



Georgia
Study of
**Early Care
and Education**
**Child Care
Center
Findings**

Executive Summary

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Executive summaries and full reports from this study are available at www.dec.al.ga.gov.

Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Child Care Center Findings

Executive Summary

Nationwide, most young children are cared for regularly by someone other than their parents. Twenty percent (20%) of all infants and toddlers and 44% of all three- and four-year-olds are served in a center-based care arrangement. The percentages are higher in the Southeastern part of the US: 25% of all infants and toddlers and 56% of preschoolers are served in child care centers.¹ Research has demonstrated a modest but statistically significant link² between the quality of child care and children's academic and social skills.^{3,4,5} Research on brain development has underscored the importance of providing high quality experiences for young children.^{6,7} Thus, improving child care quality is an important strategy for supporting children's readiness for school success.

Purpose

The primary purpose of this statewide study was to describe the quality of early care and education and types of services provided to young children throughout the state of Georgia, using a representative sample of child care centers and Georgia's Pre-K Programs.

Key Findings

Findings from this study suggest that administrators and teachers in licensed child care centers are working hard to serve young children and their families. Almost all of the programs met or exceeded the basic state licensing requirements for group size and ratio of children per adult. Lead and assistant teachers across all classroom types reported participating in more than 15 hours of training in the past year. Most program administrators reported using a curriculum in their program and child assessments to guide instruction. Most also reported providing a range of services and supports to the families they serve.

Study Description

In 2008–09, FPG conducted a statewide study of 173 randomly selected licensed child care centers and Georgia's Pre-Kindergarten programs, collecting data on the observed classroom quality and program characteristics.

Of the 173 programs in the study, 112 were child care centers and 61 were public schools. This Executive Summary highlights findings from infant, toddler, and preschool classrooms in child care centers.

Data were collected between September 2008 and May 2009. Data were gathered at the program and classroom levels using multiple methods: observation by an independent data collector, review of written documents, and self-report of directors and teachers.

Findings about Georgia's Pre-K classrooms, both in centers and schools, can be found in a companion report, *Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Findings from Georgia's Pre-K Program*.

On average, center-based care across Georgia was of “low” to “medium” quality. The mean total score on the Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R)⁸ was 2.74 (see Figure 1; scores range from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating higher quality). For preschool classrooms that are not part of Georgia’s Pre-K Program, the mean total score on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R)⁹ was 3.39 (see Figure 2; scores range from 1 to 7).

The quality of care for infants and toddlers was lower than the quality of care for preschoolers. Thirty-five percent (35%) of preschool classrooms and 67% of infant/toddler classrooms were rated as having low quality (i.e., ITERS-R or ECERS-R mean total score < 3.0). Children in these low-quality classrooms likely experience environments that are inadequate for their health and safety and do not promote their cognitive and social-emotional development.

Figure 1. Quality of Infant/Toddler Classrooms in Child Care Centers (as measured by the ITERS-R)

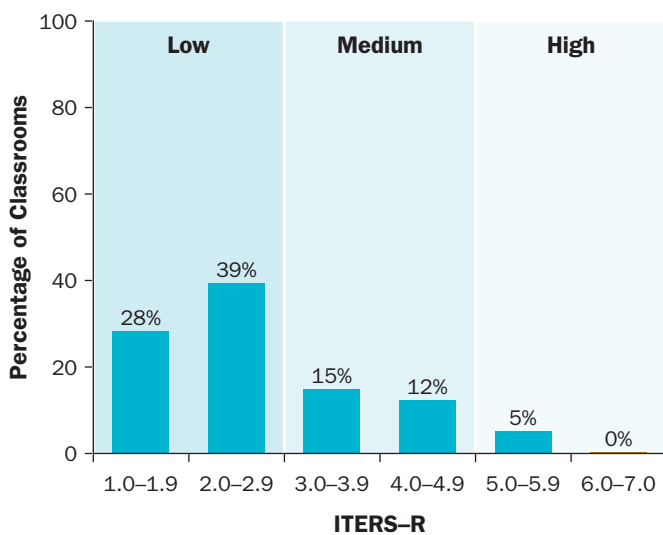
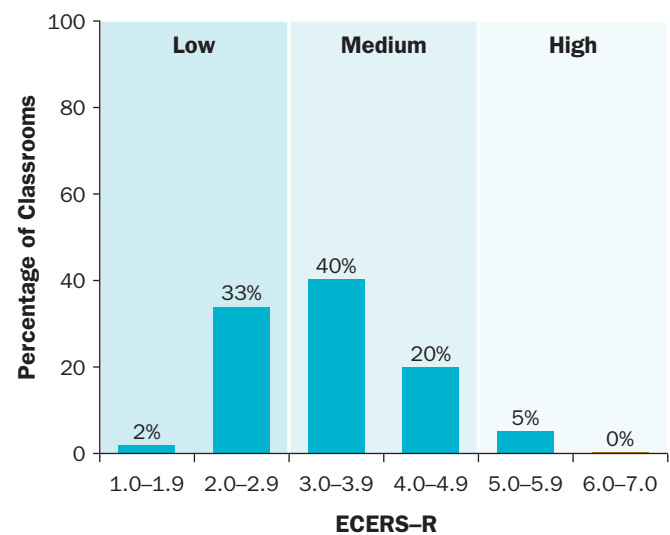


Figure 2. Quality of Georgia’s Preschool Classrooms (not part of Georgia’s Pre-K Program) in Child Care Centers (as measured by the ECERS-R)



Conclusions and Recommendations

- **The findings of this study underscore the need for improving the quality of center-based care for children across Georgia.** The data suggest that very few licensed child care centers provide to young children the care and education that is generally considered “high” quality. Specifically, only 5% of infant/toddler classrooms and 5% of preschool classrooms were rated as high quality (i.e., ITERS–R or ECERS–R mean total score ≥ 5). If Georgia wants to support young children’s development and success in school, many more early care and education classrooms need to provide high quality care. Moving low-quality classrooms into the medium range of quality would also be an improvement.
- **Additional efforts are needed to improve the quality of infant/toddler center-based care in Georgia.** It is particularly troubling that two-thirds of infant/toddler classrooms in the study were rated as low quality. With research documenting the importance of early brain development,¹⁰ it seems especially important to strengthen the quality of center-based care for infants and toddlers in Georgia.
- **Although multiple strategies are needed, professional development—education, training, and technical assistance—is important for improving the quality of care for Georgia’s young children.** Extra supports may be needed to meet the needs of the sizable portion of teachers without degrees beyond high school. Teachers may benefit from more effective or intensive education, training, and technical assistance to ensure that new knowledge and skills are translated into practice.^{11, 12, 13} With so many classrooms in the low quality range—particularly those serving infants and toddlers—special efforts may be needed to first emphasize basic health and safety issues of caring for young children as well as a general understanding of child development.
- **Improving the quality of care will require additional funds.** Although Bright from the Start: Department of Early Care and Learning can improve quality by using these study findings to help decide how best to invest state funds, dramatically improving the quality of care for all children in Georgia will require additional resources. A combination of both public and private investments are likely needed to ensure that young children in Georgia—from the time they are babies until they start kindergarten—receive the high quality early care and education they need to support their school success.

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