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Georgia's child care is growing more fragile

Atlanta Business Chronicle - by [Maria Saporta](#)

The economy has taken its toll on the youngest among us. A new survey conducted by Quality Care for Children, an Atlanta-based organization dedicated to nurturing and educating infants and young children, has documented a sharp decline in the number of child-care centers, a net loss of about 600, in the state during 2009.

But the results are even more dire when it comes to quality child-care centers.

In 2008, Georgia had 304 centers that had been accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. In 2009, that number had dropped to only 221 nationally accredited child-care centers.

To put that in context, there are an estimated 470,000 children in Georgia under the age of 6 who spend as much as 10 hours a day in the care of someone other than their parents. But only 26,843 of those children (5.7 percent) are in centers that have received national accreditation.

"We have a very fragile system for child care in Georgia," said **Pam Tatum**, CEO of Quality Care for Children. "Georgia invests very little in child care. Most of the investment is federal money, and if Georgia wants to have a high-quality child-care system, the state is going to have to invest."

National studies have shown that every dollar spent on early learning — from birth to kindergarten — ends up saving \$7 in what would have been spent on remedial education, welfare subsidies and prisons.

"We've got to remember that we either invest in our children on the front end or pay dearly on the back end," said Judge **Glenda Hatchett**, a former chief judge for Fulton County's Juvenile Court who has her own television show.

This is the second consecutive year that Quality Care for Children has documented declines in quantity and quality of child-care programs in Georgia.

It's not a new challenge. In 1999, then-Gov. **Roy Barnes** announced the Georgia Early Learning Initiative. When Gov. Sonny Perdue was elected, the program was transitioned into Smart Start.

And more recently, **United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta Inc.** established the Early Education Commission co-chaired by Atlanta Federal Reserve Bank President **Dennis Lockhart** and Spelman College President **Beverly Daniel Tatum**. The commission should be releasing its recommendations sometime this month.

Retired BellSouth Corp. executive **Phil Jacobs** has been involved in each of these early-learning initiatives. "Over the years, the problem has become more acute," Jacobs said. "Today, about 65 percent of kids in this state are in some kind of child care."

Judge Hatchett will chair this year's fundraiser — El Dia de Los Niños — for Quality Care for Children. She was asked to chair the event by philanthropist **Stephanie Blank**, who chaired it last year.

"It's hard to say no to this group," Hatchett said. "There are 470,000 children under the age of 6 in need of quality child care. And the situation has been exacerbated because of the deep, deep recession."

Blank agreed. The declining quality and quantity of child-care centers in Georgia are "both really terrible trends for the status of child care in our state," she said.

The El Dia de los Niños event is expected to raise about \$100,000 and will be held on Thursday, April 29, at the Mansion on Peachtree.

KIPP closes in on goal

KIPP Metro Atlanta is getting closer to reaching its \$6.5 million campaign goal.

Three major gifts from local supporters will allow KIPP to renovate two of its public charter schools — **KIPP STRIVE Academy** and **KIPP South Fulton Academy**.

Those gifts totaled nearly \$1.98 million and came from the **Kendeda Fund**, **Recall Corp.** and **Equifax Inc.** That means that KIPP has raised nearly \$5.4 million since the campaign was launched in 2009.

David Jernigan, executive director of KIPP Metro Atlanta, said the organization was thrilled to receive the gifts because the organization will be able to do much of its renovation during the summer when its students will be out of school.

Currently there are three KIPP charter middle schools in metro Atlanta serving about 425 students between fifth and eighth grades. About 95 percent of those students are African-American and 70 percent are eligible for the federally subsidized meals program. KIPP will add a fourth academy this summer.

KIPP was founded in 1994. Today it has a national network of 82 public schools in 19 states serving more than 21,000 students.

Recall raising its profile

One of the major three major donors to KIPP's campaign is Recall Corp., an Atlanta-based global company that has kept a fairly low profile. But that's changing as the information management company gets more involved in the community.

"We've been here since 1999, but we are not very well-known in the Atlanta community," said **Mark Wesley**, president of Recall North America, which has sales of about \$300 million.

Recall Corp. has global sales of about \$700 million and employs 1,500 in 20 countries. About 200 people work at its headquarters in Norcross and another 75 work at the companies facilities in metro Atlanta. Recall is owned by **Brambles Ltd.**, which is based in Australia. Wesley said the executive team of Brambles decided to focus on two areas of corporate responsibility — education and the environment. Recall's partnership with KIPP will go far beyond its contribution of \$200,000 over a three-year period. It will include the mentoring of students and volunteering time.

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