



FACT SHEET

The State of Early Childhood in Georgia

April 10, 2015

Georgia's preschool program, created in 1993, was originally designed to serve children in at-risk families. The program broadened its target in 1995 by opening enrollment to all 4-year-olds and scaled up to serve more 4-year-olds in the state, funded by the state lottery.¹ Georgia has one of the highest-quality programs in the country. The program currently serves 58 percent of the age-eligible population in all settings, including public schools, child care centers, state colleges and universities, and family child care homes.²

Georgia families have quality but need more access

One of the leading research institutions on state preschool programs, the National Institute for Early Education Research, or NIEER, has established 10 benchmarks of quality. Georgia meets eight of them. The state has the opportunity to improve quality by maintaining a low staff-to-child ratio and ensuring that the class size remains fewer than 20 students.³ Since Georgia does not provide state-funded preschool to 3-year-olds and reaches only 58 percent of 4-year-olds, it can improve the current program by opening enrollment to 3-year-olds and creating more slots for 4-year-olds.

- In 2013, Georgia ranked 28 out of 41 states in per-student funding.⁴
- Georgia currently spends \$3,599 per student, which falls below the national average of \$4,026.⁵

Early childhood education can help support Georgia's most vulnerable children

Many Georgia children live in families feeling severe financial strain. Growing up in such an environment affects young children's ability to thrive, putting them behind their wealthier peers on a number of developmental, educational, and social measures.

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The stress that often comes with living in poverty can also adversely affect brain development in children's early years. High-quality early education has been proven to alleviate these risk factors and help close the school-readiness gap.⁶

- 54 percent of Georgia children under age 6 live in low-income families.⁷
- 17 percent of Georgia children live in areas of concentrated poverty, putting them at a greater risk of starting kindergarten behind.⁸

Child care is out of reach for many Georgia families

The cost of child care in Georgia is about the same as public college tuition, making it out of reach for most families.⁹ In Georgia, where 67 percent of children under age 6 have all available parents in the workforce, child care is not a luxury—it is a necessity.¹⁰

- For a family with children in Georgia, the median income is \$53,100 per year.¹¹
- The average annual cost of a child care center in Georgia is \$7,025 for an infant and \$5,947 for a 4-year-old.¹²

Endnotes

1 Bright from the Start, "History of Georgia's Pre-K Program," available at <http://decal.ga.gov/Prek/AboutPrek.aspx> (last accessed March 2015).

2 W. Steven Barnett and others, "The State of Preschool 2013: State Preschool Yearbook" (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013), available at <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2013.pdf>.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Jack P. Shonkoff and others, "The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress," *Pediatrics* 129 (1) (2012): e232–e246, available at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/129/1/e232.short>.

7 National Center for Children in Poverty, "Georgia: Demographics of Low-Income Children," available at http://www.nccp.org/profiles/GA_profile_6.html (last accessed March 2015).

8 Kids Count Data Center, "Children Living in Areas of Concentrated Poverty" (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013), available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6795-children-living-in-areas-of-concentrated-poverty#detailed/2/2-52/false/1376,1201,1074,880,11/any/13891,13892>.

9 Child Care Aware of America, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care" (2013), available at http://usa.childcareaware.org/sites/default/files/cost_of_care_2013_103113_0.pdf.

10 Kids Count Data Center "Median Family Income Among Households with Children" (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013), available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/65-median-family-income-among-households-with-children#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/365>.

11 Kids Count Data Center, "Children Under Age 6 with All Available Parents in the Labor Force" (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013), available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5057-children-under-age-6-with-all-available-parents-in-the-labor-force#detailed/2/2-52/false/36,868,867,133,38/any/11472,11473>.

12 Child Care Aware of America, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care."

13 Authors' calculations based on Child Care Aware of America, "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care."

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For a typical family with an infant and a 4-year-old in Georgia, the average cost of child care at a center amounts to

1/4

of annual income¹³