



Child Care in Metro Atlanta

Quality Care for Children
Education When It Matters Most

August 2006



Introduction



Pam Tatum
Chief Executive Officer

As the child care resource and referral agency serving the 10-county Metropolitan Atlanta area, Quality Care for Children serves as the repository for child care information for the area. We maintain a database of all licensed and registered child care in the area, including child care centers, family child care homes, Head Start, Pre-K and after school programs. Our database includes a wealth of information about programs such as fees, hours of operation, quality indicators and special services provided. Through our referral service, we speak daily to parents seeking child care. Their child care needs and challenges, along with demographic information, are also maintained in our database. As a result, Quality Care for Children is uniquely positioned to present the picture of child care supply and demand in Metro Atlanta.

The ability to respond to the data needs of policy makers, community partners and others interested in child care in Metro Atlanta is one of the important functions of Quality Care for Children. We are continually updating our information and working to improve our capacity to collect and maintain accurate data to serve our community.



Pam Runkle
Executive Director of
Child Resource and
Referral Services

The following report offers a current picture of the demand, supply, cost and quality of child care in Metro Atlanta. We hope you will find it useful as we continue to work together to create a system of quality early care and education for our children, families and communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pam Tatum".

Pam Tatum
Chief Executive Officer

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pam Runkle".

Pam Runkle
Executive Director of
Child Resource and Referral Services

A Closer Look at Supply and Demand

Child care is a necessity for most American families, and an economic hardship for many. Welfare reform has increased the number of single mothers of young children in the labor force. **Research shows that even in 78% of two parent households, where conceivably one parent might stay home with the children, both parents work. In Georgia, there are more than 400,000 children in child care. Many children are in child care for up to 10 hours a day.**

In seeking child care, parents consider many factors, such as location, cost, type of child care program and quality. Cost and location are the major drivers, with most parents seeking child care close to their homes. Yet for many families, the supply of care in their neighborhoods is inadequate. **Infant/toddler care is especially scarce in low-income neighborhoods and many parents find themselves commuting in one direction to take their child to child care, and then in another direction to work.** Other parents find themselves making child care choices that leave them unsettled and may place their children at risk.

Child care is, for the most part, an industry of small businesses, many of them located in a child care provider's home. **In the 10-county Metro Atlanta area, there are approximately 1,020 child care centers caring for between 18 and 220 children. In addition, there are four group homes caring for between seven and 18 children, and 1,535 smaller family child care homes where a child care provider is registered with the state to care for up to six children in her home for pay.** Of the callers to the child care referral line, there were 7,642 requests for searches for child care centers, 4,759 requests for searches for family child care homes. 236 callers were seeking school-age programs and 407 were seeking summer camps.

The adequacy of the child care supply is difficult to assess. Numbers of children in a particular age group, compared to the number of licensed child care slots for that age group, does not tell the story. Parents need child care that is convenient to home or work. Enough child care slots metro-wide, or even county-wide, means little to a mother faced with the daily task of getting her children ready and dropping them off at child care each morning before heading to an eight-hour job. In order to get her child to child care, get herself to work on time and pick up her child before the child care program closes, she needs child care conveniently located.

The supply of child care is constantly changing in response to the demand, perhaps, because the child care industry is made up of so many small and frequently home-based businesses. As the child care resource and referral agency, Quality Care for Children recruits and trains new family child care providers and helps new centers and school-age programs open in areas where the demand is unmet. Nonetheless, supply needs are most likely to go unmet in low-income neighborhoods. For-profit centers typically see little profit potential in low-income neighborhoods where parents can pay little. Low-income neighborhoods frequently lack facilities that can be inexpensively converted to quality child care environments. Low-income parents are frequently left with few child care choices, and most times even fewer quality choices.

A Closer Look at Supply and Demand

School-Age Care

The challenge of finding and paying for care does not end when children reach school-age. Some parents may need child care before and after school, while others may need care during the after school hours only.

Quality school-age care is not only important to allow working parents to work, but it also supports children's development and keeps them safe during their after school hours. Having children in quality after school care provides them structure in the hours between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m., the peak time for children and teens to get into trouble. Research indicates that having children in a quality after school program has other significant benefits as well. **Children who attend quality after school programs have better grades, peer relations, emotional adjustment and conduct in school. They spend more time engaged in academic or enrichment activities, and less time watching television.**

Some elementary and middle schools offer before and after school care, and there are also school-age programs in the community that provide transportation to and from school. Finding a program that meets the particular interests and needs of your child, and that offers transportation from the school to the program, can be difficult. Transportation can be a big obstacle for families seeking after school care.

Children with Special Needs

Parents of children with special needs experience an extra challenge when seeking quality child care. While the ADA requires that child care businesses make reasonable accommodations for children with special needs, children need much more than a safe place to be. Parents of children with special needs seek programs that will include their children in the daily activities and support their child's development and learning. Parents want their children to be nurtured and cared for, to have fun with other children and to learn. Quality child care that is inclusive for children with special needs is hard to find.

Last year, more than 390 parents called Quality Care for Children for assistance in finding child care for children with physical, mental or behavioral disabilities. QCC provides training and consultation to child care programs chosen by parents to ensure children are fully included in activities and receive quality child care. The most common special needs reported by parents calling the QCC referral line included: Autism Spectrum Disorder (14.5% of children), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (7% of children) and asthma (8% of children).

A Closer Look at Supply and Demand



Georgia Pre-K

Many Georgia families of 4-year-olds benefit from the Georgia Pre-K Program funded by the Georgia Lottery for Education established in 1993. The Georgia Pre-K Program provides Georgia's 4-year-old children with high-quality preschool experiences at no cost to families. While Georgia's Pre-K program reaches a higher proportion of 4-year-old children than any other state in the nation, funds do not go far enough to serve every preschool age child in our state. In addition, the program is only part-day, meaning most working parents must still pay for before and/or after care. The following chart shows the estimated 4-year-old population for each Metro County and the number and percentage of 4-year-olds served by Georgia Pre-K.

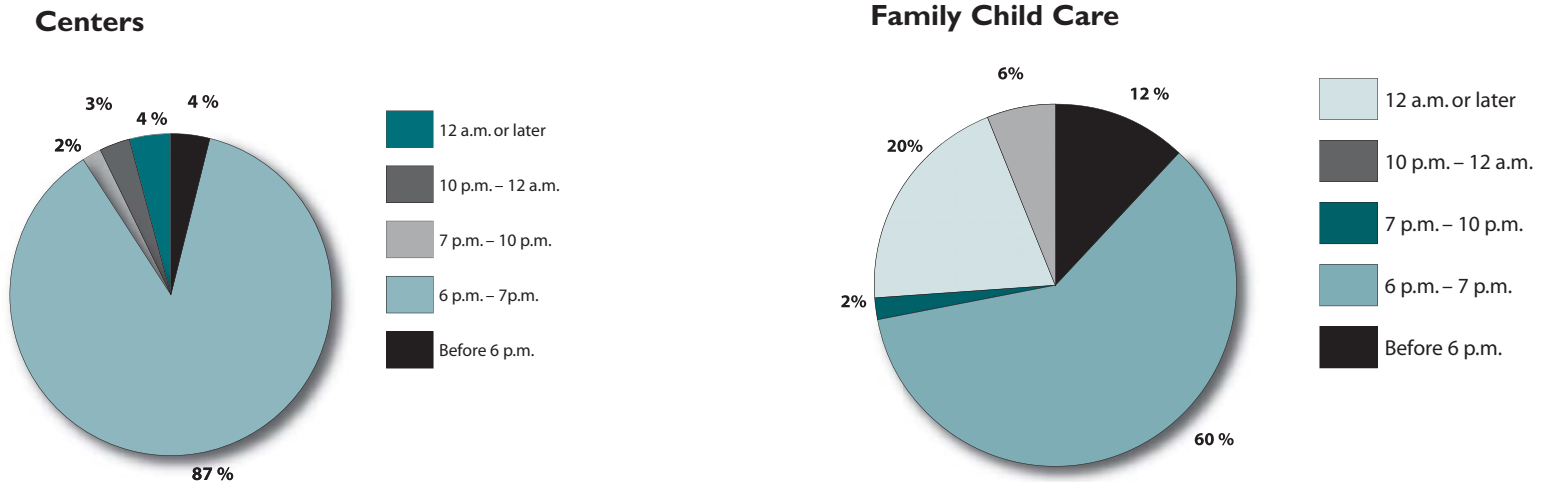
County	Estimated Population of 4-year-olds	Number of 4-year-olds Enrolled in Pre-K	Percent of Estimated Population Served
Cherokee	2,561	1,336	52%
Clayton	4,512	2,137	47%
Cobb	10,191	4,441	44%
DeKalb	10,645	4,880	46%
Douglas	1,518	986	65%
Fayette	1,093	562	51%
Fulton	12,953	6,365	49%
Gwinnett	11,185	6,864	61%
Henry	2,400	1,290	54%
Rockdale	1,035	637	62%
Total	58,093	29,498	50.7%

Families Need Child Care during Non-Traditional Hours

Increasingly, parents need child care during non-traditional hours such as evenings and weekends. A study conducted in 2002 found that an estimated 28% of children from birth to age 5 in low-income single-parent families had a parent working non-traditional hours. In addition, many low-income parents work fluctuating schedules that include an unpredictable mix of weekend, evening and daytime work. This trend has continued to grow with the implementation of welfare reform and the growth of the service economy.

In Metro Atlanta, the vast majority of child care programs operate Monday through Friday, with only 11% offering weekend child care. Programs tend to open between 6:30 a.m. and 7:00 a.m., and close between 6:00 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. In the past 12 months, QCC received 812 requests for care provided during non-traditional week-day hours and 434 requests for weekend care. Among the types of care, family child care, care provided in the caregiver's home, tends to be the most flexible. For example, 20% of family child care providers in Metro Atlanta offer child care until midnight, as opposed to only 3.26% of child care centers. **Finding child care during non-traditional hours is a challenge for working parents. Many piece together a patchwork of child care arrangements that may include some regulated child care with care provided by relatives or neighbors.**

The pie graphs below illustrate closing times of family child care homes versus child care centers.



Quality Child Care is Important

Study after study has highlighted the importance of quality early care and education.

- Ninety percent of a child's brain development occurs before the age of three, making quality child care in the early years critical to a child's later success;
- Children who benefit from high-quality child care display better cognitive and language development, school readiness and early school achievement;
- High quality child care is especially effective in improving outcomes for children growing up in poverty or facing other family-based risks.

The most telling figures related to the supply of quality child care may be the comparisons of the overall supply of care to the supply of nationally accredited child care. **National accreditation is widely recognized as the highest standard of quality in child care.** Quality Care for Children provides training and consultation to help child care programs meet these high standards and achieve national accreditation. Child care centers are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or the National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA). Family child care homes are accredited by the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC).

The table on the right compares the overall number of child care slots to the number of accredited slots in each of the Metro Atlanta counties. Some counties, most notably Clayton, DeKalb and Fulton, show growth in the number and percentage of accredited slots since 2005.

County	Total Capacity (slots)		Slots in Accredited Programs		Percentage Slots in Accredited Programs	
	2005	2006	2005	2006	2005	2006
Cherokee	3,963	4,081	648	657	16.4	16.0
Clayton	10,649	11,108	823	1,324	7.7	11.9
Cobb	20,748	20,513	2,698	2,991	13.0	14.5
DeKalb	26,636	25,111	2,377	2,882	8.9	11.4
Douglas	4,600	4,799	404	398	8.8	8.2
Fayette	3,717	3,839	343	343	9.2	8.9
Fulton	44,943	43,313	8,778	10,451	19.5	24.1
Gwinnett	29,771	28,841	3,788	3,899	12.7	13.5
Henry	6,681	6,706	347	341	5.2	5.0
Rockdale	3,495	3,744	381	375	10.9	10.0
Total	155,203	142,740	20,587	23,173	13.3	16.2

Child Care is Expensive

Nationally, one quarter of families with young children earn less than \$25,000 a year. A family with both parents working full time at minimum wage earns just \$21,400 a year.

Many parents who call Quality Care for Children for child care referrals have a difficult time finding child care they can afford. Seventy percent of parents reported incomes of under \$25,000. The majority of these parents are single-parent households. Many of these parents are not currently in the labor force, but are seeking employment. They are caught in a child care bind. Without child care, they cannot pursue employment. Yet without employment and, specifically, that first paycheck, they cannot pay for child care.

Through foundation and some county funding, Quality Care for Children is able to help some low-income families by paying for child care until their first paycheck arrives, but funding is limited and goes quickly. The state provides child care subsidies for low-income families but again lacks adequate resources to meet the need. **In 2005, Georgia reported 17,600 families on the waiting list for child care subsidies.** Many families eligible for assistance report to us that they do not even bother to apply. **Far more low-income parents need assistance paying for child care.**

Incomes of parents using Quality Care for Children's online child care search are higher overall than those who call our referral line. Thirty-six percent report incomes between \$25,001 and \$50,000 and 33% report incomes over \$50,001. Yet many of them struggle to pay for child care as well. Families typically incur child care expenses at a time in their lives when they may be least able to pay, when they are just starting their careers and are saddled with college loans. As we will show later, most of Atlanta's median-income parents are spending a disproportionate amount of their incomes on child care.

Cost Varies by Age Group



In general, the younger the child, the more expensive the child care. Infant/toddler care is the most expensive child care for families to afford and child care programs to provide.

Weekly child care rates for infants go as high as \$308 a week in Metro Atlanta. The average cost for child care for children birth to 12 months of age is \$130 weekly, approximately \$6,760 per year. Average cost varies significantly by county – with the lowest average weekly cost (\$112) in Clayton County and the highest average weekly cost (\$155) in Cherokee County.

The cost of child care for toddlers aged 13 – 36 months in metropolitan counties averages \$122 a week, \$6,344 annually. The cost of toddler care also varies by county, with Cherokee County having the highest weekly average (\$137) and Clayton County having the lowest weekly average (\$101).

Care for 4-year-old children not enrolled in the Georgia Pre-K program ranges from a weekly average of \$133 in Cherokee County to a weekly average of \$96 in Clayton County.

When children enter school, young working families see their child care expenses decrease. Full-day child care becomes before and/or after school care during the school year, and summer camps during the summer break. Summer day camps range in cost from \$100 a week to \$300 or more a week for specialty camps. Some cities, counties and youth serving non-profit agencies offer summer camp at a less expensive rate, but spaces are limited and go quickly. The average weekly cost of after school care ranges from a high of \$66 in Gwinnett County to an average weekly low of \$48 in Fayette and Clayton counties.

Cost Varies by Age Group

Average Weekly Cost of Child Care by Age and County 2004 – 2005

(2005 costs are in parentheses.)



County	0 – 12 Months	13 – 36 Months	3-Year-Olds	4-Year-Olds (non Georgia Pre-K)	School-Age Care (After School Care Only)
Cherokee	155 (144)	146 (137)	138 (130)	133	63
Clayton	112 (109)	104 (101)	98 (95)	96	48
Cobb	139 (136)	129 (126)	122 (125)	119	50
DeKalb	116 (111)	108 (103)	102 (98)	100	53
Douglas	120 (112)	111 (104)	102 (98)	100	50
Fayette	140 (135)	132 (129)	125 (119)	124	48
Fulton	134 (128)	124 (119)	116 (110)	112	61
Gwinnett	135 (133)	127 (125)	121 (118)	119	66
Henry	123 (118)	125 (113)	108 (106)	106	56
Rockdale	120 (112)	112 (105)	105 (98)	103	54
Total	130 (124)	122 (116)	114 (110)	111	55

Quality Child Care Costs More

On average, child care in accredited child care programs is more expensive than care in non-accredited programs.

A parent choosing accredited child care for an infant can expect to pay an average of \$1,404 more per year than for non-accredited care. For a child 13 – 36 months old, they can expect to pay \$1,352 more than for non-accredited child care.

Among accredited programs, family child care tends to be less expensive than child care centers. For example, the average cost of child care in an accredited family child care home in Metro Atlanta is \$123 a week. The average cost of child care in an accredited center in Metro Atlanta is \$162 a week, an additional \$2,028 annually.

Average Weekly Cost

County	0 – 12 Months		13 – 36 Months		3 Years	
	Accredited Programs	Non-Accredited Programs	Accredited Programs	Non-Accredited Programs	Accredited Programs	Non-Accredited Programs
Cherokee	171	152	163	143	149	136
Clayton	125	111	117	102	109	99
Cobb	182	136	165	126	150	120
DeKalb	145	113	134	106	126	100
Douglas	147	118	137	109	130	100
Fayette	161	140	160	131	154	123
Fulton	160	128	148	119	134	112
Gwinnett	156	133	148	125	142	122
Henry	141	123	128	115	120	109
Rockdale	155	117	148	110	138	102
Total	154	127	145	119	135	112

Can Families Afford Child Care?



On average, child care costs should not exceed more than 10% of a family’s annual gross income according to the US Department of Health and Human Services. A two-parent family with both parents working full time for the minimum wage makes \$21,424 a year before taxes. In Metro Atlanta, this family would spend a little more than 31% of their income (\$6,760) for child care for one infant. Compare this to the \$3,638 it costs for two semesters of tuition at Georgia State University. The impact of child care expenses on working single parents is even more alarming. **A single mother of two children in Fulton County making \$28,000 annually can easily spend half her gross income on child care.**

The following chart shows the median family income for each Metro county and the percentage of the median family income required to pay for child care for one infant in an accredited program.

County	Median Family Income	% of Family Income Spent on Child Care
Cherokee	66,248	13.4
Cobb	66,274	14.2
Douglas	52,537	14.5
Fulton	53,161	15.6
Dekalb	47,927	15.7
Clayton	46,787	13.8
Fayette	81,562	10.2
Gwinnett	64,873	12.5
Henry	60,175	12.1
Rockdale	57,932	13.9

The State of the Child Care Workforce



The child care workforce is the main ingredient to quality early care and education. It is also a leading contributor to the cost of child care.

Quality child care requires a well-trained workforce that is able to create and sustain trusting relationships that are the foundation for young children's learning. Quality child care requires low child to staff ratios that allow caregivers to give individualized attention to each child to support their learning. It is no wonder that of all the expense categories, personnel is the highest. **Yet even though personnel costs are the highest single expense in child care, staff remain for the most part undertrained and underpaid.**

Currently the State of Georgia requires only 10 hours of training to care for children, 515 fewer than required to do nails. And even if the requirement were increased, there is little incentive for caregivers to meet it. Wages for child care workers are among the lowest of any profession. According to recent research conducted by the Center for the Child Care Workforce, wages for child care workers in Georgia are among the lowest nationally at \$7.33 hourly, \$15,247 annually. Most child care workers have no health insurance or other benefits. It is not surprising that turnover in the child care workforce is estimated nationally at 30% a year.

Although family, friend and neighbor caregivers are not a part of the formal child care workforce, they play a crucial role in preparing young children for school. **National studies estimate that approximately half of young children 0 – 5 years are cared for regularly in family, friend and neighbor care.** We suspect that these figures hold true for Metro Atlanta as well. Little is known about the safety of these environments or the quality of the early learning experiences children in family, friend and neighbor care receive. Quality Care for Children supports family, friend and neighbor caregivers through Play & Learn activities for children and their caregivers, training, information and support and participation in the child care food program.

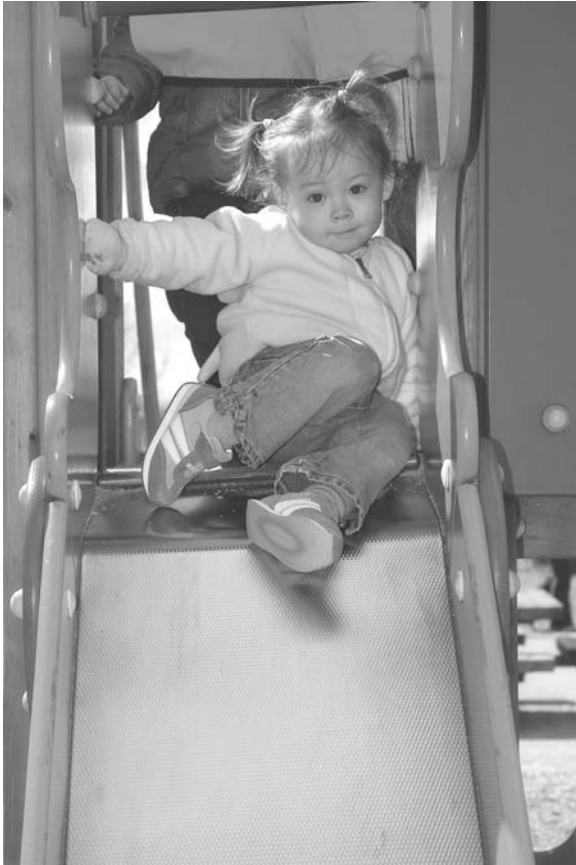
The Child Care Food Program Assists Quality

The Child Care Food Program is the only federal entitlement program that impacts the cost and quality of child care. This program reimburses child care centers and family child care homes for the costs of meals and snacks served to children, provided they meet certain requirements. The Child Care Food Program guarantees that child care programs meet minimum quality standards and that the snacks and meals served to children meet nutritional requirements. By reimbursing the costs of snacks and meals, the Child Care Food Program reduces a child care program's expenses, allowing them to keep their rates more affordable for parents. The Families and Work Institute's national Study of Children in Family Child Care and Relative Care, cited participation in the Child Care Food Program as one of the major factors associated with quality care, reporting that 87 percent of the family child care homes considered to be providing good quality child care participated in the Child Care Food Program. Further, the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Evaluation of the Child Care Food Program found that children in the food program received meals that were nutritionally superior to those served to children in child care settings without the Child Care Food Program. Quality Care for Children sponsors the Child Care Food Program for family child care providers in Georgia. As the largest sponsor in the Southeast, QCC serves approximately 1200 providers, impacting nearly 10,000 children.

The chart on the right shows estimated Child Care Food Program participation rates for family child care homes and child care centers in the 10-county metro area. These rates are based on a sample of programs in each county.

County	Child Care Centers	Family Child Care Homes
Cherokee	7%	84%
Clayton	55%	72%
Cobb	26%	57%
DeKalb	34%	77%
Douglas	29%	68%
Fayette	12%	44%
Fulton	33%	64%
Gwinnett	22%	66%
Henry	19%	51%
Rockdale	46%	47%
Total	30%	68%

Conclusion



Education always matters, but research tells us that we have a unique window of opportunity between birth and age 5 when quality education can have the greatest impact – when it matters most.

Economic studies have proven repeatedly that an investment in early care and education pays off. The investment yields immediate and long-term gains, through increased productivity and decreased costs of government. Early care and education benefits the private sector and the general public.

In spite of the research, 95% of our public education investment occurs for children after the age of 6. Quality early care and education easily costs more than a four-year education at a public university. It costs more than most parents can afford to pay. Yet current resources are not enough to fairly compensate the highly trained, skilled educators our young children need and deserve.

A quality, affordable, accessible child care system in our community will depend on partnerships between parents, child care providers, public and private funders, non-profits and government (local, state and federal). It cannot thrive without the full participation of all partners. **As a community, we need to invest in education beginning at birth and seize the opportunity for greatest impact.** This not only makes sense for the future of our children, but also for the future of our community.



The mission of Quality Care for Children is to expand the capacity of parents, child care providers and communities to nurture and educate infants and young children in Georgia.

Child Care Resource & Referral of Metro Atlanta

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