REDACTED]. It just breaks my heart because those kids are so transitional. I'll have them for a little bit, and then probably next week, and they've moved on; they have the transition out of the shelter somewhere else. I try to keep five or six slots for them, but it's very transitional over in that corridor off of [REDACTED].

### **Transportation and Siblings**

Participants stated that for some parents and caregivers, transportation influences enrollment. Parents and caregivers may lack transportation in some communities, so the public Georgia's Pre-K is perceived to be a better option. Other children have siblings who attend school, so the parents and caregivers prefer to have one drop-off or one method of transportation for their children. As one participant stated,

The transportation is a big key. For an example, the school system can just drop them off. We cannot release them until we release them to an adult. Because of the compliance thing, that's the difference. And I get it, parents need to save. You get a lot more kids to publics versus them coming with us. If they need before and after care, then it's a charge. Then if they're with the school, they can go home with the siblings. That's the big difference.

Another participant described the issue of transportation in the context of siblings, explaining that costs might inhibit parents and caregivers from placing a child at a private center if the older children are in the public-school system. The participant stated,

With our program, if they have smaller siblings like infant, toddlers, and preschool—when they get to be the bigger children, that's when we see a lot of movement. If you have a parent that maybe has a child that's coming up for Pre-K, [and] maybe has an elementary child, then that's when we do see some movements to the school system. We survey our parents, and the majority of the time, we get it's not with the quality. Sometimes by being in the [public] school, they think they're going to get just a little bit more than being in a child care setting. The majority of it is that transportation piece, and the before and after care. We're all over the state, but some schools, they have Title I. Sometimes they take some of their Title I funding and do enrichment programs in the afternoon. The cost is very minimal if any. We understand it because these days you have to save every little penny. When you have a family that has three siblings and making under \$25,000, that's a big chunk. We get that part. I know Pre-K is pushing, DECAL is pushing everybody to do the Quality Rated, which we have all of our sites Quality Rated except three. They're in the midst of being Quality Rated. I just wish it was more funding for the before and after care because that's really what a lot of parents need in order just to survive.

Participants agreed that for working families, before and after care is a critical component in choosing Pre-K programs due to cost, convenience, transportation, and flexibility. As one participant stated,

Transportation is one of the pieces or components that are very critical to parents because of their work schedule. I know daycares tend to have more of a flexibility as far as bringing their child earlier. With elementary, as early as they can arrive, it's at 7:30, and the school day starts at 7:45. If the parent has to be to work at 6:00, it's not going to work in the public-school system because they won't permit students in. Whereas with the daycare, they choose that because of the flexibility of being able to have before and after care. We do have after care in the school systems, but there's a cost for that because it's funded through the government. It makes it difficult for some parents to be able to absorb that expense or that cost. It's not as expensive, but there's a cost there. Sometimes parents say some public-school systems where they're zone and they have the flexibility to go any elementary school in [REDACTED] County for Pre-K only. That's what I tell parents, and I tell them to draw back from that. If you choose a school outside of your zone, transportation will not be provided. Then at the end of that school year, the child has to go to the home school, which means the child would have gotten acclimated to one school. Then you put them at the home school, and they have to start all over again. They leave their friends behind, the teachers, the familiar environment that they're in. That becomes a drawback to parents when I say that. I say that not to deter them, but I say that so that they will be informed so they won't be shocked at the end of the year and the child is going to a different school. That's some of the reasons for that as well.

Private Georgia's Pre-K participants stated that they are hampered in providing transportation due to costs and liability issues, which makes public Georgia's Pre-K locations a better choice for those with transportation issues. As one participant stated,

When they call, they might ask if we'll pick up from their house but as a private owner, I don't want that liability. I just don't. There are a lot of issues that go with that being at the house, and then you don't really know who you're dropping off to, picking up [from]. I don't want that liability. I think parents should have some responsibility in their child's educational career.

### **Before and After Care Needs**

Private Georgia's Pre-K participants that provide before and after care said that it positively influences their enrollment. For parents and caregivers in need of before and after care for their children, private Georgia's Pre-K centers are able to provide seamless care throughout the day. Although public Georgia's Pre-K providers offer after care services, the majority of participants stated that private centers have the ability to provide care without transport to another location. Other private centers noted that they collaborate with surrounding public schools to coordinate

before and after care, which was considered useful if the private locations offered transportation. As one participant stated,

Yes, because all of my elementary---We do before and after care also. We have a great relationship with all the elementary schools that are in our surrounding— We pick up from, we drop off, and so forth. They have different activities at their school than my four-year-olds, private as well as Georgia’s Pre-K. They go and visit. At the end of school, they do a tour of the schools.

### **THEME THREE. DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING**

Three issues of data collection were discussed in each focus group: the Work Sampling System, waitlist rosters, and screenings.

#### **Work Sampling System**

Across all groups, public and private Georgia’s Pre-K participants described confusion over the Work Sampling Online (WSO) System. Participants were not aware of how WSO is being used and reported that the data are not being transferred with the child when they transition to kindergarten. Participants indicated that they are collecting data for a system they are not certain is being used as intended. It is important to note that this is the perception of the participants, not necessarily actual practice. The following exchange illustrates participants’ confusion about WSO:

**Participant A:** WSO information. I have been so disheartened by the fact that our teachers are doing this data entry and it goes into a big black hole.

**Participant B:** They lost it the last year.

**Participant A:** Even deeper than that. The school systems don't use it because that can't access it. It's a lot of work. If my teachers knew that it went somewhere ... I always say they really need this information because they keep it for when they go to kindergarten, and it follows them to the 12th grade. It's crap, and they realized that that's the truth that it goes nowhere. Kindergarten teachers are not even looking at that information at all.

**Participant C:** It's very useful, and they're not using it. I feel so bad because, like you said, they spend so much time on WSO. It's not being utilized.

**Participant B:** Once again, the state lady comes in and she has access to WSO. She looks in there and says this teacher didn't do this or this teacher did not put in this information.

**Participant A:** It doesn't go anywhere.

**Participant B:** It's wiped clean every year, so it's not like even if you were a returning teacher to try and pull ... You can pull some reports before and possibly share it.

## **Waitlists**

Across all groups, public and private Georgia's Pre-K participants described confusion over how waitlist data are used by DECAL, and they questioned waitlist accuracy. Concerns about waitlists centered on three main issues: inaccurate (e.g., out-of-date) waitlists, lack of access to waitlist data, and use of waitlist information to determine Georgia's Pre-K locations. In the exchange below, two participants are discussing inaccurate roster information:

**Participant A:** Once we submit our roster, if we have open spaces, they [DECAL] will show on their website that there are one or two or whatever spaces. By the time that information has been submitted, it's outdated.

**Participant B:** Yes, this year, on our waiting list, we had 50. We do know that they shop around, so what's the list really?

Other participants expressed concern about how the waitlist data are used to determine Georgia's Pre-K locations. Participants appear to believe that waitlists determine additional classrooms but may inaccurately reflect need or a lack thereof, as one public-school system participant explained,

Here's the problem with that; they [DECAL] base it on the waitlist. I'm sure they make decisions about you guys based on us, and they say we're saturated, but the problem is they look at our whole county. They look at our waitlist, and we have four schools that have over 150 kids on a waitlist because that's where the parents want their children. These parents, if they don't get into these four particular schools, they're not coming to public school. They'll go to private school. The waitlist doesn't tell the true story because I could probably fill 10 classes on the west side, but they won't give me any more classes on the west side because they say I'm saturated, but I'm not saturated in the right area. Or there is several openings in the west side, that's what they look at because they don't want to hurt either public or private when they issue these classrooms. If there are several privates on one end, even though you've got the waitlist, if there is still openings there, they know that granting a public there is going to hurt the private even more so.

Finally, the following participant sums up the confusion around waitlist data:

**Participant B:** The first roster is September 7th, but we don't submit them [on time] [because] we have until another week after that to get them in. A lot of stuff happens. Then another thing it doesn't reflect is, for example in [REDACTED] we have inclusion Pre-K classes. We don't have the full 44 spaces or the full 22 spaces. They don't show that on that list. Parents think that there's availability there. Really there's not.

Another participant stated,

Unlike [REDACTED], but very much like [REDACTED], we're finding issues with enrollment. Not being able to access waitlists. In my perspective, what could be considered an oversaturation of Pre-K classes in our community. Maybe within a two-mile radius, I can account for as many as six or seven schools with Pre-K. None of whom have full classes, so that's really an issue that we face.

## **Screenings**

Across all groups, public and private Georgia's Pre-K participants stated that the number of screenings, such as immunization records and vision screenings, required for enrollment in Georgia's Pre-K classrooms (e.g., immunizations, vision) can be onerous for some parents, influencing whether they place their child in a program. This issue ties into that of the resource coordinator role, which is discussed in the next section. As one participant explained,

You have to ensure that there was eye, ear, and dental forms filled out. And if the parents have to work, you sometimes have to take them to the dentist. You sometimes have to take them to get their eyes checked. Those are the things that you have to do to support those parents. A lot of people say you're not supposed to do that, but if they're on the verge of losing their job, they'll lose their child care, they'll lose their income for their family, for the center. You have to do those things that you have to do in order to keep your center at flow as well as to support them and their children and then keep the children inside the program. The advantage of having a resource coordinator keeps the project director or me particularly as being the director and the owner. That was the types of things that you don't have to deal with, coming up with parents' workshops and trying to support them. Being the assistance for them, networking, trying to help them find jobs, job readiness and skills, and those things and resources coordinating all those things. Now, you find where the director or the project director is doing that and it's just not for the Pre-K children, but it's for everybody in their center. At least if you had a resource coordinator, she can handle those 20 to 22 kids. Then that'd be her issue, and everybody else could benefit from what you have. But you don't necessarily have to deal with it, but more resources are available for your center. I took advantage, because when we had the resource coordinator in Atlanta, we worked with the occupational therapists, we worked with the speech pathologist. And most of them have followed me and my business. That's going to be an advantage that I have. But I don't think every center has that where they necessarily have someone that works with speech pathologists or occupational therapists. Whatever those children need and additional services, I don't think every center has the resources to grab those people to do those things.

## **THEME FOUR. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT: STRATEGIES AND PERCEIVED NEEDS**

Participants across all groups stated a desire for joint professional development, waitlist sharing and access, and greater community collaboration, as illustrated below.

### **Interagency Collaboration**

Participants across all groups stated a desire to have all children served by Georgia's Pre-K. Participants unanimously indicated that Georgia's Pre-K "works" and that they want to increase enrollment by moving children off of waitlists and into classroom. Strategies given by participants for improving waitlists centered on greater collaboration in the community, both community-led and DECAL-led. One participant stated,

I would like to see a true partnership between the public and private where it appears that we only have two county representatives from the public-school systems right now in all of our surrounding counties that we've got. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] [county] represented here. That there needs to be a mandate through Bright from the Start that whoever is in charge of project directors [at DECAL] for Georgia's Pre-K has to attend some type of a meeting at the very beginning of school so that there can be a collaboration of wait lists are available and there are slots that are open in places so that we're truly serving the needs for each of our counties respectfully amongst us to make sure that children aren't sitting at home today when school started out or they weren't sitting at home last Thursday when school started up. That's the biggest piece of it. We can't ensure kindergarten readiness if we can't get the children into the Pre-K programs. That's the way to do it, if there is some type of a, as much as I hate regulations, a mandatory that we were put in the room together so we can put a face to whoever that project director is for the county public-school systems and say, "There is a waitlist that exists. You have community partners that have openings.

### **Resource Coordinators**

Participants across all groups stated a need for a resource coordinator position. Participants who had been with Georgia's Pre-K the longest stated that the elimination of this position has forced center directors and school administrators to fulfill many duties previously carried out by resource coordinators, as two participants explained in the following exchange:

**Participant A:** That's just a small piece of it. They [resource coordinators] identify help needs to help children with. Teachers identify children that may benefit from a referral. They worked as a liaison with the parent to help with that referral. They did the parent involvement pieces for the parenting classes, whether or not it was on budgeting or parenting, whatever things that the parent wanted. They had several components that they had to meet and do.

**Participant B:** They also acted as a social worker for those families.

**Participant A:** Back with us, because you had children that weren't necessarily getting their immunizations like they should. They weren't getting access to medical care like they should. That resource coordinator acted as the liaison between that to help with that because, once again, there is guidelines by state for us to have them in the program. We've got to have the immunization records. We've got to have our REDs, and if a parent doesn't get it done, that resource coordinator helps with that and says, "Here's where you can go. This is the hours they are open. Let me help you make the appointment."

**Participant B:** Or there are obstacles and can they help you with obstacles.

**Participant A:** Yes. "Do you need transportation?" Because there is spending built into that. We can get you a taxi to and from. We can get you an Uber to and from. We can help bridge that and make that happen for you. It was a very integral piece when it was in existence being used. Their first cut that they did was remove it from privates unless it's in the public-school system, or privates that served a predominant Title I needs-based category, is what we call them in Lottery Pre-K. You had to have over 60% of your enrollees, and then you got to retain your resource coordinator. As soon as the next cut of Lottery Pre-K happened, then resource coordinators disappeared completely and it fell on project directors to be that bridge and that gap. And in the private centers, just like [REDACTED] is saying with her being a regional, it's put on her site director to do all of that. Typically, your site director and project director are one in the same. In our smaller providers, your site director or project director is also your owner.

Another participant also described the burden placed on Pre-K directors or owners without the resource coordinator position:

Back on the resource coordinator end, I was a teacher when they pulled the resource coordinators from the district. I remember thinking, "Oh my gosh." There was so many things that this resource coordinator did for us that we had no clue, and it was just all on us. It continues to be placed on, and the public-school system, it's the teacher's responsibility. If you've ever been a teacher, they don't have time to chase paperwork. I feel that's why I lose so many Pre-K teachers, because of having to chase immunizations and EEDs and all of that paperwork. It's unfair that that's placed on the teacher, but the principal, there is nobody else to place it on. Like I said, the resource coordinator, as everybody has said, was a valuable asset.

### **Education and Outreach**

Participants discussed the need for greater education and outreach to parents and caregivers across Georgia about Georgia's Pre-K, particularly to address the misconception that Georgia's Pre-K programs at private centers are different from the programs offered in public schools.

Participants were particularly concerned about a widespread misconception that early care and learning centers are merely “daycares” or “babysitters.” As one participant stated,

Giving them the right words because if they’re asking, “What do they do all day,” and you say, “They learn through play,” they’re thinking, “Oh boy. What are they learning?” They don’t realize that we’re sitting in an area teaching them patterns or sequencing or developing language. They don’t realize that we’re sitting there. They think it’s just that they’re playing with each other all day. (Laughter.) Also, for me, the three-year-olds, we let those parents before they go into the four-year-old program come and observe. A lot of them, they know the teachers and sometimes they may choose the private over the ... Just because they’ve got a personality thing with that teacher.

And another participant said,

I understand, they still call it day care. It just makes my skin crawl when I hear that. I’m like, “We’re all professionals that are in this business, and we are working with the children and looking at the whole child,” and that kind of thing. But, you don’t hear that in the public. The public thinks of us, it’s day care, they’re babysitting. It’s been a long time since we’ve been babysitting.

Finally, participants discussed the need for outreach to parents and caregivers who may not be aware of Georgia’s Pre-K or the need for early learning. As one participant stated,

They [parents and caregivers] don’t know what to expect, because we have to also, I don’t want to say teach the parents, but help and assist them. We cannot tell a parent that “You’re a bad parent.” We have to find ways to engage them so that they will understand why it’s important for their children to be in Pre-K. We too are NAEYC [National Association for the Education of Young Children] accredited, and so we have to follow certain standards as well aside from Bright from the Start. Having parents come in, sometimes we would see parents walking the street. They don’t have to drive anywhere. They’re right there in the neighborhood, and the child wasn’t coming. We have to go and encourage this person: “Your child needs to be in because, when that child gets into public school, it’s going to be a barrier for that child.” We have to balance both sides of the teaching the children but also teaching the parents, for lack of a better word. And because they are younger parents, they may not know anything about Pre-K and they certainly aren’t looking at after Pre-K. It’s still an educational process for the younger parent that these are things you need to be working on and engaging in to help your child.

## **LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY**

As with any research undertaking, this study has limitations. Qualitative research sampling methods are non-representative and cannot be transferred outside of the setting in which the

research took place. While certain characteristics may speak to the larger body of research on lottery-funded Pre-K, the findings in this study can only be attributed to those who chose to participate in these focus groups.

## Conclusion

To recap, this report disseminates the findings from a series of exploratory focus groups on Georgia's Pre-K enrollment. The study was comprised of two parts: (1) a series of focus groups with Georgia public and private Pre-K directors to better understand their perspectives on Georgia's Pre-K enrollment in local communities, and (2) a survey of parents and caregivers of children currently on Georgia's Pre-K Program waiting list. The Institute of Government held five focus groups with a total of 39 public and private Georgia's Pre-K directors. There were four categories of findings from the focus group interviews: (1) Georgia's Pre-K in the local community: provider perceptions; (2) Access and demand: influences on Georgia's Pre-K enrollment; (3) Data collection and reporting; and (4) Suggestions for improvement: strategies and perceived needs for Georgia's Pre-K.

This sections below highlight the main findings along with potential recommendations.

### **Need for increased collaboration between public and private Georgia's Pre-K providers.**

The perception that public-school settings are preferred to private center-based settings permeated the discussion of Georgia's Pre-K enrollment. In focus group discussions where a public-school system representative was present alongside private center-based representatives, it was clear that collaboration between the two was key to addressing the long waitlists at local public schools and open classroom slots at private center-based settings.

**Recommendation:** In communities with long waitlists at local public schools for Georgia's Pre-K programs but with multiple open classroom slots at private center-based settings, collaboration among the two types of provider is suggested. Private school directors can reach out to the Georgia's Pre-K directors at the local public schools to inform them of openings and to encourage parents and caregivers on their waitlist to seek out private center-based settings for Georgia's Pre-K enrollment. Note that all successful collaborations described in the focus group hinged on the private Georgia's Pre-K center reaching out to the public school. Additional collaborations can be explored with other community agencies that offer resources such as transportation to and from care, community education and outreach on Georgia's Pre-K, or assistance with the many screenings required for children in Georgia's Pre-K.

### **Need for increased community outreach and education about Georgia's Pre-K**

Participants unanimously agreed on the issues affecting access to Georgia's Pre-K and demand for Georgia's Pre-K. Issues of access and demand were intertwined in participant responses. Discussion generally focused on the following areas that affect Georgia's Pre-K enrollment:

waitlists, parent and caregiver perceptions, location and saturation, transportation, siblings, and the level of collaboration between public and private providers.

**Recommendation:** Expanded outreach and community education about Georgia’s Pre-K program might address parents and caregivers’ erroneous beliefs about differences in the quality and cost of lottery-funded programs based in public versus private settings.

### **Concerns about oversaturation**

A perception emerged during the focus groups that DECAL uses waitlist data to determine the location of new classrooms. This issue was a particular concern for some private Georgia’s Pre-K providers due to the misperception among some caregivers that public programs are of higher quality than private programs. This erroneous belief can lead to long waitlists for Georgia’s Pre-K classroom in elementary school while nearby private providers have trouble filling open slots in their classrooms.

**Recommendation:** Continued careful decision-making on where to develop new Georgia’s Pre-K classrooms is encouraged.

**Recommendation:** Additional education or awareness-building about how Georgia’s Pre-K locations are chosen and how Georgia’s Pre-K waitlist data are used at the state level may be warranted, especially if DECAL does not use waitlist data in making these decisions.

### **Frustration with how WSO data are used**

Providers in all focus groups expressed frustration in how WSO data are used. Across focus groups, participants discussed the time and energy that goes into entering data into the WSO system, only to be wiped out at the end of the year. Participants seemed to believe that these data are not being used by kindergarten teachers.

**Recommendation:** Additional education or awareness-building among public and private Georgia’s Pre-K directors about how WSO functions and how the data are used could prove helpful.

### **Encourage Community Collaboration**

Participants across all groups stated a desire for joint professional development, waitlist sharing and access, and greater community collaboration. Participants regularly stated that they miss the “resource coordinator” position to help with many of the above concerns about access and enrollment into Georgia’s Pre-K.

**Recommendation:** Encourage joint professional development on the local level, while also providing opportunities for joint professional development on the state level. Joint professional development may allow public and private Georgia’s Pre-K programs to collaborate and work

out many of the issues around waitlists, enrollment, and access merely by providing the space and time to connect outside of the workplace.

In summary, participants said that DECAL is providing a tremendously valuable program for children in Georgia. Numerous participants stated that they believe in Georgia's Pre-K and its benefits to Georgia's children.

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## **APPENDIX B. Focus Group Protocol**

**University of Georgia  
Department of Early Care and Learning Bright from the Start  
Pre-K Enrollment Study  
Focus Group Protocol**

**ANY INFORMED CONSENT OR PERMISSION FORMS and/or  
REGISTRATION CARDS/SIGN UP SHEETS FILLED OUT BEFORE GROUP BEGINS.**

Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion of Pre-K enrollment in your community.

My name is [RESEARCHER 1] and this is [RESEARCHER 2] and we will be your moderators for the day.

As part of a study on Georgia's Pre-K enrollment in local communities, the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning Bright from the Start is working with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government to conduct focus groups with Georgia's Pre-K directors. The Institute of Government is conducting the current study to better understand public and private Pre-K directors' perspectives on Pre-K enrollment. The results of these exploratory focus groups will support a survey of parents and caregivers whose children are currently on a Georgia's Pre-K waitlist. As a Pre-K director, your input is needed.

As part of today's discussion, we will ask questions about the following: issues of access and demand for Pre-K in your community; what currently works with enrollment procedures; and suggestions for improvements to enrollment procedures.

We want to hear from all of you. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. We're interested in positive and negative viewpoints, common and uncommon experiences. I may sometimes "direct traffic" by encouraging someone who has been quiet to talk, or by asking someone to hold off for a few minutes. However, you don't have to answer any questions you don't want to. It is important that you feel comfortable speaking candidly. To encourage open and honest discussion, we ask that you only use first names or, if you prefer, a nickname or alias. We ask that you respect the confidentiality of everyone here. Please don't repeat who said what when you leave this room.

We will be recording for an accurate record of this conversation. After our discussion, this recording will be transcribed and names will be removed from the final transcript. Information will be held confidential. The researchers use the information from the transcripts to include your thoughts in the final report. No reports will link what you say to your name. What this means is, when the report is written, all names will be removed as well as anything that could possibly identify you.

During the discussion, I will ask you questions, and I will listen to what you say. I will not participate in the discussion. So please, feel free to respond to each other and to speak directly to others in the group.

It is important that you speak up and that you only speak one at a time. We don't want to miss any of your comments.

If it is OK with you, we will turn on the recorder and start now. This focus group is being conducted for [PROJECT CLIENT OR NAME] on [DATE] by [MODERATOR/RESEARCHER].

START TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

*[Engagement questions]*

1. Let's begin with introductions.
  - a. Please tell us your first name and [WHERE YOU WORK].
  - b. How long have you been an owner or director?
  - c. Can you tell me a little about your experiences with Georgia's Pre-K?

*[Exploration Questions]*

2. Now that we know a little about you, I'd like you to think about your experiences as a [Pre-K director].
  - a. What does Georgia's Pre-K enrollment look like in your community?
  - b. What does "demand" look like in your community [PROMPTS: how many enrolled; how many on a waitlist]?

- c. What factors do you think increase demand for your program [PROMPTS: transportation]?
3. How does community demand for Georgia's Pre-K influence programming for your site [PROMPTS: number of Pre-K classrooms; teacher hires; instructional planning; classroom management policies]?
4. How do enrollment policies influence access for Pre-K in your community? [PROMPTS: who can enroll; who gets moved at the top of a waitlist; number of slots available; multiple waitlists/one child]
5. What currently works in terms of enrollment procedures? [PROMPTS: forms, policies]
  - a. What data is currently being reported to DECAL that you find useful?
  - b. What data do you feel DECAL needs that currently is NOT being collected?
6. What suggestions for improvement do you have for enrollment procedures?
7. As we said at the beginning, the purpose of this study is to better understand public and private Pre-K directors' perspective on Pre-K enrollment.
  - a. Is there anything we left out?
  - b. Is there anything we didn't talk about that you think we should know?

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in this discussion.

END RECORDING.

END TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX C. Consent Forms**

### **UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA**

#### **CONSENT FORM**

#### **Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning Pre-K Study**

**Principal Investigator:** Theresa A. Wright  
Carl Vinson Institute of Government  
(706) 542-9404  
tawright@uga.edu

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning Bright for the Start has contracted with the Institute of Government to conduct focus groups with Georgia's Pre-K site directors as part of a larger study on Georgia's Pre-K enrollment. The Institute of Government is conducting the current study to better understand Pre-K site directors' perceptions of parent and caregivers use of Georgia's Pre-K, particularly in the area of access and demand. The results of these exploratory focus groups will support a survey of Georgia's Pre-K parents and caregivers. As a Georgia's Pre-K site director, your perception of these services is needed.

#### **Study Procedures**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked questions about your perceptions of Georgia's Pre-K enrollment. Questions will cover things such as the following: issues of access and demand for Georgia's Pre-K in your community; what currently works for enrollment procedures; and suggestions for improvements to enrollment procedures.

You were asked to participate in this discussion because of your employment as a Georgia's Pre-K site director. If you decide to join in this discussion, here are some things you should know:

- Your participation is entirely voluntary.

- Your name will not be used in any reports about this discussion. We will be taking notes during the discussion about what was said but we will not use any names in the reporting of data from the discussion.
- This discussion will be audiotaped so that when we write our report we can make sure we understand everything that was said.
- You may discontinue participation at any time, either by leaving the discussion group or not answering a question, without penalty or loss of benefits.
- Any questions you have about this discussion group and the study will be answered before we begin our discussion. Contact information is provided below for any questions that arise after your participation.
- The discussion group will last approximately 2 hours.
- You will be provided a copy of this consent form to take with you.

### **Risks**

We do not anticipate any risks from participating in this study.

### **Benefits**

As participants will identify the demands, strengths, and needs of the Georgia's Pre-K enrollment, this may enable better support for Georgia's Pre-K procedures, thus ensuring greater outcomes for Georgia's children enrolling in Georgia's Pre-K.

### **Incentives for participation**

There will be no incentives for participation.

### **Audio/Video Recording**

This session will be audio-recorded for ease of data analysis. All focus group transcripts will be stripped of identifying information, such as names. Participants will be encouraged not to use names in the session. All audio and transcripts will be deleted upon completion of the study. Any reports using the information from this study will be de-identified and will not include names. Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

**If you have questions**

The main researcher conducting this study is Theresa A. Wright, PhD, a researcher at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact **Dr. Wright** at **(706) 542-9404** or at **tawright@uga.edu**.

**Research Subject's Consent to Participate:**

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

## APPENDIX D. Sample Recruitment Script

Dear [NAME],

As part of a study on Georgia's Pre-K enrollment, the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning Bright from the Start is working with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government to conduct focus groups with Georgia's Pre-K site directors. The Institute of Government is conducting the study to better understand public and private Pre-K directors' perspectives on Pre-K enrollment. The results of these exploratory focus groups will support a survey of parents and caregivers whose children are on a Georgia's Pre-K waitlist.

**As a Georgia's Pre-K site director, your input is needed.**

Researchers will ask questions about the following: perceptions of Pre-K enrollment; issues of access and demand for Pre-K in your community; what currently works for enrollment procedures; and suggestions for improvements to enrollment procedures.

This meeting will be held in the [DATE, TIME, and LOCATION]. Focus group participation will take no more than two hours. Refreshments will be provided.

**We invite you to participate in this discussion. Follow this link to secure your spot.**

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

[https://ugeorgia.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_01yTLcVCU5Yi4NT?Q\\_DL=06akdiHGXKNimbP\\_01yTLcVCU5Yi4NT\\_MLRP\\_1XM1ApdwiG1KXg9&Q\\_CHL=email](https://ugeorgia.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_01yTLcVCU5Yi4NT?Q_DL=06akdiHGXKNimbP_01yTLcVCU5Yi4NT_MLRP_1XM1ApdwiG1KXg9&Q_CHL=email)

The main researcher conducting this study is Dr. Melinda Moore, with the Institute of Government at the University of Georgia. If you have any questions about this project, you may contact **Dr. Melinda Moore** at (404) 324-0145 or [melinda.moore@uga.edu](mailto:melinda.moore@uga.edu).

We hope to see you [DATE], from 10am-12pm.

**APPENDIX E. Bright from the Start: The Georgia Department of  
Early Care and Learning**

**Survey Report of Parents and Caregivers on Georgia's Pre-K  
Waitlist**

Brian W. Simmons, PhD

Melinda W. Moore, PhD

Michelle Bailey

Katie Davis

Darrell Robinson, MS

Meghan Camp Armstrong, MSW

Theresa Wright, PhD

Carl Vinson Institute of Government

February 2019

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## Executive Summary

In 2018, Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) contracted with the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government (Institute of Government) to study lottery-funded Georgia's Pre-K waitlist. The study comprised two parts: (1) a series of focus groups with Georgia public and private Pre-K directors to better understand their perspectives on Georgia's Pre-K enrollment in local communities and (2) a survey of parents and caregivers of children currently on Georgia's Pre-K Program waiting list. This report describes the findings from the parent and caregiver survey. Appendix A contains the results from the exploratory focus groups.

The Institute of Government collaborated with DECAL to develop a 17-item survey asking parents and caregivers with children on waitlists for Georgia's Pre-K classrooms about their perceptions of the waitlist experience. Survey items covered four general categories: Georgia's Pre-K waitlist status, Pre-K program preferences, Pre-K program selection, and respondent demographics.

In addition to examining perceptions of the waitlist experience, the secondary purpose of the survey was to examine the effectiveness of two modes of contacting Pre-K waitlist parents and caregivers. As such, the survey utilized a dual-mode approach to test the response rates between a web-based option with a mailed invitation and a phone-based option. Participants were randomly assigned to either receive the survey via phone or receive a survey invitation and reminders via standard mail with instructions to access the survey via a provided URL and unique access code. Random assignment was used to ensure that the two groups would be statistically comparable. From December 3, 2018, to December 21, 2018, 5,095 parents and caregivers on Georgia's Pre-K waitlists were invited to complete the survey either online or via phone. Overall, 625 respondents completed the survey, with significantly more respondents via phone ( $N = 548$ ) than online ( $N = 77$ ).

Key findings include:

- Half of survey respondents indicated they currently had a child on a Georgia's Pre-K waitlist; most of these (84%) indicated that their child was only on one waiting list. Three-quarters (74%) stated they "never" received updates about their child's waitlist status.
- The majority of respondents whose child was no longer on a waiting list indicated that this was because he or she was currently enrolled in a lottery-funded Georgia's Pre-K classroom (48%) or another preschool/Pre-K (38%).
- Parents and caregivers with a child on a waiting list most commonly wanted to enroll their child in a Georgia's Pre-K program so that he or she could attend a high-quality program (66%) or to save on child care costs (51%).

- When selecting Pre-K programs, parents indicated they generally prefer programs that are close to their home (75%), public elementary school-based (48%), or close to or at their other children's school (39%); these preferences were consistent with perceptions held by Georgia's Pre-K directors who attended focus groups.
- When asked their single most important reason for selecting a particular Pre-K program, the most frequent response was that it was close to their home (29%).
- Waitlist parents and caregivers found out about the programs through a variety of sources, most commonly through their local elementary school (47%) and prior experience with the program (30%).
- Nearly one-quarter (22%) of respondents with a child on a waitlist used Georgia's Pre-K Provider Search on [www.qualityrated.org](http://www.qualityrated.org).
- Less than one in ten waitlist respondents (8%) used 1-877-ALL GA KIDS.
- Respondents were primarily between ages 25 to 44 (87%), had two children (43%), and were employed full time (49%).

## Introduction and Methodology

In 2018, Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) contracted with the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government (Institute of Government) to study lottery-funded Georgia's Pre-K waitlist. The study comprised two parts: (1) a series of focus groups with Georgia public and private Pre-K directors to better understand their perspectives on Georgia's Pre-K enrollment in local communities and (2) a survey of parents and caregivers of children currently on Georgia's Pre-K Program waiting list. This report describes the findings from the parent and caregiver survey. Appendix A contains the results from the exploratory focus groups.

The Institute of Government collaborated with DECAL to develop a 17-item survey asking parents and caregivers with children on waitlists for Georgia's Pre-K classrooms about their perceptions of the waitlist experience. Survey items covered four general categories: Georgia's Pre-K waitlist status, Pre-K program preferences, Pre-K program selection, and respondent demographics. See Appendix F for the full survey instrument and Appendix G for tables showing survey responses to each item.

In addition to examining perceptions of the waitlist experience, the secondary purpose of the survey was to examine the effectiveness of two modes of contacting Pre-K waitlist parents and caregivers. As such, the survey utilized a dual-mode approach to test the response rates between a web-based option with a mailed invitation and a phone-based option. Each mode utilized the same survey instrument, with the only difference being the mode of participant contact.

DECAL provided the Institute of Government a list of 5,095 parents and caregivers on Georgia's Pre-K waitlists. Participants were randomly assigned to either the phone- or web-based mode, with 2,547 parents and caregivers receiving mail invitations and reminders to complete the web-based survey and 2,548 participants being contacted via phone. Random assignment was used to ensure the two groups would be statistically comparable.

The web-based mode utilized a push-to-web format whereby an invitation and reminders were sent via standard mail with instructions to access the survey at a provided URL. Mailed invitations were sent by the Institute of Government; the invitations identified DECAL as the survey sponsor and described the survey purpose. Invitations and reminders also included a unique access code to ensure that only invited participants responded and to prevent multiple responses from the same participant. The use of a unique access code further allowed the Institute of Government to accurately calculate a reliable response rate. Initial invitations were mailed on December 3, 2018, and reminder postcards were mailed on December 10, 2018, to encourage survey participation.

The 2,548 participants assigned to the phone-based mode were contacted at the telephone number provided by DECAL. Similar to the invitation letter used in the web-based mode, the phone script described the purpose of the survey and introduced the survey as a project conducted on behalf of DECAL. Phone surveys were initiated on December 3, 2018, to ensure the phone-based and web-based modes occurred simultaneously. To further ensure comparability between the phone- and web-based modes, follow-up attempts were limited to three phone calls per number. The phone survey was concluded on December 21, 2018.

## Survey Response

A total of 5,095 parents and caregivers were invited to participate in the study, either online ( $N = 2,547$ ) or via phone ( $N = 2,548$ ). Taking into account undeliverable addresses ( $N = 383$ ), the adjusted online sample was 2,164 respondents. For the phone-based sample, numbers that were disconnected/non-working or not associated with an eligible respondent were removed ( $N = 447$ ), providing an adjusted phone sample of 2,101 respondents. Overall, 625 respondents completed the survey, either online ( $N = 77$ ) or via phone ( $N = 548$ ); therefore, the adjusted response rate to the survey was 14.7% (3.6% for online respondents and 26.1% for phone respondents).

## Comparison of Survey Modes

A total of 625 parents and caregivers completed the survey. Over seven times more respondents completed the survey via phone ( $N = 548$ ) than online ( $N = 77$ ). After accounting for undeliverable addresses and invalid phone numbers, the phone-based mode produced a significantly higher response rate (26.1%) than the push-to-web methodology (3.6%) ( $\chi^2(2, N = 4,265) = 432.45, p < .000$ ). Given the random assignment of caregivers to either the phone- or web-based mode, this difference is assumed to be due to the type of contact method and not to respondent characteristics.

Exploratory analysis was conducted to identify any difference in respondent characteristics between the phone- or web-based modes. No significant differences were detected in respondent age, number of children under 18 in the household, household income, or employment between those responding online or via phone. However, respondents completing the survey online were significantly more likely to have completed some postsecondary education (83%) compared to those completing via phone (71%).

Parents and caregivers who responded online were significantly more likely to indicate their child was on a waitlist at the time of the survey (84%) compared to those from the phone survey (45%). Because respondents were randomly assigned to the phone- or web-based mode and current waitlist status was unknown when assigning contact modes, this difference between

groups is likely a result of active versus passive survey recruitment efforts. The phone-based mode required relatively passive participation: Parents and caregivers simply needed to answer the incoming call and agree to participate. Conversely, the web-based mode required a higher level of active intent: Parents and caregivers needed to read the recruitment materials and then use the provided URL and access code to take the survey. As such, it appears that caregivers with a child on a waitlist were more highly motivated to actively participate in the web-based mode; in comparison, the phone-based mode was equally successful in garnering participation from both waitlist and non-waitlist parents and caregivers.

Despite the phone-based method providing a significantly higher response rate, caution should be used when applying these results to other projects. For example, the web-based method provided proportionally more waitlist respondents, while the phone-based methodology resulted in greater contact with non-waitlist respondents. Thus, when attempting to focus on a narrow subset of the population, a phone-based methodology might elicit responses from a sizable number of contacts outside of the target population. Similarly, when attempting to contact a highly motivated population, methods that require respondents to actively access the survey may be appropriate. Thus, the results of this mode test should not be interpreted as evidence that all attempts at surveying Georgia's Pre-K parents and caregivers need to be phone-based.

## **Margin of Error**

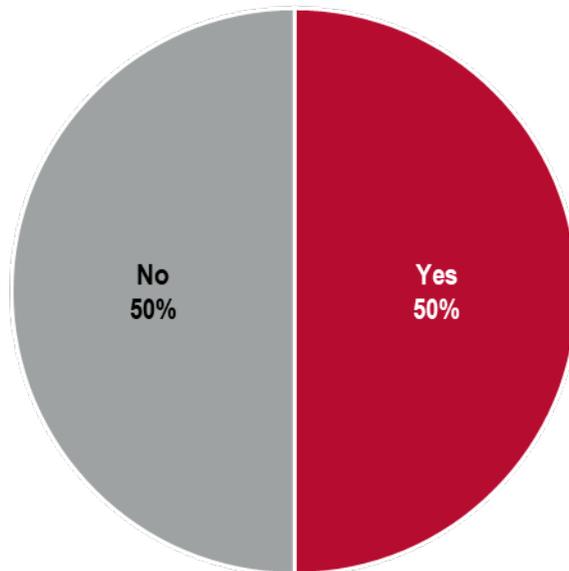
As with all surveys, the DECAL Pre-K Waitlist Survey has a potential for error because not all Pre-K parents in Georgia completed the survey and not every question on the survey was answered by all respondents. For questions answered by all 625 respondents, the sampling error is  $\pm 4\%$ , and for items answered by only those with a child on a Pre-K waitlist at the time of the survey ( $N = 312$ ), the margin of error is  $\pm 5\%$ .

## **Item Nonresponse**

The total sample for this study is 625 parents and caregivers; however, many items were only asked of those with a child currently on a Pre-K waitlist ( $N = 312$ ). In addition, some respondents chose not to answer every question. In such cases, a total response less than the total sample is reported. All numerical values have been rounded to the nearest whole percentage, so some items may not sum to 100%.

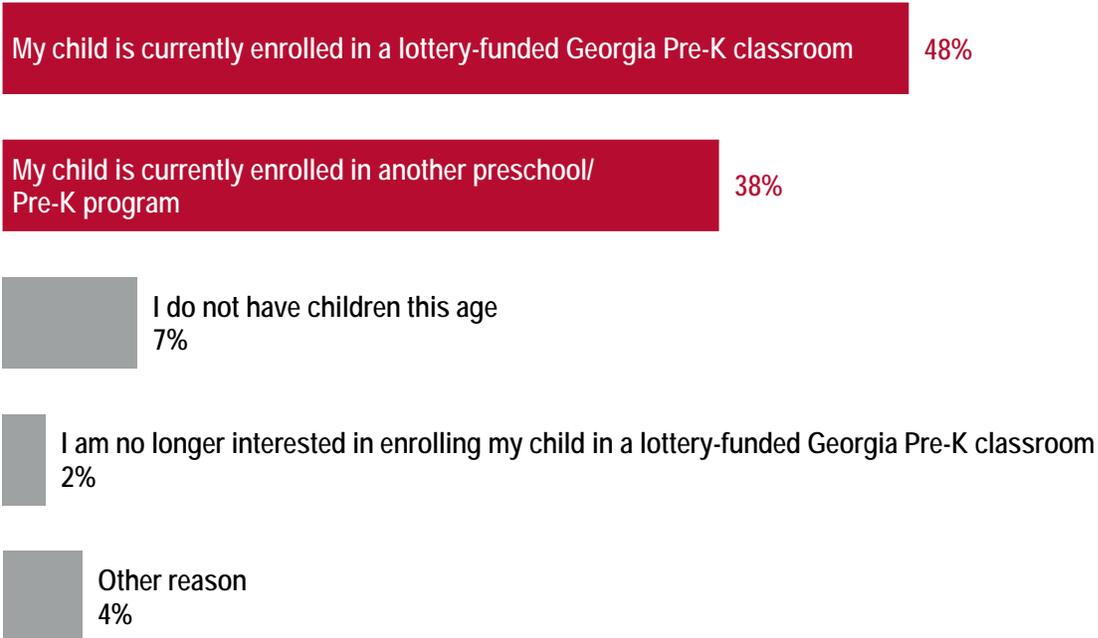
## Georgia's Pre-K Waitlist Status

Half of the survey respondents (50%) indicated that they currently had a child on a waiting list for a lottery-funded Georgia's Pre-K classroom (Figure 1). Respondents to the online survey were significantly more likely to indicate their child was on a waitlist (84%) compared to those who took the phone survey (45%). Whereas response mode was randomly assigned, this difference between groups suggests that online respondents had a stronger incentive to participate in the survey when their child was on a waitlist.



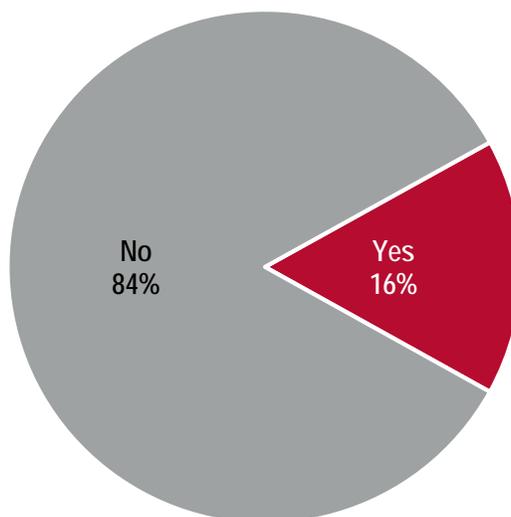
**Figure 1. Do you have a child currently on a waiting list? (N=624)**

Respondents whose child was not on a waitlist were asked to indicate why their child was not on a waitlist (Figure 2). The most common responses were that their child was currently enrolled in a lottery-funded Georgia's Pre-K classroom (48%) or another preschool/pre-K program (38%). Small portions of respondents indicated that they did not have children of pre-K age (7%) or were no longer interested in enrolling their child in a lottery-funded Georgia's Pre-K classroom (2%). Respondents were able to indicate "other" reasons why their child was not on a waiting list; responses included not meeting the deadline, moving out of state, or enrolling in a private pre-K. See Appendix G, Table 2, for additional details.



**Figure 2. Why is your child not on a waiting list? (N=307)**

Respondents with a child on a waitlist were asked if their child was on more than one waitlist (Figure 3) and how often they received updates on their child’s waitlist status (Figure 4). The majority of respondents (84%) reported their child was on only one Georgia’s Pre-K waitlist, and three-quarters (74%) reported they never received updates. See Appendix G, Table 4, for more details.



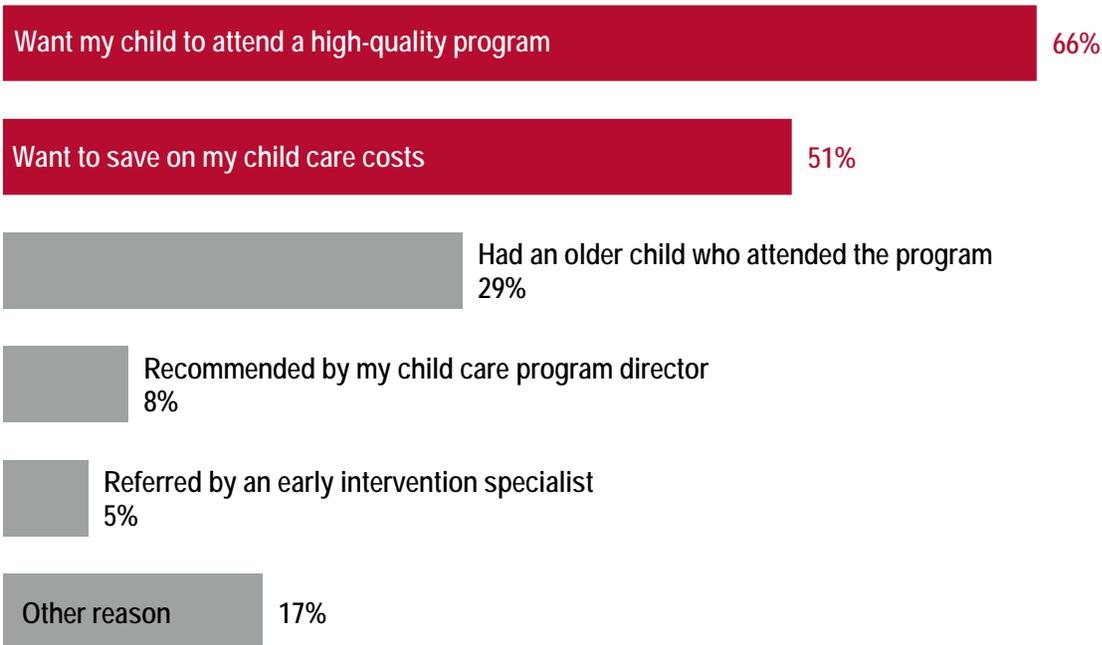
**Figure 3. My child is on more than one lottery-funded Georgia Pre-K waitlist. (N=310)**



Figure 4. I receive updates about my child's waitlist status... (N=310)

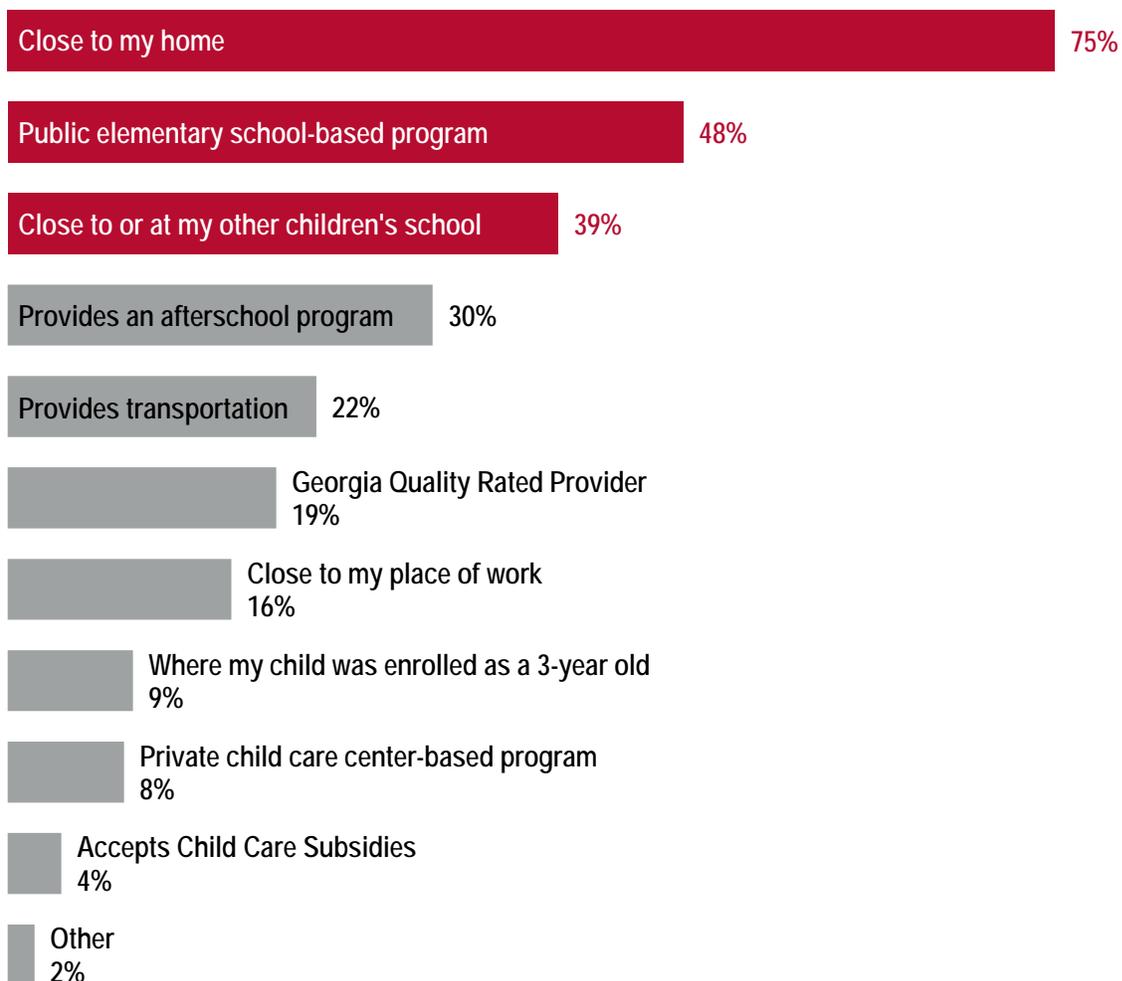
## Pre-K Program Preferences

Those with a child on a waitlist were asked why they would like to enroll their child in a lottery-funded Georgia's Pre-K program (Figure 5). Respondents could select as many reasons as applicable. The most common reasons given were a desire for their child to attend a high-quality program (66%) and a desire to save on child care costs (51%). Approximately one-third of respondents (29%) indicated they wanted to enroll their child in a Georgia's Pre-K program because they had an older child who had attended the program. Respondents were less likely to report seeking enrollment based on a recommendation by a child care program director (8%) or an early intervention specialist (5%). Respondents' "other" reasons included convenient location and hours, child socialization, and preparation for later education. See Appendix G, Table 5, for more details.



**Figure 5. Why would you like to enroll your child in a Georgia Pre-K program? (N=312)**

Respondents with a child on a waiting list were asked to identify their preferences in a Georgia’s Pre-K program. Respondents were able to select as many preferences as applicable. Three-quarters of respondents (75%) indicated they prefer a program close to their home. Respondents also commonly indicated a preference for public elementary school-based programs (48%) and programs close to or at their other children’s school (39%). Note that these results corroborate perceptions held by Georgia’s Pre-K directors who attended the focus groups. Respondents noted a preference for additional services such as afterschool programming (30%) and transportation (22%). Few respondents reported a preference for programs that accept child care subsidies (4%). See Appendix G, Table 6, for more details.



**Figure 6. The lottery-funded Georgia Pre-K program that I most prefer: (N=312)**

Respondents with a child on a Georgia’s Pre-K waitlist were asked to identify the single most important reason when selecting a lottery-funded Pre-K program (Figure 7). The most commonly endorsed reason was the program is close to their home (29%). The other top reasons were the program is close to or at their other children’s school (20%), is a public elementary school-based program (17%), and is a Georgia Quality Rated provider (16%). See Appendix G, Table 7, for more details.

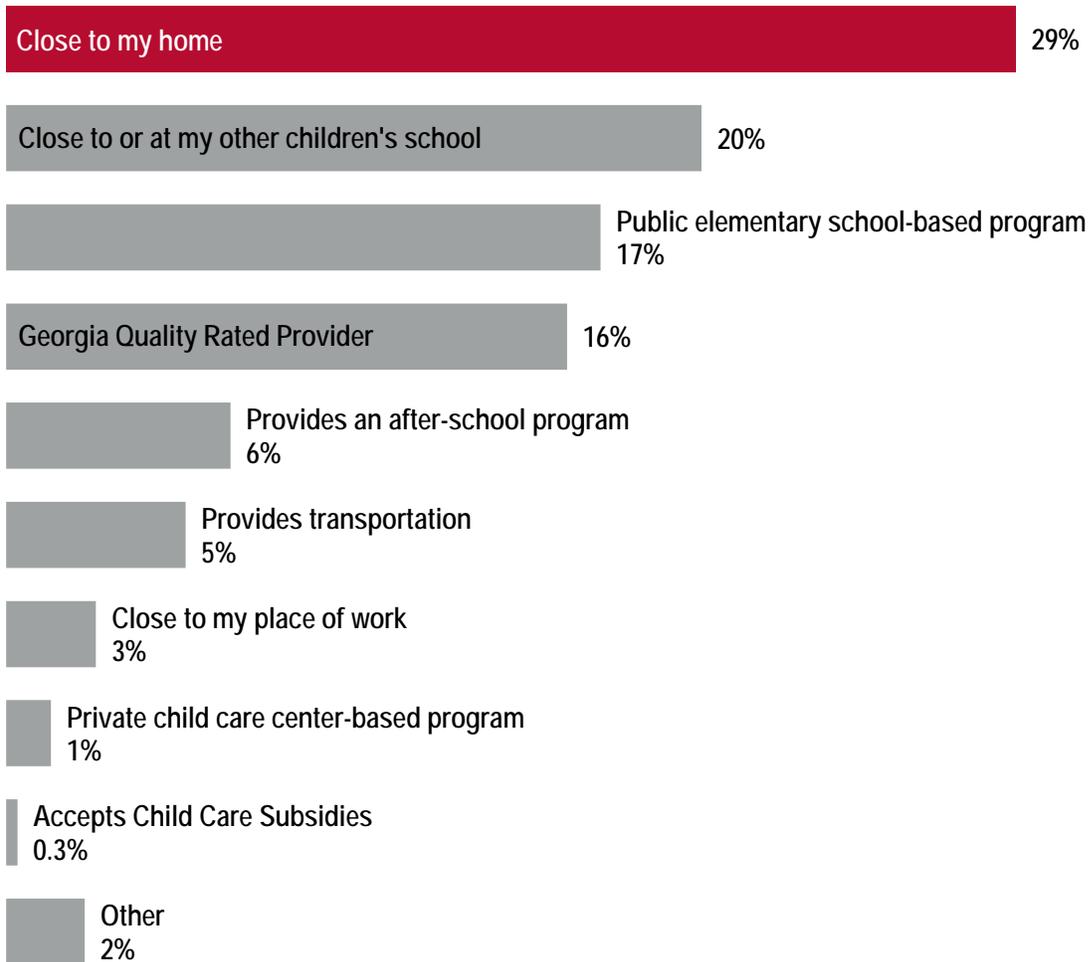
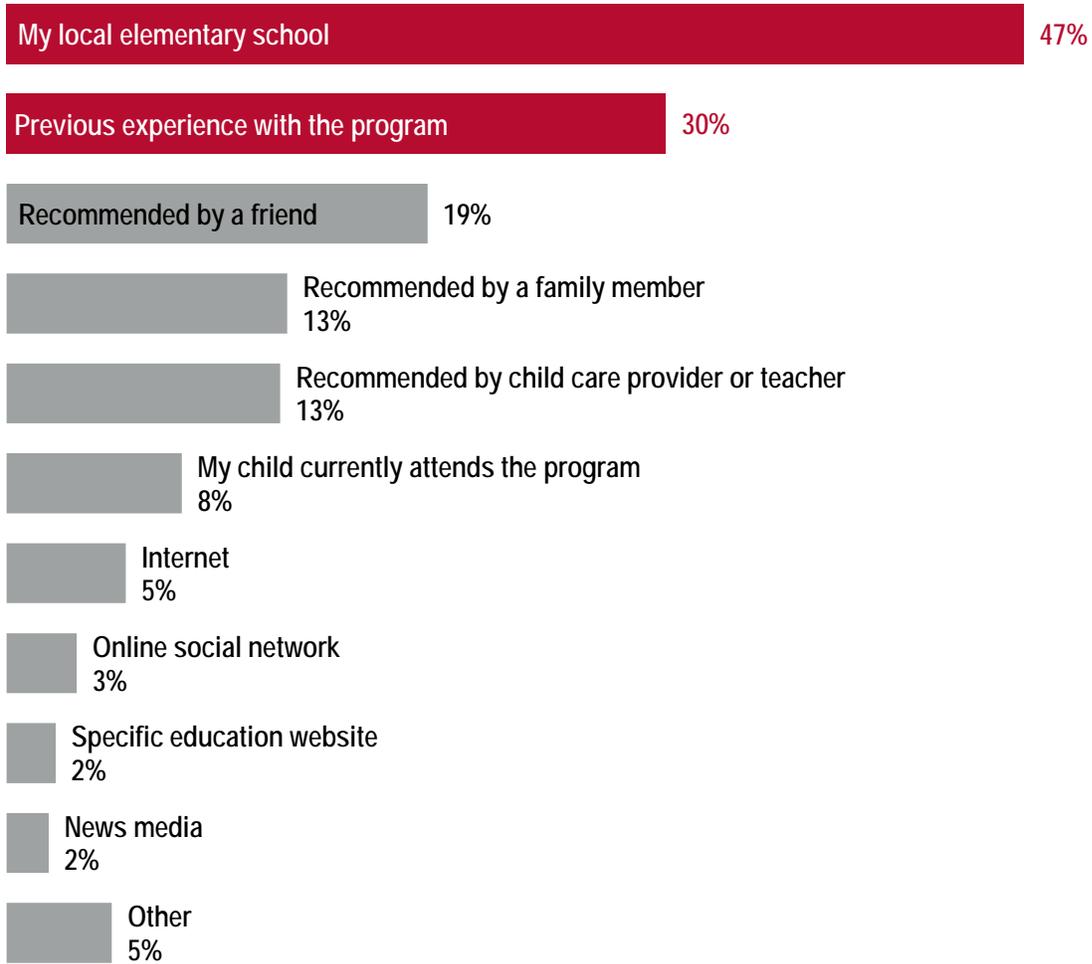


Figure 7. The most important reason in selecting a Georgia Pre-K program: (N=311)

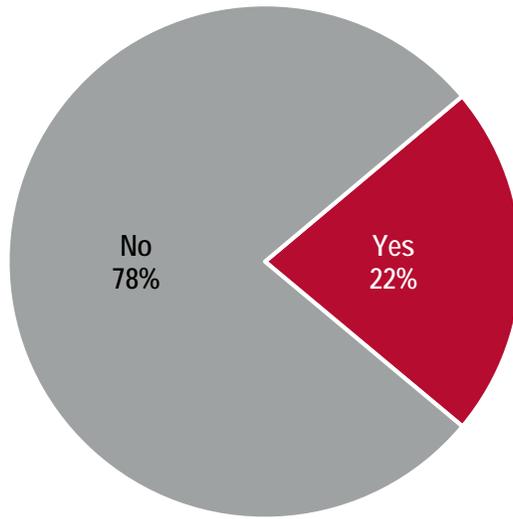
## Pre-K Program Selection

Respondents were asked several questions regarding how they searched for Georgia’s Pre-K programs. Respondents indicated that they found the Georgia’s Pre-K program where their child was on the waiting list from their local elementary school (47%) or through previous experience with the program (30%). Word-of-mouth recommendations were also common, such as from a friend (19%), family member (13%), or child care provider/teacher (13%). See Appendix G, Table 8, for more details.

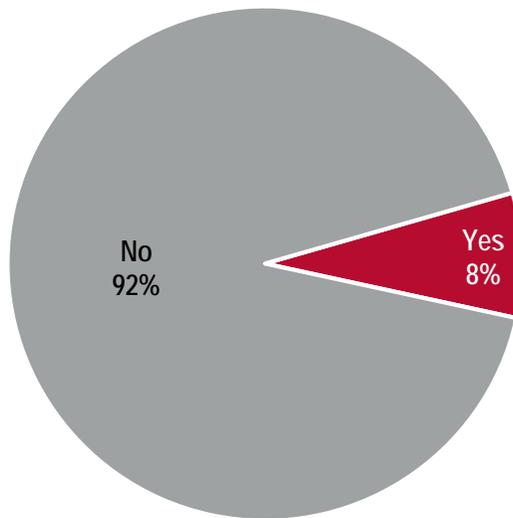


**Figure 8. How did you find out about the lottery-funded Pre-K program(s) you are currently on the waitlist for? (N=311)**

Nearly a quarter (22%) of respondents with a child on a waitlist indicated that they had used the Georgia’s Pre-K provider search function on [www.qualityrated.org](http://www.qualityrated.org) (Figure 9). Use of 1-877-ALL GA KIDS was less common among respondents on a waiting list (8%) (Figure 10). See Appendix G, Table 9 and Table 10, for more details.



**Figure 9. Used Georgia's Pre-K Provider Search on [www.qualityrated.org](http://www.qualityrated.org). (N=311)**



**Figure 10: Used 1-877-ALL GA KIDS (N=306)**

## Demographics

Survey respondents were primarily between ages 25 and 44, with nearly half (47%) between ages 25 and 34 (Figure 11). Just under half of all respondents (43%) indicated they had two children, and one-quarter (24%) had three children under age 18 (Figure 12). See Appendix G, Table 11 and Table 12, for more details.



Figure 11. How old are you? (N=618)

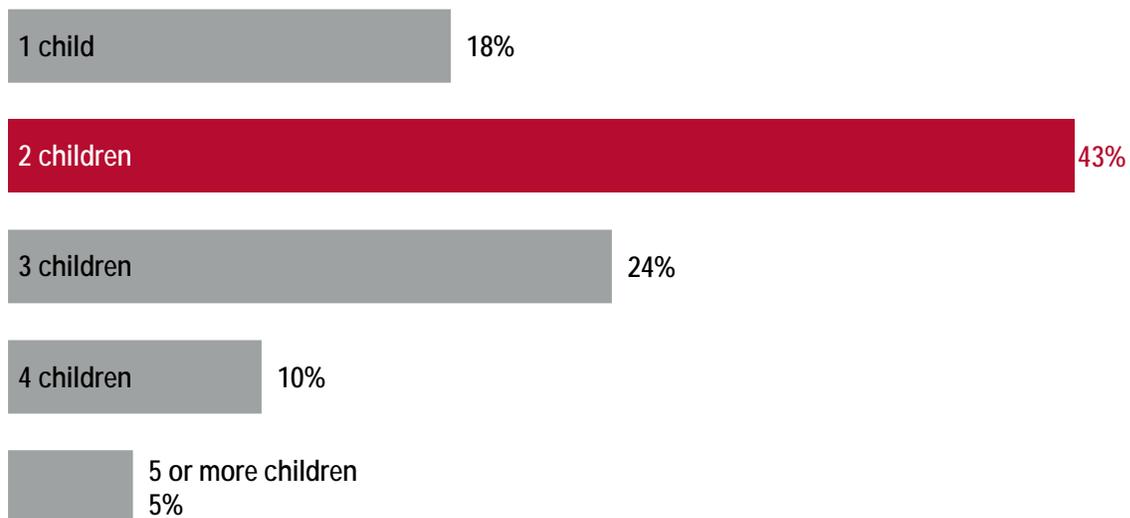


Figure 12. How many children under 18 are in your family? (N=619)

Survey respondents provided their zip codes, which were used to identify their residential county. Respondents represented 74 Georgia counties (Figure 13), with the largest portion of respondents from DeKalb (20%) and Fulton (11%). See Appendix G, Table 13, for more details.

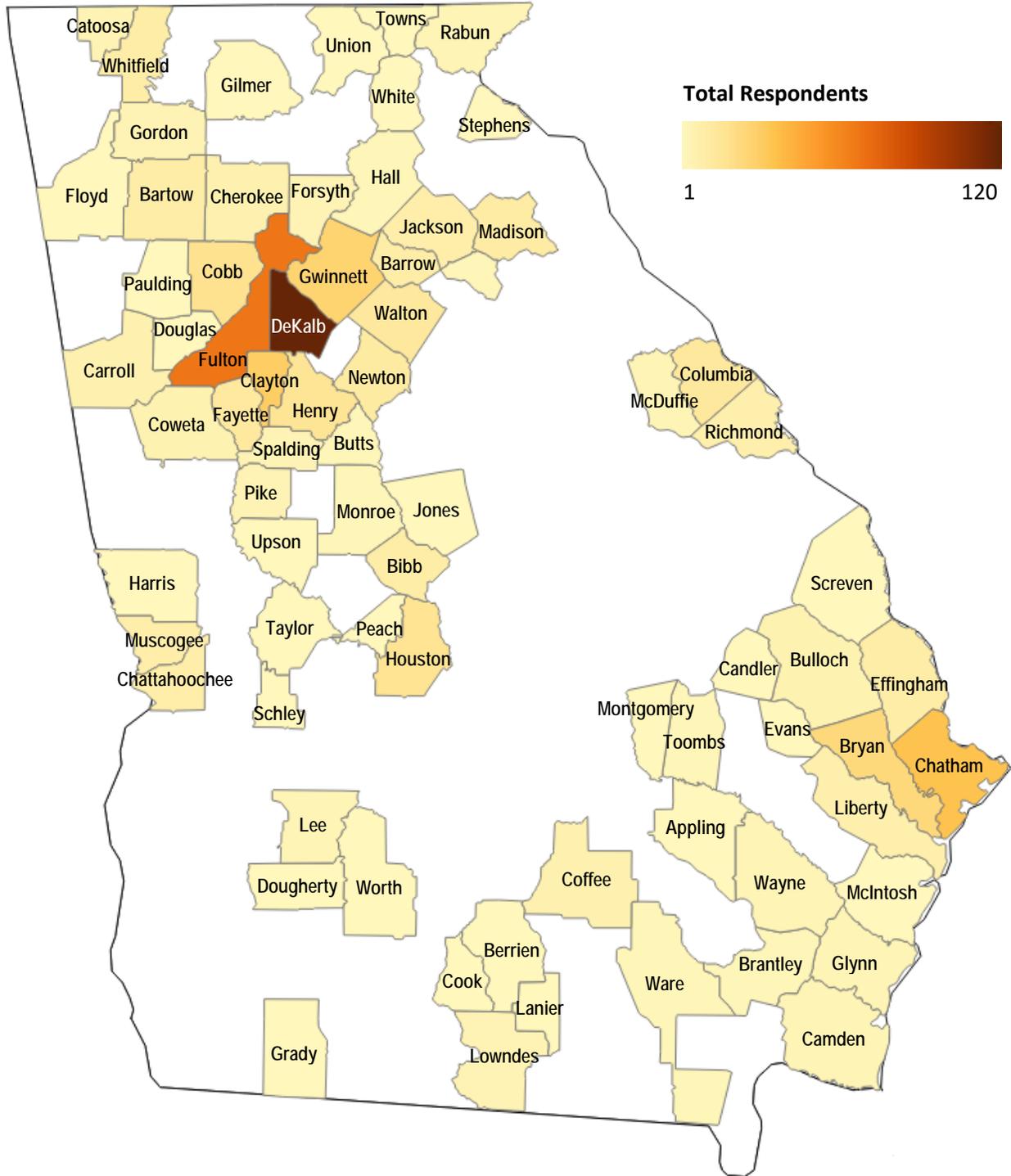
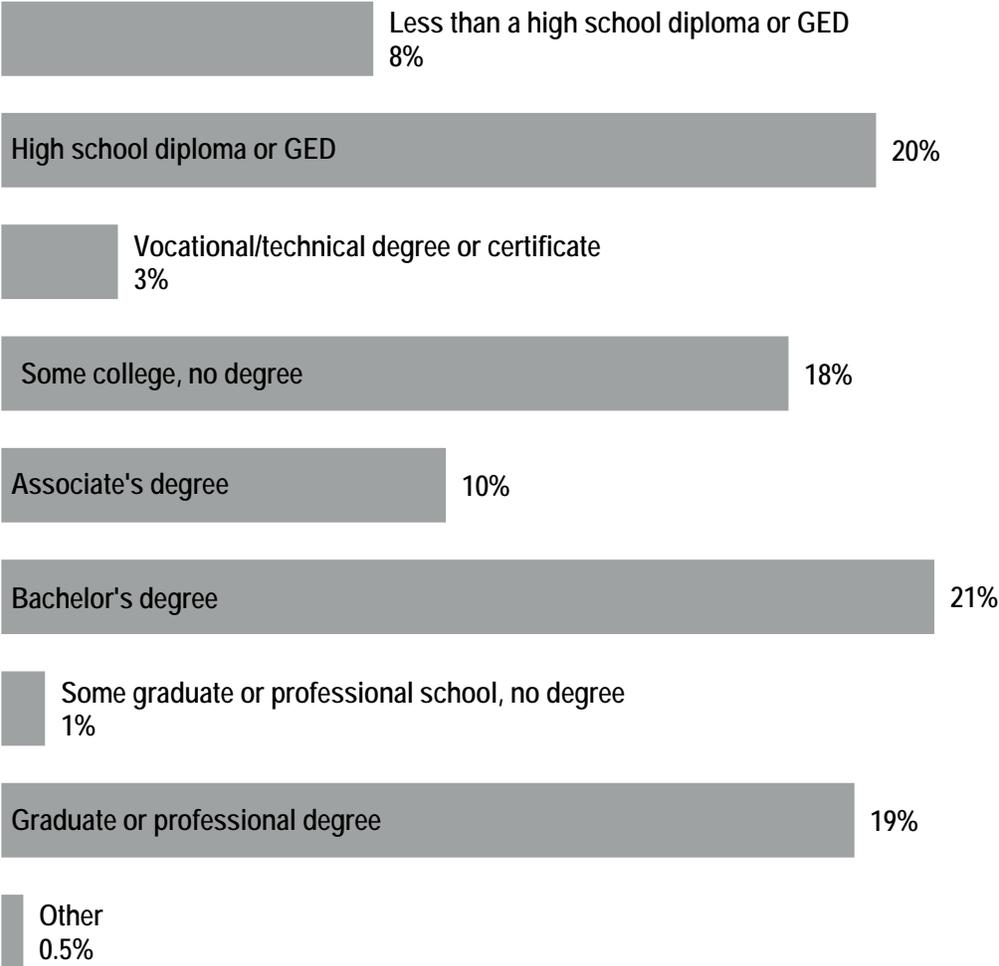


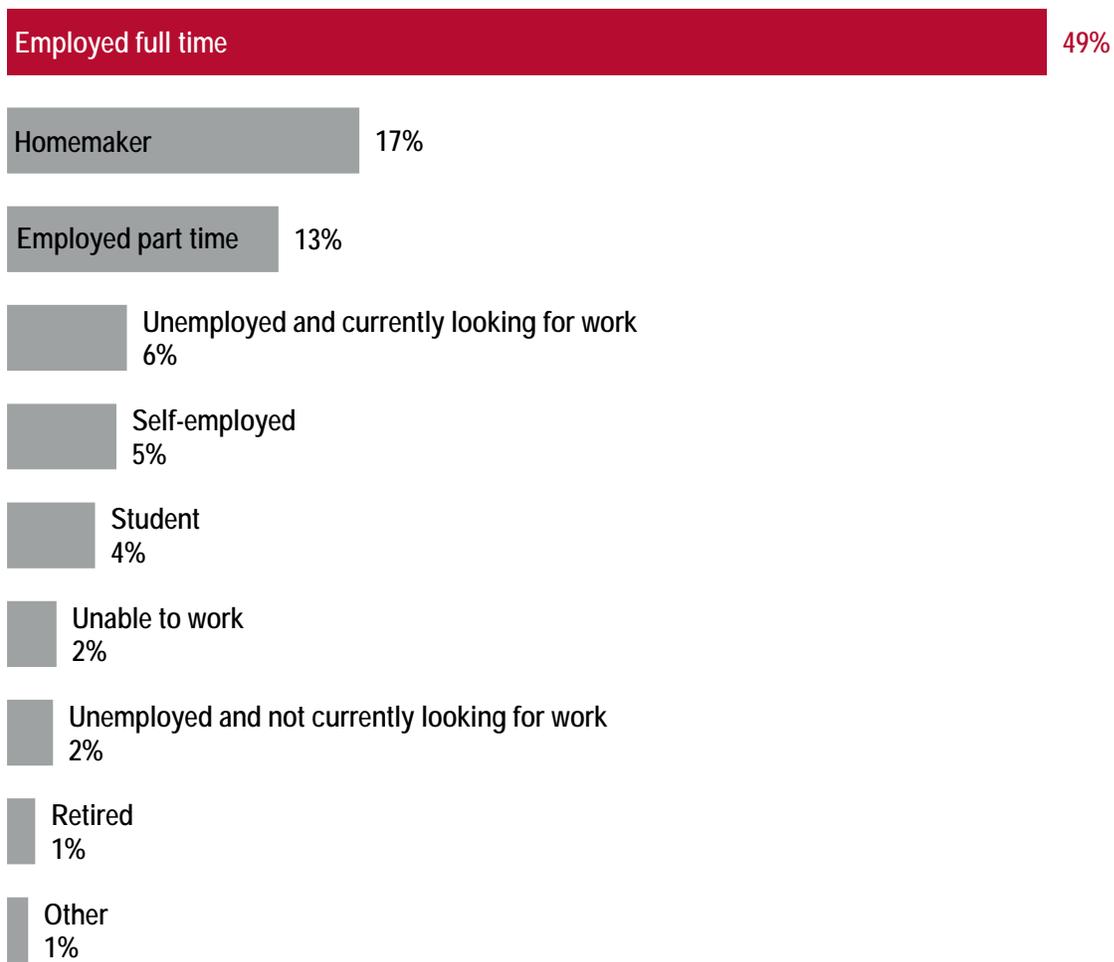
Figure 13. Respondent county. (N=605)

The survey asked respondents to indicate the highest level of education they had achieved. Approximately half (52%) indicated an associate’s degree or higher. An additional 18% had completed some college, and 20% had a high school diploma or GED as their highest level of education (Figure 14). See Appendix G, Table 14, for more details.



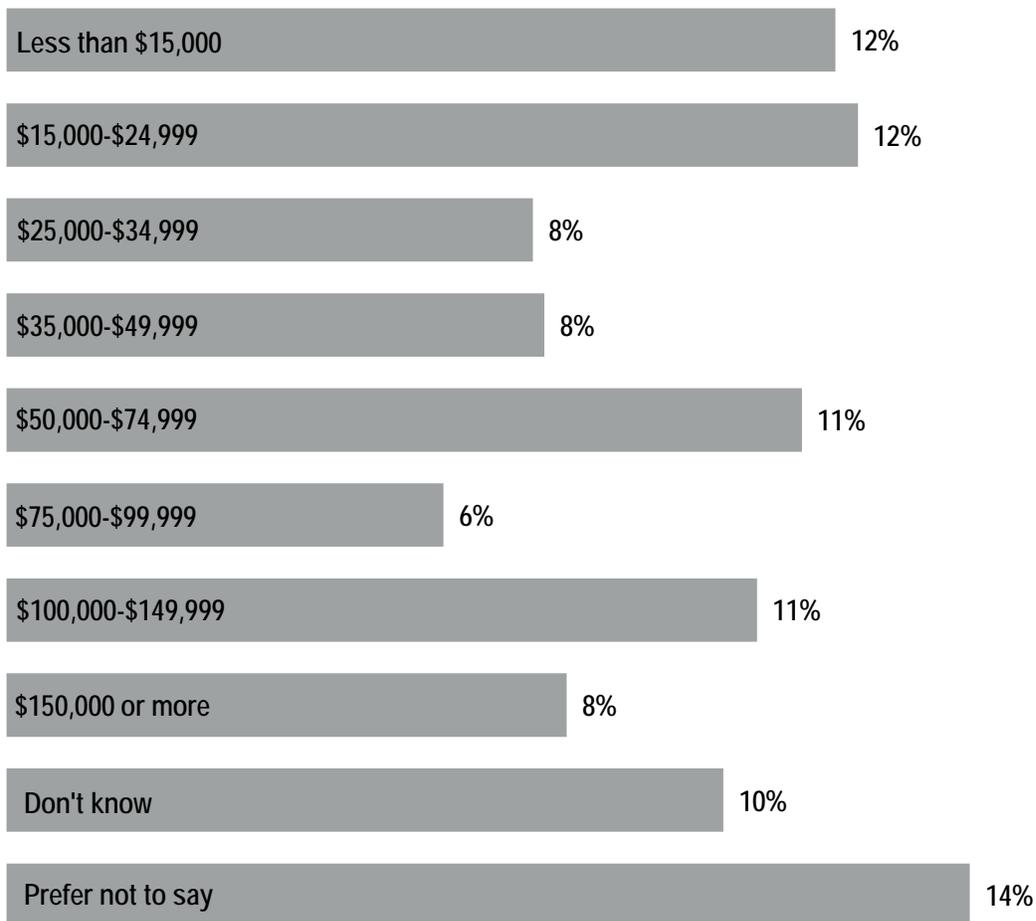
**Figure 14. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (N=610)**

Regarding employment, just under half of participants indicated they were employed full time (49%). Approximately 20% reported they were homemakers (17%), and 13% were employed part time (Figure 15). See Appendix G, Table 15, for more details.



**Figure 15. What is your current employment status? (N=306)**

Nearly one-quarter of respondents either declined to provide (14%) or stated that they did not know (10%) their household income. Approximately half of respondents indicated that their household income before taxes in 2017 was below \$75,000 (51%), and one-quarter reported income of more than \$75,000 (Figure 16). The median response was \$35,000–\$49,999. See Appendix G, Table 16, for more details.



**Figure 16. What was your total household income in 2017? (N=622)**

The final survey item asked respondents to provide any additional comments about their Georgia’s Pre-K waitlist experience. Comments were provided by 329 respondents; from these, 414 items were coded and analyzed. Most commonly, participant comments indicated a negative waitlist experience (73%)—specifically poor communication, a lack of information, or a lack of updates (34%)—or that there was not enough space available (21%). Conversely, 12% of comments indicated a positive opinion, indicating that it was an overall good experience (8%) or efficient process (3%). Seven percent of comments indicated that the respondent chose other pre-K options, such as a private pre-K (5%). See Appendix G, Table 17, for more details.

## Limitations

The limitations of the survey findings primarily concern survey nonresponse. While efforts were made to invite all parents and caregivers of children currently on Georgia’s Pre-K Program waiting list, not all sample members participated. With a survey response rate of

14.7%, a substantial majority of invited parents and caregivers chose to not participate in the survey. While 100% response rates are unheard of in surveys of humans, it is impossible to assume the attitudes and opinions of those who did not respond mirror those of respondents<sup>2</sup>. Whereas the current study relied on voluntary participation, participants' waiting list experiences and attitudes likely impacted their willingness to respond to survey invitations. As such, it is probable that individuals who did not participate in the survey hold varying attitudes on the topic.

A second issue related to survey nonresponse is undeliverable survey invitations. In the current study, a total of 830 parents and caregivers did not receive a survey invitation due to inaccurate or insufficient phone or address contact information. This substantive count of undeliverable survey invitations might indicate a subpopulation of highly transient parents and caregivers, whose early care and education needs could present differently than those with stable contact information. As such, the perceptions and experiences of survey non-respondents might contain additional insight beyond what was captured in the survey results.

## Conclusion

Over seven times more respondents completed the survey via phone ( $N = 548$ ) than online ( $N = 77$ ). Half of all survey respondents indicated they had a child on a Georgia's Pre-k waitlist; however, parents and caregivers who responded online were significantly more likely to indicate their child was on a waitlist at the time of the survey (84%) compared to those from the phone survey (45%). This difference between groups is likely a result of active versus passive survey recruitment efforts. Despite the phone-based method providing a significantly higher response rate, caution should be used when applying these results to other projects; the results of this mode test should not be interpreted as evidence that all attempts at surveying Georgia's Pre-K parents and caregivers need to be phone-based.

Most survey respondents with a child on a Georgia's Pre-K waitlist stated their child was only on one waiting list (84%). In instances where respondents did not have a child on a waiting list, the majority indicated this was because their child was currently enrolled in a lottery-funded Georgia's Pre-K classroom (48%) or another preschool/Pre-K (38%). Thus, it would appear parents and caregivers generally place their child on one waiting list and retain on a waiting list until their child is enrolled, contrary to perceptions expressed in focus groups with Georgia's Pre-K directors. Most parents with children on waiting lists (74%) stated they never received

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<sup>2</sup> Groves, R. M., Fowler Jr., F. J., Couper, M. P., Lepkowski, J. M., Singer, E., Tourangeau, R. (Eds.) (2009). *Survey methodology* (2nd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

updates about their child's waitlist status, with this issue being a recurrent complaint in parent and caregiver comments at the end of the survey.

Parents and caregivers with a child on a waiting list most commonly wanted to enroll their child in a Georgia's Pre-K program for their child to attend a high-quality program (66%) or to save on child care costs (51%). When selecting Pre-K programs, parents generally preferred programs that are close to their home (75%), public elementary school-based (48%), or close to or at their other children's school (39%); these preferences were consistent with perceptions held by Georgia's Pre-K directors who attended a focus group. The single most important reason when selecting a Pre-K program was that it was close to their home (29%).

Waitlist parents and caregivers found out about the programs through a variety of sources, most commonly through their local elementary school (47%) and prior experience with the program (30%). Nearly one-quarter of waitlist parents and caregivers (22%) used the provider search on [www.qualityrated.org](http://www.qualityrated.org) and 8% used 1-877-ALL GA KIDS. Thus, it appears parents use informal sources with more frequency than formal sources provided by DECAL.

Most respondents who provided comments indicated they had a negative waitlist experience (73%). The most recurrent criticism was a lack of communication, information, and updates, which correlates with nearly three-quarters of waitlist parents and caregivers indicating they never received updates. Thus, it appears the lack of communication was a persistent concern for waitlist respondents. The next most common complaint among waitlist respondents was the lack of space for all interested children. Respondents frequently requested additional Pre-K spots to accommodate all Pre-K aged children. Thus, parents and caregivers have a strong interest in Georgia's Pre-K programs and would like to see the program expanded.

## APPENDIX F. Survey Instrument

Q1) Do you have a child who is currently on a waiting list for a lottery-funded Georgia Pre-K classroom?

- Yes → Skip to Q3
- No → Continue to Q2

Q2) Why not?

- You are no longer interested in enrolling your child in a lottery-funded Georgia Pre-K classroom
- Your child is currently enrolled in a lottery-funded Georgia Pre-K classroom
- Your child is currently enrolled in another preschool/ Pre-K program (such as a faith-based Pre-K or private tuition based Pre-K).
- You do not have children this age
- Other reason (please specify):

*If Q1=No, skip to Q11.*

Q3) Why would you like to enroll your child in a lottery-funded Georgia Pre-K program?  
(Select all that apply)

- You want your child to attend a high quality program
- You had an older child who attended the program
- You were referred by an early intervention specialist
- You were recommended by your child care program director
- You want to save on your child care costs
- Other (please specify):

Q4) Is your child is on more than one lottery-funded Georgia Pre-K waitlist.

- Yes
- No

Q5) Which lottery-funded Georgia Pre-K program would you prefer: (Select all that apply)

- Is where your child was enrolled as a 3-year old
- Is close to your home
- Is close to your place of work
- Is close to or at your other children's school
- Provides an after-school program
- Provides transportation
- Is a public elementary school-based program
- Is a private child care center-based program
- Accepts Child Care Subsidies (CAPS)
- Is a Georgia Quality Rated Provider
- Other (please specify):

Q6) When selecting the lottery funded Georgia Pre-K programs I want my child to attend, the following reason is most important:

- Being close to my home
- Being close to your place of work
- Being close to/at your other children's school
- Providing an after-school program
- Providing local transportation
- Being a public elementary school-based program
- Being a private child care center-based program
- Accepting Child Care Subsidies (CAPS)
- Being a Georgia Quality Rated Provider
- Other (please specify):

Q7) How did you find out about the lottery-funded Pre-K program(s) you are currently on the waitlist for? (Select all that apply)

- Your child currently attends the program
- Recommended by a family member
- Recommended by a friend
- Recommended by child care provider or teacher (4)
- Previous experience with the program (such as previous employment, older child attended, etc.)
- Your local elementary school
- Internet
- News media
- Online social network (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
- Specific education website (e.g., [www.qualityrated.org](http://www.qualityrated.org))
- Other (please specify):

Q8) Have you used the Georgia's Pre-K Provider Search function on [www.qualityrated.org](http://www.qualityrated.org) to determine the lottery-funded Pre-K programs in my area.

- Yes
- No

Q9) Have you used 1-877-ALL GA KIDS to assist me with selecting lottery-funded Pre-K program(s).

- Yes
- No

Q10) How often do you receive updates about your child's waitlist status...

- Frequently
- Occasionally
- Infrequently
- Rarely
- Never

Q11) How old are you?

- 18-24 years old
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-59
- 60+ years old

Q12) How many children under 18 are in your family?

- 1 child
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more children

Q13) Please provide your ZIP code.

Q14) What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Less than a high school diploma or GED
- High school diploma or GED
- Vocational/technical degree or certificate
- Some college, no degree
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Some graduate or professional school, no degree
- Graduate or professional degree
- Other (please specify):

Q15) Approximately what was your total household income before taxes in 2017?

- Less than \$15,000
- \$15,000-\$24,999
- \$25,000-\$34,999
- \$35,000-\$49,999
- \$50,000-\$74,999
- \$75,000-\$99,999
- \$100,000-\$149,999
- \$150,000 or more

Q16) What is your current employment status?

- Employed full time (40 or more hours per week)
- Employed part time (up to 39 hours per week)
- Unemployed and currently looking for work
- Unemployed and not currently looking for work
- Homemaker
- Student
- Retired
- Self-employed
- Unable to work
- Other (please specify):

Q17) Please provide us with any additional comments about your Georgia Pre-K Waitlist experience.

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We appreciate you taking the time to complete this brief survey. As a reminder, this survey is for informational purposes only, and your participation will not change your child's Pre-K waitlist status. Thank you again and have a good day/evening.

## APPENDIX G. Data Tables

**Table 1. Do you have a child who is currently on a waiting list for a lottery-funded Georgia Pre-K classroom?**

	N	%
Yes	312	50.0%
No	312	50.0%
Total	624	100%

**Table 2. Why not?**

	N	%
My child is currently enrolled in a lottery-funded Georgia Pre-K classroom	148	48.2%
My child is currently enrolled in another preschool/ Pre-K program	117	38.1%
I do not have children this age	22	7.2%
I am no longer interested in enrolling my child in a lottery-funded Georgia Pre-K classroom	7	2.3%
Other reason	13	4.2%
Total	307	100%

**Table 3. My child is on more than one lottery-funded Georgia Pre-K waitlist.**

	N	%
Yes	50	16.1%
No	260	83.9%
Total	310	100%

**Table 4. I receive updates about my child's waitlist status...**

	N	%
Never	228	73.5%
Rarely	45	14.5%
Infrequently	12	3.9%
Occasionally	17	5.5%
Frequently	8	2.6%
Total	310	100%

**Table 5. Why would you like to enroll your child in a lottery-funded Georgia Pre-K program?**

	N	%
Want my child to attend a high-quality program	207	66.3%
Want to save on my child care costs	158	50.6%
Had an older child who attended the program	92	29.5%
Recommended by my child care program director	25	8.0%
Referred by an early intervention specialist	17	5.4%
Other	52	16.7%
Total	312	100%

**Table 6. The lottery-funded Georgia Pre-K program that I most prefer:**

	N	%
Close to my home	234	75.0%
Public elementary school-based program	151	48.4%
Close to or at my other children's school	123	39.4%
Provides an after-school program	95	30.4%
Provides transportation	69	22.1%
Georgia Quality Rated Provider	60	19.2%
Close to my place of work	50	16.0%
Where my child was enrolled as a 3-year old	28	9.0%
Private child care center-based program	26	8.3%
Accepts Child Care Subsidies	12	3.8%
Other	6	1.9%
Total	312	100%

**Table 7. When selecting the lottery funded Georgia Pre-K programs I want my child to attend, the following reason is most important.**

	N	%
Close to my home	90	28.9%
Close to or at my other children's school	62	19.9%
Public elementary school-based program	53	17.0%
Georgia Quality Rated Provider	50	16.1%
Provides an after-school program	20	6.4%
Provides transportation	16	5.1%
Close to my place of work	8	2.6%
Private child care center-based program	4	1.3%
Accepts Child Care Subsidies	1	0.3%
Other	7	2.3%
Total	311	100%

**Table 8. How did you find out about the lottery-funded Pre-K program(s) you are currently on the waitlist for?**

	N	%
My local elementary school	145	46.6%
Previous experience with the program	94	30.2%
Recommended by a friend	60	19.3%
Recommended by a family member	40	12.9%
Recommended by child care provider or teacher	39	12.5%
My child currently attends the program	25	8.0%
Internet	17	5.5%
Online social network	10	3.2%
Specific education website	7	2.3%
News media	6	1.9%
Other	15	4.8%
Total	311	100%

**Table 9. I used the Georgia's Pre-K Provider Search function on [www.qualityrated.org](http://www.qualityrated.org) to determine the lottery-funded Pre-K programs in my area.**

	N	%
Yes	69	22.2%
No	242	77.8%
Total	311	100%

**Table 10. I used 1-877-ALL GA KIDS to assist me with selecting lottery-funded Pre-K program(s).**

	N	%
Yes	24	7.8%
No	282	92.2%
Total	306	100%

**Table 11. How old are you?**

	N	%
18-24	28	4.5%
25-34	291	47.1%
35-44	244	39.5%
45-54	38	6.1%
55-59	3	0.5%
60+ years old	14	2.3%
Total	618	100%

**Table 12. How many children under 18 are in your family?**

	N	%
1 child	110	17.8%
2	265	42.8%
3	150	24.2%
4	63	10.2%
5 or more children	31	5.0%
Total	619	100%

**Table 13. Counties with 10 or more respondents**

	N	%
DeKalb County	119	20%
Fulton County	66	11%
Chatham County	35	6%
Clayton County	29	5%
Gwinnett County	26	4%
Bryan County	23	4%
Cobb County	18	3%
Houston County	17	3%
Henry County	16	3%
Walton County	13	2%
Columbia County	13	2%
Fayette County	12	2%
Newton County	11	2%
Madison County	10	2%

**Table 14. What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

	N	%
Less than a high school diploma or GED	51	8.4%
High school diploma or GED	120	19.7%
Vocational/technical degree or certificate	16	2.6%
Some college, no degree	108	17.7%
Associate's degree	61	10.0%
Bachelor's degree	128	21.0%
Some graduate or professional school, no degree	6	1.0%
Graduate or professional degree	117	19.2%
Other	3	0.5%
Total	610	100%

**Table 15. What is your current employment status?**

	N	%
Employed full time	295	48.9%
Homemaker	100	16.6%
Employed part time	77	12.8%
Unemployed and currently looking for work	34	5.6%
Self-employed	31	5.1%
Student	25	4.1%
Unable to work	14	2.3%
Unemployed and not currently looking for work	13	2.2%
Retired	8	1.3%
Other	6	1.0%
Total	603	100%

**Table 16. Approximately what was your total household income before taxes in 2017?**

	N	%
Less than \$15,000	74	11.9%
\$15,000–\$24,999	76	12.2%
\$25,000–\$34,999	47	7.6%
\$35,000–\$49,999	48	7.7%
\$50,000–\$74,999	71	11.4%
\$75,000–\$99,999	39	6.3%
\$100,000–\$149,999	67	10.8%
\$150,000 or more	50	8.0%
Don't know	64	10.3%
Prefer not to say	86	13.8%
Total	622	100%

**Table 17. Please provide us with any additional comments about your Georgia Pre-K Waitlist experience.**

	N	%	N	%
Negative Comments	301	72.7%		
Poor Communication, Information, & Updates			140	33.8%
Not Enough Space Available			88	21.3%
Slow Process			37	8.9%
Complicated Process			18	4.3%
General Negative Experience			15	3.6%
No Waitlist			3	0.7%
Positive Comments	50	12.1%		
General Positive Experience			31	7.5%
Efficient Process			11	2.7%
Easy Process			4	1.0%
Good Communication, Information, & Updates			2	0.5%
Great Teachers			1	0.2%
More Space Available			1	0.2%
Chose Other Pre-K	31	7.5%		
Private Pre-K			19	4.6%
No Pre-K			5	1.2%
Remain at Daycare			4	1.0%
Other Pre-K Experience			3	0.7%
No Problems	5	1.2%		
No Comment	8	1.9%		
Miscellaneous/Unrelated Comment	19	4.6%		
Total	414	100%		