



COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PACESETTER ATLANTA

Category: School Readiness

Atlanta, the capital and most populous city in Georgia, is the cultural and economic center of the ninth-largest metropolitan area in the United States. The city is working with a wide variety of partners from government agencies, advocacy groups, academic institutions, community service organizations, the business community and foundations to focus efforts on school readiness.

These efforts have included hosting statewide conferences on language and literacy development in infant and toddler classrooms and providing Read Right From the Start training, along with establishing a quarterly Early Education Funders roundtable meeting. In 2011, the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) headed a coalition of supporters that led Gov. Nathan Deal to preserve full-day pre-kindergarten. GEEARS is presently working with partners to preserve and expand funding for the program.

Students typically become enrolled in Georgia pre-K through a first-come, first-served system or a lottery. Sixty percent of state children are currently served by the full-day program, which is five days per week for 36 weeks, and is focused on developmentally appropriate practices.

In 2009, Georgia's Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) commissioned a comprehensive evaluation of child care and early learning programs across the state. The study found that quality is uneven. Based on these findings, DECAL is implementing improvements in standards alignment, professional development, data systems and longitudinal studies; it also is raising licensing requirements. In 2010, DECAL piloted a summer pre-K program that targeted the state's most vulnerable children, those who are the least likely to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

In 2011, a group of organizations dedicated to school readiness launched Georgia Pre-K Week to involve state lawmakers in quality early learning in their communities. Last October, almost half of all state legislators, as well as Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle and First Lady Sandra Deal, visited pre-K classes and toured classrooms for infants and toddlers. Georgia Pre-K Week 2012 has been announced, and the goal has expanded to include local civic leaders such as mayors, county commissioners and business executives.

At the beginning of the year, Quality Rated, a quality rating and improvement system, was launched by the state. A public-private partnership, coalition members are working to leverage long-lasting community collaboratives to promote high-quality early learning and development programs.

STRATEGIES

- Hosted statewide conferences on language and literacy
- Evaluated child care and early learning programs and made improvements based on the findings
- Participated in Georgia Pre-K Week, during which state officials visited pre-K classrooms