



The GA Pre-K 411: Teacher Edition

Spring is here!



We are at that time of the year when the cold weather has pushed out and the warm, sunny days and the flowers and the green of nature feels hopeful and renewing. It is that time of year when your students suddenly seem older and more mature, ready to take on the big world of Kindergarten. It is that time of year when you pause, take a step back, and see your hard work and effort in the shiny, happy faces of your students that greet you every day.

You have built a community. You have created a safe, engaging space for your children to grow this year - and look how much they grew! This is that time of year to reflect on the growth, celebrate the progress, and cheer to the finish line as you prepare to send your Pre-K students to Kindergarten.

Speaking of community, our thoughts are with our Georgia's Pre-K providers, staff, students, families, local residents, firefighters, first responders, and government officials in South Georgia as they continue to battle dangerous wildfires.

Georgia's Pre-K :)

In this newsletter you can find...

Children's Mental Health Week

WSO Reminders

Georgia's Pre-K receives nationwide recognition

Shaping Futures Luncheon

Teacher Credential and GaPDS info

Summer Transition Program

TOTY Favorite Things

Children's Mental Health Week!

Please join us for the 6th Annual Children's Mental Health Week!

DECAL and GA-AIMH is excited to celebrate the 6th annual Children's Mental Health Week, taking place May 4–8, 2026. This week serves as an important opportunity to elevate awareness of children's mental health and to recognize the critical role that early relationships and supportive environments play in shaping lifelong well-being.

To learn more about the activities of the week and resources to support you, [visit the Children's Mental Health Week webpage](#) and listen to the podcast episode [here!](#)

PS. Some of the activities include registration for a virtual puppet show, a mental health strategies toolkit for adults and children, a week of activities featuring books with SEL activities, tips for creating a calm-down corner in your classroom, self-care resources, and more!



The Pre-K Scoop

Work Sampling Online (WSO) TIPS + Reminders

Currently:

- Checklists should be well underway at this point in the assessment period for all children actively enrolled and attending your program.
- At this time, however, 7,607 checklists for period 2 have not yet been started.
 - If you have children in WSO who are no longer enrolled, please archive them in WSO.
 - If you have not yet started checklists for all children in your class, please begin rating the evidence you've linked today.

Looking ahead:

- Complete and finalize developmental checklists before the end of the reporting period.
- Complete narrative summaries in their entirety. Don't forget to include attendance.
- Conference with all families before the end of the year. Keep copies of developmental checklists and signed narrative summaries on site for 3 years.

If you need assistance with WSO, click this link to submit a [Georgia's Pre-K WSO Help Ticket](#), or:

1. Go to www.decal.ga.gov/PreK/
2. Scroll down to the bottom of the page
3. In the menu on the left, click Work Sampling System Program
4. Click in the Blue Box to start your help ticket (response to tickets submitted through Pearson or GAPREK may be delayed)
5. WSO Resources, "How To" Files, and Updates are also available on this page

Georgia's Pre-K is #1

Exciting News: Georgia's Pre-K is recognized as the model for high-quality preschool nationwide! Georgia's Pre-K Program meets all 10 NIEER quality benchmarks, making it the largest and first universal program in the nation to achieve this!

"Georgia is proud to be a leader in quality early childhood education as we work to ensure all Georgians have the opportunity to succeed, including our youngest learners." Governor Kemp said in a press conference on April 22.

To watch the Press Conference, [click here](#).

To read the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) State of Preschool Yearbook 2025 report, [click here](#).

Thank you, teachers, for being part of this amazing achievement!

Shaping Futures Luncheon

The Georgia Foundation for Early Care and Learning honored Decal's Early Childhood Educators of the Year and Georgia's Pre-K Teachers of the Year at a luncheon on April 25. The event included a panel discussion with the teachers led by Super Bowl Champion and former UGA star Malcolm Mitchell, where the teachers were able to shine and share stories of the great things happening in their classrooms.

Congratulations again to this year's Pre-K Teachers of the Year, Autumn Hart and Teresa Swaim!



The Pre-K Scoop

How to Provide Your Georgia Professional Development System (GaPDS) Profile

Pre-K Project Directors are required to confirm a teacher's eligibility to teach in a Georgia's Pre-K classroom. A teacher may be required to submit their GaPDS profile to their employer. Please follow the steps below to access and print your profile.

GA Professional Development System (GaPDS) Profile

- Visit: <https://gapds.dec.state.ga.us/Registry/Profile>
- Log in to your GaPDS account
- Select Reports and Profile
- Download or print your profile

If you want to access and print your GaPSC Certification, please use the following steps:

Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) Certification

- Visit: <https://mypsc.gapsc.org/Login.aspx>
- Log in to your MyPSC account
- Navigate to Certificate / License
- Print your certification

Certified Teachers: Be Sure to Check Your GaPSC Certification!

If you are certified, your Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) certificate is essential for maintaining your teaching eligibility and ensuring accurate reporting for your program. Please take a few minutes to:

Log in to your GaPSC account and check:

- Expiration dates on your teaching certificate. Ex: If a teaching certificate expires June 30, start the renewal process 3 months prior to the expiration date.
- Upcoming renewals or professional learning requirements.
- Any updates needed (name changes, new credentials, added endorsements, etc.).
- Accuracy of your certification fields and levels.

Keeping your certification current helps protect your teaching status, and ensures your credentials are up to date for employment and Pre-K reporting.

What You Need to Do:

Visit www.gapsc.com, log in to your MyPSC account, and review your certification details today.

If you need help, contact GaPSC at (404) 232-2500 or visit

<https://www.gapsc.com/Certification/EmailPSC.aspx> for additional questions.



Summer Transition Program (STP)

Did you know DECAL offers a Summer Transition Program to Rising Pre-K and Rising Kindergarten children?

DECAL offers two types of Summer Transition Programs, which operate for 5 weeks during the months of June and July. Each program offers high-quality instruction with a focus on language, literacy and math and are designed to reduce the achievement gap.

Rising Pre-K – for students who are age eligible for Georgia's Pre-K in the fall and whose home language is Spanish
Rising Kindergarten – for students who are age eligible for Kindergarten in the fall

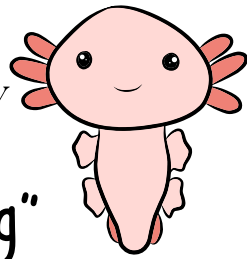
The lists of this summer's locations are available now on the [STP page of our website](#). Please consider this resource for any of your students who did not attend your program all year or who attended but need more support before Kindergarten in the fall.

Interested in teaching STP? Each classroom has a lead teacher, assistant teacher, and a transition coach (family engagement and support staff). Schools hire for their own programs. They can post open positions on our website [here](#), or you can use the locations list to find a school year you and give them a call to see if they are hiring.



Science Center Fun

Teresa Swaim, Public School GA Pre-K TOTY



Think unique for your "Living Thing"

Why Choose Something Different?

While fish and plants are classic classroom choices, animals like axolotls and hermit crabs offer unique, hands-on learning experiences that inspire curiosity and conversation. They help children see that living things come in all shapes, colors, and behaviors — and that each one deserves care and respect.

Meet Our Axolotl: The Smiling Scientist

Our axolotl (also known as a "Mexican walking fish," though it's really an amphibian!) has quickly become the **star of our classroom**. With her feathery gills, gentle movements, and always-smiling face, she captures the children's attention every single day.

Why We Love Having an Axolotl in Pre-K:

- **Built-in science lessons:** Children learn about habitats, life cycles, and animal adaptations all in real time!
- **Peaceful and low-maintenance:** Axolotls prefer cool, clean water and little handling, making them easy to care for with the right setup.
- **Natural calmers:** Watching her glide through the tank has a soothing effect on the whole class (and the teacher too!).
- **Conversation starter:** "Why does she have feathers?" "Can she breathe underwater?" Perfect for inquiry-based learning.



Our Hermit Crabs: Tiny Travelers with Big Personality

Alongside our axolotl, we also added a few **hermit crabs** to our classroom family — and they are such a hit! Their curious nature, colorful shells, and slow, deliberate movements invite even our youngest learners to observe carefully and gently.



Why Hermit Crabs Make Great Classroom Pets:

- **Simple setup:** A small tank, sand, a shallow water dish, and extra shells are all they need to be happy.
- **Teachable moments:** Students can watch them explore, climb, and even change shells, a natural lesson about growth and change.
- **Promotes empathy:** Caring for small creatures builds responsibility, patience, and kindness.
- **Creative tie-ins:** We've painted hermit crab shells on paper, counted "crabs in the tank," and written stories from a crab's point of view!

Teacher Tip

If you're thinking of adding a living creature to your classroom, **start small and research first**. Many pet stores and local science centers can help you set up the right habitat. You'll be amazed at how much joy and learning your new classroom friends bring!

In our classroom, our axolotl and hermit crabs aren't just pets, they're tiny teachers helping our little scientists discover the wonders of the natural world!

Created by: Teresa Swaim, Georgia Pre-K Teacher of the Year



Celebrating Diversity

Autumn Hart, Private Program GA Pre-K TOTY

The World In Our Classrooms



As early childhood educators, we know that young children are naturally curious about the world around them. What I've discovered over the years is that this curiosity often begins with a simple, meaningful question: "Where do I belong?", and "Where do you belong?"

In my Pre-K classroom, this question has grown into a yearlong journey of connection, identity, and celebration. What began as a simple classroom globe activity quickly evolved into something much more meaningful. As children noticed the globe, they began asking questions like, "Where is Taiwan?" or "My grandma and grandpa live in Michigan. Where is Michigan?" Their curiosity was consistent and genuine, and it became clear that they weren't just interested in geography, they were trying to understand their place in the world and how it connects to others.

And from there, we began a class tradition. At the start of each year, we place student photos on a globe to represent the countries and states where their families live or have connections. A small idea that started on a whim has turned into a special tradition in our classroom. Our visual display lets each child see themselves as part of our community and helps them value their classmates' different backgrounds.

Building on this tradition, we first read the book *I Love You Near and Far* to open conversations about how love and family can stretch across any distance. We also use tools like Google Earth to take virtual trips to their special places, look at where everyone comes from, and help our students feel connected to a bigger world in ways that are fun and easy for young kids to understand.

Our exploration of identity continues through family-centered projects inspired by stories like *A Family of Buttons*. After discussing what makes a family, each child creates a representation of their own using buttons and art materials. Then we put them together to create a class book, one of our most cherished classroom favorites. Children return to it again and again, taking pride not only in their own families but in learning about the families of their classmates and teachers.

We also create a digital "Pre-K Family Scrapbook of Holidays Around the World" every year and invite families to share photos and stories about their traditions, celebrations, foods, and cultural practices. As we look through the scrapbook together, children start to see both the differences and the similarities in how and what we celebrate. These talks help build respect, curiosity, and a stronger of belonging.

We revisit these ideas again during our "Where I Live" unit, where children explore their homes, neighborhoods, and school community. Once again using Google Earth, we map out where we live in relation to our school and to one another, reinforcing both individuality and connection.

Through these experiences, what started as simple questions about a globe has become a thoughtful way to honor each child's identity and build a strong, inclusive classroom community. These projects are not separate activities. Instead, they are part of our daily learning.

In the end, our goal is not just to teach children about the world. We also want them to see that they are an important part of it, and that their story matters as much as anyone else's. And in a Pre-K classroom, that can make all the difference.



Written and shared by Autumn Hart, Georgia's Pre-K Teacher of the Year

Extra, Extra!



CMHW 2026: Take a PAWS with CALi

CLICK ON THE VIDEO ABOVE TO P.A.W.S WITH CALI

Take a PAWS for grounding

Grounding is a way of bringing your mind and body back to the present moment. It helps us feel steady, safe, and in control — even when our emotions feel big or overwhelming.

Taking a PAWS (CALi's playful way of saying *pause*) means stopping for a moment to notice how you feel.

A quick PAWS helps children understand their feelings — and helps adults stay grounded instead of joining the chaos.

Take a PAWS with CALi

ICYMI: Every Amazing Story Contest Winners!



Dodge County Pre-K
Ms. Pruet + Ms. Bundick's Class



CLICK HERE TO WATCH A VIDEO FROM THIS FUN DAY!



Len Lastinger Elementary School
Ms. Smith + Ms. Walker's Class

CONGRATULATIONS!

Thank you for reading!

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