

Quick Definition

Educators and policymakers are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of the first five years of life in the development of children's brains and the cognitive, social, emotional and physical foundations of later success. Research has demonstrated that quality early learning programs can have significant and lasting benefits throughout childhood and into early adulthood.¹

Early learning encompasses the variety of early childhood care and education settings that children encounter prior to school entry, including preschool, pre-kindergarten and Head Start. These programs may be offered in private or public settings. Additionally, in recent years researchers and policymakers have expanded the notion of early learning to encompass policies and programs that impact child health and well being for children aged zero to five.

¹ Education Commission of the States. "P-3 Early Learning & the Early Grades." Retrieved September 9, 2011 from <http://www.ecs.org>.

Relevancy to Georgia

Georgia's youngest children deserve an assuring start in life. Yet the promises that should come with being born in one of the wealthiest and most technologically advanced nations in the world remain unfulfilled or broken for many of our state's most vulnerable citizens. Despite the proliferation of irrefutable evidence that the first few years of a child's life lay the groundwork for his or her future growth and success, there is a stark disconnect between the demand for quality health, childcare, and educational programs and our government's commitment to ensuring affordable access to such programs. Policies that target early childhood health, learning, and well being are critical to helping improve the academic achievement and social outcomes of all youth.

Ensuring children aged zero to five have access to enriching early life experiences increases their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical foundations for later success. Parents seeking such experiences for their children in Georgia may choose to enroll their children in Head Start, Georgia Pre-K, or some other private child care setting.

Georgia Head Start

Head Start is a comprehensive federal program serving low-income children and their families. Created in 1964 and launched as an eight-week summer program in 1965, Head Start now provides education, nutrition, health, and social services in schools and community settings to over 980,000 children in all 50 states and U.S. territories.²

The Georgia Head Start Association enhances the capability of local Head Start programs to deliver services to low-income preschool children and their families. There are 30 organizations, including school systems, community agencies, and universities, that operate Head Start and Early Head Start programs in Georgia. Parents can find Head Start services in 157 out of 159 Georgia counties. During the 2008-09 operational year, Georgia Head Start and Georgia Early Head Start enrolled 25,227 families, including 173 pregnant women, 27,552 children ages 3 to 5, and 1,587 children from birth to age 3.³

Georgia Pre-K

In 1993, Georgia piloted a targeted pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) program for 750 at-risk 4-year-olds with funds from the state education budget. In subsequent years, the program has been funded with lottery dollars. In 1995, the program was opened to all 4-year-old children whose parents wanted them to participate, and Georgia became the first state in the country to offer universal pre-kindergarten. In 2010, Georgia also became the first

² In 2009-10, 983,809 children were served in Head Start. Source: National Head Start Association. "Basic Head Start Facts." Retrieved September 2, 2011 from <http://www.nhsa.org>; Georgia Head Start Association. "About Us: History." Retrieved September 2, 2011 from <http://www.georgiaheadstart.org>.

³ Georgia Head Start Association, 2008-2009 Head Start Program Information Report. January 26, 2010.

state to serve one million children in a voluntary, universal, lottery-funded pre-kidnergarten program.⁴

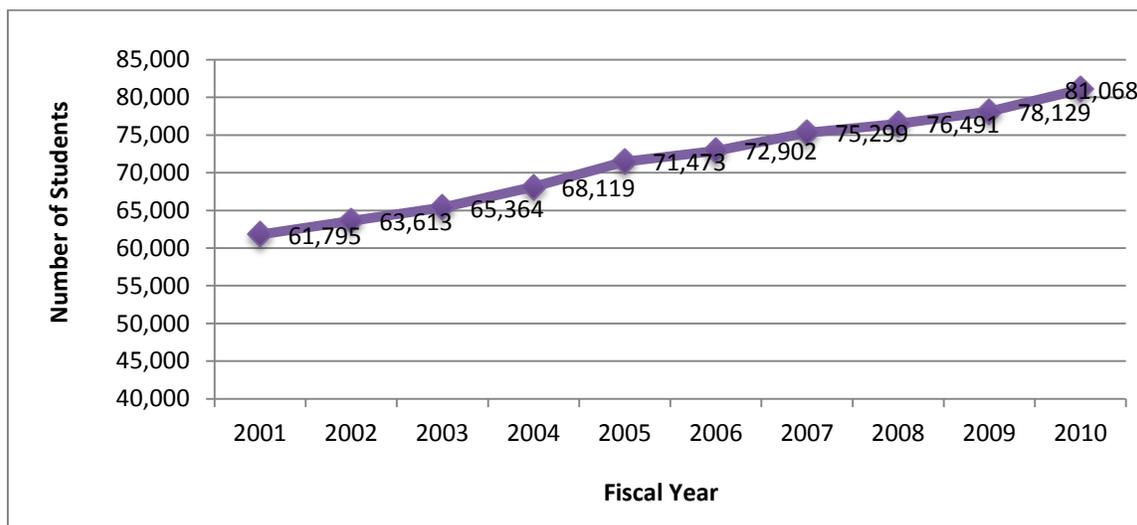
Georgia’s Pre-K program operates as a public-private partnership with program providers from public school systems, private schools, Head Start agencies, postsecondary vocational technical institutes, private and state colleges, private non-profit and for-profit child care learning centers, military bases, faith based institutions, state colleges, and universities. Participating private programs must meet state childcare licensing requirements and public school systems must meet public school accreditation standards.

Georgia Pre-K serves children considered at-risk as well as their more socioeconomically advantaged counterparts. It also serves children from varying racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Access

Though Georgia’s program is designed to be universal, it has consistently underserved the total four-year-old population. During the 2009-10 school year, Georgia’s state Pre-K served approximately 81,068 four-year-olds, which was 57 percent of the total four-year-old population, a 31% increase since 2001.⁵ Annual increases in the number of Pre-K slots available have not kept pace with the growth of Georgia’s 4-year-old population and demand for program services. Thus, access to the state-funded program continues to be problematic for large urban and metropolitan areas. Figure 1 shows enrollment growth of the Pre-K program.

Figure 1 Georgia Pre-K Enrollment: 2001-2010



⁴ Bright from the Start. “Georgia’s Pre-K Program Serves One Million Children.” February 3, 2010. Retrieved from <http://decad.ga.gov>.

⁵ Governor’s Office of Student Achievement. 2009-2010 Pre-Kindergarten Report Card. Retrieved from <http://www.gaosa.org>.

All but one of the 16 states that comprise the Southern Regional Education Board currently operate state-funded pre-kindergarten programs. Yet, as revealed in Figure 2, there is great variation among the enrollment of children in pre-K programs throughout the South.

Quality

In Georgia, Pre-K classroom teachers are required to have a minimum of a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education.⁶ Teacher assistants must have a minimum of: a para-professional certificate; a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential; a Technical Certificate of Credit or a Technical College Diploma in Early Childhood Education; or an Associate's Degree in any field.⁷ A study conducted by the Frank Porter Graham (FPG) Child Development Institute found that 96 percent of teachers in school-based Pre-K and 72 percent of teachers in center-based Pre-K had a Bachelor's degree or higher.⁸

Other measures of quality by the FPG study show that Georgia Pre-K has a mix of strengths and areas for improvement. The study found that 13 percent of Pre-K programs were of low quality, 15 percent were of high quality, and the remaining were of medium quality. Emotional support and classroom organization were of high quality, but instructional support was of low quality. Almost all centers used a curriculum and assessed children to for instructional planning.⁹

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) developed ten research-based quality standards for pre-kindergarten programs, which are used to compare quality standards across the states. Georgia meets nine of the ten quality standards.¹⁰

⁶ Lead teachers with an Early Childhood Education Associate's Degree that were approved in the 2009-10 school year may continue their employment as a Pre-K lead teacher if they remain with the same company.

⁷ Bright from the Start, Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. "2011-2012 School Year Pre-K Providers' Operating Guidelines." Effective July 1, 2011. Retrieved from <http://dec.al.ga.gov>.

⁸ Maxwell, K. L., Early, D. M., Bryant, D., Krauss, S., Hume, K., and Crawford, G. "Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Findings from Georgia's Pre-K Program." The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, FPG Child Development Institute, December 2009.

⁹ Maxwell, K. L., Early, D. M., Bryant, D., Krauss, S., Hume, K., and Crawford, G. "Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Findings from Georgia's Pre-K Program." The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, FPG Child Development Institute, December 2009.

¹⁰ Barnett, W. S., Epstein, D. J., Carolan, M. E., Fitzgerald, J., Ackerman, D. J., & Friedman, A. H. "The State of Preschool 2010: State Preschool Yearbook." National Institute for Early Education Research, 2010.

Table 1. Georgia’s Pre-kindergarten Program Quality, as Measured by NIEER Standards, 2010

Policy	Georgia’s State Requirement	NIEER Quality Benchmark	Does GA Meet Benchmark?
Early learning standards	Comprehensive	Comprehensive	✓
Teacher degree	Associate’s Degree (AA) or Montessori diploma	Bachelor’s Degree (BA)	
Teacher specialized training	Degree in Early Childhood Education or meet Montessori requirements	Specializing in pre-K	✓
Assistant teacher degree	High School Diploma*	Child Development Associate (CDA) or Equivalent	✓
Teacher in-service	15 clock hours	At least 15 hours/year	✓
Maximum class size	20	20 or lower	✓
Staff-child ratio	1:10	1:10 or better	✓
Screening/ referral and support services	Vision, hearing, health, developmental, dental, immunizations, and support services	Vision, hearing, health; and at least 1 support service support services	✓
Meals	Lunch	At least 1/day	✓
Monitoring	Site visits and other monitoring	Site visits	✓

Source: Barnett, W. S. et al. “The State of Preschool 2010: State Preschool Yearbook.” National Institute for Early Education Research, 2008. *Beginning in the 2009-10 school year, teacher assistants will be required to hold at least a Child Development Associate (CDA).

Funding

In 2010, Georgia ranked 20th in the level of state resources devoted to pre-kindergarten programs.¹¹ Georgia’s per-pupil Pre-K expenditure for 2010 was \$4,212, which is less than half of what the state invests in each K-12 pupil. In almost all states, investments in state pre-kindergarten students are a mere fraction of those for K-12 students. Table 2 represents the rankings and state pre-K resources of the 16 states that comprise the

¹¹ Georgia ranks 20th out of the 40 states with publicly funded state Pre-K programs. Source: Barnett, W. S. et al. “The State of Preschool 2010: State Preschool Yearbook.” National Institute for Early Education Research, 2010.

Southern Regional Education Board.¹² Also shown in the table are states' per pupil expenditures for public elementary and secondary (K-12) education. In almost all states, investments in state pre-kindergarten students are a mere fraction of those for K-12 students.

Table 2. State Pre-kindergarten and K-12 Per-Pupil Expenditures, 2007 and 2008			
Rank Among All 50 States for Pre-K Resources	State	State Funding Per Child Enrolled in Pre-K, 2010	State Per-Pupil Expenditure for K-12 Public Education, FY 2009
--	United States	\$4,028	\$10,591
7	Delaware	\$6,795	\$12,109
10	West Virginia	\$5,521	\$10,821
11	Arkansas	\$5,414	\$8,854
13	North Carolina	\$5,239	\$8,518
14	Louisiana	\$4,706	\$10,625
15	Alabama	\$4,554	\$9,042
16	Oklahoma	\$4,477	\$7,878
17	Tennessee	\$4,445	\$7,992
19	Virginia	\$4,221	\$10,928
20	Georgia	\$4,206	\$9,649
21	Maryland	\$4,116	\$13,797
25	Texas	\$3,686	\$8,543
30	Kentucky	\$3,103	\$9,038
34	Florida	\$2,514	\$8,867
38	South Carolina	\$1,446	\$9,228
N/A	Mississippi	No Program	\$7,459

Source: Barnett, W. S. et al. "The State of Preschool 2010: State Preschool Yearbook." National Institute for Early Education Research, 2010.; Zhou, L. "Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Education: Fiscal Year 2009." National Center for Education Statistics, February 2012.

Note: For each category, data given represents the most current figures available. Pre-K resources and K-12 resources are given for different years, and are meant for general comparison only.

Unlike Georgia's K-12 education system, the state's public Pre-K program is not funded through general state revenues. Instead, Georgia funds its Pre-K program through state lottery funds. These lottery funds are also used for HOPE higher education scholarships, resulting in competition between these two programs as revenues have dropped. There

¹² Steve Suits. "Pre-Kindergarten in the South." Southern Education Foundation, 2007.

are advantages to the use of lottery funds, which can produce significant levels of revenue and do not require annual legislative approval. Yet some critics of the lottery funding mechanism have voiced concerns that lotteries are a regressive tax (i.e., low-income individuals typically play the lottery more than those of higher-incomes). Additionally, there is no guaranteed level of funding, as lottery revenue fluctuates with the market.¹³

A reduction in lottery revenue has resulted in significant cuts to the Georgia Pre-K program beginning in the 2011-12 school year. In an effort to save \$54 million, the Governor's revision to Georgia Pre-K includes:

- An increase in class sizes from 20 to 22 children (except in classes serving Head Start children);¹⁴
- A reduction in the number of Pre-K classrooms from 4,215 to 3,909;
- A shortened school calendar from 10 months to 9 months;
- A 10 percent reduction in salaries for lead and assistant teachers;
- A cap on training and experience (T & E) salary increases for teachers; and
- A 6.8 percent reduction in operating costs.

In spite of these cuts, the changes to the program allowed for an additional 2,000 program slots, yielding a projected 84,000 children to be served in the 2011-12 school year.¹⁵

Family and Center-Based Child Care

In Georgia, the majority of children under age 6 spend at least part of their time under the care of someone other than a parent.¹⁶ The FPG Child Development Institute conducted a study that found that 77 percent of Georgia's registered family child care homes were of low quality. The remaining 23 percent were of medium quality and none were of high quality.¹⁷ By comparison, The FPG study of child care centers found that 35 percent of preschool classrooms (that were not a part of Georgia Pre-K) and 67 percent of infant/toddler classrooms were of low quality. Only 5 percent of infant/toddler classrooms and 5 percent of preschool classrooms were rated as high quality. Research indicates that there is a modest but statistically significant link between the quality of child care (including family and center-based care), and children's academic and social

¹³ Stone, D. "Funding the Future: States' Approaches to Pre-K Finance." Pre-K Now, 2008.

¹⁴ Pre-K programs that also serve Head Start children must adhere to the highest standard of the two programs. Head Start has a maximum class size of 20.

¹⁵ Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. "Pre-K FY 2012 Budget: Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Governor's New Pre-K Model." August 15, 2011.

¹⁶ In Georgia, 36 percent of children under age 6 are *not* enrolled in nursery school, preschool, or kindergarten. Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS Count Data Center. "Children Ages 3 to 5 Not Enrolled in Nursery School, Preschool or Kindergarten—2009." Updated November 2010. Retrieved from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>.

¹⁷ Maxwell, K. L., Early, D. M., Bryant, D., Krauss, S., & Hume, K. "Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Family Child Care Findings." The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, FPG Child Development Institute, December 2010.

skills. If we hope for Georgia’s children to develop optimally, we must increase our public and private investment in high-quality family and center-based care.¹⁸

Race to the Top

In 2010, Georgia won a \$400 million Race to the Top (RTT) grant, to improve the state’s public schools. This grant includes an Early Childhood Initiative, which is being led by Bright from the Start: Georgia’s Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). This initiative allows for the creation of a professional development framework for Georgia’s Pre-K teachers, with an emphasis on teacher-child interactions. Utilizing the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), a tool for assessing classroom interactions, DECAL will measure the effectiveness of four different professional development models over the course of three years.¹⁹

In response to this research, Georgia’s Bright From the Start: Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) is taking steps that are aimed at maintaining and improving quality and increasing statewide accessibility, especially among Georgia’s low-income population. In October 2011, DECAL submitted an application for the RT3-ELC grant competition to support the full development and implementation of their programs. The grant was designed to support states in their efforts to implement a high quality plan that will impact school readiness and reduce the achievement gaps. There were 11 proposed project elements in the \$70 million proposal that focused on improving services for Georgia’s high need population, and promoting school readiness. One key project included in the proposal was the roll-out of the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (TQRIS), which has been under development for the past six years. The TQRIS will rate licensed facilities and home childcare programs as good, very good, or excellent. Facilities will earn bonuses based on their quality rating and support will be provided to help centers move from one level to the next.

A second key project in the proposal was a complete revision of the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards, which would include professional development for teachers, curriculum alignment, marketing of the importance of the standards, and resource development. Moreover, in order to assure that children are entering kindergarten ready to learn, the proposal also included the development and implementation of a kindergarten readiness assessment.

Finally, the grant focused on increasing accessibility. Through the grant, child care subsidies could be increased to make high-quality centers, which are traditionally more costly, accessible to students with higher needs, such as low income and disabled students.

¹⁸ Maxwell, K. L., Early, D. M., Bryant, D., Krauss, S., Hume, K., and Crawford, G. “Georgia Study of Early Care and Education: Child Care Center Findings.” The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, FPG Child Development Institute, December 2009.

¹⁹ Georgia Department of Education. “Georgia’s Race to the Top E Newsletter: Issue #4.” July 2011.

In December 2011, winners of the Early Learning Challenge Grant were announced and Georgia was not selected. The state's chances at winning the grant had been considered low, primarily because the competition gave extra points to applicants that already had in place a child care rating system. Georgia's TQRIS has been under development for years and began implementation in early 2012.

National Perspective

Head Start

Head Start is the primary federal early care and learning program. Created in 1964 as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's anti-poverty agenda, Head Start provides low-income children with education, nutrition, health, and social services at special centers based in schools and community settings throughout the country. The Head Start program provides grants to local public and private non-profit and for-profit agencies to provide comprehensive child development services to economically disadvantaged children and families, with a special focus on helping preschoolers develop the early reading and math skills they need to be successful in school. Significant emphasis is placed on the involvement of parents in local Head Start programs. Parents are engaged in their children's learning and also provided services to make progress toward their own educational, literacy, and employment goals.

In 1995, the Early Head Start program was established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to serve children from birth to three years of age in recognition of the mounting evidence that the earliest years matter a great deal to children's growth and development. The mission of Early Head Start is to promote healthy prenatal outcomes for pregnant women, enhance the development of very young children, and promote healthy family functioning.

Pre-Kindergarten

Pre-kindergarten programs are perhaps the most visible of states' commitments to early learning. Across the country, more states are realizing the benefits of making investments in pre-kindergarten and the attention to this policy issue is growing. Three important policy components of pre-kindergarten programs are access, quality, and funding.

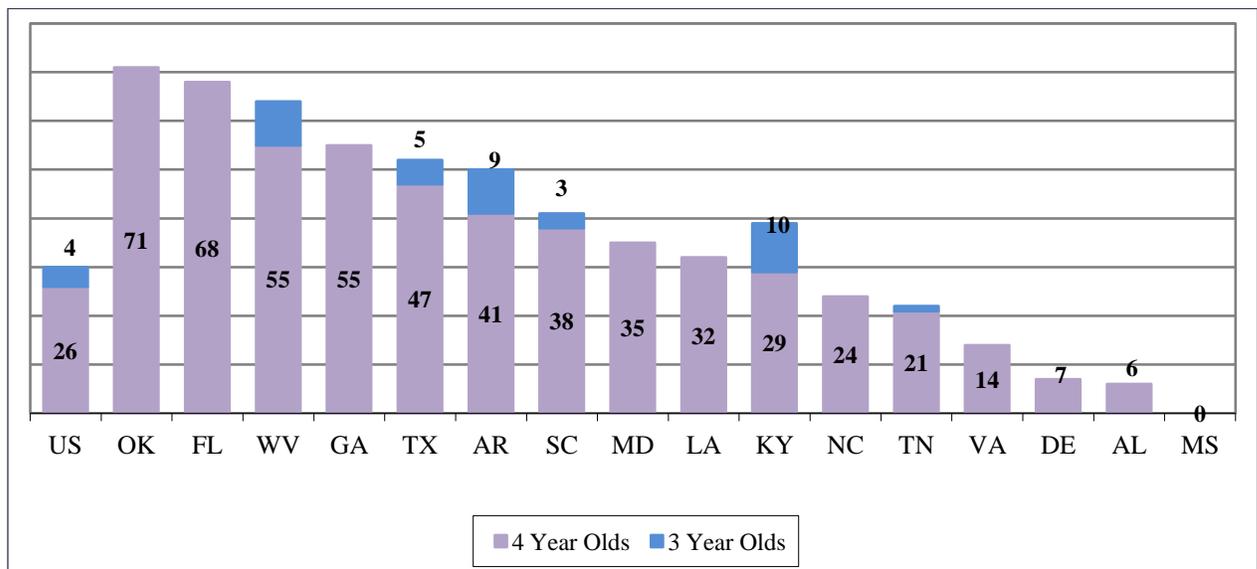
Access

Nationally, state-funded pre-kindergarten reached more children during the 2009-10 school year than ever before. State pre-kindergarten programs served 1,292,310 children in 40 states across the country. For the first time in several years, two states began new pre-k programs—Alaska and Rhode Island. Overall, 31 percent of 4-year-olds and 8 percent of 3-year-olds were served in state-funded pre-kindergarten programs across the country during the 2009-10 school year.²⁰

All but one of the 16 states that comprise the Southern Regional Education Board currently operate state-funded pre-kindergarten programs. Yet, there is great variation among the enrollment of children in pre-kindergarten programs throughout the South.

²⁰ Barnett, W. S., Epstein, D. J., Carolan, M. E., Fitzgerald, J., Ackerman, D. J., & Friedman, A. H. "The State of Preschool 2010: State Preschool Yearbook." National Institute for Early Education Research, 2010.

Figure 2. Percentage of Children Enrolled in State Pre-kindergarten in Southern States, 2009-2010



Source: W. Steven Barnett et al. *The State of Preschool 2010: State Preschool Yearbook*. National Institute for Early Education Research, 2010.

Quality

The quality of a pre-kindergarten program plays a critical role in determining its value to the children who attend it and the taxpayers who support it. All states require classrooms to meet some specific quality standards to receive state pre-kindergarten funds.²¹ The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) developed ten research-based quality standards for pre-kindergarten programs, which are used to compare quality standards across the states.²²

Currently, four states—Alabama, Alaska, North Carolina, and Rhode Island—meet all 10 of the NIEER quality benchmarks. Ten additional states have pre-kindergarten initiatives that meet nine of the 10 benchmarks—Arkansas, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Washington.²³

Funding

For the first time since NIEER began tracking state spending, total spending for state pre-kindergarten programs decreased from the previous year. The effects of the economic recession led to a national drop in spending of nearly \$30 million in 2009-10. Without

²¹ Barnett, W. S., Epstein, D. J., Carolan, M. E., Fitzgerald, J., Ackerman, D. J., & Friedman, A. H. “The State of Preschool 2010: State Preschool Yearbook.” National Institute for Early Education Research, 2010

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

support from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), NIEER predicts that spending would have dropped an additional \$49.3 million.²⁴

Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge

Recognizing a need to make investments in young children, the federal administration has appropriated \$500 million for early childhood support. In late 2011, states competed for a portion of these funds through the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC). The amount of the grant is based on each state’s share of zero- to five-year-olds in low-income families, ranging from \$50 million to as much as \$100 million. The funding supports states’ efforts to develop and implement an integrated system of high quality early learning and development programs, and increase the rate of participation in those programs by low-income and disadvantaged children. The RTT-ELC grant is designed to build on the strengths of existing programs, including Head Start, pre-kindergarten, and child care, and improve the quality and coordination of services in these programs.²⁵ Table 3 shows the winners of the RTT-ELC grants.

RTT-ELC States	Amount Granted
California	\$52,572,935
Delaware	\$49,878,774
Maryland	\$49,999,143
Massachusetts	\$50,000,000
Minnesota	\$44,858,313
North Carolina	\$69,991,121
Ohio	\$69,993,362
Rhode Island	\$50,000,000
Washington	\$60,000,000

Policy Considerations

There is a debate in many states as to whether pre-kindergarten programs should be universal and open to all children or targeted to certain populations, such as low-income level children. Universal programs are often more accepted politically; however, some experts argue that pre-k should only be offered to those children and families who most need the service.

Given our research-based understanding of the conditions that influence whether children get off to a promising or an ominous start in life, state policymakers have the capability to craft legislation that can improve the societal conditions and family supports of our youngest citizens. Policy decisions made at the state and federal levels can ensure that mothers and children receive adequate prenatal services and healthcare, provide family

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. “Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge: Application for Initial Funding.” August 2011.

access to child development information and services, and guide significant investments to public health insurance and child care subsidies.

Across the country, the majority of state-level early learning policies focus on pre-kindergarten initiatives for four-year-olds. Yet research underscores the benefits of additional programs and larger-scale efforts for the population of children aged zero to three. And in order for families and states to reap the most benefit from any early learning program, policymakers must carefully consider the access and funding of state initiatives. All families need access to affordable, quality options for early learning.

It is clear that the quality of early learning matters. In order to earn the dividend from early childhood initiatives, states must make an intentional investment in *quality* early learning opportunities.

Research Tells Us

Research on early learning holds several implications for parents, educators, and policymakers. Profiled here are three major areas of research that pertain to early childcare and education: brain development and child health; the school preparation gap; and the economic benefits of early learning.

Brain Development and Child Health

Scientists have repeatedly demonstrated that during the critical time between birth and age five, when the brain undergoes its most rapid development, children learn more than during any other five-year period of life. Children whose early years are spent in an environment that meets their basic physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs are better prepared for the school experience. Providing safe and healthy home environments for children is, therefore, critical to their cognitive development. However, many of our nation's policies, such as parental leave, childcare, welfare work requirements, and child protection services fail to take into account the crucial importance of early life experiences and their impact on child well being.²⁶

Georgia is one of only a few states with a dedicated agency, Bright from the Start: Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), which oversees the health and educational needs of young children. However, a comparison of Georgia's children to those in other states reveals a dismal and challenging environment for our youngest citizens. According to the national *2011 KIDS COUNT Data Book*, Georgia falls below the national average on all ten key indicators of child health and well being. For overall child well being, Georgia ranks 42 out of 50 states.²⁷

The School Preparation Gap

Not all students begin school with the same preparation and knowledge base. Children in white families and in families with higher incomes are more likely to be enrolled in a quality pre-kindergarten program and be exposed to enriching environments that foster development. There is a significant preparation gap between these children and those of lower-income, African-American, and Hispanic families. While more than 65 percent of all entering kindergarteners can recognize letters, less than 40 percent of traditionally underserved children can. Children in the highest socioeconomic quintile score 61 percent higher than those in the lowest quintile on cognitive tests. Researchers estimate that these preparation gaps account for one-half of the achievement differences among

²⁶ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. "Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships." 2004; Updated October 2009. Retrieved from <http://www.developingchild.net>.

²⁷ Annie E. Casey Foundation. "2011 KIDS COUNT Data Book: State Profiles of Child Well-Being." Retrieved September 9, 2011 from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>.

racial and socioeconomic student subgroups. On average, this gap equates to four grade levels by the time children reach high school graduation.²⁸

A study of Georgia Pre-K found that students in Georgia Pre-K had the lowest rates of kindergarten retention. In 2003-04, 2.8 percent of students in Georgia Pre-K repeated kindergarten compared to 4.4 percent of children in private preschool, 5.9 percent of children with no preschool, and 5.5 percent of all children.²⁹

Economic Benefits of Early Learning

The long-term economic and educational benefits of high-quality early learning programs are well documented in research. Children who attend pre-kindergarten not only enter school prepared for success, but also are less likely to repeat grades, drop out of school, or need special education throughout their school years, compared with similar children who did not have such exposure.³⁰ A recent study conducted by the University of Georgia found that students participating in a Georgia Pre-K Program consistently outperformed their peers who did not attend Pre-K through the ninth grade.³¹ Children who participated scored significantly higher on their academic assessments, were significantly less likely to be retained, and significantly less likely to be enrolled in a special education program.

The Perry Preschool Project - perhaps the most well known longitudinal study of a pre-kindergarten program - found that the benefits of quality preschool experiences for three- and four-year-olds extended through age 40. Students who participated in the Perry Preschool Project experienced higher lifetime earnings, greater rates of homeownership, and less dependence on social services.³²

Leading economists, including the Nobel-prize winning James Heckman, are concluding that investments in young children may be *the* best way to stimulate economic growth. Programs found to have the greatest impact are those of high quality that establish a solid foundation for children's social and emotional skills while also providing economic and

²⁸ Mead, S. "Open the Door, Close the Preparation Gap." Progressive Policy Institute, 2004; Rimm-Kaufman, S.E., R.C. Pianta, & Cox, M. J. "Teachers' Judgments of Problems in the Transition to Kindergarten." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 15(2), 2000.

²⁹ The Southern Education Foundation. "The Promise of Georgia Pre-K: Building Life-Long Education, Current Budget Savings and Long-Term Economic Growth in Hard Times." 2011.

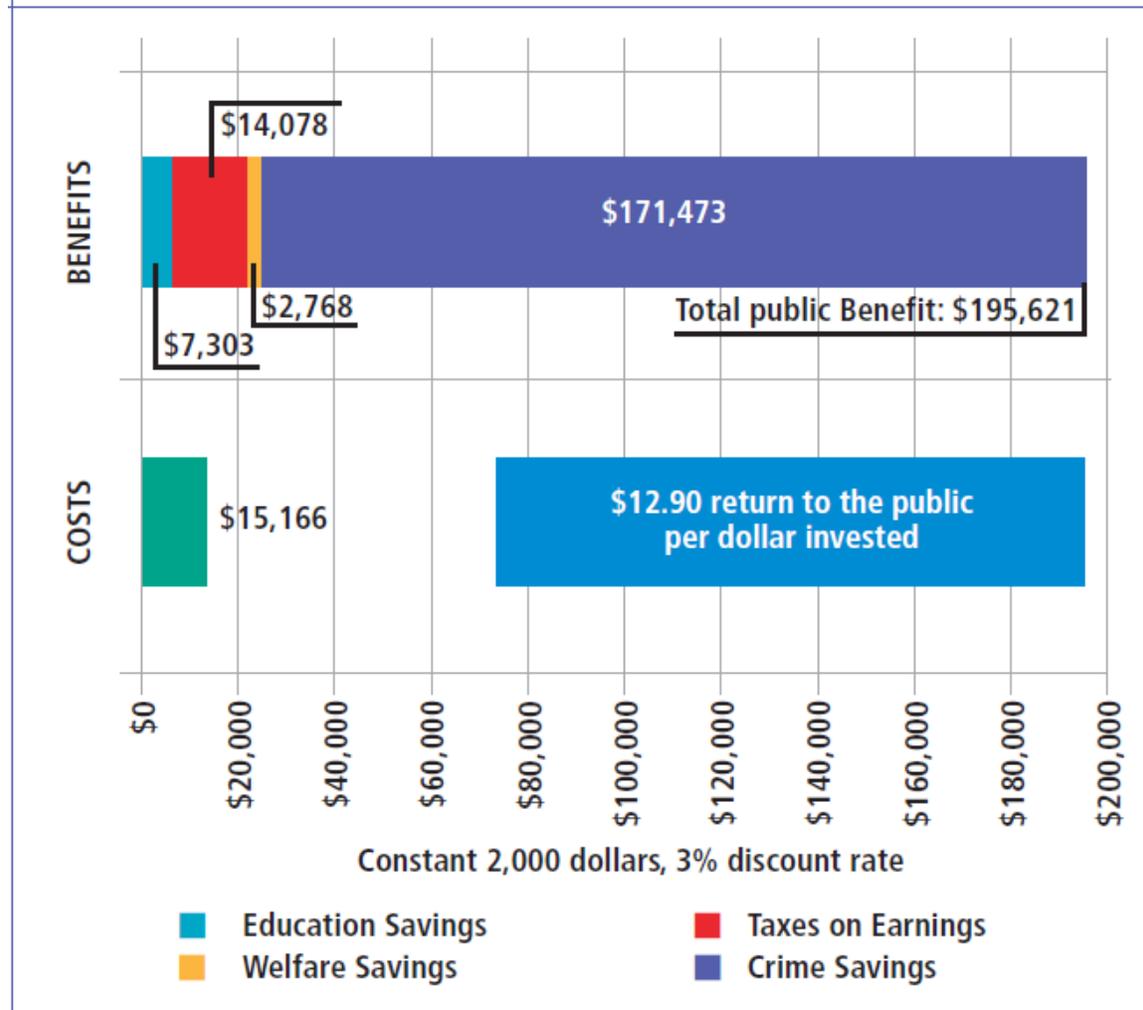
³⁰ Barnett, W. S. et al. "The State of Preschool 2006." National Institute for Early Education Research, 2006; Henry, G. T., et al. "Report of the Findings from the Early Childhood Study: 2001-02." Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, 2003.

³¹ Vail, C. O., & Neuharth-Pritchett, S. (2011). *Realizing the Potential of Quality Early Care and Education: Longitudinal Benefits of Georgia's Pre-K Program. 2011 State of Education in Georgia Conference.* Athens, GA.

³² Schweinhart, L. J., et al. "Lifetime Effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40." High/Scope Press, 2005.

social supports for their families. Research has concluded that the largest economic return comes from preschool programs—interventions that begin early in a child’s life.³³

FIGURE 4. ECONOMIC RETURNS FROM PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS



SOURCE: Schweinhart, L.J. (2005). The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 40.

A study of the economic impact of Georgia’s Pre-K program determined that if we enrolled 82 percent of our four-year-old population (a rate that economist Robert Lynch considers truly “universal”), within 20 years the annual savings in state and local government expenditures would exceed the cost of Pre-K. Economist Timothy Bartik

³³ Partnership for America’s Economic Success. “Long-Term Economic Benefits of Investing in Early Childhood Programs: Proven Programs Boost Economic Development and Benefit the Nation’s Fiscal Health.” Issue Brief #5. Retrieved August 26, 2011 from <http://www.partnershipforsuccess.org>.

predicts that over a period of 75 years, Georgia Pre-K could increase the state's gross domestic product by more than \$5 billion.³⁴

Georgia Pre-K is also saving public education dollars. Students in Georgia Pre-K are not repeating grades in school as often as other students. Due to this drop in rates of retention, between 2011-2016, public education will realize savings of more than \$212.9 million in tax revenues and expenditures. Because the program is lottery-funded, this savings comes without the state spending tax dollars.³⁵

³⁴ The Southern Education Foundation. "The Promise of Georgia Pre-K: Building Life-Long Education, Current Budget Savings and Long-Term Economic Growth in Hard Times." 2011.

³⁵ The Southern Education Foundation. "The Promise of Georgia Pre-K: Building Life-Long Education, Current Budget Savings and Long-Term Economic Growth in Hard Times." 2011.

For More Information

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

<http://dec.al.ga.gov>

Bright from the Start is responsible for the childcare and early education needs of Georgia's Pre-K program, licensing and monitoring child-care facilities, and administering federal dollars to a variety of programs servicing young children.

Center on the Developing Child

<http://developingchild.harvard.edu>

Through innovations in policy and practice, the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University utilizes the science of health, learning, and behavior to enhance child well-being.

National Institute for Early Education Research

<http://nieer.org>

The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) conducts and communicates research to support high quality, effective, early childhood education for all young children.

The Frank Porter Graham (FPG) Child Development Institute

www.fpg.unc.edu

The FPG Child Development Institute was founded in 1966 to conduct research that would impact children, families, and policy. One of the institute's notable achievements is the Abecedarian Project, which demonstrated the significance of early intervention into children's lives. Today it is one of the largest multidisciplinary centers in the nation and works on research projects addressing the needs of children and families.