



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

Pre-K Program 2025 - 2026 School Year Pre-K Providers' Operating Guidelines

This document highlights program guidelines updates for the 2025-2026 school year. This is not a complete listing so please read the entire 2025-2026 School Year Pre-K Providers' Operating Guidelines for all updates.

Section 11.4 Pre-K Teacher Enrollment in the Georgia Professional Development System: Beginning in the 2025-2026 school year, a GaPDS number is required when entering lead and assistant teachers in the GAPREK system.

Section 18.3 Payments: Monthly payments will be processed by the 8th business day of each month.

Section 18.7 Reporting Teacher and Student Data: Providers will not be able to enter teacher changes during the last three business days of each month.

Appendix Updates:

The following appendices have been added.

- Appendix T Lead Teacher Credential/Certification Requirements
- Appendix U Assistant Teacher Credential/Certification Requirements
- Appendix V Critical Reporting, Payment, and Data Entry Dates

The *Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) 2025 - 2026 School Year Pre-K Providers' Operating Guidelines* are effective for the 2025 - 2026 school year. Key program components are listed in the Table of Contents for easy reference.

This document outlines the requirements and regulations for operating a Georgia's Pre-K Program. To ensure program compliance and quality service, all Pre-K providers must be familiar with and implement these guidelines. This document is intended to provide clarity and to offer guidance to current and new Pre-K providers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 General Program Operations and Services Information (Page 8)

- 1.1 Purpose
- 1.2 Dates of Service
- 1.3 Days of Service

2.0 Child/Family Eligibility (Page 8)

- 2.1 Age Requirement
- 2.2 Residency Requirement
- 2.3 Parent Requirement
- 2.4 Category One Definition
- 2.5 Category Two Definition

3.0 Enrollment (Page 10)

- 3.1 Open Enrollment
- 3.2 Children Who are Experiencing Homelessness
- 3.3 Children in Foster Care
- 3.4 Children in Military Families
- 3.5 Local School Attendance Zones
- 3.6 Child Registration Forms
- 3.7 Student Social Security Numbers
- 3.8 Waiting Lists
- 3.9 Category One and Category Two Designation After Enrollment
- 3.10 Procedures for Student Attendance
- 3.11 Health Services
- 3.12 Certificate of Vision, Hearing, Dental, and Nutrition Screening (Form 3300)
- 3.13 Certificate of Immunization (Form 3231)

4.0 Classroom Requirements (Page 16)

- 4.1 Approved Curricula
- 4.2 Locally Developed Curriculum
- 4.3 Supplemental Curriculum
- 4.4 Montessori Curriculum
- 4.5 Religious Instruction
- 4.6 Lesson Plans
- 4.7 Assessment
- 4.8 Family Participation
- 4.9 Basic Classroom Equipment, Materials and Supplies
- 4.10 Record Keeping

5.0 Delivery of Services (Page 19)

- 5.1 Program Administration and Supervision
- 5.2 Classroom Delivery
- 5.3 Program Delivery
- 5.4 Orientation
- 5.5 Licensing
- 5.6 Substitutes
- 5.7 Rest Time
- 5.8 Program/Staff Hours
- 5.9 Transportation
- 5.10 Extended Day (Before and After School Care)
- 5.11 School Closures and Make Up Days
- 5.12 Other Program Components

6.0 Student Support (Page 22)

- 6.1 Children with Identified Disabilities
- 6.2 Children with Developmental Concerns
- 6.3 Children with Behavior Concerns
- 6.4 Student Discipline
- 6.5 Immediate Suspension
- 6.6 Extended Suspension
- 6.7 Modified Day
- 6.8 Disenrollment Procedures
- 6.9 Requests for Children to Repeat Pre-K

7.0 Family Support (Page 26)

- 7.1 Objectives

8.0 Program Fees (Page 26)

- 8.1 Program Fees
- 8.2 Requests for Donations of Classroom Supplies
- 8.3 Field Trip/ Special Experiences for Students
- 8.4 Fee Structure for Non-Pre-K Services
- 8.5 Meal Fees
- 8.6 School Uniforms
- 8.7 Special Family Activities

9.0 DECAL Monitoring and Technical Assistance (Page 28)

- 9.1 Pre-K Specialist Support
- 9.2 On-Site Evaluation

10.0 Quality Support Program (Page 29)

- 10.1 Reasons for Quality Support Referral
- 10.2 Definition of Probation and Monitoring
- 10.3 Probation Funding Considerations
- 10.4 Program Conferences

10.5 Peer Review Process

11.0 General Personnel Information (Page 31)

11.1 Records Check Determination

11.2 Employees

11.3 Employment Terms Document

11.4 Pre-K Teacher Enrollment in the Georgia Professional Development System

12.0 Lead Teachers (Page 32)

12.1 Days of Service

12.2 Age Requirement

12.3 Professional Conduct

12.4 Credential/Certification Requirements

12.5 Out-of-Country Credentials

12.6 Online Credentials

12.7 Lead Teacher Salary

12.8 Creditable Years of Experience

12.9 Prorated Teacher Salary and Summer Personnel Expenses

12.10 Provider Responsibility Regarding Salary

13.0 Assistant Teachers (Page 35)

13.1 Days of Service

13.2 Employment Requirements

13.3 Professional Conduct

13.4 Credential/Certification Requirements

13.5 Assistant Teacher Salary

13.6 Prorated Teacher Salary and Summer Personnel Expenses

13.7 Provider Responsibility Regarding Salary

14.0 Substitute Teachers (Page 37)

14.1 Substitute Teacher Employment Requirements

14.2 Short-Term Substitutes

14.3 Long-Term Substitutes

15.0 Professional Development (Page 37)

15.1 Purpose of Professional Learning for Teachers

15.2 Requirements of Professional Learning

15.3 Professional Learning Plan for Pre-K Staff

15.4 Professional Learning Registration

15.5 Attendance at Professional Learning Training

15.6 No Shows and Repeat Training Penalty

15.7 Professional Learning/Training Reimbursement to Staff

16.0 Grant Award Notification and Budgets (Page 39)

16.1 Awarding of Grant Agreements

- 16.2 Start Up Funds
- 16.3 Class Budget
- 16.4 Grant Agreement Signatory
- 16.5 Multi-County and Multi-Program Pre-K Providers
- 16.6 Low Student Enrollment
- 16.7 Grant Award Calculation

17.0 Expenditure Requirements (Page 40)

- 17.1 Expenditure Guidelines
- 17.2 Playground Equipment
- 17.3 Instructional Technology
- 17.4 Expenditure Waivers
- 17.5 Capital Improvements
- 17.6 Record Keeping

18.0 Reimbursement Process (Page 43)

- 18.1 Automatic Deposit of Funds
- 18.2 Enrollment Requirements for Funding
- 18.3 Payments
- 18.4 Calculation of Payments
- 18.5 Payment Advice
- 18.6 Payment Dispute
- 18.7 Reporting Teacher and Student Data
- 18.8 Fraudulent Reporting on Rosters

19.0 Audit and Accounting Requirements (Page 47)

- 19.1 Reconciliation Report
- 19.2 Balances Due to DECAL Pursuant to the Year End Reconciliation
- 19.3 Private Nonprofit (PNP) Audits
- 19.4 Right to Audit / Agreed Upon Procedures Review
- 19.5 Record Keeping Findings and Adverse Findings
- 19.6 Balances Due to DECAL Pursuant to an Audit, AUP Review or Investigation
- 19.7 Audit Reconsideration
- 19.8 Random Reviews
- 19.9 Tracking of Pre-K Funds
- 19.10 Lost, Stolen, or Destroyed Records
- 19.11 Fraudulent / Inappropriate Use of Funds
- 19.12 Special Allotment Funding

20.0 Pre-K Program Change of Ownership (Page 51)

- 20.1 Georgia's Pre-K Change of Ownership Process

21.0 Reporting Requirements (Page 51)

- 21.1 GAPREK Participation
- 21.2 2025 - 2026 School Year Critical Reporting Dates

22.0 Community Involvement (Page 52)

22.1 Participation

22.2 Activities

22.3 Policy Development

23.0 Blended Pre-K/Head Start Classrooms (Page 52)

23.1 Definition

23.2 Classroom Delivery

23.3 Attendance Requirements

23.4 Teaching Staff

23.5 Assessment

23.6 Parent Conferences/Home Visits

23.7 Classroom Equipment, Materials, and Supplies

24.0 Montessori Classrooms (Page 53)

24.1 Prior Approval

24.2 Teaching Staff

24.3 Attendance at Professional Development Training

24.4 Classroom Equipment, Materials, and Supplies

24.5 Assessment

24.6 Parent Conferences

25.0 Inclusion Classrooms (Page 54)

25.1 Prior Approval

25.2 Enrollment

25.3 Teaching Staff

25.4 Attendance at Professional Development Training

25.5 Class Size

25.6 Funding

25.7 Parent Conferences

APPENDICES

Appendix A	Parent Acknowledgement Form
Appendix B	Student Social Security Number Information
Appendix C	Waiting List Information Form
Appendix D	Roster Information Form
Appendix E	Basic Equipment, Materials, and Supplies Inventory List
Appendix F	Suggested Topics to Discuss at Family Orientation
Appendix G	Suggested Topics to Discuss at Pre-K Staff Orientation
Appendix H	Pre-K CAPS Form
Appendix I	Pre-K Year End Reconciliation Report
Appendix J	Checklist for Student Files Form
Appendix K	Grant Requirement Checklist
Appendix L	Instructional Quality (IQ) Guide for the Learning Environment
Appendix M	Instructional Quality (IQ) Guide for Daily Schedule
Appendix N	Instructional Quality (IQ) Guide for Planning Instruction
Appendix O	Instructional Quality (IQ) Guide for Assessment Work Sampling Online Director Timeline
Appendix P	Instructional Quality (IQ) Guide for Assessment Work Sampling Online Teacher Timeline
Appendix Q	Instructional Quality (IQ) Guide for the Montessori Learning Environment
Appendix R	Recommended Montessori Materials List
Appendix S	Sample Georgia's Pre-K At-Will Employment Agreement
Appendix T	Lead Teacher Credential/Certification Requirements
Appendix U	Assistant Teacher Credential/Certification Requirements
Appendix V	Critical Reporting, Payment, and Data Entry Dates

Georgia's Pre-K Program 2025 –2026 Operations and Services

1.0 General Program Operations and Services Information

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of Georgia's Pre-K Program is to provide a minimum of 180 full days (6.5-hours of instructional services per day; 1170 total hours per year) of high quality educational/instructional services to eligible four-year-old children.

1.2 Dates of Service

The 2025 - 2026 school year for Georgia's Pre-K Program will operate within the dates stated in the grant agreement.

1.3 Days of Service

The required days of service for the 2025 - 2026 school year is 190 days, which includes 180 instructional days for students and 10 days of Pre-K professional development/ planning days (pre- and post-planning, staff development, Pre-K training, in-service days) for staff. Pre-K staff cannot be used to provide services unrelated to Pre-K during the 190-day school year during the day.

Each program is required to submit a calendar into GAPREK for approval. The Pre-K program calendar must document 180 days of student instructional days or the equivalent instructional hours (1170 hours). If a program is unable to provide the required instructional time, then the provider's Pre-K payment will be prorated based on the number of instructional days provided. In addition to the student instructional days, programs must document the additional 10 professional development/planning days for staff. Any concerns or issues regarding meeting the required days of service should be referred to the program's regional Pre- K Specialist for resolution.

Programs without approved plans for providing the required instructional and planning time could be in jeopardy of losing funding.

2.0 Child/Family Eligibility

2.1 Age Requirement

Children must be four years of age on September 1, 2025, based on acceptable documentation, such as birth certificates, certificates of live birth, passports, official medical documents, legal documents, or official documents from other countries. Immunization records should not be used as age documentation. Only children whose birth dates are from September 2, 2020, through September 1, 2021, are eligible for participation in the 2025 - 2026 school year. **Proof of age eligibility must be on file the day the child begins the Pre-K program.** Payments to Pre-K providers will be reduced for children without age documentation on file the first day of school.

A child who is five years of age on September 1, 2025, and has not attended Georgia's Pre-K Program as a four-year-old, may enroll in the Pre-K program. Families and teachers are encouraged to consider the child's date of birth, physical maturity, emotional maturity, and prior experiences when making the decision to enroll the child in the Pre-K program at age four or age five.

If a child enrolls as a four-year-old, and the family elects to withdraw the child within the first 30 calendar days of enrollment, the family may withdraw the child, and the child may be eligible to enroll in Pre-K the following year if the local enrollment policies allow.

If a child is not served as a four-year-old, then the child may be eligible to attend the Pre-K Program as a five-year-old. However, programs may choose to deny enrollment into their Pre-K program for children who are age eligible for kindergarten. Families should check the enrollment policies of local programs before enrolling their child. If enrolled, families of children who are five years of age on September 1, 2025, and age eligible for kindergarten will be asked to sign a **Parent Acknowledgement Form (Appendix A)** indicating that the child did not previously attend Georgia's Pre-K Program for longer than 30 days. The Parent Acknowledgement Form is available in multiple languages at <http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/FormList.aspx?cat=Pre-K>. Children who are six years of age on September 1, 2025, and are age-eligible for first grade are not eligible for enrollment in Georgia's Pre-K Program.

2.2 Residency Requirement

The child must be a Georgia resident. For purposes of this program, Georgia resident is defined as a child who resides in the state of Georgia. When documenting residency, Pre-K providers should refer to the policy of the local school system regarding appropriate documentation. Examples of proof of residency include the following: current lease, property tax notice, homeowner's insurance bill, mortgage statement, current vehicle registration form, letter from shelter, letter from employer if employer provides housing, any utility bill listing the residence as the service address, and current PeachCare eligibility documents (PeachCare card or eligibility letter) for the child.

A cell phone bill or a driver's license is **not** acceptable proof of residency. If a student's family is living with someone else, families should provide a notarized affidavit from the property owner stating where the child's family is residing, plus a copy of the property owner's proof of residency (any items listed above). Active-duty military families can support Georgia residency with a copy of official military orders verifying Georgia residency during the school year.

2.3 Parent Requirement

A parent must agree to send the child to the Pre-K program for 6.5-hours of instructional time for the full school year. A child who is chronically tardy or absent without a reasonable excuse can be disenrolled from the program. A child who is not enrolled in the extended day program and is not picked up at the end of the Pre-K day on a regular basis can be disenrolled (see Section 3.10.)

2.4 Category One Definition

Category One eligibility is defined as the child's and/or family's participation in one of the following: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), SSI (Supplemental Security Income), Medicaid, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), or Child and Parent Services (CAPS) program. Documentation of participation must be verified and kept on file for review. Children in foster care and children who participate in the free and reduced meal program through the school that they attend may also

be eligible to qualify as Category One status. Income verification must be kept on file for children who participate in the free and reduced meal program.

2.5 Category Two Definition

Category Two status are those who do not meet the requirements for Category One eligibility.

3.0 Enrollment

3.1 Open Enrollment

Enrollment for the program must be open and nondiscriminatory. Children cannot be denied participation in educational programs on the basis of race, color, or national origin (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964); sex (Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 and Title II of the Vocational Education Amendment of 1976); or disability (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990).

Georgia's Pre-K Program is a universal preschool program. A universal program is open to all children who meet the age and residency requirements (four-year-old on September 1st and reside in Georgia). The definition and implementation of enrollment policies are developed by individual providers. Enrollment policies should address exactly how students are chosen for participation in the Pre-K Program. Acceptable enrollment selection processes include first-come, first-served and a lottery drawing. Policies should include procedures for enrollment of siblings/multiple births. Enrollment policies cannot prioritize children based on the family's income. Written enrollment policies must be submitted for review by DECAL and should be made available to families.

Procedures for how students are assigned to Pre-K classrooms should also be included in the written enrollment policies. Programs are encouraged to provide specific procedures regarding enrollment periods, attendance zones, placement of siblings in same or different classes, and other critical issues related to enrollment.

Providers cannot require the following as a condition of enrollment:

- Certificate of Immunization (Form 3231)
- Certificate of Vision, Hearing, Dental, and Nutrition Screening (Form 3300)
- Upfront payment of meals or extended day fees
- Participation in summer programs prior to starting Pre-K
- Verification of child's status related to Category One or extended day services
- Independent toileting skills (toilet trained)

Programs should consider the populations defined in the following sections while developing their enrollment policies: 3.2 Children Who are Experiencing Homelessness, 3.3 Children in Foster Care and 3.4 Children in Military Families. In addition, programs should review Section 3.5 Local School Attendance Zones when developing enrollment policies.

3.2 Children Who are Experiencing Homelessness

Pre-K providers are encouraged to examine their existing enrollment policies to address families experiencing homelessness who are seeking to enroll a child in Georgia's Pre-K Program. Providers choosing to give priority to eligible children experiencing homelessness should clearly define this practice in their written enrollment policy. Providers should contact their Pre-K Specialist if guidance is needed for families who do not have access to enrollment and eligibility documentation.

Homeless children and youth are defined by [McKinney-Vento Homeless Act](#) as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. The term "homeless" includes children and youth who experience any of the following:

- ***Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason:*** If economic hardship, such as an accident or illness, loss of employment, loss of public benefits, or conditions of poverty, forces a family or youth to share the housing of others temporarily, the children and youth are eligible for McKinney-Vento services. A long-term, cooperative living arrangement among families or friends that is fixed, regular, and adequate should not be considered a homeless situation, even if the parties are living together to save money.
- ***Living in a motel, hotel, trailer park, or camping ground due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodation:*** Motels, hotels, and camping grounds will almost always be homeless situations, as they are rarely fixed, regular, and adequate. In contrast, trailer parks often are fixed, regular, and adequate residences. Asking questions about the condition and size of the trailer, the number of people living there, the intended length of stay, and whether the family or youth has an adequate alternative will help determine if the student is eligible for McKinney-Vento services.
- ***Living in an emergency or transitional shelter:*** Emergency or transitional shelters of all kinds, including youth shelters, domestic violence shelters, family shelters, transitional living programs, and supportive housing programs are homeless situations.
- ***Abandoned in hospitals:*** A child or youth abandoned in the hospital is eligible for McKinney-Vento services.
- ***Awaiting foster care placement:*** Children and youth awaiting foster care placement are considered homeless; therefore, they are eligible for McKinney-Vento services. Children who are already in foster care are not considered homeless.
- ***Living in a public or private place not designated for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings:*** An example of a place that meets these criteria is a public restroom.
- ***Living in a car, park, public space, bus station, train station, abandoned building, substandard housing, or similar setting:*** Substandard housing is any dwelling that deviates from, or falls short of, local laws, standards, or norms.
- ***Migratory children:*** Migratory children who qualify as homeless living in circumstances described above.

3.3 Children in Foster Care

Pre-K providers are encouraged to examine their existing enrollment policies to address families seeking to enroll a child, who is in foster care, in Georgia's Pre-K Program. Providers choosing to give priority to eligible foster children should clearly define this practice in their written enrollment policies. Providers should contact their Pre-K Specialist if guidance is needed for families of foster children who do not have

access to enrollment and eligibility documentation.

3.4 Children in Military Families

A child whose parent or guardian is on active duty in the United States Armed Forces and has received official military orders to transfer into or within this state is eligible for enrollment in the public school of the attendance zone where they will reside, or in a public school authorized pursuant to Code Section 20-2-295. This eligibility applies in the same manner and at the same time as students residing within the local school system. The child can be enrolled prior to physically establishing residency in the local school system, upon presentation of a copy of the official military orders to the local school system.

3.5 Local School Attendance Zones

A child who resides within the local school system, but not within the attendance zone of the specific school providing the Pre-K program, may not be denied service but may be placed on a waiting list until all children who do reside within the attendance zone of the specific school are enrolled. A child who resides within another local school system's attendance zone may not be denied service but may be placed on a waiting list until all children who do reside within the district are enrolled. Families may be required to pay out-of-district fees depending on local board of education policies.

3.6 Child Registration Forms The Child Registration Form is available in multiple languages at <http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/FormList.aspx?cat=Pre-K>. Providers should use the appropriate form(s) for their type of program. A parent or guardian must complete and sign a registration form for each child registering in the program. The complete child registration form should be filed in each child's file and kept on-site for review. Providers can use an online registration process if the online registration application contains the same information as the Georgia's Pre-K Child Registration form.

3.7 Student Social Security Numbers

Social Security numbers are used to help identify students on rosters. Providers should request a copy of each enrolled student's Social Security card, however, the family cannot be required to submit the information. If a parent chooses not to submit the Social Security card, providers should ask the parent to complete the **Student Social Security Number Information Form (Appendix B)**. The Social Security Number Information Form is available in multiple languages at <http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/FormList.aspx?cat=Pre-K>. If the provider has a similar form, they may choose to use that form. A copy of each student's social security card or completed *Student Social Security Number Information Form* (or similar form) should be kept on-site for review by the Pre-K Specialist.

Providers should not ask all families to complete the *Student Social Security Number Information Form* in lieu of requesting the Social Security card. The *Student Social Security Number Information Form* should only be requested when a family chooses not to submit their child's Social Security card.

3.8 Waiting Lists

A waiting list shall be maintained at the site level for children that are not able to attend due to full enrollment. Adding children to the waiting list must follow enrollment requirements as stated in Section 3.1 and be open and nondiscriminatory. All families asking to be placed on the waiting list must complete all sections of the

Waiting List Information Form (Appendix C). The Waiting List Form is available in multiple languages at <http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/FormList.aspx?cat=Pre-K>. *Waiting List Information Forms* must be kept on-site and available to DECAL staff. Providers can use an online waiting list process if the same information is gathered.

Entering waiting list information into GAPREK is **mandatory**. Complete waiting list information must be reported and updated throughout the school year. Providers should begin entering students on the waiting list when the Class Reporting Manager opens. Waiting list information is a key component in determining placement of new and expansion classes.

3.9 Category One and Category Two Designation After Enrollment

Children should not be identified as having a Category One or Category Two status at the time of registration; however, the Pre-K provider is responsible for determining Category One or Category Two designation after enrollment. All families should complete the **Roster Information Form (Appendix D)** which should be kept on site for review by the Pre-K Specialist. The Roster Information Form is available in multiple languages at <http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/FormList.aspx?cat=Pre-K>.

In addition, the provider must request appropriate documentation of Category One services (such as copies of cards with current dates, current statements, etc.) and maintain documentation in student files. Providers must report Category One designation in the Class Reporting Manager after supporting documentation is received. Designation of Category One and Category Two status for children may be updated as needed in the Class Reporting Manager in GAPREK.

3.10 Procedures for Student Attendance

Programs are required to have an approved daily schedule and school calendar. The daily schedule must include consistent arrival and dismissal times. In developing the schedule, providers should allow a five to ten minute drop off and pick up window outside of the 6.5 instructional day. A written attendance policy, including school calendar and daily schedule, must be provided to families at orientation or upon enrollment.

Daily attendance records must be maintained on-site, documenting the dates when a child is absent as well as the dates and times when a child arrives late, leaves early, or is picked up late. These records should clearly specify whether the child's absence, late arrival, or early departure is due to medical reasons or other approved circumstances. Attendance tracking systems can utilize electronic attendance tracking software or a paper-based system, such as an attendance roll book or a weekly/monthly attendance chart

Attendance Issues

Children should attend the program on a regular basis and arrive and leave according to the program's approved schedule. Teachers should document attendance issues including the following:

- Absent more than two days per month without medical or other reasonable explanation
- Late arrival more than once per week (Programs should allow children that arrive late to attend class for the remainder of the day. Children should not be turned away regardless of their arrival time.)
- Early departure more than once a week
- Late pick up more than once per week when child is not enrolled in extended day

- Documented attendance pattern(s), e.g., child is late every Monday or absent every Tuesday or leaves early every Friday

Addressing Chronic Attendance Issues

Pre-K providers must create written procedures to address chronic attendance issues, aiming to help families establish regular school attendance. These procedures should outline actions for providers and how they will collaborate with families, such as:

- Calling the family after three unexcused absences
- Sending a letter from the director after five unexcused absences
- Holding a family meeting after six unexcused absences
- Referring to the Pre-K Specialist after ten unexcused absences

These procedures should be shared upon enrollment or during family orientation.

Providers must document efforts to assist families in resolving attendance issues, including a meeting with the parent/guardian to identify and address the problem. If unresolved after interventions, it can be submitted as a Student Chronic Absenteeism or Tardiness Request in GAPREK.

Consecutive Absenteeism

Children who do not attend class for 10 consecutive days without a medical or other reasonable explanation should be withdrawn from the class and an end date for attendance entered in the Class Reporting Manager. DECAL approval is not needed. The end date is defined as the last day the child physically attended the program.

A student whose parent or legal guardian is in military service in the Armed Forces of the United States or the National Guard, and such parent or legal guardian has been called to duty or is on leave from overseas deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting, shall be granted excused absences, up to a maximum of five additional school days per school year, for days missed from school to visit with his or her parent or legal guardian prior to the parent's or legal guardian's deployment or during the parent's or legal guardian's leave. Families shall provide a written statement for the child's file to document the absence.

3.11 Health Services

Health screenings are required for Georgia's Pre-K students to identify and address any issues that may affect their learning ability as early as possible. Programs should ask families for the date of their child's last preventive health visit and provide a referral if necessary.

Additional verification is required for Category One children. The Georgia Department of Community Health's guidelines require that any child eligible for Medicaid or PeachCare have a preventive health visit at ages four and five with their primary care provider (PCP) that includes a history, physical examination, anticipatory guidance, appropriate immunizations, appropriate laboratory test and other screenings. Therefore, programs should verify that Category One children have visited their PCP prior to entering Georgia's Pre-K. If a child has not had a visit, the Pre-K program should provide appropriate referrals and

follow-up to the family,

3.12 Certificate of Vision, Hearing, Dental, and Nutrition Screening

All children attending Georgia's Pre-K Program must have a Certificate of Vision, Hearing, Dental, and Nutrition Screening (Georgia Department of Public Health Form 3300). The vision, hearing, dental, and nutrition screenings reported on Form 3300 must have been conducted within 12 months prior to the start of the Pre-K program.

Children may register and begin attending Pre-K prior to completion of these screenings and issuance of a Form 3300 certificate. However, the Certificate of Vision, Hearing, Dental, and Nutrition Screening indicating that children have completed these screenings must be on file within 90 calendar days of the start of the Pre-K program. A completed form includes a checked box and screener's signature in each section. Any child who does not have a completed certificate within the 90-calendar day period may not return to the program until a certificate is provided and is on-site. If a family presents a valid appointment card for a 3300 appointment, the child can remain in the program until the date of the appointment.

Form 3300 is intended to ensure that every child in Georgia is screened for potential problems with their vision, hearing, teeth, and nutrition. If the 3300 is marked Needs Further Professional Examination, families should be asked to take the child to a professional for a more detailed evaluation. Families should provide documentation indicating their follow-up efforts. Providers should maintain follow-up documentation on site (i.e., updated certificate, doctor's notes, scheduled appointments, information from the family, etc.). Programs should contact their Pre-K Specialist for guidance in addressing families who fail to provide the appropriate follow-up after the program has made multiple attempts to obtain the information.

When children enter the program later in the year, the Pre-K provider shall make every effort to obtain the Certificate of Vision, Hearing, Dental, and Nutrition Screening as soon as possible to identify any follow-up needed. Waiting 90 days to obtain the 3300 for children who enroll later in the school year may not leave sufficient time to identify problems that could hinder the child's ability to learn.

3.13 Certificate of Immunization

All children attending Georgia's Pre-K Program must have a Georgia Department of Community Health Certificate of Immunization (Form 3231). Children may register and begin attending before issuance of Form 3231. However, form 3231 must be on file within 30 calendar days of the start of the program. Any child who does not have a completed certificate within the 30-calendar day time frame may not return to the program until a certificate is provided and is on-site. If a family presents a valid appointment card for a 3231 appointment, the child can remain in the program until the date of the appointment. A valid Form 3231 must have either the *Date of Expiration* or *Complete for School Attendance* box marked.

Expired certificates must be updated within 30 calendar days of the expiration date. Any child who does not have a completed certificate within the 30-calendar day time frame may not return to the program until an updated certificate is provided and is on-site. If a family presents a valid appointment card for a 3231 appointment, the child can remain in the program until the date of the appointment. An updated certificate, or another appointment card should be provided upon the child's return to the program.

Immunization Exemptions

Georgia law allows for two types of exemptions from the immunization requirements: medical and religious. Medical exemptions are used when it is deemed medically necessary for the health of a child. A medical exemption must be marked on Form 3231. A letter from a physician, advanced practice registered nurse, or physician assistant attached to the certificate will not be accepted as a medical exemption. It must be marked on the certificate. Medical exemptions are valid for a one-year period.

Families may object to vaccinations on religious grounds by filing an affidavit noting their objection. The only affidavit that may be used to register a religious objection to required vaccinations is the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) Form 2208. Religious affidavits must be notarized and kept on file. The affidavit does not expire.

4.0 Classroom Requirements

4.1 Approved Curricula

The Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) form the foundation for Pre-K classroom instruction (see www.gelds.decal.ga.gov for more information). The GELDS are correlated to Georgia's Kindergarten Performance Standards and to the Work Sampling System assessment indicators, thus promoting a seamless educational program for early learning. The Pre-K provider must provide a complete educational program in accordance with age-appropriate instructional practice and use a DECAL approved curriculum to enhance and supplement the GELDS.

Approved curricula are intended for use as a resource in planning age-appropriate instruction that aligns with the GELDS. All Georgia's Pre-K requirements such as those outlined in the Instructional Guide (IQ) for Planning Instruction, IQ Guide for the Daily Schedule and the IQ Guide for the Learning Environment must be met.

The list of approved curricula for the 2025 - 2026 school year is below.

Curriculum	Company
Alpha Skills Pre-K Curriculum	Alpha Skills, Inc
Beyond Centers and Circle Time	Kaplan Early Learning Company
Creative Curriculum for Preschool	Teaching Strategies, LLC
Connect4Learning: The Pre-K Curriculum	Kaplan Early Learning Company
Frog Street – EXCEL Pre-K	Frog Street Press, LLC
Frog Street Pre-K	Frog Street Press, LLC
High Scope Preschool Curriculum	High Scope Educational Research Foundation
InvestiGator Club: Prekindergarten Learning System	Robert-Leslie Publishing, LLC
Ready to Advance Early Learning Program	Benchmark Education Company, LLC
We Can Early Learning Curriculum	Voyager Sopris Learning, Inc
WINGS: The Ideal Curriculum for Children in Preschool	WINGS Curriculum, LLC

Guidelines for Choosing a Curriculum

Each Pre-K program must choose an approved curriculum, purchase the curriculum; and provide staff training associated with the curriculum. DECAL does not provide additional funding for purchasing a curriculum nor the required training. Providers may use their existing Pre-K budget to purchase a curriculum. It is recommended that providers explore content, costs, and hours of training

needed when considering a curriculum. Additional information about each curriculum is available on the DECAL website <http://dec.al.ga.gov/Prek/Curriculum.aspx>

Newly funded Pre-K programs will be to select a specific curriculum in GAPREK after a grant agreement is awarded. Continuation programs may request to change their curriculum by submitting a request in GAPREK.

4.2 Locally Developed Curriculum

Pre-K providers desiring to use a locally developed curriculum must submit the curriculum for approval through the curricula review process. This process takes place every five to seven years. DECAL must approve any locally developed curriculum before it is implemented in a program.

4.3 Supplemental Curriculum

DECAL must approve the use of any supplemental curriculum. Pre-K providers must submit written requests for approval to their Pre-K Specialist. Written approval of the supplemental curriculum from DECAL must be kept on-site for specialist review.

4.4 Montessori Curriculum

A Pre-K program must have approval from DECAL before choosing Montessori as a curriculum. Requests for using a Montessori curriculum should be sent to the program's Pre-K Specialist. Refer to Section 24.0 for additional Montessori information.

4.5 Religious Instruction

No part of the Pre-K instructional day may be religious in nature. If an approved curriculum has both a secular and religious version, the secular version must be utilized in the Pre-K program. Programs may choose to offer religious instruction outside of the Pre-K instructional day. No Pre-K funding may be utilized for religious instruction.

4.6 Lesson Plans

Written lesson plans are required for a minimum of 6.5-hours per day. Lesson plans should be completed prior to the start of each week and kept on-site for the entire school year. Lesson plans should be kept organized and easily accessible for specialist review. Current year lesson plans may be reviewed by the Pre-K Specialist during site visits.

The lesson plans should be based on the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) and include educational experiences in all learning domains: physical development and motor skills; social and emotional development; approaches to play and learning; communication, language and literacy; and cognitive development and general knowledge (math, science, social studies, creative development, and cognitive processes). Teachers should also have a plan for transitions throughout the day. Corresponding GELDS indicator(s) should be included on the lesson plan with each of the planned instructional activities. Outside play should be included in the lesson plans. Meals and rest time will make up a portion of the 6.5-hour instructional day.

Lesson plans should include differentiated instruction based on the individual needs of all the children in the class, including children with disabilities. Goals and objectives from a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) should be used when planning instruction (when applicable).

DECAL provides lesson plan templates for teachers to utilize. The templates are not required but recommended because they document the required Pre-K instructional activities. The lesson plan templates, and sample copies of lesson plans are located at <http://www.dec.al.ga.gov/Prek/Planning.aspx>. Teachers can also create a customized lesson plan template in the [GELDS portal](#). All required lesson plan components must be included in the plan if the DECAL lesson plan template is not used.

Providers should refer to the ***Instructional Quality (IQ) Guide for Planning Instruction (Appendix N)*** for additional clarifications, information, and guidance in instructional planning.

4.7 Assessment

All Georgia's Pre-K Programs are required to implement the *Work Sampling System* and are required to use the online version *Work Sampling Online* (WSO). Providers using additional assessments must have written approval. Requests should be submitted in writing to their Pre-K Specialist.

Lead teachers are required to maintain copies of the WSO Narrative Summary Reports and Developmental Checklists. Documentation gathered in the form of notes, matrices, and photos will be uploaded and stored online. Work samples may be uploaded or kept in each child's assessment folder. Teachers who choose not to upload work samples must enter a description and classification of work samples online as well as filing the actual work sample in the child's assessment folder. Assistant teachers should work with lead teachers to collect documentation to support assessment. However, it is the responsibility of the Lead Teacher to ensure documentation is entered and ratings are made in *WSO*.

The following student assessment data must be retained for a minimum of three years as specified in the grant agreement:

- *The Work Sampling System P-4 Developmental Checklist*
- *Work Sampling Online Narrative Summary*
- Documentation of Family Conferences

Assessment Requirements for New Teachers

New teachers (who have never taught in Georgia's Pre-K Program) will receive training on Work Sampling Online when they attend New Teacher Training. From the beginning of school until completion of training, new teachers should gather assessment documentation on children through observational notes, work samples, matrices, and photos. New teachers who do not receive training until after the fall rating period, are required to complete only the narrative portion of the Georgia's Pre-K Progress Report.

Providers should refer to the ***Instructional Quality (IQ) Guide for Assessment for Directors (Appendix O) and Teachers (Appendix P)*** for the assessment timeline and additional information.

4.8 Family Participation

Pre-K providers should provide opportunities for families to participate in their child's educational experience. Research shows that active family participation in children's learning experiences contributes to success in school. Families should be encouraged to volunteer their time, talents, and experiences in the classroom. The Pre-K provider and families should maintain open communication throughout the school year and conduct parent meetings as needed.

Family Conferences/Sharing Assessment Information with Families

Information on each child's performance, including the *WSO Narrative Summary*, should be shared with families at two documented family conferences required during the school year. Documentation of these conferences should be kept in each child's on-site file.

4.9 Basic Classroom Equipment, Materials and Supplies

Pre-K providers must maintain adequate and appropriate equipment, materials, and supplies for each Pre-K classroom. All equipment must be in good repair. Pre-K providers should refer to the ***Georgia's Pre-K Program Basic Equipment, Materials, and Supplies Inventory List*** for required items. (Appendix E).

4.10 Record Keeping

The current year records must be maintained at the Pre-K site. The Pre-K provider must retain the following records for a minimum of **three** years as specified in their grant agreement for Pre-K services:

- Pre-K Child Registration form
- Student Roster Information form
- Daily child attendance records
- Class enrollment rosters
- Age documentation
- Assessment information (see Section 4.7)
- Documentation related to suspension and/or disenrollment.
- Parent orientation and conference documentation
- Category One documentation
- Receipts and other financial records supporting expenses charged to Pre-K program (see Section 17.0)

5.0 Delivery of Services

5.1 Program Administration and Supervision

Each Georgia's Pre-K program must designate an administrator to serve as Project Director. Each separate site housing Georgia's Pre-K classes must have an individual designated to serve as Site Director. The Site Director should be located on site at the Pre-K facility during the 6.5-hour instructional day. The designated Site Director can have other duties but should be able to focus on the operation of the program during the 6.5-hour day.

The Project Director is responsible for ensuring that current year records are maintained at the Pre-K site or at a designated administrative office that the Pre-K Specialist can access. The collection, organization, and maintenance of current year records can be delegated to the Site Director or other designated administrator. Employees with other responsibilities such as teaching in another classroom or preparing meals may not serve as Site Director. A Pre-K Lead Teacher or Assistant Teacher may not also serve as Project Director or Site Director.

5.2 Classroom Delivery

Each Georgia's Pre-K classroom must have the following:

- Licensed classroom space for class size of 20 students (if applicable).
- Licensed playground space for class size of 20 students (if applicable).
- Lead teacher with approved credential.
- Assistant teacher with approved credential.
- A maximum of 20 children enrolled.
- Regardless of the number of children in attendance, two adults (lead teacher, assistant teacher, and/or substitute) must be present and actively involved with children during the entire 6.5-hours of instructional time each day of operation, apart from the one-hour rest time.
- Approved furniture, equipment, materials, and supplies.

5.3 Program Delivery

The Pre-K program will provide 6.5 hours of instructional time, a minimum of 180 days per year for eligible children. Pre-K providers are required to develop a school year calendar that accounts for 190 days including a minimum of 180 days of instruction to children and 10 days of Pre-K related activities/duties for teachers (pre- and post-planning, staff development, Pre-K Training, in-service days). Set-up and take-down of the Pre-K classroom are expected to happen during pre- and post-planning days. Any changes to this requirement must be approved by the program's Pre-K Specialist (see Section 1.3).

5.4 Orientation

Programs are required to provide an orientation for all teaching and administrative staff and an orientation for families within 20 working days of commencement of Pre-K services for children. The school year calendar should be shared with Pre-K staff and with families during orientation meetings.

During family orientation, families should receive written information concerning meal and extended day charges, including charges during times when children are out of school for holidays. While not required, DECAL recommends that providers explain their Pre-K policies and procedures and have families sign a statement that they received these policies and procedures in writing. Orientation provides an opportunity for families to complete the Roster Information Form (Appendix D). Documentation of these orientation sessions should be available in on-site program files.

See **Appendix F** for Suggested Topics to Discuss at Family Orientation. See **Appendix G** for Suggested Topics to Discuss at Pre-K Staff Orientation.

5.5 Licensing

The facility must meet the licensing requirements of the appropriate licensing agencies. At a minimum, the license must cover the 6.5-hour instructional program. Child care programs must hold a valid child care license issued by the Department.

5.6 Substitutes

The Pre-K provider must ensure that a substitute lead teacher and/or substitute assistant teacher is present and working in the Pre-K classroom for each day that a lead teacher and/or assistant teacher is absent due to illness, required training, personal leave, etc. Refer to Section 14.0 for additional information.

5.7 Rest Time

Programs must provide a designated rest time for children each day. To maximize instructional activities, rest time cannot exceed one hour per day except when necessary to address specific needs of individual children. Children who do not rest shall be given quiet activities such as books and puzzles. All children must have a covering (sheet) on their individual rest equipment (mat or cot) and a covering (blanket or sheet) for themselves. These items may be purchased with Pre-K funds or families may choose to supply them. During the scheduled rest period, one adult providing direct supervision to all students is acceptable. For additional information regarding rest time, refer to the IQ Guide and FAQ for the Daily Schedule.

5.8 Program/Staff Hours

The 6.5-hours of instructional time should begin no earlier than 7:30 a.m. with hours of operation as delineated in the original approved application. The remaining working hours of the lead teacher and assistant teacher day must be used for Pre-K program activities such as family conferences, meetings, instructional planning, documenting children's progress, maintaining assessment portfolios, etc. Inappropriate duties for Pre-K teachers (lead and assistant) during the workday include but are not limited to completing administrative tasks or serving as bus driver, office manager, cook, or receptionist. Inappropriate use of Pre-K staff is unacceptable and may place the program on probation. This includes using staff during the Pre-K Day to supervise children not enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K Program.

5.9 Transportation

Transportation services are optional and may be provided for enrolled Pre-K children at the discretion of the Pre-K provider. The Pre-K provider should establish reasonable transportation zones. Field trips are considered part of the instructional program and are not considered transportation for purposes of reporting or funding.

5.10 Extended Day (Before and After School Care)

DECAL does not require Pre-K programs to provide extended day services. Extended day services for Pre-K children may be provided at the parent's expense and choice. DECAL recommends that fees for extended day services not exceed \$35-\$75 per week.

Families who meet income and activity requirements may qualify to receive financial assistance with the cost of extended day services through the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program. Interested families should apply online through Georgia Gateway at www.Gateway.ga.gov and upload the CAPS Pre-K Referral Form (**Appendix H**) with their application. The CAPS Pre-K Referral Form is available in multiple languages at <http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/FormList.aspx?cat=Pre K>

5.11 School Closures and Make-up Days

There are circumstances which may necessitate the temporary closure of a Pre-K classroom(s) and cancelation of a scheduled Pre-K instructional day(s). Appropriate circumstances for cancelation of instructional day(s) include:

- Inclement weather
- Structural damage to the classroom or building
- Other circumstances that would be unsafe for children or teachers to attend

In the event of a closure, the provider must notify their Pre-K specialist as soon as possible with details of the closure.

Make-up Days

When a school closure occurs due to a State of Emergency declared by the Governor (for the entire state or for specific counties), the days of closure are not required to be rescheduled. Outside of a State of Emergency, providers may cancel up to four days without prior approval from DECAL, and these days do not need to be rescheduled.

However, if a program must cancel more than four days of instruction, Pre-K programs are required to make up the missed days and are responsible for scheduling the make-up days. Programs should review their school calendar and determine the most appropriate method for making up instructional days. Generally, programs are encouraged to follow the make-up calendar set by their local school system. Additional options for make-up days include:

- Converting a portion of the remaining teacher professional development days into student instructional days,
- Converting a portion of planned holidays or breaks into instructional days.
- Adding additional instructional days at the end of the school year calendar.

It is not necessary for programs to update their program calendar in GAPREK; however, programs must provide written notice of the make-up days and any changes to the calendar to families, Pre-K teachers, and assigned Pre-K Specialist(s).

If a program is unable to reschedule the required makeup days, the payment will be prorated based on the reduction of instructional days. Pre-K payments are not adjusted for closures due to inclement weather or due to a State of emergency declared by the Governor; therefore, the salary for closures must be paid in lead and assistant salary or the funds must be returned to DECAL.

5.12 Other Program Components

- A “moment of silence” is an acceptable practice at mealtimes.
- Lunch and snacks are part of the Pre-K program. Breakfast may be included at the discretion of the Pre-K provider but should be offered prior to the start of the 6.5-hour instructional day or as part of the instructional program (i.e., a teacher-directed language development time, a center-time activity, etc.).
- Weather permitting, supervised outdoor play should occur daily. The length of time appropriate for students to engage in outdoor play will vary and may be determined by a master schedule for the program. There is no specific time limit, however a general guide suggests 30 to 60 minutes of outdoor time daily. See FAQ for Daily Schedule (http://dec.al.ga.gov/documents/attachments/FAQ_for_Daily_Schedule.pdf) for detailed information regarding outdoor play. Licensed child care centers should refer to the Child Care Learning Centers [Rules and Regulations](#) for guidance on implementing outdoor activities.

6.0 Student Support

Children grow and develop at their own rate. Although there is a general predictable sequence of milestones, they may not proceed through these stages in the same way or at the same time. A child's

development is influenced by many factors including the child's environment and experiences. Visit <https://development.dec.al.ga.gov/#/> for more information on developmental milestones.

Once children have had the opportunity to acclimate to the Pre-K classroom environment, differences in skills and behavior may become apparent. A child may exhibit significant developmental, behavioral, or health concerns that require special considerations. Providers should work with their Pre-K Specialist to ensure that support services are provided to children and their families. The Inclusion and Behavior Support Program at DECAL (1-833-354-HELP or inclusion@dec.al.ga.gov) is a resource available that can provide classroom practices coaching, professional development, and assistance with referrals to intervention services.

6.1 Children with Identified Disabilities

A child who is age-eligible for the Pre-K program and is identified as eligible for special education and/or related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) shall not be denied access to the Pre-K program. If a child is assessed and determined eligible for special education services, dual enrollment in public school system preschool special education classes and Georgia's Pre-K program is permitted. If staff need additional assistance with accommodating a child with an identified disability in the classroom, an Inclusion and Behavior Support Specialist is available by contacting the SEEDS Helpline at 1-833-354-HELP or inclusion@dec.al.ga.gov.

6.2 Children with Developmental Concerns

Providers with concerns about a child's development should contact their Pre-K Specialist for support and guidance. Providers should ensure that appropriate instructional activities are planned to meet the needs of the individual children. The Specialist may recommend contacting the local school system's special education services department for a referral to assess the child's development and determine if the child is eligible for intervention services. The Inclusion and Behavior Support Program at DECAL can assist with contact information for the referral, as well as assist the teacher with classroom practices on inclusion. An Inclusion and Behavior Support Specialist is available by contacting the SEEDS Helpline at 1-833-354-HELP or inclusion@dec.al.ga.gov.

6.3 Children with Behavioral Concerns

Pre-K providers should document challenging behaviors using the [Behavior Incident Report \(BIR\)](#) while implementing classroom strategies that support social emotional development. Providers can request help in developing and implementing these strategies from their Pre-K Specialist. Providers that have implemented these strategies and still have concerns about a child's behavior should contact the Inclusion and Behavior Support Program at DECAL by calling the SEEDS Helpline (1-833-354-HELP or inclusion@dec.al.ga.gov) for more specific support and guidance as soon as possible. Classroom practices and individualized behavior plans should be implemented within the program to help the child be successful before utilizing exclusionary practices such as suspension or modified day. An effective behavior support system should include the child, family, and teacher to ensure the child's success in the classroom environment.

6.4 Student Discipline

Georgia's Pre-K Program's policy regarding discipline is consistent with the Core Rules in the Rules for Child Care Learning Centers, Chapter 591-1-1-.11 (discipline) as follows:

(1) Disciplinary actions used to correct a child's behavior, guidance techniques and any activities in which the children participate or observe at the center shall not be detrimental to the physical or mental health of any child.

(2) Personnel shall not: physically or sexually abuse a child or engage or permit others to engage in sexually overt conduct in the presence of any child enrolled in the center; inflict corporal/physical punishment upon a child; shake, jerk, pinch or handle a child roughly; verbally abuse or humiliate a child which includes, but is not limited to, the use of threats, profanity or belittling remarks about a child or his family; isolate a child in a dark room, closet or unsupervised area; use mechanical or physical restraints or devices to discipline children; use medication to discipline or control children's behavior without written medical authorization issued by a licensed professional and given with the parent's written consent; restrict unreasonably a child from going to the bathroom; punish toileting accidents; force-feed a child or withhold feeding a child regularly scheduled meals and/or snacks; force or withhold naps; allow children to discipline or humiliate other children; and confine a child for disciplinary purposes to a swing, highchair, infant carrier, walker or jump seat.

Programs needing support with appropriate guidance and classroom management practices should contact their Pre-K Specialist or the SEEDS Helpline (1-833-354-HELP) for support.

6.5 Immediate Suspension

DECAL does not support the use of suspension with young children; however, an immediate suspension for **no more than two days** can be made if a child is causing an immediate danger to himself/herself or others. The purpose of immediate suspension is to allow the program an opportunity to plan for the child's re-entry and successful participation in the Pre-K program and should not be used as punishment. At the time of the immediate suspension, programs should contact the Inclusion and Behavior Support Program at DECAL (1-833-354-HELP or inclusion@decalfga.gov) for assistance with developing a plan to support a child's re-entry and successful participation in the Pre-K classroom. Programs should also schedule a conference with the child's family to discuss strategies and options. Document the conference including the next steps and follow up as agreed upon by all parties.

Programs can implement immediate suspension up to two days at a time (**no more than five total days during the school year**) per child. No DECAL prior approval is needed; however, the program must complete the Student Suspension Notification Request in GAPREK within 24 hours. Failure to report student suspensions in GAPREK may result in a referral to the Quality Support Program. Programs must maintain ongoing communication with families and with the Inclusion and Behavior Support Unit anytime

suspension is implemented.

If all five immediate suspension days have been used and a child is a danger to self, peers, or staff, the child may be sent home for the day while the program develops a plan for the child's successful return.

Programs should use the following procedure:

- Notify their Pre-K Specialist immediately and contact the Inclusion and Behavioral Support Unit at DECAL (1-833-354-HELP or inclusion@decals.ga.gov).
- Prepare all documentation of behaviors and intervention strategies used to address concerns. The documentation must state the behavior, how often the behavior occurs, the interventions used, and the child's response to the interventions.
- Documentation should also include support provided to the teacher to help the teacher address concerns (Inclusion and Behavior Support Specialists, resources, professional development, etc.).
- Schedule a meeting with the child's family, teacher, assigned Inclusion and Behavior Support Specialist and program administrator to discuss strategies and options. Document the meeting including next steps and follow up as agreed upon by all parties.

6.6 Extended Suspension

An extended suspension should only be considered when all other options have been exhausted.

An extended suspension (i.e., more than two days at a time or more than five cumulative days) requires prior approval from DECAL. Programs must contact their Pre-K Specialist to discuss requests for extended suspension. Extended suspension without prior approval may result in probation.

Completed Extended Suspension Request Forms (form may be requested from the Pre-K Specialist) should be submitted via email to the program's Pre-K Specialist and include **Request for Extended Suspension** in the subject line.

Programs implementing an extended suspension should work with their Pre-K Specialist, Inclusion and Behavior Support Specialist and the family to create a plan to support the child's successful return to the Pre-K classroom.

6.7 Modified Day

A modified day schedule for a child (i.e., less than 6.5-hours of instructional time a day) requires prior approval from DECAL. A modified day should be used in conjunction with conferences with the child's family and targeted classroom interventions. Programs should request a modified day schedule in GAPREK.

6.8 Disenrollment Procedures

Disenrollment occurs when a school initiates the removal of a child from the program. Programs should contact their Pre-K Specialist to discuss procedures and documentation required for submitting a request for disenrollment of a child from a Pre-K program. Disenrolling a child without prior approval may result in nonrenewal or termination of the grant.

6.9 Requests for Children to Retain in Pre-K

DECAL will review requests for children to repeat Pre-K on a case-by-case basis. Pre-K Programs can request to retain a child in Pre-K. Requests should be discussed with the child's family prior to submission. Retention requests must be submitted by the Pre-K Project Director in GAPREK and should include the following:

- Letter from the project director stating reason(s) the student would be better served in Pre-K than in kindergarten.
- Letter from the family requesting that their child repeat Pre-K.
- Written summary describing special education referrals, services a child is receiving, evaluations conducted, etc. Actual documents should not be submitted with the summary. If specific documents are needed for review, the program will be contacted to gain family permission for release.
- Documentation to support the request to repeat Pre-K
 - Work Sampling Online (WSO) information:
 - Developmental Checklist
 - Narrative Summary
 - Teacher's recommendation, and/or doctor's recommendation
 - Interventions during the Pre-K program year

All requests to repeat Pre-K including supporting documentation must be submitted by April 30, 2026. Requests received after this date will not be considered.

7.0 Family Support

7.1 Family Support Services

Support services are a vital component to the success of the Pre-K program. The following objectives should serve as a guide for activities Pre-K providers should offer to Pre-K children and their families:

- Health – No child should exit the Pre-K program with an undetected condition that could hinder his/her ability to learn. Any child with identified needs should be referred to the proper resource or agency for access to and coordination of services. Documentation of referrals should be kept on-site.
- Child Development – Family knowledge of the child's development and involvement in their child's educational experience should be enhanced through informational seminars, volunteer opportunities at the center/school, parent/center conferences, etc. Families should be encouraged to read to their children daily and complete activities with their children.
- Community Resources – Upon request, families should be provided with information about community resources such as GED, TANF, PeachCare for Kids, help in obtaining extended day services, etc.
- Kindergarten Readiness Initiative – Assistance should be provided to obtain all necessary documentation and health related requirements for kindergarten registration before the end of the Pre-K school year.

8.0 Program Fees

8.1 Program Fees

All children must receive the same instructional opportunities during the 6.5-hour instructional program day and cannot be charged a fee for activities during this time. For example, if dance, art, or computer classes are included in the 6.5-hour day, these opportunities must be free and available to all Pre-K children. Fees cannot be charged to any child/family for services needed to operate the instructional program such as registration, curriculum fees, classroom supplies, etc.

8.2 Requests for Donations of Classroom Supplies

Georgia's Pre-K Program provides a per classroom allotment for supplies annually to all Pre-K programs. Pre-K programs may request donations of classroom consumable supplies such as paper, crayons, glue, etc. However, these requests must be reasonable and must not be a requirement for enrollment or participation in the Pre-K program. Solicitation of monetary donations for the purchase of these supplies is not permissible. Requests can only be made for the actual items. Programs failing to adhere to this guideline or abusing this policy will be subject to probation or termination of funding.

8.3 Field Trips/ Special Experiences for Students

Field trips off-site or on-site give students educational experiences that are different from their regular classroom environment. They enhance instructional activities and increase the relevance of the teaching topic. Field trips and/or special activities are highly encouraged but not required in Georgia's Pre-K and are considered part of the instructional program.

Programs may request a per child donation per field trip. Donations requested should not exceed a total of \$25 per child per year. If a family does not provide a donation, Pre-K funds may be used to provide the field trip for that child. A child cannot be denied participation in a field trip based on whether a donation was received. Family members who participate in field trips may be charged a fee.

8.4 Fee Structure for Non-Pre-K Services

Families can be charged fees for services outside of the Pre-K instructional day (before and after school care and for non- Pre-K program days, e.g., holiday/vacation times, teacher work or professional development days). Fee policy must be in writing and provided to families prior to the first day of instruction. While not required, DECAL recommends that providers explain and have families sign a statement that they have received written information explaining charges for non-Pre-K services.

8.5 Meals

Programs have a meal fee policy for Pre-K students. The meal fee policy must be uploaded in GAPREK for review and include the following:

- Families with a Category One status: Meal or snack fees cannot be charged to families with a verified Category One status. Pre-K funding may be used for costs related to meals and snacks.
- Families with a Category Two status: Meal and snack fees may be charged to families with a Category Two status. Pre-K providers can charge a maximum of \$25 per week for Pre-K lunch and snack. If breakfast is served during the Pre-K Day, then an additional weekly fee of \$10 can be charged.
 - Meal or snack fees cannot be charged if Pre-K program receives Child and Adult Food Program (CACFP) reimbursement for the child.

- Meal and snack fees should only be charged for meals/snacks served during the Pre-K Day when Pre-K is in session.

If the child attends the program on days when Pre-K is not in session (e.g., holiday breaks, teacher planning days), the fees should be consistent with the meal/ snack policy for the child care program or school. Pre-K providers should contact their Pre-K Specialist when there is an instance of continued non-payment of meal fees by a family with a Category Two status. Disenrollment for non-payment of meal charges will be at the discretion of DECAL.

8.6 School Uniforms

The purchase of school uniforms cannot be required for participation in Georgia's Pre-K Program. This includes special attire such as t-shirts for field trips. Centers with uniform policies may request that families dress children in uniforms. However, eligible children cannot be denied access to the Pre-K program for failure to meet the request. Providers are urged to provide uniforms for those who cannot afford them. With prior approval, Pre-K funds may be used for this purpose.

8.7 Special Family Activities

DECAL encourages Pre-K providers to plan family activities that focus on celebrating children's learning and participation in Georgia's Pre-K Program. Activities such as a field day, an open house, a family/child picnic, or a luncheon are recommended. All children should be included in these activities. Practice for programs should not negatively impact instructional time. Providers may not charge families any fees for participation in these programs.

9.0 DECAL Monitoring and Technical Assistance

9.1 Pre-K Specialist Support

DECAL Pre-K staff work closely with providers throughout the year and are available for consultation regarding onsite technical assistance, questions about the program, problems with maintaining enrollment, approval of equipment/materials/supplies requests, training needs, etc. Staff will provide specific technical assistance to help providers maintain compliance with program requirements and thereby allow them to maintain their funding viability.

9.2 On-Site Evaluation

DECAL Pre-K staff will make announced and unannounced visits throughout the school year to monitor and evaluate program progress. The monitoring process delineates the responsibilities of administrators and teachers and allows a greater focus on classroom instruction. The evaluation procedures listed below are designed to help raise instructional quality across the state.

All Georgia's Pre-K programs will be required to complete the following instructional checklists. The checklists will be used to ensure that all classrooms meet Pre-K requirements. They are used as communication tools for project/site directors and teachers, monitoring tools for Pre-K Specialists, and data reporting pieces for state level reporting.

- **Grant Requirement Checklist (Appendix K):** The Project and Site Director use this checklist to monitor the Pre-K grant requirements. It is meant to be used throughout the school year.

- **Instructional Quality (IQ) Guide for the Learning Environment (Appendix L):** Both teachers and directors utilize this checklist to ensure that each Pre-K classroom is properly equipped with quality materials.
- **Instructional Quality (IQ) Guide for Daily Schedule (Appendix M):** Both teachers and directors utilize this checklist to ensure that each classroom's daily schedule meets Pre-K guidelines.
- **Instructional Quality (IQ) Guide for Planning Instruction (Appendix N):** Both teachers and directors utilize this checklist to ensure that lesson plan guidelines are being met. Teachers will use this checklist along with a lesson plan template provided by DECAL or a template created by the program. Lesson plan templates are available on the DECAL website.
- **Instructional Quality (IQ) Guide for Assessment: WSO Director Timeline (Appendix O):** Directors utilize this checklist to ensure that all assessment requirements are being met.
- **Instructional Quality (IQ) Guide for Assessment: WSO Teacher Timeline (Appendix P):** Teachers utilize this checklist to ensure that all assessment requirements are being met.

All Georgia's Pre-K sites are required to complete the Grant Requirement Checklist (GRC) and Instructional Quality (IQ) Guides. Pre-K Specialists will monitor the use of these checklists in the following ways:

- **Roster Verification Visits:** Pre-K sites are randomly selected each year to participate in one full roster verification visit to take place between September and April. During this visit, a Pre-K Specialist will review rosters and children's records for completion and accuracy.
- **Program Visits:** Each specialist will review and use checklists to guide technical assistance at both the classroom and program level.
- All probation sites will be subject to full monitoring visits at multiple times throughout the program year.

10.0 Quality Support Program

The Pre-K Quality Support Program helps Georgia's Pre-K providers deliver high-quality education by offering hands-on support, resources, and technical assistance. It promotes continuous improvement, ensures compliance with operating guidelines, and provides targeted support for new providers, director training, and intensive monitoring for programs on Pre-K Probation.

10.1 Reasons for Quality Support Referral

Failure to correct ongoing Pre-K issues or multiple instances of failing to follow the *Pre-K Providers' Operating Guidelines* will result in a referral to the Quality Support Program. The Quality Support Referral involves a review process that will result in a recommendation for a change in status to Monitoring or Probation or the development of a Quality Support Action Plan.

A Quality Support Referral may be submitted based on the following:

- Failure to correct ongoing Pre-K issues or multiple instances of failing to follow the *Pre-K Providers' Operating Guidelines*.
- Failure to submit required reports, information, and documents to DECAL by due dates or submission of fraudulent reports or documentation.

- Lack of credentialed teaching staff or failure to notify DECAL of any changes in teaching staff.
- Serious or repeated instances involving noncompliance with DECAL program requirements (Pre-K, Child Care Services, Nutrition Services, Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS), or Audit/AUP).
- Extended suspension, or modified day, or disenrollment of a child without prior approval (See Sections 6.6, 6.7, and 6.8).
- Exceeding the maximum allowance of 20 students per class or inappropriate staff/child ratios.
- Ineligible child birthdates or lack of birth documentation.
- 45% or more ratings of “NO” during a Program Visit or Roster Verification Visit.

10.2 Definition of Probation and Monitoring

Probation status notifies providers of potential grant non-renewal or termination due to quality concerns or non-compliance with Pre-K Operating Guidelines. Programs on probation are not guaranteed class continuation, may receive fewer classes, and cannot apply for expansion or operate a Summer Transition Program. Grant agreements may be withheld or not renewed.

- Probation is a two-year process and sites participating in the Pre-K Quality Support Program will receive a minimum of three site visits during the school year to monitor and report on progress.
- A program conference with the Pre-K Project Director and DECAL staff will be scheduled for programs on probation. During the meeting, the probation process, and the requirements for returning to good standing will be discussed.
- Targeted technical assistance based on identified needs and goals will be provided to programs participating in the Pre-K Quality Support Program.

Monitoring is a status that warns a provider of the possibility of a probationary status. Programs on monitoring that are not making adequate progress may be moved to probation status.

- **A Quality Support Action Plan** is developed for programs that implement extended or additional suspensions, modify a child’s day, or disenroll a child from the Pre-K class without prior approval from DECAL. Programs that complete the Quality Support Action Plan and continue to implement extended suspensions, modified day, or disenrollment without prior approval from DECAL may be placed on probation.

10.3 Probation Funding Considerations

Programs not making adequate progress in the Quality Support Program will be in jeopardy of losing Pre-K funding. Sites failing to make progress may lose funding for at least one class during the initial year of probation. Reducing the number of classes has been an effective means for quality improvement; it is easier to maintain quality with fewer classes. Sites with only one class may lose all Pre-K funding at the discretion of DECAL. Sites with serious or repeated instances involving noncompliance with DECAL program requirements (Pre-K, Child Care Services, Nutrition Services, CAPS, or Audit/AUP) may lose all Pre-K funding regardless of

the number of years in the process.

10.4 Program Conferences

DECAL reserves the right to schedule a program conference with any Pre-K provider. If a program conference is scheduled, requested participants are required to attend. Failure to participate in a mandatory meeting may result in immediate probation or termination of the Pre-K grant agreement during the program year.

10.5 Peer Review Process

Programs that continue to have unresolved probation issues, despite technical assistance, may have their Georgia's Pre-K Program grant agreement denied or revoked at DECAL's sole discretion. In such circumstances, providers may appeal the DECAL decision before a Peer Review Committee. The Peer Review Committee appeal process is not available to Pre-K programs identified with serious or repeated instances involving noncompliance with program requirements (Child Care Services, Nutrition Services, CAPS, Audit/AUP), fraudulent teacher or student data, audit (Pre-K or federal nutrition programs) irregularities, loss of nutrition program due to serious deficiencies, termination from CAPS, low enrollment, and/or repeated issues with teacher credentials.

11.0 General Personnel Information

11.1 Records Check Determination

Every employee must have a satisfactory record check determination to be present at a facility when children are present for care, as required by O.C.G.A. 20-1A-30 et. seq. and Rule 591-1-1-.09, Rules, and Regulations Child Care Learning Centers. If Grantee is not a licensed child care learning center and participates in Georgia's Pre-K Program as approved by the Grantor, Grantee then must comply with O.C.G.A. § 20-1A-30 et. seq. or similar state or federal requirements. The grantee must allow, upon the request of the Grantor or its authorized representatives, the review of all necessary documentation for compliance purposes.

11.2 Employees

All Pre-K program personnel are employees of the Pre-K provider for whom they work, not Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning or the State of Georgia.

11.3 Employment Terms Document

It is required that all Pre-K grantees have written documentation detailing the employment terms between the employer and all Georgia's Pre-K lead teachers. This written documentation is recommended, but not required, for Pre-K assistant teachers. The written documentation should be developed by individual providers and shall include the following terms, at a minimum:

- Employment begin and end date
- Compensation information
- Benefits information
- Inclement weather/school closure procedures and compensation
- Professional conduct expectation
- Broad scope of work

The written documentation can be an employment contract, work agreement or letter of intent signed by the employer, provided to each individual Pre-K lead teacher, and kept on-site for review by DECAL staff. Providers may refer to the *Sample Georgia's Pre-K At-Will Employment Agreement (Appendix S)* for guidance in developing the employment terms document.

11.4 Pre-K Teacher Enrollment in the Georgia Professional Development System

The Georgia Professional Development System (GaPDS) is Georgia's early childhood workforce registry and training registration system. Users who complete and submit a profile are assigned a Career Level, which is based upon the user's highest level of degree or credential in early childhood education or a related field.

The Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) reviews and verifies GaPDS profiles to verify an individual teacher's credentials, degrees, and certifications. Until a teacher is enrolled in GaPDS, the eligibility to serve in the lead or assistant teacher role has not been established.

If a teacher is currently certified as a Georgia teacher or paraprofessional through GaPSC, the certification and/or Paraprofessional license/certificate information will appear in the registrant's GaPDS profile after the registrant completes the profile. A social security number must be entered into the user's profile to verify teacher certification information from GaPSC. If the user is not a Georgia certified teacher or paraprofessional, he/she will need to submit a profile and provide all required information, including but not limited to training certificates, credential completion certificates, and official transcripts.

Any level of degree must be supported by an official transcript from an accredited institution. If a teacher's credential cannot be verified, an email from GAPREK will prompt the Project Director to have the teacher review their GaPDS profile and submit the appropriate credential information.

Beginning in the 2025-2026 school year, a GaPDS number is required when entering lead and assistant teachers in the GAPREK system.

Failure to have credentials current and verified in GaPDS will affect Pre-K payments. Project Directors should confirm that teachers have registered in GaPDS, submitted required documentation to GaPDS, and GaPDS has verified the credential. If the teacher's credential has not been verified in GaPDS, then GAPREK will automatically set the teacher's credential level to "Insufficient."

Questions regarding enrolling in GaPDS or assistance with an account should be directed to gapds@decals.ga.gov or 404-267-2760.

12.0 Lead Teachers

12.1 Days of Service

All lead teacher positions are funded for 190 days of service – 180 days of classroom instruction to Pre-K children (or the equivalent if a modified calendar is approved) and 10 days of Pre-K related activities/duties (pre/post planning, staff development, Pre-K training, in-service days). DECAL does not maintain personnel policies for Pre-K teachers. Pre-K programs should provide teachers with a contract or work agreement outlining personnel policies including sick leave and holiday policies.

12.2 Age Requirement

All lead teachers must be 21 years of age or older. Lead teachers who have a valid bachelor's degree or higher teaching credential do not have to meet the minimum 21 years of age requirement. The teacher must, however, meet the age requirement for the facility's licensing agencies.

12.3 Professional Conduct

All lead teachers shall demonstrate conduct that follows recognized professional standards and preserves the dignity and integrity of the early childhood education profession. Lead teachers shall not engage in unprofessional Conduct or take any action or commit any act that might injure, tarnish, damage or otherwise negatively affect the reputation and goodwill associated with the Pre-K Provider, Georgia's Pre-K Program, or the Department in any way. Unprofessional conduct includes, but is not limited to, any behavior or action that could shock, insult, or offend the community, diminish the teacher's ability to interact professionally with others or otherwise bring disgrace or infamy upon themselves, the Pre-K Provider, Georgia's Pre-K Program, or the Department. Lead teachers shall not commit any act or do anything which might reasonably be considered to be illegal, immoral, deceptive, scandalous or obscene. Pre-K providers are responsible for ensuring lead teachers conduct themselves in a professional manner, especially while representing the Pre-K Provider, Georgia's Pre-K Program, or the Department in the community.

12.4 Credential / Certification Requirements

A lead teacher must have a qualifying valid and current certificate or credential. Pre-K providers should review the qualifications and conditions carefully to ensure that the lead teacher qualifies to teach in Georgia's Pre-K. All degrees and credentials are verified in the Georgia Professional Development System (GaPDS) by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC). A complete list of qualifying credentials and credentials can be found in Appendix T.

12.5 Out-of-Country Credentials

Degrees completed outside of the U.S. or in a U.S. commonwealth or territory must have a course evaluation from an approved PSC/PDR foreign credential evaluator. The list of approved evaluators may be accessed at <http://www.gapsc.com/MoveToGeorgia/FromOutsideUSA/foreignCredentialReports.aspx>

12.6 Online Credentials

Online degree programs can be verified through the Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools at www.sacscoc.org or with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education at <https://www.ed.gov/accreditation>. Other online degree programs may be acceptable with proof of approved credibility and certification.

12.7 Lead Teacher Salary

Pre-K Lead Teacher salary rates are based on the [*State Salary Schedule for Georgia's Pre-K Teachers*](#) (*State Salary Schedule*). Annual salary is determined by the K-12 State Teacher Schedule and is based on the teacher's verified credential(s) plus additional compensation for Salary Steps earned. The Salary Steps are based on the teacher's creditable years of experience (CYE). The salary on the *State Salary Schedule for Georgia's Pre-K Teachers* reflects the gross amount, which is an individual's total earnings before any taxes or deductions and is for the 10-month school year. The salary does not include any additional compensation or benefits the teacher may receive from the employer.

12.8 Creditable Years of Experience

For Georgia's Pre-K Program, *Creditable Years of Experience* (CYE) are defined as all years taught as a full-time lead teacher in a Georgia's Pre-K Program (public or private) with an approved credential and/or all years taught as a full-time certified teacher in a K-12 public school. A teacher must have taught full-time for at least six months of the school year (60% of the year) to receive credit for one full year. CYE does not have to be consecutive. Years of experience taught in a public school in another state would count toward creditable years of experience if the teacher held a valid, in-field state education certificate related to the field of employment and was under contract during the period in which the experience was earned.

CYE is used to determine the appropriate Salary Step on the State Salary Schedule. Local School Systems should use the CYE and Salary Step entered on the Certified/ Classified Personnel Report (CPI) report for Pre-K Lead Teachers to determine Pre-K Lead Teacher Salary.

DECAL will conduct audits to verify program reported CYE and may request verification documentation used by the program. If verification documentation is not available to support the reported CYE, Pre-K funding will be impacted. Therefore, it is imperative that providers verify a teacher's creditable years of experience prior to reporting CYE in GAPREK. When adding a new teacher in GAPREK, providers should only report CYE if the years have been verified with supporting documentation.

12.9 Prorated Teacher Salary and Summer Personnel Expenses

If the teachers' salary is prorated over 12 months, programs must pay personnel salaries from 2025 - 2026 school year funds. The teacher's contract (if applicable) must reflect the period of work as 10 months (Pre-K school year) with the annualized salary to be paid over 12 months. Funds must be fully expended by the end of the Grant period.

Summer salaries paid for the months of June and July may not be used to pay staff to supervise children in a private class or other duties which include, but are not limited to, bus driver, office manager, cook, and receptionist. Final salary payment must be in accordance with the normal pay cycle and funds expended by June 30, 2026.

If Pre-K teachers work during the summer months, then the teachers must be compensated for the work. Providers who incur summer salary personnel expenses for teaching staff should have written policies in place for payment of staff from funds other than Pre-K funds. If Pre-K teachers work through the months of June and July and receive a 12-month prorated Pre-K salary, they should receive additional payments for the months of June and July. The prorated salary is strictly for the work conducted during the Pre-K school year.

Examples of prorated teacher salaries and summer personnel expenses are available at <http://dec.al.ga.gov/Prek/ProjectDirectors.aspx>

12.10 Provider Responsibility Regarding Salary

Providers are required to pay the lead teacher position 100% of the total salary funded by DECAL. The salary is required to be paid in a consistent schedule (weekly, monthly, etc.) determined by the employer. Salary (or any portion of salary) cannot be paid as a bonus. It is not allowable to hold salary and pay mid-

year or at the completion of the school year.

Pre-K providers are responsible for sharing teacher salary information with their teachers at the beginning of employment. Salary information should be also shared with others as appropriate such the program's accountant, finance director or human resources department. DECAL requires that programs provide teachers written information explaining their salary and that programs have teachers sign a statement that they received and understand written information explaining their salary.

13.0 Assistant Teachers

13.1 Days of Service

All assistant teachers are funded for 190 days of service – 180 days of classroom instruction to Pre-K children and 10 days of Pre-K related activities/ duties (pre/post planning, professional development, training, in-service days).

13.2 Employment Requirements

An assistant teacher must be 18 years of age or older.

13.3 Professional Conduct

All assistant teachers shall demonstrate conduct that follows recognized professional standards and preserves the dignity and integrity of the early childhood education profession. Assistant teachers shall not engage in Unprofessional Conduct, take any action, or commit any act that might injure, tarnish, damage or otherwise negatively affect the reputation and goodwill associated with the Pre-K Provider, Georgia's Pre-K Program, or the Department in any way. Unprofessional conduct includes, but is not limited to, any behavior or action that could shock, insult, or offend the community, diminish the teacher's ability to interact professionally with others or otherwise bring disgrace or infamy upon themselves, the Pre-K Provider, Georgia's Pre-K Program, or the Department. Assistant teachers shall not commit any act or do anything which might reasonably be considered to be illegal, immoral, deceptive, scandalous, or obscene. Pre-K providers are responsible for ensuring assistant teachers conduct themselves in a professional manner, especially while representing the Pre-K Provider, Georgia's Pre-K Program, or the Department in the community.

13.4 Credential/Certification Requirements

An assistant teacher must have a qualifying credential/certificate. Pre-K providers should review the qualifications and conditions carefully to ensure that the assistant teacher qualifies to teach in Georgia's Pre-K. All degrees and credentials are verified in the Georgia Professional Development System (GaPDS) by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC). A complete list of qualifying certificates and credentials can be found in Appendix U.

A CDA credential is valid for three years from the award date, after which it may be renewed in three-year increments. Information regarding the CDA credential is available through the Council for Professional Recognition at www.cdacouncil.org

For information regarding the Technical Certificate of Credit, please refer to the Technical College System of Georgia website at www.tcsgeorgia.edu for enrollment information.

For information about scholarships or educational counseling, visit <http://www.decalscholars.com>.

13.5 Assistant Teacher Salary

All credentials for an assistant teacher position will be paid at an annual rate of \$25,741.35. Providers are required to pay 100% of the total salary funded by the Department for an assistant teacher position. Actual compensation may vary based on the number of days and hours worked that an individual worked.

DECAL does not provide supplemental compensation for assistant teachers. The minimum salary amount does not include any additional compensation or benefits the assistant teacher may receive. The base salary rate reflects the gross amount, which is an individual's total earnings before any taxes or deductions.

13.6 Prorated Teacher Salary and Summer Personnel Expenses

If the teachers' salary is prorated over 12 months, programs must pay personnel salaries from 2025 - 2026 school year funds. The teacher's contract (if applicable) must reflect the period of work as 10 months (Pre-K school year) with the annualized salary to be paid over 12 months. Funds must be fully expended by the end of the Grant period.

Summer salaries paid for the months of June and July may not be used to pay staff to supervise children in a private class or other duties which include, but are not limited to, bus driver, office manager, cook, and receptionist. Final salary payment must be in accordance with the normal pay cycle and funds expended by June 30, 2025.

If Pre-K teachers work during the summer months, then the teachers must be compensated for the work. Providers who incur summer salary personnel expenses for teaching staff should have written policies in place for payment of staff from funds other than Pre-K funds. If Pre-K teachers work through the months of June and July and receive a 12-month prorated Pre-K salary, they should receive additional payments for the months of June and July. The prorated salary is strictly for the work conducted during the Pre-K school year.

Examples of prorated teacher salaries and summer personnel expenses are available at <http://dec.al.ga.gov/Prek/ProjectDirectors.aspx>

13.7 Provider Responsibility Regarding Salary

Providers are required to pay the assistant teacher position 100% of the total salary funded by DECAL. The salary is required to be paid in a consistent schedule (weekly, monthly, etc.) determined by the employer. Salary (or any portion of salary) can not be paid as a bonus. It is not allowable to hold salary and pay mid-year or at the completion of the school year.

Pre-K providers are responsible for sharing teacher salary information with their teachers. Salary information should be also shared with others as appropriate such the program's accountant, finance director or human resources department. DECAL requires that programs provide teachers written information explaining their base salary and supplemental compensation (if applicable) and that programs have teachers sign a

statement that they received and understand written information explaining their salary.

14.0 Substitute Teachers

14.1 Substitute Teacher Employment Requirements

The Pre-K provider must ensure that a substitute lead teacher and/or substitute assistant teacher is present and working in the Pre-K classroom (during the 180-day student school year) for each day that a lead teacher and/or assistant teacher is absent.

A substitute teacher must meet ALL of the following minimum requirements:

- Must be at least 18 years of age.
- Possess a high school diploma or its equivalent
- Satisfactory Records Check Determination

14.2 Short-Term Substitutes

A short-term substitute is a substitute who serves in the Pre-K classroom while a lead or an assistant teacher is out of the classroom due to illness, personal leave, or professional development training. A short-term substitute may serve in the classroom anywhere from a few hours up to three weeks. No prior approval from DECAL is needed for a short-term substitute. If a lead or assistant teacher is out for more than three continuous weeks but is returning to their position, then a long-term substitute must be used.

14.3 Long-Term Substitutes

A long-term substitute is a substitute for the lead teacher or assistant teacher who will be in the Pre-K classroom for longer than three weeks. Programs must submit a Long-Term Substitute Request in GAPREK. Valid reasons for requesting a long-term substitute are extended medical leave, parental leave, military reserves, or a student teaching program. Programs should attempt to hire long-term substitutes with a credential equivalent to the credential of the original lead teacher.

No changes for long-term substitutes are needed unless the substitute has a credential that is higher than the lead teacher on leave. If the substitute has a credential that is higher than the lead teacher, then the provider should enter an end date for the teacher on leave and add the long-term substitute so payment can be adjusted accordingly. When the lead teacher returns, the Class Reporting Manager should be updated to show the original lead teacher. If a lead or assistant teacher is out of a classroom for longer than three weeks for other reasons, a new teacher should be hired and updated in the Class Reporting Manager.

The Pre-K Specialist will review any requests for long-term substitutes and contact the program for any additional information if needed. The program is responsible for informing the Pre-K Specialist of any changes such as a change in return date for the teacher or a change in substitute teachers.

15.0 Professional Development

15.1 Purpose of Professional Learning for Teachers

DECAL offers multiple professional development opportunities for Pre-K teachers. Professional learning training is intended to enhance the skills and knowledge of teaching staff. Each provider is responsible for ensuring that all teaching staff is qualified and able to deliver quality instruction on the date they are hired.

15.2 Requirements of Professional Learning

To maintain quality standards, annual professional development is required for all teachers directly associated with the Pre-K program. Staff completion of required training components will be verified by a Pre-K Specialist. Failure of providers and their staff to participate in required training will place their program in noncompliance and may result in probation. DECAL makes every effort to provide training in a variety of locations throughout the state; however, some travel may be required. Appropriate compensation for travel expenses must be provided for staff who are required to travel for training.

15.3 Professional Learning Plan for Pre-K Staff

Pre-K providers are required to develop a Professional Learning Plan for their Pre-K staff. A Professional Learning Plan is used as a tool to help plan a career, guide development, and assess progress toward career goals. The Professional Learning Plan for Pre-K staff should include identified areas for improvement and growth, specific professional learning activities to address these areas (including Pre-K training attended), timelines for completion, hours accrued, and reviews of progress toward goals. A sample Professional Learning Plan is located at <https://www.dec.al.ga.gov/PreK/ProjectDirectors.aspx>

15.4 Professional Learning Registration

The Pre-K Project Director is responsible for distributing professional learning and Pre-K Best Practices training information to their sites and all Georgia's Pre-K personnel. The Project Director must register staff for Pre-K Best Practices training in the GaPDS. For help with professional learning needs, Pre-K providers should contact prek.training@dec.al.ga.gov.

15.5 Attendance at Pre-K Training

All administrative, teaching, and support staff listed below will have the opportunity to attend DECAL sponsored professional development annually. Pre-K Best Practices training is provided free of charge. Additional details about professional learning requirements for the 2025 - 2026 school year will be released in late July 2025.

- Project Directors (Required for all new Project Directors)
- Site Directors / Principals (optional for new Site Directors/ Principals)
- Lead Teachers
- Assistant Teachers

All lead teachers and assistant teachers working in Georgia's Pre-K classrooms are required to meet the professional learning requirement. **This includes additional full-time staff in Montessori classrooms and inclusion classrooms.**

Late Arrival to Training

Late arrival results in interruptions to training delivery and the learning process. Individuals who arrive more than 30 minutes after the start time will not be admitted. Arriving more than 30 minutes late to one session may result in cancellation of all sessions in the series.

15.6 No Shows and Repeat Training Penalty

Participants who are unable to attend training should have their registration cancelled in GAPDS by the Pre-K Project Director at least 24 hours before the start time. Providers who register participants for training and

do not cancel in the GaPDS system may be charged a \$50 no-show fee. Providers cannot substitute inappropriate staff in the place of staff registered for training. For example, if a lead teacher cannot attend training, a Site Director cannot attend for him/her. In the case of a “no show,” \$50 for each participant will be deducted from the next Pre-K payment. In the case of a dispute, the provider must present written confirmation from DECAL that the training was cancelled within the required time frame. For instructions for training cancellation, refer to the GaPDS Help Files for Georgia’s Pre-K Program Directors at <https://gapds.dec.al.ga.gov/Shared/HelpContent.aspx?c=pnlgaprek>

When registering teachers for training, providers should:

- Register a teacher for training based on the teacher's current role (i.e., new lead, returning assistant. For example, an assistant teacher cannot attend training designated only for lead teachers.
- Register a teacher for one training course, unless approved by the Pre-K Training Team. For example, though there are multiple training choices for returning assistant teachers, the assistant teacher should only attend one.
- Register a teacher for training they have not previously attended. For example, a lead teacher that completed M in STEM training should not attend the training for a second time. Exception: a teacher returning to the Pre-K classroom after being away five or more years, should attend New Teacher Training.

Providers should review the training history page in the GaPDS for new and returning teachers to determine what DECAL professional development/training they have taken in the past before registering them for training for the current school year. In the case of a repeat or incorrect training registration, \$50 for each participant may be deducted from the next Pre-K payment.

15.7 Professional Learning/ Training Reimbursement to Staff

Pre-K funds or other program funds must be used to cover salaries for staff attending Pre-K Best Practices training, to pay for costs associated with Pre-K training travel (lodging and meals in conjunction with overnight travel, mileage, parking, etc.) and to pay for substitutes who serve in the classroom while a lead or an assistant teacher attends training. DECAL recommends that Pre-K providers develop and distribute a travel reimbursement policy prior to travel, review with employees, and ask employees to sign a statement that they understand the policies before they travel.

16.0 Grant Award Notification and Budgets

16.1 Awarding of Grant Agreements

For the 2025 - 2026 school year, programs will receive their Georgia’s Pre-K Grant Agreement via email and will be signed via DocuSign. Grant agreements will be awarded to Pre-K providers subject to funding availability, previous program compliance (for continuation programs in good standing) and identified regional need. Compliance and good standing with other DECAL programs (Child Care Services, Nutrition Services, Audits, CAPS, and Quality Initiatives) are also considered before awarding a grant agreement. Programs are considered in “good standing” if they have maintained full classes, met all program and reporting requirements, met child care licensing regulations if applicable, met federal program rules if applicable, have no unresolved audit or reconciliation issues, and are not on probation. DECAL will enter into a grant

agreement with public and private providers for Pre-K services.

16.2 Start-Up Funds

Start-up funds will be provided for purchasing classroom equipment, supplies, and materials for a new classroom. Start-up funding is \$30,000 per new class. Providers should work with their assigned Pre-K Specialist or Quality Support Specialist regarding the approval of ordering and purchasing items.

16.3 Class Budget

Classes with enrollment of 20 students will receive full funding. Funding for classes with fewer than 20 students will be reduced by 1/20 for each child below 20. This funding reduction applies only to operating costs paid to the program. Funding provided by DECAL for lead and assistant teacher salaries and benefits will not be impacted by student enrollment. Regardless of the number of children enrolled in the program, DECAL will provide the full funding amounts for salary and benefits.

16.4 Grant Agreement Signatory

The legal signatory (CEO, COO, CFO, President, Sole Proprietor, School Superintendent) who has apparent authority or legal authority for the program/company/school system/etc. applying for the grant must sign the grant agreement.

16.5 Multi-County and Multi-Program Pre-K Providers

DECAL will issue one operating grant agreement containing separate funding amounts for each site. Funds are class-specific; therefore, Pre-K providers must spend the required minimum levels for teacher salaries and supplies for each class at each site.

16.6 Low Student Enrollment

DECAL will review roster reports throughout the school year. Classes with fewer than 16 children will be considered for closure during the school year at the discretion of the Department. Any provider reporting fewer than 16 children on the final roster of the 2025 - 2026 school year will not automatically be awarded a continuation class. DECAL will review final rosters; contact providers directly concerning low numbers of children; and make a final determination about continuation of services.

16.7 Grant Award Calculation

Funding is based on program type and service area (Private Metro, Private Non-Metro, and Public School), the number of children served, and the lead teacher credential verified through the GaPDS. The actual reimbursement amount may vary based on changes in class size, changes in lead teacher credential, and number of days offering service. The 2025 - 2026 Budget Information and Rate Charts can be found at [Project Directors \(ga.gov\)](https://projectdirectors.ga.gov).

17.0 Expenditure Requirements

17.1 Expenditure Guidelines

All expenditures made with grant funding must be for the appropriate direct and indirect costs of operating the Georgia's Pre-K classroom.

- Salary:
 - 100% of funding must be paid to salary for Lead and Assistant teacher positions.

- 100% could include salary for substitute costs when the position is not filled by an appropriately credentialed lead or assistant teacher.
- The salary rates reflect the gross amount, which is an individual's total earnings before any taxes or deductions.
- Actual compensation for an individual teacher may vary based on the number of days and hours worked.
- Operating:
 - Classroom and Transportation:
 - Programs must spend a minimum of \$1,000 per classroom from their classroom operating funds on classroom equipment, classroom materials, classroom supplies, and/or additional classroom materials. Classroom supplies and materials should be selected from the ***Georgia's Pre-K Program Basic Equipment, Materials, and Supplies Inventory List (Appendix E)***. Change of ownership programs, classes funded later in the school year, or programs that closed a class(es) during the school year may annualize the amount of time the program operated prior to the change. For example, a class that started in August and closed in November must spend at least \$400 on classroom materials/supplies (\$100 per month).
 - Funding can be used for transporting Pre-K children to and from school. Transportation is not required.
 - Funding can be used for classroom technology purchases and playground equipment. Prior approval is required from the Pre-K or Quality Support Specialist and the classroom must be adequately equipped before purchases can be made. (See Sections 17.2 and 17.3)
 - Benefits:
 - Funding provided can be used for benefits for lead and assistant teachers.
 - Pre-K programs determine the benefit package for Pre-K lead and assistant teachers.
 - Examples of benefits include health insurance, life insurance, flexible benefits such as dental and vision, dependent child care, and the provider's portion of federal and state taxes.
 - Other operating costs:
 - Pre-K programs may use no more than six percent of the total budget for administrative expenses (i.e., office supplies, accounting and/or clerical costs, Pre-K's portion of the director's salary and benefits).
 - Funds can be used for Pre-K's portion of properly allocated and documented rent, utilities, liability insurance, etc.
 - Funds can also be used for costs associated with meals or snacks provided during the Pre-K Day. (If the program participates in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), then those regulations must be followed.)

17.2 Playground Equipment

Purchase of stationary playground equipment requires prior approval from a provider's Pre-K Specialist. Approval is granted on a case-by-case basis. Purchasing stationary playground equipment with Pre-K funds without prior approval may result in the provider being required to return the expended funds. The deadline to submit for approval is May 29, 2026.

17.3 Instructional Technology

Approval is not required for technology items included in the ***Georgia's Pre-K Program Basic Equipment, Materials, and Supplies Inventory List (Appendix E)***. For all technology items not on the list, prior approval is required from the provider's Pre-K Specialist. Using Pre-K funds to purchase technology not listed on the *Georgia's Pre-K Program Basic Equipment, Materials, and Supplies Inventory List* may result in the provider being required to return the expended funds. The deadline to submit for approval is May 29, 2026.

17.4 Expenditure Requirement Waivers

Programs can request the following expenditure requirement waivers. Waivers will be reviewed and approved based on the documentation submitted and overall quality of the program. The deadline to submit for approval is May 29, 2026.

- **Instructional Supplies Waiver:** A waiver for up to \$1,000 for the materials and supplies requirement may be requested if all classrooms and the playground at the site are well equipped. The Pre-K Specialist must verify that classrooms and playground are well equipped using current monitoring tools and checklists. If a waiver is granted, the unexpended funds may be used for teacher salary and benefits, field trips, or other instructional activities only. Funds cannot be applied to non-instructional items. The waiver is approved for the current year only.
- **Lead and Assistant Teacher Salary Waiver:** Providers must meet the salary requirements for lead teachers and assistant teachers as listed in Section 12.7, 12.10 and Section 13.5. In cases where a lead teacher or assistant teacher is absent frequently during the year and the substitute for that teacher is paid at a lower rate, the program can request a waiver in GAPREK to use the unused portion of the base salary on other allowable Pre-K expenses. The waiver is approved for the current school year only.

17.5 Capital Improvements

Capital improvements are costs related to improvements that extend the useful life of property, improve the quality of a product, or add value to capital assets such as buildings and vehicles. Capital assets are assets that have a useful life longer than one year and are not intended for sale during the normal course of business.

For Pre-K related purposes, capital improvements are not allowable Pre-K expenditures. Examples include, but are not limited to purchases and installation of:

- roofing
- tile
- carpet
- doors or windows
- wallpaper
- air conditioning
- alarm system

For Pre-K related purposes, replacement parts for capital assets and repairs to capital assets such as buildings and transportation vehicles are not allowable Pre-K expenditures.

17.6 Record Keeping

The Pre-K provider is required to keep all receipts and other records necessary to support figures reported on the annual reconciliation report. **If a Pre-K program is audited and receipts and other records are not available to support these amounts, funds must be returned to DECAL.** Examples of such records include, but are not limited to:

- canceled check copies (front and back)
- bank statements
- credit and Debit Card Statements
- paid invoices
- federal and state payroll records
- EFTPS or other evidence of taxes remitted to regulatory agencies
- timesheets
- original receipts for equipment, materials, and supplies for Georgia's Pre-K classrooms
- documentation of Pre-K's portion of operating expenses
- special allotment funding
- approval documentation for special allotment funding purchases
- approval documentation for long-term substitutes
- approved waivers (instructional supplies and materials, teacher salaries, etc.)
- appropriate allocation methodology

The Pre-K provider shall maintain full and complete program funding and expense records pertaining to the grant agreement for a period of three years beyond the ending date, or until all litigation, claims, or audit/review findings involving the records have been resolved if such claim or audit/review is started before the expiration date of the three-year period.

18.0 Reimbursement Process

18.1 Automatic Deposit of Funds

All payments will be deposited in the Pre-K provider's bank account via an Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) process. Providers are responsible for reviewing their monthly payments and payment documentation. Providers are accountable for the correct routing of their payments by promptly notifying DECAL of changes in bank account information. To update banking information a Change of Bank Account Information Request should be submitted in GAPREK.

18.2 Enrollment Requirements for Funding

Pre-K providers are expected to maintain the class enrollment levels specified in their grant agreement. Enrollment below 20 students will reduce funding for operating costs.

18.3 Payments

Funds will automatically be deposited in accounts in ten monthly payments beginning in August 2025.

- Georgia's Pre-K payments will be processed by the 8th business day of each month. The deposit will occur within 3 to 7 business days from the processed date in GAPREK. A calendar with payment dates can be found in Appendix V.

- Payment will be delayed if the grant agreement has not been executed, class roster information has not been submitted, school calendar is not approved, there are instructional days without a reported teacher, or if the class, site, or program's payment has been placed on hold.
- All payments are subject to payment processing and bank processing delays.
- Payment for providers who have approved calendars with July 2026 instructional and/or teacher planning/professional development days will be included with the August 2026 payment.
- The final Pre-K payment for the year will be the May 2026 payment.
- Providers who have approved calendars with instructional and/or teacher professional development/planning days in June, will receive a June 2026 payment.

18.4 Calculation of Payments

The monthly payment is calculated based on the classroom's approved calendar for the month. A daily rate is calculated for each class and is determined by dividing annual classroom funding for the year by the number of student instructional days and teacher professional development/planning days. Operating funding is based on student instructional days. Salary and benefits are based on total days (instructional days + teacher professional development/ planning days).

- The August and September payments are based on full class enrollment. Beginning in the October payment, the Operating Classroom portion of the payment may be prorated by student enrollment.
- Lead teacher salary steps are based on the individual teacher's verified creditable years of experience.
- Attendance and enrollment records are subject to review and audit upon request. Students found to be enrolled for the same period of time in more than one class will require proof of enrollment and attendance. Payments for operating costs will be retroactively adjusted for changes in student enrollment.

No additional corrections, adjustments or payment processing will be made after May 4, 2026, or within five business days after receipt of the final scheduled payment from DECAL in accordance with the grant agreement (whichever occurs last).

18.5 Payment Advice

A monthly payment advice detailing the Pre-K payment is available in GAPREK. Providers should review their payment advice immediately after a Pre-K payment is processed to confirm that the payment is accurate. Providers are responsible for contacting DECAL with any discrepancies.

18.6 Payment Disputes

If the provider's payment does not reflect the number of students on the submitted roster, the verified lead teacher credential, and/or lead teacher Creditable Years of Experience (CYE) reflected in the Class Reporting Manger, the provider may submit a payment dispute to DECAL.

The payment dispute process is not intended to address lead teacher credential and/or CYE matters that the provider should have addressed/resolved prior to the last roster submission. An example of a payment dispute is a payment not calculating according to what was reported on the roster.

No additional corrections, adjustments or payment processing will be made after May 4, 2026, or within

five business days after receipt of the final scheduled payment from DECAL in accordance with the grant agreement (whichever occurs last).

18.7 Reporting Teacher and Student Data

Teacher and student data is critical and must be accurate for teachers' and students' information. Data is subject to audit and must be substantiated by documentation of credentials and creditable years of experience for teachers, and enrollment and attendance records for students. Providers are required to enter teacher and student data into the Class Reporting Manager in GAPREK.

Lead Teacher and Assistant Teacher Data

Pre-K programs are required to enter lead and assistant teacher data in the GAPREK Class Reporting Manager. Required data includes credentials and Pre-K start and end dates. Teacher data must be updated at the time of a lead or assistant teacher change. The teacher end date is the final day of the teacher's employment. Providers will not be able to enter teacher changes during the last three business days of each month. Appendix V includes a list of data entry dates.

Payment calculations are based, in part, on the lead teacher credentials verified in the Georgia Professional Development System (GaPDS). It is important that providers ensure that the teachers have registered in the GaPDS and have submitted supporting documents to confirm educational attainment. If no qualifying credential has been verified, the teacher credential value will be set to Insufficient in GAPREK.

A GAPREK email will be sent to all providers notifying them when GAPREK is open for teacher data entry. Data entry made prior to August 1, 2025, will be used to calculate lead teacher base salary and supplemental compensation for the August payment. Therefore, it is critical that lead teacher information be accurate and entered timely. Delays in updating teacher data will impact payment calculations.

Student Data

Student data must be entered into the Class Reporting Manager and will be reported on four roster reports during the school year. Data required on enrolled children includes name, date of birth, start and end date, gender, race, ethnicity, home language, special education services, and parent information. The Roster Information Form is available in multiple languages and can be located at <http://www.dec.state.ga.us/BftS/FormList.aspx?cat=Pre-K>. Providers will not be able to enter student changes during the last three business days of the month. Appendix V includes a list of data entry dates.

Duplicate students are students who appear on more than one roster for the same reporting period. Potential duplicate students will be flagged in the Class Reporting Manager in GAPREK. When potential duplicates are flagged, providers may update student data in the Class Reporting Manager to resolve the issue. To reduce the number of "duplicates," DECAL recommends that providers contact the family of a child absent for three consecutive days to find out the reason for the absence. Contacting the parent can reduce the number of children kept on the attendance rolls of one program when they might be attending another program.

The Pre-K provider is responsible for replacing any child who leaves as soon as possible. Children who have been absent for 10 consecutive days without a reasonable excuse must be removed from the roster, but this does not mean that a child should be kept on the roster for 10 days after their last day of attendance. The end date is the last day the child physically attended the program. The exception would be children on

extended medical or other approved leave. Appropriate leave documentation should be maintained on site.

Rosters

Rosters must include staff begin date in the classroom along with date of enrollment and birth dates for children. Rosters must be completed and properly submitted through the GAPREK online system to receive payments.

Roster based payments will be made until the required roster information is submitted.

Roster	Count Day	Due to DECAL
1 st	September 12, 2025	September 19, 2025
2 nd	November 7, 2025	November 14, 2025
3 rd	January 9, 2026	January 16, 2026
4 th	March 6, 2026	March 13, 2026

Note: The count date is the date providers verify students who are actively enrolled and attending Pre-K and teachers who are currently employed and teaching in the class.

Failure to submit rosters by the due date will result in delayed payments. Rosters submitted after the due date may result in payments being processed by DECAL after all other payments have been made.

The first roster should include the names and information for children who attended Pre-K since the beginning of the school year. All changes up until the count date should be reflected on the first roster. Children who have enrolled or registered for Pre-K but have not attended a scheduled Pre-K instructional day should not be reported on the first roster. (Exception: If the class instruction begins after the first roster is due, the Pre-K provider will need to report “registered” students beginning as of the count date.)

Subsequent student rosters should include any changes made from the previous roster count date. Dates must be accurate for beginning and ending points for children and teachers so that a reduction in payment does not occur. Student rosters and attendance documentation (kept in the classroom) must match.

It is the responsibility of Pre-K providers to review electronic payment advice information in GAPREK and alert DECAL of any discrepancy in the payment amount on or before May 16, 2025. Corrections and/or changes to the submitted roster not reported in a timely manner on submitted rosters could result in non-payment of the adjusted amount.

18.7 Fraudulent Reporting on Rosters

Any person who knowingly and willfully makes a false, fictitious, or fraudulent statement or representation in a statement to a government agency may be guilty of a felony of a violation of Code Section 16-10-20 of the Official Code of Georgia. Any person, firm, corporation, or other legal entity that 1) knowingly presents or causes to be presented a false or fraudulent claim for payment or approval or 2) knowingly makes, uses, or causes to be made or used a false record or statement material to a false or fraudulent claim, shall be liable for civil penalties. The civil penalty can range from \$5,500 to \$11,000 for each false or

fraudulent claim, plus three times the amount of damages sustained by the government because of such act pursuant to Code Section 23-3-121 of the Official Code of Georgia.

19.0 Audit and Accounting Requirements

19.1 Reconciliation Report

Pre-K providers must provide DECAL with a reconciliation report spanning the dates of the grant agreement. The purpose of the reconciliation report is to provide an actual accounting of all the providers' Pre-K funding expenditures related to Pre-K. This report shall demonstrate that funds were spent in appropriate categories for their intended uses. **Supporting documentation must be maintained and provided upon request from DECAL.** If a program is audited and receipts and other records are not available to support these amounts, funds must be returned to DECAL (See Section 17.1 and 17.6). Closeout procedures regarding the 2025 - 2026 year-end reconciliation process will be forwarded to Pre-K providers during July 2026.

Shared Cost Allocation

Funds paid by DECAL for Pre-K services can be used to cover costs of the Pre-K program only and the Pre-K program's prorated share of other allowable costs expensed through normal operation of the facility. Allowable costs are those ordinary and necessary expenses directly benefiting or resulting from Pre-K program operations. **All Pre-K funding must be expended by June 30, 2026.**

Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) provides authoritative guidance that must be followed for identifying the appropriate basis for allocating shared costs. The basis of allocating costs should be similar to the unit of measure for incurring the costs or consuming the expensed item. Examples include using a square footage basis for rent/mortgage expenses and utilities, and a per person or average daily attendance basis is appropriate for office supplies, management staff, and transportation services if provided. Expenses must be allocated using the most logical basis for the costs incurred. For example, food costs would be allocated based on the number of children rather than square footage.

Related Party Expenses

Expenses involving related parties must also be charged in accordance with GAAP. Related parties are one or more entities subject to the significant influence over the operating and financial policies of another entity. Providers involved in related party transactions with their centers should survey the surrounding business area and provide support that financial charges to the Pre-K program are within the range of same or similar arms-length transactions for their area.

Report Deadlines

Private providers must submit the reconciliation report by August 31, 2026, for the 2025 - 2026 school year. Local school systems must submit the reconciliation report by September 30, 2026, for the 2025 - 2026 school year. Providers must submit reconciliation reports electronically in GAPREK.

If, during the course of an audit or AUP review, there are negative findings, the provider may be scheduled for an audit or AUP review for the subsequent school year at the discretion of DECAL.

19.2 Balances Due to DECAL Pursuant to the Year End Reconciliation

Submitted reconciliation reports will be validated in GAPREK. After the report is validated, the validation results and information regarding any funds due back to DECAL will be provided in GAPREK (see section 20.6). If the completed Pre-K Year End Reconciliation Report results in a balance due to DECAL, funds shall be required to be returned to DECAL. There are two options regarding these outstanding balances:

- Remit the balance in full by the deadline date.
- Submit a payment plan proposal with a 10% good faith payment by the deadline date (Please note, the total amount due must be paid in full by May 3, 2027).

Failure to pay the balance due shall result in DECAL withholding future Pre-K payments and/or other actions as directed by DECAL staff until the balance is paid in full.

19.3 Private Nonprofit (PNP) Audits

PNP Pre-K providers must adhere to audit requirements as specified in O.C.G.A. § 50-20-1 et seq., Relations with Nonprofit Contractors. Before DECAL enters into a grant agreement with a nonprofit contractor, the contractor must furnish DECAL with certified financial statements showing the nonprofit contractor's financial condition at the end of the previous fiscal year and revenues and expenditures for the previous fiscal year. When the nonprofit contractor has existed for less than a full year, the financial statements must cover year-to-date operations for the current year. The financial statements must include an individual list of each employee and his salary and reimbursable expenses; a list by category of the sources of income of the nonprofit contractor; and a list of the source(s) of all public funds received by the nonprofit contractor and the program for which the funds were received.

19.4 Right to Audit/ Agreed Upon Procedures (AUP) Review

DECAL reserves the right to require an independent, certified financial audit of the Pre-K program at the Pre-K provider's expense. DECAL reserves the right to conduct an Agreed Upon Procedures (AUP) review of the Pre-K Program. DECAL may conduct audits and AUP reviews as specified in Georgia's Pre-K Program Grant Agreement for the 2025 - 2026 school year, Grant Obligations and Requirements Section III, Part C:

Grantee agrees to cooperate fully with Grantor auditors and/or agents providing Audit or Agreed Upon Procedures (AUP) review services. The Grantee will coordinate with auditors/reviewers to have appropriate staff available during the scheduled audit/review period. Grantee will make advanced preparations for scheduled audits/reviews to make available for auditors or reviewers all identified documents, records, and entity related materials requested by the auditors/reviewers for the current school year, as well as for prior school years in which Grantee participated in Georgia's Pre-K Program as requested by the Grantor. The Grantee's failure to substantially prepare for a scheduled audit engagement or provide requested documentation or information to an auditor/reviewer during the scheduled audit period may result in the withholding of grant payments. The failure of the Grantor to review and/or inspect the services provided or to discover a breach of this Grant or any amendment thereto shall not subsequently operate as a waiver of any remedies available to the Grantor.

If, during the course of an audit or AUP review there are negative findings, the provider may be scheduled for an audit or AUP review for the subsequent school year at the discretion of DECAL.

19.5 Record Keeping Findings and Adverse Findings

Findings noted during the course of an audit, AUP review, or investigation that do not result in a balance of funds due back to DECAL are considered Record Keeping Findings. Examples include:

- Understatements of reported expenses compared to the reconciliation report.
- Overstatements of reported expenses compared to the reconciliation report.
- Variances between the expenditures reported on the Pre-K reconciliation and the allowable Pre-K expenditures supported during fieldwork.

Findings noted during the course of an audit, AUP review, or investigation that result in a balance of funds due back to DECAL are considered Adverse Findings. Examples include:

- Failing to support unreimbursed food costs.
- Failing to meet lead teacher salary requirements.
- Failing to meet the instructional supplies and materials expenditure requirements.
- Failing to support that payroll taxes were forwarded to the relevant taxing authorities.
- Failing to support all expenditures of special allotment funding.
- Failing to support that the use of all monies received from DECAL were used in accordance with applicable regulations and guidelines.

19.6 Balances Due to DECAL Pursuant to an Audit, AUP Review or Investigation

If a Pre-K program is unable to support its expenditures with receipts and other records while having its financial records reviewed during an audit, AUP review, or investigation, funds shall be required to be returned to DECAL. There are three options regarding these outstanding balances.

- Remit the balance in full by the deadline date.
- Submit a payment plan proposal with a 10 percent good faith payment by the deadline date. The total amount due must be paid in full by May 3, 2027.
- Request Reconsideration - Submit all source documentation by the deadline date disputing the results of the audit, AUP review, or investigation findings.

Failure to pay the balance due shall result in DECAL withholding future Pre-K payments and/or other actions as directed by DECAL staff until the balance is paid in full.

19.7 Reconsideration – Audit, Agreed Upon Procedures Review (AUP), or Investigation

For an Audit, AUP review, or investigation findings to be reconsidered, providers must submit a formal request. The request must meet the following requirements:

- Submitted in GAPREK
- Made within 15 days of the notice of balance due notice from DECAL.
- Include a detailed audit trail including all source documents necessary for DECAL to make a final decision in a timely manner.

19.8 Random Reviews

The Pre-K provider is subject to random, unannounced expenditure reviews by DECAL or DECAL contract auditors during the program year. All records (programmatic and financial) must be retained for a minimum of three years as stated in the grant agreement.

19.9 Tracking of Pre-K Funds

The Pre-K provider must maintain financial records to track Pre-K expenditures in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP). All records must be retained for a minimum of three years as stated in the grant agreement.

The Pre-K provider is required to keep all receipts and other records necessary to support figures reported on the annual or mid-year reconciliation statement. If a Pre-K program is audited and/or subject to an AUP review or investigation, and the receipts and other records are not available to support these amounts, funds must be returned to DECAL. Examples of such records include, but are not limited to, federal and state payroll records to verify payment of lead teacher and teacher assistant salaries, original receipts for equipment, supplies and materials for Pre-K classrooms, credit/debit card statements, and documentation of the Pre-K portion of operating expenses.

19.10 Lost, Stolen, or Destroyed Records

In the event of natural or manufactured disasters, i.e., flooding, fire, hurricane, tornado, theft, etc., the Pre-K provider is responsible for providing third party verification to substantiate the disaster. Verification includes police reports, insurance company claims, photos, or other proof that support the disaster and must also include detail of the property impacted. Claims related to manufactured disasters must be made and filed within 30 calendar days of the incident. Claims related to natural disasters must be filed as soon as possible in accordance with insurance company regulations.

Lost, stolen, or destroyed records **will not** exclude an organization selected for an audit, AUP review, or an investigation from undergoing the scheduled review. DECAL reserves the right to request other supplementary documentation in lieu of supporting records that have been lost, stolen, or destroyed.

19.11 Fraudulent/ Inappropriate Use of Funds

The Pre-K provider shall ensure that expenses charged to the Pre-K funding source are not concurrently charged to another program funding source. The Pre-K provider must ensure that no Pre-K funds are used to pay penalties associated with adverse actions imposed by licensing or governmental agencies. Pre-K expenditures should be identifiable as separate from federal expenditures (e.g., Head Start, CACFP). Misuse of funds shall result in repayment of funds and denial of current and future participation in Georgia's Pre-K Program and/or in prosecution.

Providers that participate in any federal programs operated by DECAL and who are terminated from a federal program because of fraudulent or misrepresentative submission of records and/or inappropriate use of funds as determined by the federal program, shall also be terminated from the Pre-K program.

19.12 Special Allotment Funding

Special Allotment Funding is supplemental funding provided to eligible sites. If supplemental funding is provided, DECAL will provide a separate set of guidelines regarding these funds, outlining how the funds are to be utilized. All Special Allotment Funding must be **expended by the deadline provided**. The provider is responsible for maintaining accurate financial records, including receipts, onsite. All financial records are subject to audit and/or review by various oversight agencies including Georgia's Office of the Inspector General.

20.0 Pre-K Program Change of Ownerships

20.1 Georgia's Pre-K Program Change of Ownership Process

Georgia's Pre-K Program is generally non-transferable. When a center is sold after entering into a Georgia's Pre-K grant agreement with DECAL, change of ownership requirements must be met as determined by DECAL before a determination can be made as to the transferring of the Pre-K program to the new owner. Entities applying for transfer of classes must be agents who are eligible to receive Pre-K funds.

New owners applying for transfer of Pre-K classes must submit the change of ownership application in the DECAL Kids Online Administrative Licensing Application (KOALA) portal. The change of ownership application includes all the information and documentation required by both the Pre-K Division and the Applicant Services Unit of the Child Care Services Division.

A request to continue services does not guarantee continuation of funding for the new owner. Funding decisions are at the discretion of DECAL. Therefore, entities requesting a change of ownership should not base business decisions on the assumption that Georgia's Pre-K will automatically approve the continuation of Pre-K classes once a request is processed. The Pre-K Division will notify the new owner of the continuation status of the Pre-K classes after the Child Care Services Division issues a permit or valid license.

Pre-K payments are placed on hold during the change of ownership process. If the transfer of the Pre-K program is approved, the payment will be released, and the new owner may continue delivery of Pre-K services.

It is understood that all equipment, supplies, and materials purchased for the Pre-K program remain with the program. It is also understood that the new owner accepts the conditions of the Pre-K grant agreement for the current school year. Additionally, if a program is not in good standing when the class(es) is transferred, the probation status is applied to the new owner. The seller is responsible for notifying the new owner of the probationary status.

21.0 Reporting Requirements

21.1 Pre-K Application and Database Access (GAPREK) Participation

Pre-K providers are required to use the GAPREK system to conduct Pre-K related activities (rosters, application, waiting lists). Regular access to the internet and an e-mail address are required to use GAPREK. Using GAPREK allows providers to receive regular Pre-K payments as quickly as possible and reduces duplication of provider efforts related to child roster data. A list of critical reporting dates is included in Appendix V.

21.2 2025 - 2026 School Year Critical Reporting Dates

A list of critical reporting dates for submission of information to DECAL, Pre-K payment dates, and GAPREK data entry dates is provided in Appendix V.

22.0 Community Involvement

22.1 Participation

The existence of local coordinating councils is optional for each county. Providers are encouraged to participate in local collaborative partnerships at the local or county level to better serve children and prevent duplication of services.

22.2 Activities

For counties where local collaborative partnerships exist, the following activities are suggested:

- Update and distribute lists of local community resources to all Pre-K sites in the county.
- Collaborate to provide services for children and families in need.
- Develop procedures for referring children with disabilities.
- Identify providers willing to donate medical services.
- Provide forums for family to share ideas and concerns.
- Provide forums for discussing and solving local concerns/problems of providers and teachers.
- Create and distribute a list of substitute teachers/teacher assistants who could be utilized by all providers
- Provide forums for sharing instructional practices
- Develop a process to share non-confidential wait list information
- Collaborate on recruiting children to ensure that all Pre-K slots are filled
- Provide forums for compiling and submitting suggestions to DECAL

22.3 Policy Development

Local collaborative partnerships that want to establish policy guidelines for providers in their communities must obtain **prior approval** from DECAL before beginning this effort.

23.0 Blended Head Start / Pre-K Classrooms

23.1 Definition

A blended classroom is defined as a class that has funding which is braided using both Georgia's Pre-K and Head Start dollars. Pre-K funding is used for the 6.5-hours of instruction and Head Start funding is used for the wrap-around support services.

23.2 Classroom Delivery

Blended Head Start Pre-K classrooms will operate with a maximum of 20 children enrolled, per Head Start guidelines. Full funding for Blended Head Start Pre-K classes is based on a class of 20; however, Pre-K payments are calculated using the per child funding amount. Classes with fewer than 16 children enrolled will be considered as "Low Roster" classes and may be subject to closure.

23.3 Attendance Requirements

Head Start policies regarding student attendance shall be followed in blended classrooms with respect to disenrollment of students due to chronic absenteeism or tardiness and late pick-ups. Providers must document efforts to contact the family and develop strategies to assist families in resolving attendance issues (contact log, conference notes, etc.).

23.4 Teaching Staff

Lead Teacher

All lead teachers must meet Georgia's Pre-K requirements for credentials and training (See Section 12.3), as well as Head Start requirements for credentials.

Assistant Teacher

All assistant teachers must meet Georgia's Pre-K requirements for credentials and training (See Section 13.3), as well as Head Start requirements for credentials.

23.5 Assessment

Blended programs must implement *Work Sampling Online (WSO)*. All components must be completed, as well as Head Start performance standards must be met. Head Start may have additional health screenings and standardized assessments.

23.6 Family Conferences/Home Visits

Georgia's Pre-K guidelines require two family conferences. Georgia's Pre-K Child Assessment information must be reviewed with family in at least two of the visits/conferences. Programs may use a home visit to share assessment information with parent(s). Head Start requirements may require additional parent involvement activities.

23.7 Classroom Equipment, Materials, and Supplies

Blended classrooms must maintain adequate and appropriate equipment, materials, and supplies for each Pre-K classroom. All items must be in good repair. Refer to the ***Georgia's Pre-K Program Basic Equipment, Materials, and Supplies Inventory List (Appendix E)*** for recommendations.

24.0 Montessori Classrooms

24.1 Prior Approval

A Pre-K program must have approval from DECAL before choosing Montessori as a curriculum. Requests for using a Montessori curriculum should be sent to the program's Pre-K Specialist.

24.2 Teaching Staff

Lead Teacher

All lead teachers must meet Georgia's Pre-K requirements for credentials and training (See Section 12.4 and Appendix T), as well as Montessori requirements for credentials. A program using the Montessori curriculum must have a Montessori credentialed lead teacher.

Assistant Teacher

All assistant teachers must meet Georgia's Pre-K requirements for credentials and training (See Section 13.4 and Appendix U).

24.3 Attendance at Professional Development Training

All lead teachers and assistant teachers working in Georgia's Pre-K classrooms are required to meet the professional development requirement. This includes additional full-time staff in Montessori classrooms. Refer

to Section 15.0 for additional information regarding professional development.

24.4 Classroom Equipment, Materials, and Supplies

Montessori classrooms must maintain adequate and appropriate equipment, materials, and supplies for each Pre-K classroom. All items must be in good repair. Refer to the ***Recommended Montessori Materials List (Appendix R)*** and the ***IQ Guide for the Montessori Learning Environment (Appendix Q)***.

24.5 Assessment

Montessori Programs are required to implement the *Work Sampling System*. All programs are required to use the online version *Work Sampling Online (WSO)*. Refer to Section 4.7 for additional information.

24.6 Family Conferences

Information on each child's performance, including the *WSO Narrative Summary*, should be shared with family at the two documented family conferences required during the school year. Documentation of these conferences should be kept in each child's on-site file.

25.0 Pre-K Inclusion Classrooms

Any Georgia's Pre-K classroom may include a child with a disability. However, a **Georgia's Pre-K Inclusion classroom** refers to a designated classroom in which Georgia's Pre-K, the Local School System, and/or private child care provider implement an approved collaborative instructional model. In this model students with and without an Individualized Education Program (IEP) learn together. These classrooms are approved for a reduced class size.

25.1 Prior Approval

A Pre-K program must have approval from DECAL before operating a Georgia's Pre-K Inclusion classroom. Requests and questions regarding inclusion classrooms should be submitted via email to prekinclusion@decalfga.gov.

25.2 Enrollment

Students attending a Georgia's Pre-K Inclusion classroom who have an IEP are enrolled by the Local School System and placed in the Inclusion classroom. The student(s) with an IEP participate in the same classroom environment and daily opportunities as their peers without IEPs. However, additional support and accommodations may be necessary based on a student's IEP. Students with an IEP may be dually enrolled at the Local School System and in a Georgia's Pre-K Inclusion classroom. All students enrolled in a Georgia's Pre-K Inclusion class must be enrolled in accordance with DECAL Operating Guidelines for Georgia's Pre-K.

25.3 Teaching Staff

Pre-K Inclusion classrooms are staffed with additional personnel to meet the needs of the enrolled students. Generally, the classrooms are staffed with three teachers; a full-time general education lead and assistant teacher, funded by DECAL and a full-time Special Education teacher funded by the Local School System. If an alternative personnel structure is desired, prior approval must be obtained from DECAL.

25.4 Attendance at Professional Development Training

All lead teachers and assistant teachers working in Georgia's Pre-K classrooms are required to meet the professional development requirement. This includes additional full-time staff in inclusion classrooms. Refer to Section 15.0 for additional information regarding professional development.

25.5 Class Size

Georgia's Pre-K Inclusion classrooms have a maximum of six students with an IEP. These classrooms have a maximum class size of 18 students.

25.6 Funding

The maximum class size for a Pre-K Inclusion classroom is 18. However, Inclusion classes will be paid for full enrollment of 20 students.

25.7 Family Conferences

Information on each child's performance, including the *WSO Narrative Summary* should be shared with families at the two documented conferences required during the school year. Documentation of these conferences should be kept in each child's on-site file.