

GEORGIA'S EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION LANDSCAPE



Georgia's young children are educated and cared for in a variety of programs and settings, ranging from child care centers to family child care homes to relative-provided care to nannies or babysitters. **The state's early care and education landscape is diverse and complex, with programs varying widely by type, funding source, nonprofit status, and oversight.** Families sometimes combine different types of part-time and full-time care to meet their needs. **Together, the child care options below support the early learning and healthy development of Georgia's youngest learners.**

TYPES OF EARLY CARE & LEARNING

Licensed Child Care Learning Centers

are typically operated in nonresidential facilities where children are often grouped in classrooms by age, with an average licensed capacity of over 100 and a dedicated director and staff members.

Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care

is a type of home-based child care in which a relative, friend, neighbor, babysitter, or nanny provides care with or without pay.



Licensed Family Child Care Learning Homes

provide care for small groups of children (at least three and up to six) of varying ages in a professional caregiver's home for pay.

Public Schools (License-Exempt)

are subject to local oversight and may offer early learning programs, typically serving 4-year-olds through Georgia's Pre-K Program.

Other License-Exempt Programs

include many part-time or faith-based programs; must apply for exemption and still meet basic health and safety guidelines.

The **Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)** is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia's children and their families, including licensing child care and administering key programs such as Georgia's Pre-K Program, Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, and Quality Rated.

Licensed programs are monitored at least twice a year by DECAL to measure whether they meet over 400 child health and safety rules. Eligible, licensed programs can elect to participate in Georgia's Quality Rated system that assesses program quality. Programs that are **Quality Rated** have demonstrated a commitment to go above and beyond licensure standards and receive a one-, two-, or three-star rating based on the demonstration of best practices (e.g., ratios, staff credentials, curriculum, etc.).



In many parts of the state, demand for child care, particularly for infants and toddlers, outpaces supply. Roughly 500,000 children under the age of six have all available parents in the workforce.¹

Child care in Georgia is largely privately funded through parent fees, with the average yearly infant tuition exceeding in-state tuition at a four-year public college. **Some local, state, and federal initiatives exist to support access to early learning programs, including:**

	Funding Source	Eligibility	Access	Delivery Model
Georgia's Pre-K	Georgia Lottery	Georgia's four-year-olds regardless of parental income (subject to available seats)	~71,500 (about 55%) of Georgia's 4-year-olds ¹	Utilizes a mixed delivery system, with classrooms in both child care centers and public schools
Childcare & Parent Services (CAPS) <i>Georgia's child care scholarship program for low-income working families</i>	Primarily federally funded through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), which includes a required state match	Family eligibility is set at or below 50% of the state median income based on family size. Parents must also participate in approved work/education activities and be a member of a priority group (e.g., foster children).	DECAL is committed to providing 50,000 children (primarily under 13) with scholarships. ² Due to limited funding, the program serves only an estimated 14.8% of income-eligible children. ³	Families make their own decisions about what type of care is best for their child based on their needs and availability at participating programs.
Head Start & Early Head Start	Federal grant program	Head Start serves children ages four and five; Early Head Start serves infants and toddlers as well as pregnant women. Family eligibility is set at or below 100% of the federal poverty level.	~15,200 children are enrolled in Head Start and ~4,600 are enrolled in Early Head Start. ⁴	Services include education, health, mental health, and family supports through center-based or family child care programs.
Preschool Special Education	Funded through federal dollars under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B and local school district funding	Georgia's 3- to 5-year-olds who qualify for special education services	~Nearly 10,000 of Georgia's 3- and 4-year-olds receive services through Preschool Special Education. ⁵	Program provides special education services to children who have been identified by local school districts as needing early intervention services.

Georgia's early care and education landscape provides essential services for Georgia's youngest learners while allowing parents to advance their careers and provide for their families. Yet many families face barriers in affording and accessing care that meets their needs. Continuous and increased support for these programs will help ensure children are prepared for school and future success.

(1) Pre-K enrollment: Email communication with the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (August 26th, 2024); Four-year-old population: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Annual State Resident Population Estimates for Six Race Groups: April 1, 2020 to July 1, 2022. (2) Board of Early Care and Learning (August 2024). Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, Page 33. https://www.dec.state.ga.us/documents/BoardMeetings/2024-08-22_Board_Presentation.pdf (3) Ullrich, R., Schmit, S., & Cosse, R. "Inequitable Access to Child Care Subsidies." https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2019/04/2019_inequitableaccess.pdf (4) Head Start: GA CACDS, Head Start (2021); Early Head Start: PIR from Office of Head Start (2023). (5) National Institute for Early Education Research (2023). Georgia State Profile. <https://nieer.org/yearbook/2023/state-profiles/georgia>