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Georgia's Pre-K Program set to welcome 84,000 Four Year Olds

*Program Recognized Nationally as Among the Best Based on
Teacher Qualifications, Quality Standards, and Enrollment*

ATLANTA, Ga., (July 12, 2015) – School bells will be ringing soon for up to 84,000 four year olds attending Georgia's Pre-K Program. The voluntary, lottery-funded Pre-K program has been recognized as one of the top programs in the nation based on quality standards, teacher qualifications, and enrollment. The program is beginning its 24th year.

The first day of Georgia's Pre-K year is usually based on the local school system calendar. Taliaferro County is the first to start on July 14, followed by Montgomery and Terrell counties July 27. More than 70 percent of Georgia public schools start the week of August 1.

Georgia's Pre-K Program is unique especially in its access and in its delivery model. First, any age eligible child residing in Georgia may attend the program regardless of family income. Second, the program is provided through a public-private partnership involving local school systems, private for profit and nonprofit child care centers, military bases, colleges and universities, and other facilities. In the 2015-2016 school year, approximately 60 percent of all four year olds in Georgia were served by state funded Pre-K.

Georgia's Pre-K Program Welcomes 84,000 Four Year Olds – Page 2

“Pre-K is an exciting time as our state’s youngest learners begin their formal educational journey,” said Amy M. Jacobs, commissioner of Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). “Recent independent studies have shown that Georgia’s Pre-K helps four year olds build a solid foundation for lifelong learning with significant impacts in school readiness skills in language, literacy, and math.”

“Starting school is a significant time for children and families,” said Susan Adams, assistant commissioner for Georgia’s Pre-K Program and Instructional Supports. “Many children enrolling in Pre-K are ‘leaving home’ for their first school experience. For this reason we take our roles seriously, and we work really hard to provide Georgia’s children with positive and meaningful experiences.”

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

- Start a routine of “early to bed” and “school wake-up time” several weeks before Pre-K begins so your child has time to adjust to the new schedule.
- After walking your child to class on the first day of school, try not to linger too long in the classroom even if your child appears upset. Typically once children are by themselves with the teachers and their new friends, they feel less apprehensive and “settle” into their new setting more easily.
- Remember that the more calm and positive you are about your child starting Pre-K, the more confident and less anxious your child will be about this new adventure. Make this an exciting and fun time for your child!
- Send your child to school in clothes they can manage independently in the bathroom: No overalls.
- Make sure your child’s shoes are comfortable for playtime. Slip-on shoes or shoes with Velcro fasteners are easiest for children to manage.
- Visit the classroom before school starts so children are familiar with the new surroundings.
- Tell your child’s teacher about any fears he or she may have.
- Inform the teacher of any special dietary needs or allergies your child has and ask the teacher about the program’s policies relating to meals.
- 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 ask the teacher about any special bathroom routines the school observes.

- Build in extra time for the first day: Make sure you have time to say good-bye.
- Determine if your child needs a 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.
- Attend Pre-K orientation. This is a good time to learn about program policies and visit the classroom.

About Bright from the Start

Bright from the Start: 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, 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.state.ga.us.