



**Georgia Dept
of Early Care
and Learning**
BRIGHT FROM THE START

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Georgia's Pre-K Program Prepares for 2023-2024 School Year

DECAL offering Special Tips for #GaPreKFirstDay

ATLANTA, GA (July 26, 2023) – School bells are ringing for the state's youngest learners as Georgia's Pre-K Program begins the new school year. The first day of Georgia's Pre-K Program will vary based on school system and child care provider. It starts as early as July 27, in Taliaferro County and will start as late as the week of September 5, in Murray and Wheeler counties. Most Georgia school systems begin classes during the first two weeks of August.

“Research shows that the early education of children from birth to age five is critical to their success in kindergarten and elementary school,” said Amy M. Jacobs, Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, the state agency that administers the program. “We believe laying a solid foundation for academic and social emotional success in our youngest learners is also important for the long-term economic growth of Georgia by helping to build a competent and qualified workforce.”

“Starting school is an exciting time for children and families and is also a time when learning and education become more formalized,” said Susan Adams, Deputy Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K Program and Instructional Supports. “Starting school is a big step, and we are honored to provide the first quality formal education experience for many children in Georgia.”

For families enrolling their children in Georgia's Pre-K Program, Adams offered the following helpful tips to make the first day go smoother:

- Send your child to school in clothes they can manage independently in the bathroom.
- Make sure your child's shoes are comfortable and safe for playtime.
- Choose close-toed shoes that children can fasten independently such as tennis shoes with Velcro.
- Visit the classroom before school starts, so children are familiar with the new surroundings.
- Tell your child's teacher about any fears she/he may have.
- Discuss any special dietary needs or allergies your child may have with the teacher and ask her/him to explain program policies relating to

children's allergies.

- Complete necessary forms or releases your Pre-K provider may require for dispensing medication during the school day.
- Locate the bathroom with your child and determine special bathroom routines the school observes.
- Allow extra time for the first day: Make sure you have time to say goodbye.
- Ask if your child can bring a familiar blanket for rest time: Can they bring a favorite stuffed animal?
- Send a family photo in your child's backpack in case they get lonely.

Georgia's Pre-K Program began in 1992 as a pilot program serving 750 at-risk four year olds at 20 locations. Because of the success of the Georgia Lottery, in 1995 the Pre-K program was opened to all four-year-old children regardless of family income. The program has been consistently ranked one of the top state programs in the nation by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) based on quality standards, teacher qualifications and enrollment.

Enrollment in Georgia's Pre-K Program has continued to grow since 2020, but has not reached pre-pandemic levels of over 80,000 students. Last year, more than 70,000 four year olds attended Georgia's Pre-K Program. Since 1995, the program has served over 2-million students.



About DECAL

The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia's children and their families. It administers the nationally recognized Georgia's Pre-K Program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, administers Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, federal nutrition programs, and manages Quality Rated, Georgia's community powered child care rating system.

The department also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, distributes federal funding to enhance the quality and availability of child care, and works collaboratively with Georgia child care resource and referral agencies and organizations throughout the state to enhance early care and education. For more information, go to www.decals.ga.gov.



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