

Access to Early Childhood Education in Athens

Every year, the school district assigns a set number of pre-K spots available to families, based on state funding, demand, and school capacity. If the number of students who have registered is more than the number of spots available, a “lottery” system is used¹. However, a spot at a desired pre-K program, or any pre-K program in general, is not guaranteed. If a student is not assigned a spot in a pre-K program that works for their family, the family has to come up with other preschool options. There are over 6,000 children 0-5 eligible for preschool and pre-K programs in Clarke County, but the total licensed capacity is only 2,912 students².

The Data



of eligible children in Clarke County were enrolled in the Georgia Pre-Kindergarten Program in 2025³



of eligible children in Clarke County from low-income families were enrolled in the Georgia Pre-Kindergarten Program in 2025⁴

As a local example, in Clarke County in 2024⁵

\$7,362

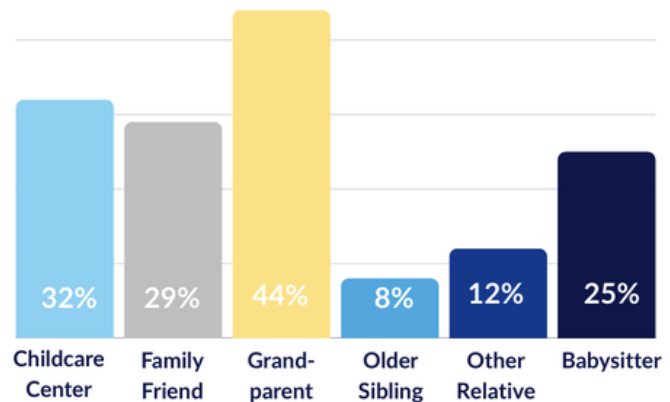
average cost of center-based preschool

As a local example, in Clarke County in 2024⁵

\$75,254

median household income

SOURCES OF CHILDCARE
(FAMILIES COULD SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)⁶



Why This Matters



✦ If families are assigned an out-of-zone school, **transportation** is not provided for the student, which is not feasible for many families, leaving them to have to look for other preschool options in the area.

✦ Some families, though, do not have access to a **network of support** that can help find other early care options.



✦ For those who do find outside options, most preschools have a **waitlist** that you have to pay to be a part of, and if a family does get off the waitlist, the price of tuition can be too expensive for families (average of almost 10% of yearly income)⁵.

✦ Some preschools accept **Childcare and Parenthood Services (CAPS)**, a program that supports early education goals by assisting low-income families with the cost of childcare⁷.



✦ However, preschools that accept CAPS must be **quality rated**, which on average takes 9 to 12 months to complete, time and effort some schools may not have, with many already being understaffed.

✦ Access to early childhood education can be an **indicator of other education related markers**, like literacy, later in child development.

For more information, questions, comments, or concerns, feel free to reach out to us at info@athensareacf.org.

Local Philanthropy in Action

Clarke County School District Fund at Athens Area Community Foundation



The Clarke County School District's goal is to be a high-performing school district that ensures all students can access opportunities and positively contribute to their communities. At CCSD they believe that the success of each student is critical to the success of our entire community and that all students can learn and achieve academic success⁸.

Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students



GEEARS is a nonprofit organization operating to ensure that all Georgia's children, birth to age five, has a strong early foundation to reach their full potential. They drive change by educating and mobilizing stakeholders in the area, advocating for effective policies, and researching the most promising innovative and evidence based practices⁹.

Easterseals North Georgia



Easterseals North Georgia is a community-based nonprofit serving children and families at the most crucial time in a child's development, the first five year. Easterseals provides services designed to support the academic, mental, physical, and social-emotional growth of Georgia's children. They are leading the way towards a world where every child is given full access to quality education and support¹⁰.

(1) "Pre-K," Early Learning Centers. 2026. (2) "Clarke County, Georgia Early Childhood Profile," Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students, 2026. (3) Anne E. Casey Foundation, "Children Enrolled in the Georgia Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) Program in Georgia," Kids Count Data Center, 2025. (4) Anne E. Casey Foundation, "Children Enrolled in the Georgia Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) Program in Georgia from Low Income Families in Georgia," Kids Count Data Center, 2025. (5) Women's Bureau, "Childcare Prices by Age of Children and Care Setting 2022," U.S. Department of Labor. November 2024. (6) Adams and Baskam, "4.0 Data Report Fall 2025," Athens Wellbeing Project, 2025. (7) "About CAPS," Childcare and Parenthood Services, 2026. (8) "2024-2029 Strategic Plan," Clarke County School District, 2024. (9) "About Us," Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students, 2026. (10) "Who We Are," Easterseals North Georgia, 2025.