



## Georgia’s Pre-K Program FAQ for the Learning Environment

Georgia’s Pre-K Program should feature busy, active, well-equipped classrooms where teachers work together to foster learning. The most powerful motivator for young children to learn is the natural joy that comes from learning and exploring. Georgia’s Pre-K classrooms should be organized around clearly defined learning centers and interest areas that allow children to experience high quality materials and activities. These materials and activities should be changed frequently to meet children’s growing developmental needs and changing interests. Young children are active learners and need to touch, feel, experiment and create.

This document includes information to support programs in providing a quality learning environment for Pre-K classrooms.

<p><b>When should the IQ Guide for the Learning Environment be completed?</b></p> <p>This guide is to be completed by the lead teacher within the first thirty (30) school/business days of when teachers report. The guide should be signed, dated and then submitted to the Director/Principal. Although additional reviews are not required, Directors/Principals are encouraged to set a date for a second review. NOTE: A second or additional reviews can be required as deemed necessary by Bright from the Start staff. This is a tool for teachers to use for communication purposes and to document needs within the classroom. Directors/Principals or a designated reviewer will review the guide by following up in the classroom and checking to see that the materials and supplies indicated on the form are present, organized, and accessible to students. The program will then make a plan for purchasing supplies and materials needed and communicate the plan to the teacher. The IQ Guide and the plan should be placed with the Grant Requirement Checklist.</p> <p>Checking off on items that are not present will not benefit the teachers, students or the program as a whole, so please take care in completing this guide. By signing the document, you are officially saying the learning environment is appropriate, well-supplied and well-organized for children to receive the full benefit of the program.</p> <p>It is expected that the <i>IQ Guide for the Learning Environment</i> will have periodic checks completed by the director/principal or designated reviewer as a part of the plan for monitoring the classrooms throughout the school year. An individual plan for each teacher is acceptable.</p>
<p><b>Who could be designated as a reviewer in place of Director/Principal?</b></p> <p>Knowing that each program is designed with different levels of administration, it may be beneficial for the Director/Principal to designate a person to assist in the monitoring of the environment. The person designated should have an understanding of an appropriate learning environment for young children. Examples of appropriate personnel may include, but are not limited to any of the following: curriculum specialists, assistant directors/principals, regional managers, or mentor teachers.</p>
<p><b>What is the difference between the IQ Guide for the Learning Environment and the Basic Equipment, Materials, and Supplies Inventory List ?</b></p> <p>The <i>IQ Guide for the Learning Environment</i> reflects the equipment, materials, and supplies that must be present and accessible in the classroom on a daily basis. The guide is used by teachers and directors/principals at the beginning of the school year as a communication tool and to determine any additional items needed for the classroom. The <i>Basic Equipment, Materials and Supplies Inventory List</i></p>

(Appendix H of the 2020-2021 Georgia's Pre-K Operating Guidelines) is typically used by new programs to assist with the initial purchase of appropriate items for the classroom. The inventory list includes recommended quantities of equipment, materials, and supplies that should be present in the classroom and also available for rotation. All classrooms should be equipped with additional materials to enhance student interests and meet varying skill levels.

**How often should I update the IQ Guide for the Learning Environment?**

Due to the fact that items may be misplaced or broken, the director should have a plan for how the environment will be monitored on a regular basis throughout the school year. This guide is intended to be a working document and should be updated as materials are replaced or follow-up is provided. The guide is required to be completed within the first 30 days of school, but additional updates are encouraged.

***Classroom Environment and Display***

*Research shows that when children are in an attractive and inviting environment they perform better and are happier. Seeing concrete reminders of their own work prompts children to recall and reflect on what they and their peers have accomplished. It also encourages children to expand their own ideas or the ideas of others and pursue those interests or projects on subsequent days. Classroom walls should be filled with visible print that is both attractive and meaningful. Classroom walls should include the children's unique work and individual expression. The display of original child-initiated work versus bought and teacher-made or teacher-initiated items assists children with feeling a sense of ownership in the classroom.*

*Teachers promote literacy development by creating an environment that actively involves children in meaningful literacy activities. Materials to promote literacy development include books, all types of writing materials, lists, charts, language activities, sample of writing efforts and center props. Materials to promote literacy development should be included in each of the classroom learning areas. By adding language and literacy items and writing supplies to each center area of the classroom, the teachers can engage with the children to increase their phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and vocabulary development. Refer to <http://decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/LiteracyInEachCenterArea.pdf> for additional materials to promote literacy development by center areas.*

**Why are learning areas important?**

Learning areas are designed to relate to the world of active learners, and materials and activities are planned to encourage the involvement of the children. Young learners are interested in the world in which they live and learning areas should be a symbolic representation of their ever-changing world. Children should feel comfortable in learning areas to try out many ideas and begin to fit them into their level of understanding. As a result, children will begin to build their confidence and become capable learners.

When playing (learning) in centers young children:

- Develop responsibility as they care for the materials they use
- Enhance skills in all content areas
- Develop social skills as they work with others
- Expand their oral language
- Begin to understand others as they role play
- Learn how to make and carry out plans
- Develop their understanding of symbols

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carry out their interests and thoughts</li> <li>• Enhance their creative abilities</li> <li>• Determine the direction of their play and learning</li> </ul>
<p><b>Explain the requirement “the classroom is inviting, clean, organized and visually appealing to children.”</b></p>
<p>Appropriate learning areas should be established, and the setting should promote and motivate children’s learning and be welcoming, inviting and inspiring. The classroom should have adequate space for children to move freely, but without large empty spaces that could cause children to run or tumble. The shelving and materials should be clean and free from dust. The classroom furnishings, carpets, rugs and materials should be cleaned on a regular basis and materials should be organized and stored neatly. Materials and shelves should be labeled appropriately.</p> <p>The storage and organization of materials is crucial in helping children take care of and use them appropriately. Labels (photos, pictures cut from catalogs, drawings or tracings) and words show where materials belong, promote children’s familiarity and responsibility for their environment, and help children begin to recognize symbols and words.</p>
<p><b>How many learning areas should be changed frequently?</b></p>
<p>While all materials listed on the Instructional Quality Guide for the Environment must be present each day to encourage in-depth exploration, some of these materials should be rotated at least monthly to expand children’s learning, prevent boredom, address interests and to facilitate the scaffolding of children’s learning. Changes to materials in the environment must occur in a minimum of 5 centers once a month (reading, language, math, science, art, dramatic play, writing, blocks). Changes must be noted on the changes to the learning environment section of the lesson plan template.</p>
<p><b>What is child-initiated work and how much should be displayed in the classroom?</b></p>
<p>Unique, child-initiated work should be included in the classroom display. Majority means more than 50% of what is included in the displayed work in the classroom should be unique and child-initiated. The children should have selected the subject and materials and completed the work in their own creative way without teacher direction or teacher choice in the materials. Dittos, worksheets, teacher-directed work and patterned artwork are not considered child-initiated.</p>
<p><b>Will the classroom need to have a protected space area set up?</b></p>
<p>It is suggested that each classroom have an area available to accommodate one or more children. Think of this space as a “retreat” space. Ideas include but are not limited to a designated protected area, a sign a child uses to define a “no interruption” space, a classroom practice of honoring requests of children to be alone, a small table set up with one or two chairs, a space set up with a music player and headphones, transparent fabric (netting, organza or tulle) draped from the ceiling, or a large box or small corner with pillows, rugs, stuffed animals and writing materials. The protected space does not have to be a stationary classroom space (a hula hoop or stop sign could be used). The protected space should not be used for discipline.</p>
<p><b>Why are displays of photos and chart stories from recent activities important?</b></p>
<p>The purpose of these charts is to support literacy development. They can include stories that the children create as a class, recalling events of a recent field trip, special event, or special visitor that occurred during the Pre-K day. Charts, graphs, and stories included in the display should include pictures and symbols, as well as print.</p>
<p><b>What are some examples of “hazards?”</b></p>
<p>Safety hazards include accessible toxic substances, dangling electrical cords, exposed electrical</p>

outlets, and broken toys or equipment.
<b>Where should the teacher's supplies be kept?</b>
Teacher's supplies are kept in a space that is not accessible to the children. Teachers should separate teacher materials and areas from the children's materials and areas. Space must be available to store hazardous materials out of children's reach. Please note teacher's backpacks and purses must be kept out of the reach of children.
<b>Language and Literacy</b>
<i>During early years children build the foundation for reading and writing. Young children need many realistic opportunities to use emerging skills and enjoy experiences with literature. Positive encounters with books and other printed materials help children become literate and learn to read and write. Learning areas should draw children to the area and capture their interest in books, writing and other related literacy materials. It is important for young children to be able to see pictures of and hear stories about all types of people.</i>
<b>Why should the reading area include books that reflect the current topic?</b>
Young children learn best by being able to actively see and work with materials related to what is being discussed in the learning environment. Reading books about current topics being discussed in the classroom further expands children's vocabulary and knowledge about the subject. As topics change, these books should be rotated.
<b>What are some examples of materials to enhance children's understanding of the alphabetic principle?</b>
Children's reading development is dependent on their understanding of the alphabetic principle; the idea that letters and letter patterns represent the sounds of spoken language. Children learn by reading books such as Chicka Chicka Boom Boom, singing songs, and reciting rhymes. Informal play in which children have opportunities to see, play with and compare letters leads to later reading success. Materials can include letter puzzles, alphabet books, displayed alphabet, word cards, labels with pictures and words, letter stamps / stencils / sponges, alphabet games (bingo, lotto, matching, dominos, interlocking cubes, wooden blocks), letter tiles, magnetic/flannel letters, computer keyboards, or typewriters.
<b>What are some examples of Language and Literacy props?</b>
Language and literacy props are materials <u>placed in various learning areas</u> to promote language development. These materials include but are not limited to a flannel board and stories, big books, telephones, dolls, large plastic animals, teacher-made games, puppets, class-made books, wooden or plastic people, or walkie-talkies. Flannel board stories should be familiar to the children, so they can practice retelling and sequencing stories. Teachers should refrain from including flannel board stories in this area that have not been retold several times in large and/or small group instruction. Language and literacy props should be clean, unbroken, and contain all pieces.
<b>What does an established writing area look like?</b>
A writing area should be established, separate from your art area, and accessible daily. The writing area should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• variety of paper (unlined and primary ruled)</li> <li>• variety of writing instruments in a variety of sizes (fat and thin markers, crayons, pencils)</li> <li>• word cards (with words and icon / picture / photograph)</li> <li>• name cards with pictures for children in the class</li> <li>• stencils (letters, numbers, shapes, animals)</li> </ul>

- stamps and stamp pads
- real and found materials (envelopes, note pads).

The area should be organized, inviting, and kept interesting by rotating materials and adding fun and unique writing tools and paper. Children will begin to learn that writing is for functional reasons (to communicate an idea, remember to do something, or give directions). The writing area gives children an opportunity to practice purposes for writing such as making lists, writing letters to friends and family members, writing a story, copying words from the classroom materials, and many other options. Keep your writing area interesting by changing materials frequently, adding seasonal items including word and picture cards related to your current topic or theme, and displaying some of the children’s work that they complete in the writing area.

### ***Dramatic Play***

*Dramatic play allows children to assume roles, to clarify life situations through play acting, to express feelings in a safe and acceptable environment and to explore the worlds of fantasy/reality. The Dramatic Play center is essential in every early childhood classroom and this area is the perfect transition from home to school. Imagination is an important component of the developmental process and allows children to be creative, to use problem-solving skills and to project consequences. A safe and interesting environment provides opportunities for children to explore and carry out thoughts, ideas and plans.*

#### **How large should the dramatic play area be?**

This area should be large enough so that several children playing can be active and noisy without interrupting other activities. The dramatic play area should be one of the largest in the classroom and accommodate five or more children.

#### **What are some examples of quality dress-up clothes?**

Clothing choices should include a variety of items with which children can identify as a part of their everyday lives. Examples could include fantasy costumes and clothing items (story book characters), community worker outfits (mail carrier, doctor, fire fighter, police officer), fancy dress-up clothing (sequin dresses, suits, dressy hats, gowns), attire that is reflective of different cultures (African dashiki and kufi or wrap hat, Latino shirt with serape, Native American attire) and work attire (overalls, suits, dress shirts, dress jackets, uniforms from local businesses).

#### **How should dress-up clothes be organized?**

Dress-up clothes should be organized and visible so children can see their choices. Some of the dress-up clothes should be hung so children can see them clearly. Additional clothing choices can be stored in drawers or in storage bins or tubs if they are neatly sorted and organized and clearly labeled with words and pictures. Clothing choices should be rotated to maintain interest throughout the year. Clothing choices should include a variety of items with which all children (both boys and girls) can identify as a part of their everyday lives.

#### **How is environmental print defined in Dramatic Play?**

Environmental print is encountered in the context of everyday life. Some examples are company logos, menus, coupons, real food labels and containers, a food pyramid or USDA’s MyPlate, phone books, restaurant items, catalogs, junk mail, or signs that relate to topic of study.

#### **What should be included in prop boxes?**

Prop boxes should have an adequate number of props to foster meaningful play experiences related to the intended theme. Props should be stored in boxes, baskets or containers and should be clearly labeled with words and pictures and/or be visible to the children. Examples of themes for prop boxes include birthday celebration, picnic, flower shop or office.

**In addition to the dramatic play area, there should be at least one prop box accessible to children. Prop boxes should be rotated throughout the year.**

### **Blocks**

*Blocks are essential materials in the classroom, and block play enhances all areas of a child's development. The Block Area should include many different types of building materials for children to use in their own constructions and combinations. The Block Area should be designed to allow children to be active builders as they think through their thoughts and ideas about construction. Through block play, mathematical concepts are explored and put to practical use, including: shape, patterns, size, length, weight, and spatial relationships, such as symmetry. While building structures with blocks, children can develop an understanding of physical science concepts such as simple machines (lever, wedge and inclined plane), cause and effect, gravity, balance, and stability.*

#### **What kinds of labels can be used for unit blocks and block accessories?**

Labels can include photos, drawings and/or pictures from magazines and/or tracings. Labels for unit blocks

#### **Can the wooden unit blocks be stored in baskets/bins?**

Unit blocks should be stacked on shelves and sorted by shape and size. Blocks should be organized neatly so children can use them independently and to facilitate clean-up. The large majority of unit blocks must be stacked on shelves. This arrangement helps children practice the skills of sorting and stacking.

#### **What types of blocks are appropriate to use for the additional block type?**

The additional block type should be stackable, rather than interlocking. Legos and mega blocks are interlocking and are considered to be a manipulative. Foam blocks, cardboard blocks, and plastic blocks are examples of an appropriate additional block type.

#### **How large should the block area be?**

This area should be large enough so that several children can build and create structures without interrupting other activities. The block area should be one of the largest in the classroom and can accommodate five or more children. This area should be located in an area of the room where traffic patterns will not disturb block play. Many teachers let the large group carpet area also serve as the block center.

### **Math**

*Math for young children should be concrete and filled with play and exploration. It is important that young children truly understand mathematical foundation concepts before moving to more abstract operations such as addition and subtraction.*

#### **In the math area, should all four of the manipulatives for counting, sorting, recognizing shapes and hand/eye coordination be rotated each month?**

One type of material for each of the following: counting, sorting, recognizing shapes, and hand/eye coordination should be accessible daily and be rotated each month.

#### **Why do clocks with moveable hands NOT meet the requirement for "materials for measuring time"?**

Materials used to measure time need to actually show the passage of time. Appropriate examples include sand timers, kitchen timers, etc. Clocks with moveable hands such as Judy Clocks are manually manipulated and do not show the passing of time.

### **Science**

*Children are curious about the things that are in their world. In the Science Area, young children question, become scientists, and explore and learn about new materials. The Science Area allows children to examine things closely, compare and contrast, and draw conclusions about observations. The well-equipped Science Area allows children to explore living and non-living things, but most importantly encourages them to learn about the biological and physical world.*

#### **What are some examples of various resources that can be added to enhance the science area?**

These resources can include science books that expand on a concept, posters depicting science concepts (life cycle of a frog, seed cycle), pictures from science activities/experiments, pictures of nature or other science-related topics, charts from field trips with a science topic (farm, pumpkin patch), charts from guest speakers who share information related to science (farmer, bee keeper), experiments, or other science-related activities (growing plants from seeds).

#### **Should children be involved in taking care of the class pet or plant?**

Yes, children should be involved in the daily care of the plant and/or animal to learn that all living things need care, food and water to live.

#### **Does the sensory table have to be open each day and what types of materials should be in the table?**

The sensory table/tub must be prepared daily and be clearly visible and open prior to center time. Sensory materials are defined as materials that are pourable or scoopable. The sensory table/tub must be supplied with ample sensory materials along with materials for children to dig, scoop and pour with, containers to fill and dump, pouring materials, and other items such as tweezers or tongs. If the sensory table is used for cutting or other materials such as plastic grass an additional container with sensory materials must be accessible to children. Sensory ideas: <http://www.decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/SensoryTableIdeas.pdf>

### **Art**

*The purpose of art in the preschool classroom is to allow children to explore artistic media and to provide a vehicle for them to express themselves creatively. As young children begin to experiment with different media, they begin to understand their world and how to control the tools they use. Young children are imaginative and enjoy using art materials to express their ideas. In the preschool years the process of creating is more important than the product the children develop. The Art Area should be a safe, comfortable area to foster the freedom of creative expression with materials and teachers who support these endeavors.*

#### **Can art materials be used as the required writing area items?**

The writing area must be established separate from the art area and accessible daily. Remember that the art area and writing area help children use materials for different purposes. While there are paper, markers, crayons, etc. in both areas, children will be using the materials for creative work in art, while they are exploring purposes for writing in the writing area.

#### **How should the art easel be prepared for the children's use?**

Young children need daily painting opportunities to express themselves creatively, as well as to develop large and small motor skills associated with easel painting. The art easel should be supplied with paint and paper and accessible daily. Paint cups should be adequately supplied (with a variety of color choices) and developmentally appropriate sized painting implements (brushes, rollers) included with the paint cups. Easel paper should be hung on the easel or easily accessible for children to hang on the easel independently. The easel, paint, painting implements, and paper should be prepared daily and be clearly visible to children as a choice prior to center time.

**What type of books can be added to the art area to enhance the area?**

Books to be included in the art area could be early childhood books related to color, shape, lines/forms, drawing or creating. Art history books or books about artists could also be included. These books can open opportunities for discussion about how creative efforts are made and famous people from our past and present who have made them.

**If I maintain three different types of paper accessible for children at the art area, how much paper of each type needs to be accessible?**

It would only be necessary to make enough paper accessible of each type for 4-5 students to use each day, for example: 10 sheets of construction paper of various colors, 10 sheets of drawing paper, and 10 sheets of slick finger paint paper. Your goal should be to routinely replenish the paper supply so children have a variety of paper for creative experiences each day.

***Music***

*Music provides an opportunity to reinforce other areas of the curriculum, such as reading readiness, dramatic play, math development and gross motor development. Children develop musical skills by singing, playing rhythm instruments, moving to music, listening to music and being creative with music. A classroom environment should be established where children can experiment with sounds while creating their own music.*

**Do musical instruments need to be out and accessible in the classroom throughout the day?**

The items listed in the Music section should be available for use in the classroom. It is optional for these items to be accessible to children during centers but activities should be planned for their use. When using musical instruments, teachers need to have enough instruments for all children participating in the music activity.

**What defines music with movement?**

Music/Movement activities should include music with gross (large) motor movement (Hokey Pokey, dancing with scarves, jumping to the beat of music). Having children sit on the rug while singing songs without movement or performing finger play songs does not qualify as Music with Movement. Music with Movement ideas: <http://www.decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/MusicMovement.pdf>

***Physical Development***

*Gross motor activities develop the large muscles of the body and enable children to develop mastery of body movements. As children develop mastery over their bodies, their self-esteem increases. Early experiences with gross motor activities lay a foundation for a lifetime commitment to physical fitness. In order to develop their large muscles, children need daily access to balls, jump ropes, wagons to pull, slides, and a climbing apparatus. Other activities like marching, running, jumping, bending and dancing also contribute to the development of the whole body. The outdoor play area provides a space for children to run and play.*

**Should the outdoor learning environment be enhanced with learning materials?**



In a well-planned environment, children can do much more than run, climb, and ride tricycles. Teachers should observe and watch for teachable moments when children make a discovery, ask questions, and show they are eager to learn more. Outdoor time is the ideal place to extend learning experiences from the classroom and to provide experiences that are considered too messy to do indoors. Sensory experiences such as measuring flour or mixing sand and water can be fully explored. Some examples of learning center materials could include: blocks, manipulatives, puzzles, science materials, paint, trucks, or dress-up clothes.

What are some examples of activities that promote physical development that can be done indoors on inclement weather days?

Children should participate in some type of physical development each day. When children are unable to go outside due to inclement weather, the teacher should provide opportunities for gross motor activities that can be done while inside.

Examples might include:

- a balance beam,
- toys for catching and throwing (soft, large balls, or beanbags),
- games such as Simon Says and Follow the Leader which incorporate gross motor movements (children can hop, run in place, touch toes (other body parts), move like an airplane and dance or exercise to music,
- create an obstacle course in the classroom using natural barriers combined with crawling, hopping, balance beam, or hula hoops, and
- paper plate skating – children stand on paper plates and use them to slide or “skate” around the room to music or the teacher’s directions.