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Georgia's Pre-K Program Prepares for 2026–2027 School Year

This Year Marks the 34th Year of Pre-K in Georgia

ATLANTA, Ga., (July 24, 2026) – School bells are ringing for the state's youngest learners as Georgia's Pre-K Program begins its 34th 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 24 in Chattooga County and as late as the week of September 3 in Murray and Webster counties. Most Georgia school systems begin classes during the first two weeks of August.

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

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

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

- Attend Pre-K orientation at the school where your child will be attending. Visit the classroom so your child is familiar with the new surroundings and will be able to meet their teachers.
- Practice your morning routine days before the actual first day of school.
- Pick out your child's outfit the night before, have everything you will need ready to go!
- Send your child to school in clothes they can manage independently in the bathroom.
- Make sure your child's shoes are comfortable and safe for playtime, close-toed shoes are a good choice.
- 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 of school once you arrive. 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.

Last year, Georgia achieved a historic milestone by meeting all 10 benchmarks in the annual NIEER State of Pre-K Report Card for the 2024–2025 school year. This accomplishment marked a major step forward for the state's early childhood education system and underscored Georgia's ongoing commitment to providing high-quality pre-kindergarten experiences for its youngest learners.

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.decal.ga.gov.