

Georgia Pre-K¹

Background

Georgia's pre-K program began as a small pilot in 1992 and was expanded to universal eligibility for all four-year-olds in 1995.² About 60 percent of Georgia's four-year-olds participated in pre-K in the 2015-16 school year.³

How is the pre-K program financed?

Georgia pre-K is funded by a state lottery for education. Grants are awarded to a variety of providers, including schools and child care centers.⁴ Guidelines stipulate that the grantee must use at least 90 percent of the funds allocated to base salary for teacher salaries specifically, and the other 10 percent can be used for benefits or other program purposes. The intention is to encourage programs to hire more highly qualified teachers, with the higher salary that this entails; for example, 10 percent of a \$30,000 base teacher salary is an additional \$3,000 to be used as the grantee sees fit, compared with 10 percent of a \$40,000 base teacher salary (\$4,000). Unlike the funds for the base salary, the salary supplement, based on levels of experience, is 100-percent tied to the teacher for its intended purpose.

What is the current status of state efforts toward compensation improvement for pre-K teachers?

Salary: All settings are funded for a base salary amount and are required to pay a minimum salary, which differs by qualification level. These requirements are not identical to K-3 teacher salaries, but are intended to be equivalent where educational qualifications are the same (e.g., where a pre-K teacher has a bachelor's degree plus state certification). Although pre-K teachers are not required to be certified in either public or private settings, more than 80 percent of pre-K teachers in both public and private settings are certified. Beginning in the 2016-17 school year, for both public and private settings, a supplement to this base salary is awarded based on years of experience — a cumulative 3-percent increase in base salary for each two years of experience up to 20 years, paid as part of a teacher's regular salary and not as an annual bonus.⁵ Because individual grantees may set higher salaries than required by Georgia pre-K policy, disparities may still exist in practice.

Benefits: Georgia's policy does not specify parity in benefits for pre-K teachers in community-based programs. Funds are included specifically for benefits, but what is provided depends on the individual provider. Public schools are required to provide benefits by law.

Payment for Professional Responsibilities: The pre-K program pays for an eight-hour workday: 6.5 hours for instruction and 1.5 hours for planning. All pre-K teachers are funded for an additional 10 days beyond classroom instruction, which are to be used for planning as well as staff development and training.⁶

1 All information in this profile comes from interview data, unless otherwise specified. Personal communication with Susan Adams, Georgia Department of Care and Early Learning, December 2016 (Follow-up: August 2017).

2 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. (n.d.). *History of Georgia's Pre-K Program*. Retrieved from <http://www.decal.ga.gov/Prek/History.aspx>.

3 Barnett, W.S., Friedman-Krauss, A.H., Weisenfeld, G.G., Horowitz, M., Kasmin, R., & Squires, J.H. (2017). *The State of Preschool 2016: State Preschool Yearbook*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

4 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. (n.d.). *Becoming a Georgia Pre-K Program Provider*. Retrieved from <http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/StartingAGeorgiaPreKProgram.aspx>.

5 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. (2016). *Georgia's Pre-K Program 2016-2017 School Year Pre-K Providers' Operating Guidelines*. Retrieved from <http://decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/Guidelines.pdf>.

6 Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. (2016). *Georgia's Pre-K Program 2016-2017 School Year Pre-K Providers' Operating Guidelines*. Retrieved from <http://decal.ga.gov/documents/attachments/Guidelines.pdf>.

What was the rationale for taking forward the issue of pay parity?

Turnover with pre-K teachers migrating to K-3 prompted recent improvements to Georgia's pre-K teacher salary policies.

What was the approach/strategy for moving toward parity?

Georgia has one of the oldest pre-K programs with a history of more than 20 years. At the outset, consideration was given to the base or starting salaries for teachers, and funding was set at the same amount for pre-K teachers across settings, with different amounts for certified and uncertified teachers. However, this scale did not include adjusted pay for experience or further training beyond a bachelor's degree, known as the salary supplement, which is normally paid for K-12 teachers through Georgia's state budget. State funds were made available to pay for these supplements for pre-K teachers in public school settings, but not for teachers in community-based settings, until a budget cut in 2010-11. Funds for the supplement continued in K-12, however, which prompted turnover of pre-K teachers in public schools who increasingly left for K-3 positions.

In 2015, the governor created an Education Reform Commission, which included early education. The commission recommended the development of a pay scale for pre-K teachers that would take into account education and experience.⁷ This recommendation was taken forward beginning in 2016-17.

What has been helpful in moving these efforts along?

Pre-K in Georgia enjoys broad-based support by the general public as well as government officials. In terms of compensation efforts, data on teacher retention was used to make the case that turnover was a problem and that salary differentials were a key contributor to this problem. Similarly, a survey of providers was used to show that compensation was perceived as a key challenge for the implementation of a high-quality pre-K program.

What positive outcomes have been seen as a result of the push toward parity?

Pre-K administrators expressed the view that discussion of improved compensation for pre-K teachers has opened the door to discussion of improved compensation for early educators more broadly, including infant-toddler teachers specifically.

What has been challenging about these efforts?

Public perception that the work of a pre-K teacher (or even elementary teacher) is not as deserving of high salaries compared to teachers of older children has made movement on this issue more difficult, according to pre-K administrators interviewed.

⁷ Education Reform Commission. (2015). *Final Recommendations to Governor Nathan Deal*. Atlanta, GA: Office of the Governor. Retrieved from https://gov.georgia.gov/sites/gov.georgia.gov/files/related_files/document/FinalGovERCReport_121415.pdf.