



The GA Pre-K 411: Teacher Edition

Happy New Year!



Welcome to 2025 and to the second half of the school year! We hope you found JOY in the holidays and have returned to the classroom rested, rejuvenated, and excited. As true for adults and children, returning to our usual routines after the break can be challenging, so remember to be patient and extend grace as you spend a little bit of extra time reviewing your rules, routines and expectations.

There's a lot about Pre-K to look forward to this second half of the school year to include our upcoming Inclusive Early Learning Week, the opportunity for you to apply to be one of our next Teachers of the Year, Children's Mental Health Week, and of course, all the fun themes, activities, and field trips you have planned for your students.

Thank you for the hard work you do each day and for the many ways you positively interact with your students and their families. Georgia's early learners are lucky to have you!

Happy Winter + Happy Reading!

*Georgia's
Pre-K :)*

In this newsletter you can find...

Save the Date for Inclusive Early Learning Week

The Power of Family Engagement

DECAL Scholars

You asked; we answered! Q+A time!

Teacher Training Information

WSO Tips + Reminders

Inclusion in GA Pre-K
A word from TOTY Rachel Robertson

GA Seeds: Inclusion & Behavior Support



Please join us for Inclusive Early Learning Week, February 10-14, 2025.

The Inclusion and Behavior Support unit is partnering with other divisions at DECAL to focus on Inclusive Early Learning during the week of

Valentine's Day. We invite you to engage in activities to raise awareness to the importance of inclusive practices in the classroom and in the community to support all children. You will have opportunities to participate in contests, receive trainings, and learn ways to engage the children and families of your program.

To learn more about the activities of the week, click on the QR code and listen to our podcast episode airing January 22nd!



Agency Awareness

The Power and Importance of Family Engagement



Family engagement during the earliest years of a child's life is one of the most powerful predictors of a child's development. Families are children's first teachers, and it is the quality of parent-child relationships and interactions that create the foundational skills that children need to be successful in school and in life. DECAL defines Family Engagement as *the shared responsibility of families, early education programs, schools, and communities to actively promote, support, and sustain family well-being, healthy child development, strong family-child relationships, and lifelong learning for all children and families*. Families come in all shapes and sizes, and can consist of parents, grandparents, extended family, foster parents or other adults who are raising and caring for a child. Programs must be sensitive to cultural definitions of family and be flexible and inclusive of all families in family engagement strategies.

Engaging with families helps to strengthen them-and benefits your program, too! The positive outcomes of engaged parents are powerful and can include increased support for children's learning at home, empowered parents, and improved family well-being. Children receive benefits like improved cognitive development and academic performance, better social-emotional development, and improved health. When families are engaged in your program, and experience positive family-provider relationships, they report feeling more comfortable and satisfied with the program. In addition, families are more likely to volunteer and participate when they feel supported and welcome in their child's program.

"Family Engagement in Child Care Programs" is a **free training** in the Georgia Professional Development System (GaPDS) that provides strategies for early care and learning programs to partner with families to improve child outcomes. This self-paced training is available in English and Spanish, can be easily accessed on GaPDS' Online Learning Library (OLLI) and providers who complete it get 1 hour of training credit.

"Family Engagement in Child Care Programs" covers the following topics and objectives:

- The many types of families
- The importance of building strong relationships with families
- The components of the Family Strengthening Protective Factors Framework
- Integrating the Protective Factors Framework into child care programs
- Building relationships with all families



To find this training, log into gapds.decal.ga.gov and select "Find OLLI Trainings" under the Trainings tab. Then search for "**Family Engagement in Child Care Programs**". If you have any questions or would like more information, contact us at childdevelopment@decal.ga.gov.

DECAL Scholars

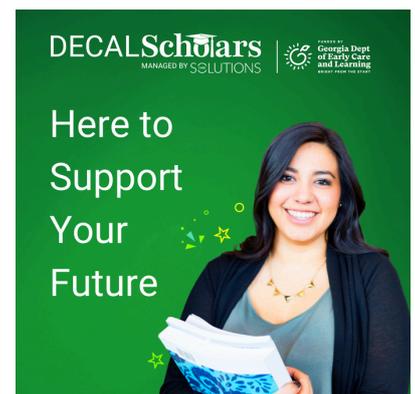
DECAL Scholars
MANAGED BY SOLUTIONS

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

Thinking about going back to school to earn your next degree or credential in early childhood education?

DECAL Scholars offers financial assistance to help early care and education professionals enhance their credentials. Scholarships cover up to 80% of tuition and mandatory fees per semester at technical colleges and public colleges/universities in Georgia or up to \$2,496 per semester of tuition and fees at private colleges/universities in Georgia. In addition, recipients also receive a \$250(+) stipend. Eligible degrees and credentials include the Technical Certificate of Credit, Technical College Diploma, Associate Degree, and Bachelor's Degree. Scholarships are also available for the Montessori credential.

For more information about scholarships offered by DECAL Scholars, visit [//bit.ly/DECALScholarship](http://bit.ly/DECALScholarship)



The Pre-K Scoop



Q: Why do I need to have a GaPDS profile?

A. All Georgia's Pre-K teachers are required to maintain an active and up-to-date Georgia Professional Development System (GaPDS) profile that accurately reflects their current educational credentials. GaPDS serves as the official platform for verifying teachers' qualifications and is directly tied to the State Salary Scale. Additionally, a GaPDS number is necessary for registration in the annual Pre-K training, and the email address associated with the GaPDS profile is the designated point of contact for receiving training notifications. <https://gapds.dec.ga.gov/>

Q. How are Creditable Years of Experience (CYE) defined for Georgia's Pre-K Lead Teachers?

A. CYE are defined as all years taught as a full-time lead teacher in a GA'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 for six months of the school year (60%) to receive credit for one full year. CYE is subject to audit and documentation may be requested. If your employer has questions about CYE, they can contact Pre-K Business Operations.

DECAL Teacher Training

Be sure to read your confirmation email from GaPDS Support (gapds@dec.ga.gov) completely so you can save the date and make appropriate arrangements for class coverage, travel, children, pets and other obligations.

Before attending **Understanding Challenging Behavior** or **New Lead or Assistant Teacher Training** you MUST watch the 1-hour [Pyramid Model overview podcast](#) and complete this [survey](#).

Remember that every training has online coursework to be completed after attending face-to-face training. You will find instructions for logging in and the link to the platform here: [Online Coursework - Best Practices Training \(gsu.edu\)](#) It is recommended that you complete the quiz and assignment within four weeks of attending training.



The **deadline** to complete all online components is 4:00pm on March 26th.

Click the **PLAY** button to watch a video to learn how to access your Online Coursework!



WSO Tips + Reminders

Welcome to PERIOD 2.

- If you have not already done so, change the Period setting on the 'Enter Evidence' screen from Collection Period 1 to Collection Period 2. This will not happen automatically because Pre-K calendars vary from program to program.
- If you have not finalized your Period 1 Checklists, please do so immediately.
- The MAP is a great tool to use to plan for assessment. <https://bestpractices.gsu.edu/resources/assessment/>
- If you need assistance with WSO, submit a WSO Online Help Ticket at: <http://www.dec.ga.gov/Prek/PreKChildAssessmentProgram.aspx>. Do not contact Pearson for help; DECAL is the first point of contact regarding WSO Support for Georgia teachers.





A Word from Pre-K Teacher of the Year, Rachel Robertson



Inclusion in Georgia's Pre-K

Hello! My name is Rachel Robertson, and I am one of Georgia's Pre-K Teachers of the Year. I teach an inclusion class at Oconee Preschool Academy with a reduced class size of eighteen students. Six of our students have IEPs, and I have a full-time assistant. I also have an amazing special education co teacher. We have clear expectations and routines in our classroom. This helps our students thrive within the structure of our day. We all work together as a team to support our students and make sure they have a great year.

I believe everyone benefits from the inclusion model. If you walked into our classroom, it would look like any other classroom. We meet the students where they are, differentiate instruction, play, learn, and most importantly have fun. Everyone has different strengths and talents. To see students forming friendships, learning from each other, working together, and growing throughout the year is amazing.

As an inclusion teacher I need to be creative when planning for instruction. I enjoy brainstorming and researching new ways to modify and differentiate instruction for my students of all abilities. Small group instruction is one area that is clearly differentiated in our classroom. We primarily focus on one or two standards per small group. The delivery of instruction and activities will vary based on each child's needs. I challenge myself to find fun and engaging activities for all the weekly small groups.

We also differentiate instruction during whole group learning. We regularly provide visual cues, encourage the use of environmental print clues, and provide verbal prompts for students who need a little more support answering questions. We also encourage the students to support each other by giving them plenty of time to interact during large group learning time. One of my favorite strategies is to have the children think-pair-and share with their elbow partner on the rug.

We use a variety of tools and strategies to support social emotional learning. We have two calm down areas where students can go and take breaks as needed. These areas have several calming items including pillows, blankets, sensory bottles, weighted stuffed animals, and fidget tools. Students know they can go to these areas throughout the day. We also use token boards for individual students as needed. We focus on one behavior that needs modification, and the child earns tokens when they model the desired behavior. The children love choosing a reward to work towards.



Building friendships and relationships are a big priority in our classroom. We read a variety of social stories throughout the year, which helps open conversations about feelings. We often role play different scenarios afterwards and let the children take turns working through different problems. We also love to play team building games. The kids enjoy working together toward a common goal. We spend a lot of time sitting and playing with the children during center time and outside. It's the perfect time to model the behaviors of a good friend and help children talk through their feelings and problems.

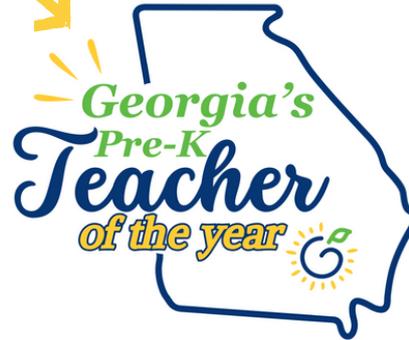
I want to end by sharing how much I believe in the inclusion model. Teaching the inclusion class has been the highlight of my career. If I had to narrow it down to my favorite part of teaching in an inclusive classroom, it is that our students learn to demonstrate kindness, empathy, and acceptance. I don't think it gets much better than that.



Extra, Extra!



THE APPLICATION FOR
2025-2026 GA PRE-K TOTY
WILL OPEN MARCH 3RD.
TO LEARN ABOUT THE TOTY
QUALIFICATIONS AND
RESPONSIBILITIES,
[CLICK HERE.](#)



GaPDS Account Verification



Remember to keep your [GaPDS](#) profile as up to date and current as possible. Your salary is tied to your credentials and your credentials are verified through the [GaPDS](#) system.

Need help? Check out the Early Care and Learning Professional help files and FAQ's here: <https://gapds.dec.state.ga.us/Shared/HelpContent.aspx?c=pnlEarlyCareandLearning>.



Winter Lesson Plan Resources

Brrr! It's cold outside! Warm up with a cup of hot chocolate and check out the wonderful winter activity ideas from our friends at Best Practices! Visit - <https://bestpractices.gsu.edu/resources/otags/winter-ideas/> or click in the cloud below.



Thank you for reading!

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Join us weekly on the [DECAL Download Podcast](#)

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