

**Bright from the Start:**  
**Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning**  
**Response to the Georgia Study of Early Care and Education**  
**March 2010**

**Research Overview**

- Nationally renowned researchers from the FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (FPG) conducted a statewide, representative study of quality across licensed child care centers and Georgia's Pre-K programs using nationally validated instruments.
- The study was conducted independent of DECAL. All participants were guaranteed confidentiality; staff from DECAL did not participate in data collection nor were they privy to the identity of providers and programs who participated.
- The findings are divided across two separate reports: Child Care Center findings and Georgia's Pre-K findings. Full copies of the report and the executive summaries can be located at [www.dec.al.ga.gov](http://www.dec.al.ga.gov).

**Child Care Center Findings (Non Georgia's Pre-K)**

- Almost all of the programs met or exceeded the licensing requirements for group size and ratio of children per adult.
- Overall quality in child care centers is medium to low.
- Quality is lowest in infant toddler classrooms and somewhat higher in preschool classrooms.
- Only five percent of infant toddler classrooms would be considered high quality whereas two-thirds of those would be considered low quality.
- Compared to infant toddler classrooms, a lower percentage (33%) of preschool classrooms were considered low quality. Only five percent of these classrooms were considered high quality.

**DECAL Initiatives Related to Child Care Center Findings**

- DECAL is making substantial investments to improve quality. These investments include ongoing initiatives as well as new projects created through the use of stimulus dollars.
- Since 2008, DECAL has begun raising core health and safety licensing requirements for child care programs and raising the credentialing requirements of child care providers, including directors, teachers and assistant teachers.
- DECAL provides numerous incentives to help providers achieve higher levels of education and higher credentials. For example, the recently developed FIRST program provides a financial incentive for early childhood teachers to receive a first credential.
- DECAL is strategically using stimulus dollars to improve quality in child care centers statewide. This includes an initiative that will provide on-site technical assistance and training to over 600 providers statewide who have demonstrated the greatest need meeting licensing compliance and basic measures of quality.
- DECAL is also using stimulus dollars to create a network of specialists to work with infant toddler classrooms across the state and conduct specific training related to the care of infants and toddlers.
- DECAL is creating a Professional Development Registry that will help teachers target the training they need the most.
- DECAL is in the process of reviewing the current alignment of all learning standards, birth through third grade. This alignment review will provide all educators, birth through third grade, with the necessary tools to implement learning objectives with the greatest impacts.

### Georgia's Pre-K Findings

- Georgia's Pre-K teachers and directors have qualifications that meet or exceed national standards.
- The overall quality in Pre-K classrooms is higher than the quality found in the preschool and infant toddler classrooms. 83% of classrooms in child care centers and 89% of classrooms in local school systems were considered medium quality.
- Most Pre-K classrooms are rated as having "basic" practice in supporting children's language and literacy skills. This is higher than the preschool (non Georgia's Pre-K) classrooms.
- Pre-K classrooms rate high in emotional support and classroom organization but lower in instructional support. These findings are congruent with studies from other states.
- The authors of the study conclude that, on average, Georgia's Pre-K classrooms are warm, exciting places for four year olds, but opportunities for appropriate learning are not maximized.

### DECAL Initiatives Related to Georgia's Pre-K Findings

- DECAL is continually making changes to improve the quality of Georgia's Pre-K program.
- DECAL is in the process of revising how Pre-K programs are monitored. This includes using measures that evaluate higher levels of instructional quality.
- DECAL has incorporated a more stringent probation process for Pre-K programs that do not meet higher standards of quality. Programs that continue to fail to meet these standards are no longer funded.
- Georgia's Pre-K directors and teachers are offered increased language and literacy professional development. DECAL is currently revising training modules to include the most current research related to children's language acquisition.
- Stimulus dollars are being used to improve the quality of Pre-K environments and instruction. Stimulus initiatives include providing vital material upgrades for Pre-K providers and creating new professional development tools that incorporate the latest technology with best practices related to children's learning.
- DECAL is in the process of reviewing the current alignment of all learning standards, birth through third grade. This will better connect Pre-K standards to their birth to three and early elementary counterparts. This alignment review will ultimately provide Georgia's Pre-K teachers with better tools to connect the Pre-K experience to children's later academic achievement.

### Conclusion

- Research continually links quality early childhood programs to improved child outcomes.
- DECAL continues to be committed to improving the quality of early learning environments across Georgia.
- There are many initiatives in place to address the findings from this study and strategically target the areas where the most improvement is needed.
- The lead researchers from the study commend DECAL for asking hard questions related to the quality of early learning environments and maintaining a commitment to quality even during these tough economic times. This study provides scientific evidence for where further investments are needed while validating DECAL's current initiatives designed to improve quality in all early learning environments across the state.