



**Nathan Deal**  
Governor

**Amy M. Jacobs**  
Commissioner

---

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Media Contact: Reg Griffin  
404-656-0239  
[reg.griffin@dec.al.ga.gov](mailto:reg.griffin@dec.al.ga.gov)



## **Georgia's Pre-K Program welcomes over 84,000 Four Year Olds**

### *Nationally Recognized Program Celebrates 25<sup>th</sup> Birthday in the 2017-2018 School Year*

**ATLANTA, Ga., (August 1, 2017)** – All over Georgia school is beginning for over 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. This school year the program is celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Georgia's Pre-K Program is unique especially in its access and in its delivery model. First, the program is accessible to any age eligible child residing in Georgia regardless of family income. Second, the program operates through a public-private partnership as Pre-K classes are offered in local school systems, private for profit and nonprofit child care centers, military bases, colleges and universities, and other facilities. This unique delivery model helps ensure that families have many options in determining the kind of preschool experience they want for their child. In the 2016-2017 school year, approximately 60 percent of all four year olds in Georgia were served by state funded Pre-K.

Usually the first day of Georgia's Pre-K Program aligns with the local school system calendar regardless of the Pre-K setting, i.e., for profit and nonprofit child care centers, military bases, colleges and universities, and other facilities. This year many Pre-K classes began the last week of July. More than 60 percent of public schools (and Pre-K classes) start this week.

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

Georgia's Pre-K Program is administered by the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). For this upcoming school year, DECAL awarded 19 new Pre-K classes, 38 expansion classes at existing programs, and 3,794 continuation classes for a total of 3,851 classes serving 84,722 children.

“Starting Pre-K is an important time for children and families,” said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. “Often it is the first time a child has been away from home and in a school environment. Georgia's Pre-K teachers, directors, and DECAL staff work hard to ensure all children and their families have a positive and successful experience.”

“This year is especially exciting as we celebrate 25 years of providing a quality Pre-K education to Georgia's four year olds,” added Susan Adams, Assistant Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K Program and Instructional Supports. “We have planned many exciting things over the course of this school year and are looking forward to celebrating this important milestone in Georgia.”

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

- For many young children the hardest part of their day is saying goodbye each morning at school. To help with this, develop a “saying goodbye” ritual to use every day but especially those first few days. Your ritual might be as simple as a big “bear hug” or a little more complicated like saying a silly rhyme you've created such as, “I love you and you love me. We will see each other again at 3:00.” Some families like to say something like, “I love you to the moon and back” or use a special handshake each time they say goodbye. Whatever you choose to do, be sure to include your child in crafting it.
- Be positive! The more calm and assured you are about your choice to send your child to Pre-K, the more confident your child will be.
- Create a calm morning by having consistent routines. Children thrive on routine. They need to know what to expect and what the expectations are for them. Having a consistent morning routine such as having breakfast together, packing their lunchbox, and putting on school clothes helps children adjust more easily to the routine of their day and keeps things calm as they prepare for school.
- Before school starts, begin getting children adjusted to an earlier bedtime. They have enjoyed later bedtimes and waking times during the summer but children who aren't well-rested are more easily upset and can be much more uncooperative when you are trying to get out the door each morning. Do yourself and your child a favor by getting them to bed earlier at least a couple of weeks before the start of school.
- After the first few days of school, don't linger in the classroom or outside the classroom door where your child can still see you.

As he begins to feel comfortable in his new environment, say a prompt goodbye; give a quick hug; and assure your child that he will have a wonderful day at school. Prolonging the goodbye only makes it tougher on you and your child. Being consistent with a quick goodbye will help your child adjust more easily to their new routines at school.

- Do not sneak out of the classroom when your child isn't looking. Leaving without saying goodbye, hoping for no tears only makes the separation worse for your child and can make her feel more anxiety and as if she has been tricked or abandoned. Be positive. Say goodbye and reassure her you'll see her that afternoon.
- It's important to remember that starting school and being away from family is sometimes a tough transition for young children and their parents. Children adjust to change at their own pace just as adults do. Some need a little extra time to feel comfortable about their new situation. Your patience, reassurance, and consistency will help your child make the transition and learn to love going to school.
- Dress your child in comfortable clothes and shoes that they can easily manage by themselves.
- Send a family photo with your child on the first day of school. If they are especially anxious or fearful, ask the teacher if the child can hold the photo during the day. Sometimes just seeing a photo of his family will calm a child's anxieties.
- Don't forget that your child's class includes 21 other children who are also there to learn and grow. Point them out to your child as a way of reassuring them that they will have many new friends, many whom they probably already know or recognize.
- Before school begins, take your child on a "dry run" of the route to her school from home. Point out the places they are familiar with along the way and plan something fun to do afterwards.
- Every day, ask your child to share what she did that day. Asking questions such as, "What story did your teacher read?" and "What did you do at small group or center time?" will help your child remember her day and be better able to share what she did.
- If you haven't done so already, make sure your child knows how to use tissue, wash his hands, and can complete simple tasks like zipping/buttoning his jacket or pants. Encourage these self-help skills and make sure your child knows he can do many things without assistance.
- Many young children worry about where they will go to the bathroom. When visiting the classroom before school starts, be sure to show them where the bathroom is in their classroom or the hallway.
- As much as possible, arrange for your child to travel home the first day of school the way she will go home the remainder of the school year. Consistency with daily transportation routines helps to cut down on confusion for your child and her teacher.

### **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.decal.ga.gov](http://www.decal.ga.gov).