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## **Georgia's Pre-K Program Returns for Post-Pandemic 2021-2022 School Year**

### *Classes to Meet In-Person after Year of In-Person, Virtual, and Hybrid*

**ATLANTA, Ga., (July 16, 2021)** – School bells will soon ring for more than 60,000 of Georgia's youngest learners as Georgia's Pre-K Program begins the new school year. The first day of Georgia's Pre-K Program will vary based on school system and child care provider. It starts as early as July 19, in Taliaferro County and as late as the week of September 6, in Murray and Webster counties. Most Georgia school systems begin the first week of August.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020-2021 school year saw a decline in Pre-K attendance from more than 80,000 students statewide to approximately 60,000 students. During the pandemic, Pre-K providers could choose to offer classes in-person, virtually, or a hybrid of in person and virtual. This year classes are expected to return to the more traditional in-person format.

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

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

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

- Send your child to school in clothes they can manage independently in the bathroom.
- Make sure your child’s shoes are comfortable for playtime: No flip-flops or tennis shoes with Velcro.
- Visit the classroom before school starts, so children are familiar with the new surroundings.
- Tell your child’s teacher about any fears she/he may have.
- Discuss any special dietary needs or allergies your child may have with the teacher and ask her/him to explain program policies relating to children’s allergies.
- Complete necessary forms or releases your Pre-K provider may require for dispensing medication during the school day.
- Locate the bathroom with your child and determine special bathroom routines the school observes.
- Allow extra time for the first day: Make sure you have time to say good-bye.
- Ask if your child can bring a familiar blanket for rest time: Can they bring a favorite stuffed animal?
- Send a family photo in your child’s backpack in case they get lonely.

Georgia’s Pre-K Program was also active over the summer. For the 11th year, DECAL offered the Summer Transition Program, a six-week intensive academic program for Rising Pre-K and Rising Kindergarten students. The program for Rising Kindergarten students was created to support students who did not attend Georgia’s Pre-K Program or Head Start or who need additional help before entering Kindergarten. The program for Rising Pre-K students was created to prepare children who are dual language learners to enter Georgia’s Pre-K program. This year DECAL funded 318 Rising Kindergarten classes, more than double the previous number because of COVID learning loss. DECAL funded 68 Rising Pre-K classes.

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

### **About DECAL**

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

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