



The GA Pre-K 411: Teacher Edition

Spring is here!



It's that time of year when energy levels rise as everyone is excited for the longer days, upcoming holidays and field trips, and all of the signs of Spring you can see around us in nature.

As a teacher, you are likely over planning your school days to ensure you have plenty to do to keep your students engaged and learning while simultaneously capturing an abundance of both formal and informal assessment to guide you as we get closer to May. You might also be taking advantage of the warm, sunny days and facilitating music with music, story times, or science experiments outdoors. And, hopefully, you are remembering to have fun with your students and enjoy these last few months with them before they are off to Kindergarten.

As the countdown to May nears, remember to take a moment and reflect on the progress, gains, and successes that have happened in your classroom this year. Thank you for all you do!

Happy Spring + Happy Reading!

*Georgia's
Pre-K :)*

In this newsletter you can find...

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Children's Mental
Health Week

GA Parent
Leadership Month

Inclusion Mini
Grant Opportunity

You asked; we
answered!
Q+A time!

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Children's Mental Health Week

DECAL is excited to celebrate Children's Mental Health Week May 5-9.

Once again, we have many fun activities planned, and we look forward to recognizing the importance of children's mental health not just this week, but every day!

Children develop social and emotional skills—mental health—through strong, nurturing relationships with the adults in their lives. There is a window of opportunity in early childhood to establish the foundation for a child's emotional wellbeing throughout life. During Children's Mental Health Week, we promote activities that help children develop social emotional skills. We also celebrate the profound impact of early learning professionals and all caregivers on the emotional wellbeing of young children.

Keep an eye out for this year's resources + activities on the [CMHW webpage on our website!](#)



Agency Awareness

March is Georgia Parent Leadership Month



Having families that are engaged in their child's program and school is one of the most powerful predictors of success for a child in all areas: academically, emotionally and socially. Every family is unique and brings their own capacities, talents, competencies, visions, values, and hopes to their child's child care program. Family leadership in childcare programs provides a way for families to be engaged and included in their child's education and success. There are many ways to support family leadership in your program. Start by engaging families in the different parts of your program planning and decision making. To effectively communicate with families, we suggest you begin with a survey. It is important to gather information about how families would like to be involved, the best times to reach them, and what communication tools they prefer.

You may want to consider adding a Family Advisory Council or Parent-Teacher Organization to your program. These can benefit programs and families in several ways, including increasing understanding between families and programs, allowing for a stronger family voice in your program, and allowing families to share real-life experiences and provide constructive feedback with the programs, which can improve the overall quality of the program.

Taking family engagement to the next step and fostering family leadership benefits both child care programs and families alike! If you need support in starting a family leadership program, reach out to our DECAL Child and Family Development unit at childdevelopment@decals.ga.gov.



Inclusion Mini Grant Opportunity



The Inclusion Mini Grant Program is designed to support early learning providers in creating environments that support the inclusion of children with disabilities. Eligible providers can receive up to \$2,500 to purchase materials or equipment to ensure children with disabilities have equitable access to and opportunities to participate in their learning environment.

Receiving materials for children with disabilities can significantly enhance a Georgia's Pre-K classroom in several ways:

- **Promotes Inclusion:** Inclusive classrooms allow children with and without disabilities to learn together. This fosters a sense of community and teaches all children empathy and understanding.
- **Supports Individual Needs:** Adaptive equipment and materials help children with disabilities participate fully in classroom activities. These tools can address specific challenges and promote independence.
- **Enhance Learning:** Specialized materials can cater to different learning styles and needs, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to succeed. This might include visual aids, sensory toys, or modified learning tools.
- **Encourages Development:** Early intervention services and special education resources can support the developmental milestones of children with disabilities, helping them to thrive alongside their peers.
- **Creates a Safe Environment:** Properly arranged classroom furnishings and accessible materials ensure that all children can move around and engage with their environment safely.

Overall, the materials purchased with Inclusion Mini Grant funds will help create a more inclusive, supportive, and effective learning environment for all children.

To be eligible to receive an Inclusion Mini Grant, a provider must:

- Be a licensed childcare provider or local school system in good standing with DECAL
- Be actively participating in coaching supports with an Inclusion and Behavior Support Specialist
- Have at least one child with a diagnosed disability enrolled in the classroom receiving coaching support from one of our Inclusion and Behavior Support Specialists
- Complete required training:
 - Complete the "Count Me In!" module on Georgia's Online Learning Library Initiative (OLLI) or participate in the "Inclusion Starts with 'I'" training series.

For more information, contact the SEEDS Helpline at inclusion@decals.ga.gov or 1-833-354-4357.

The Pre-K Scoop



Q: I will be changing Pre-K employers next school year. What documentation do I need to support my years of creditable service (CYE)?

A. Some examples of CYE documentation include:

- Employment contracts
- Letters from human resources or former employers
- Experience Verification forms completed by the employer
- Out of state credentials with matching certification
- GAPSC Foreign Credential Report
- GA PREK Lead Teacher experience
- K-12 Certified Public School experience

Q. I have updated my email address in GaPDS, but messages from the Online Coursework Platform (Strategic View) are not coming to me. What should I do?

A. Your messages are likely still going to the email account you used when you set up your GaPDS account. If you no longer have access to that account, you can ask Best Practices to update your email address in the Online Coursework Platform by completing a help ticket at this link: [Best Practices Training Contact and Help - Best Practices Training](#)

Summer Transition Program

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

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

Rising Pre-K – for students who are age eligible for Georgia's Pre-K in the fall (4 years of age by September 1st) and whose home language is Spanish

Rising Kindergarten – for students who are age eligible for Kindergarten (5 years of age by September 1st) in the fall

Programs across the state are applying to host the program now and by Mid-April we should have a list of this summer's locations on the [STP page of our website](#). Please consider this resource for any of your students who did not attend your program all year or who attended but need more support before Kindergarten in the fall.

Interested in teaching STP? Schools hire for their own programs. They can post open positions on our website [here](#).

WSO Tips + Reminders

- Checklists should be well underway at this point in the assessment period for all children actively enrolled and attending your program.
- At this time, there are over 15,000 checklists for period 2 that have not yet been started. If you have children in WSO that are no longer enrolled, please archive them in WSO. If you have not yet started checklists for all children in your class, please get started immediately.

Looking ahead:

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

If you need assistance with WSO, submit a WSO Online Help Ticket at:

<http://www.decal.ga.gov/Prek/PreKChildAssessmentProgram.aspx>.



A Word from Pre-K Teacher of the Year, Elizabeth Arthur

————— ♡ ♡ ♡ ————— The Impact of Our Pre-K Class Garden

What started as a small idea in our Pre-K class quickly blossomed into a large-scale project, engaging students, staff, and the local community. A handful of children showing an interest in farming ended up changing the life of my classroom dramatically. The garden has become more than just a project, it is a way of life in our classroom.

With the garden hands-on experiences, we are equipping students with the knowledge and skills they need to be lifelong gardeners and stewards of the environment. Are the plants in straight rows, absolutely not and we may have a sweet potato vine pop up with the watermelons but the joy and laughter that is shared in the garden is priceless. Every day in the garden brings new experiences. One morning this year we were going on a letter hunt in the garden and came back not only with the 26 letters but enough caterpillars for all of our lower grade classes. For most students in my class this was the very first time they had ever experienced observing a life cycle of any kind. To experience the metamorphosis of a butterfly amazes me every time.

Our children are empowered to be the very best that they can be, to believe in themselves, and to embrace a love of learning. The garden helps to ensure this happens. Incubating chicken eggs has become an annual favorite in our classroom, allowing students to experience the wonder of life cycles firsthand. Bookbags get dropped at the door and children are running to check on the eggs and then baby chicks when they hatch. Checking on the chickens each day is a true highlight. I think we may have the hardest egg shells in the world. Mealworms are given to chickens to strengthen the shells of the egg. When you have 20 students wanting to give the chickens a treat every day that is what you end up with. It takes weeks for some to muster up the courage to get their hands dirty and engage in this experience. But when they do, this simple act in immersive learning fosters curiosity and confidence that my students will carry with them forever. I think our class is one of a few that prepared green eggs and ham with eggs from our own class coop.



From the beginning each year, the children play a role in every decision. For the garden they helped choose a location with optimal sunlight, collaborated in teams to design raised beds, and took part in every step of the process. High school agriculture and woodshop students contributed their skills to bring our vision to life.

Once installation was complete, the real work began. When two dump truck loads of soil were delivered, only a small machine called "Dingo" could fit between the buildings to move the dirt. I was determined that my class would be the first to plant crops, so instead of waiting weeks for a company to assist, I took a crash course in operating heavy machinery. As I moved dirt, one little girl marveled at the sight, realizing that women can operate machinery too. That moment resonated with all of us, demonstrating that learning takes many forms beyond the classroom.

Since then, our garden has expanded to include a thriving chicken coop where the chickens adore the students as much as the students adore them. We have compost bins, rain barrels, and a butterfly garden established in collaboration with our local garden club. Last year we added a solar greenhouse to further our sustainability efforts.



We were all amazed at how warm the greenhouse stayed this winter without using electricity. My students enthusiastically teach their peers about composting, rainwater conservation, and pollinator-friendly plants.



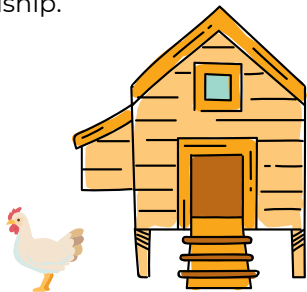
One memorable day, our assistant principal joined us in the garden just as a child discovered a worm. "Wow, what a long worm," he remarked. The student proudly responded, "It's a decomposer!" Immersed in the garden, my students truly grasp natural and scientific processes. They confidently use terms like "decomposer" and "pollinator," explaining photosynthesis to their peers, upperclassmen and teachers alike.



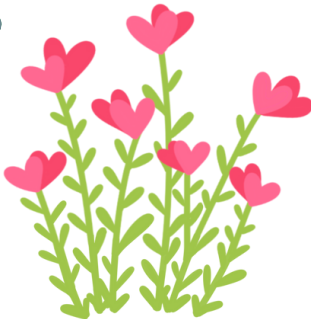
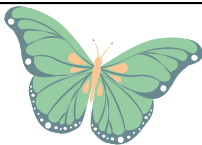
The greatest reward is seeing my students pull a wagon full of vegetables and fruits into the lunchroom, proudly sharing their harvest with the cafeteria staff. When a fifth-grader tells my students that the collard greens were the best they've ever had, their sense of accomplishment is unmatched. No lesson plan or textbook can replicate the pride and responsibility that come from giving back to their community through real-world experiences.

Everyone loves visiting the garden. Other grade levels have even set up bird feeders by their windows, hoping for a visit from our chickens. While my initial goal was to impact my classroom and two other Pre-K classes, our garden has evolved into something far greater.

Our mission is to ensure every child meets their full potential. By nurturing their natural curiosity and talents, we are preparing them not just for academic success, but for a lifetime of discovery, innovation, and environmental stewardship.



Spring Lesson Plan Resources



Spring is nature's way of saying, 'Let's party!' Get the party started with some help from our friends at Best Practices! Check out their Spring ideas to include in your upcoming lessons such as Counting Carrot Tops, Ice Cream Shop, and various Plant ideas. Visit - <https://bestpractices.gsu.edu/resources/otags/otags-spring-ideas/>.

Thank you for reading!

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