



## **GEORGIANS ASSESS THE RELATIVE VALUE OF THE LOTTERY-FUNDED EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAM**

The Georgia Prekindergarten (Pre-K) Program was established in 1993 to provide all four-year-olds an opportunity to attend a public or private preschool program designed to prepare children to enter kindergarten ready to learn. The program is funded exclusively by the Georgia lottery. Because the program is entirely voluntary, school systems may opt to not participate. On the other hand, private providers of preschool may choose to offer the program under the state guidelines, providing free pre-K education to four-year-olds. Additionally, families may choose not to enroll their four-year-olds in the program.<sup>1</sup>

An expansive study conducted by the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies (AYSPS) showed that children who attended Georgia Pre-K were far better prepared for formal schooling than children who did not.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the study showed that the program reached a broad range of families differing in economic resources, parental education, involvement with children and schools, and family structures. The study by AYSPPS showed that after accounting for individual and family characteristics and selection bias, children with significant economic disadvantages who attended Georgia's Pre-K Program were better prepared for kindergarten than were children in the Head Start program.<sup>3</sup>

In the June 2004 Peach State Poll, a quarterly survey of the Georgia general public, we asked the public about (1) its awareness of the state Pre-K program, (2) its opinion of the program, and (3) how the program compares to HOPE in increasing educational opportunities for Georgians. Most Georgians have heard about the importance of early education (77 percent) and, whether or not they have heard about the importance of early education, they believe that it is very important in preparing children for school (86 percent). Additionally, a majority of Georgians believe that four-year-olds are ready to begin formal education, and three out of four respondents from households with children younger than six years of age believe that four-year-old children are ready for school.

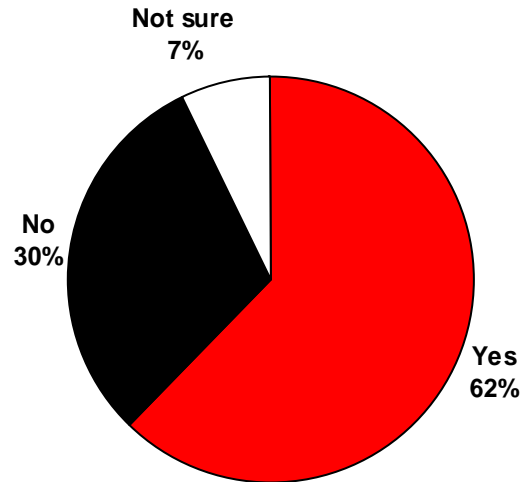
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<sup>1</sup> Most of the descriptive information about the Georgia Pre-K program presented here was acquired from the Office of School Readiness Web site, <http://www.osr.state.ga.us/whatisprek.html>. (Accessed September 16, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Henry, Gary T., et al. "Report of the Findings from the Early Childhood Study: 2001-02." Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, Georgia State University. August 2003.

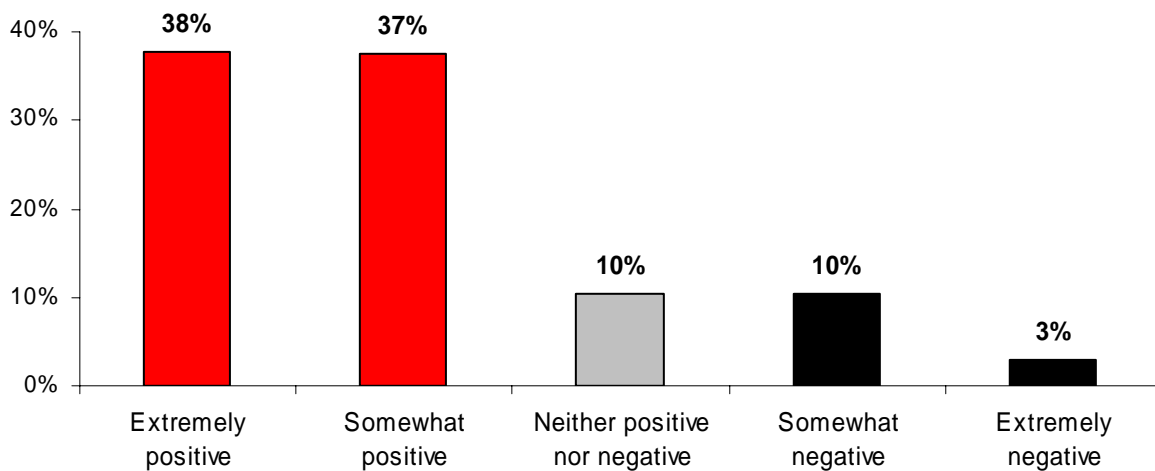
<sup>3</sup> The comparison between the children in the Georgia Pre-K program and the children in the Head Start program is based upon six of the eight directly assessed measures of language and cognitive skills and four out of five skills ratings by kindergarten teachers, and the research team controlled for several factors in order to avoid making spurious correlations.

**Given what you know about children, do you think that four-year-olds are ready to begin formal education?**

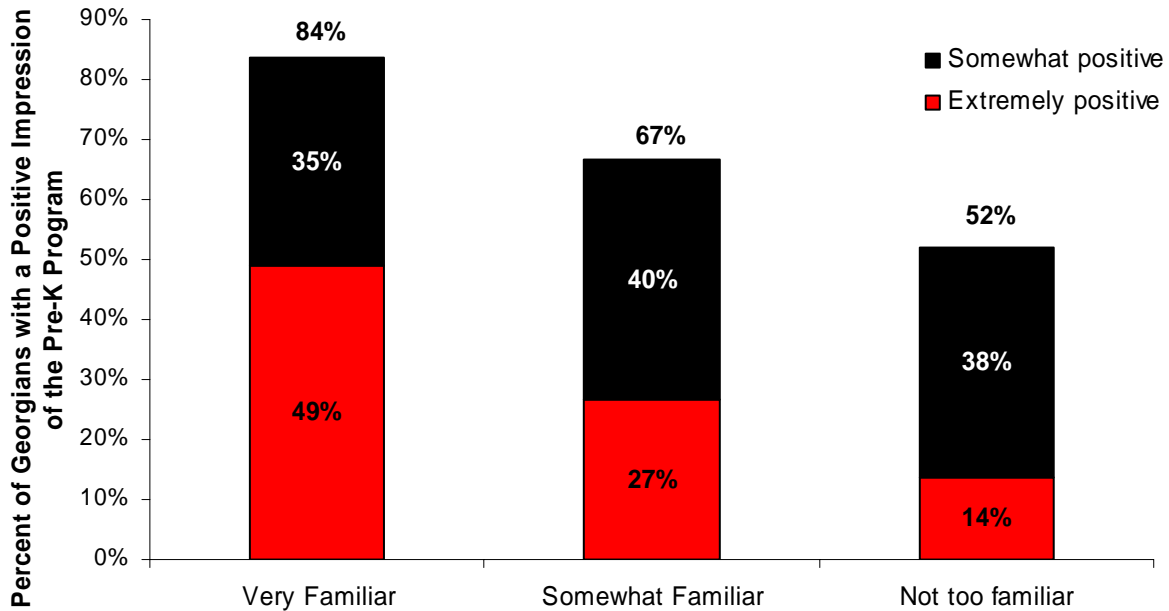


Georgians generally have a favorable impression of the Pre-K program; those who report the highest levels of familiarity with the program hold the most positive impression of it. Surprisingly, there is no meaningful difference in one’s impression of the program based on whether or not one has a child enrolled in the program. Women have a more positive impression of the program than do men, and low-income Georgians (those from households with reported income below \$20,000) are the most likely to hold a negative impression of the program.

**Impression of the Lottery Funded Pre-K Program Among Georgians Who Are At Least Somewhat Familiar with the Program**



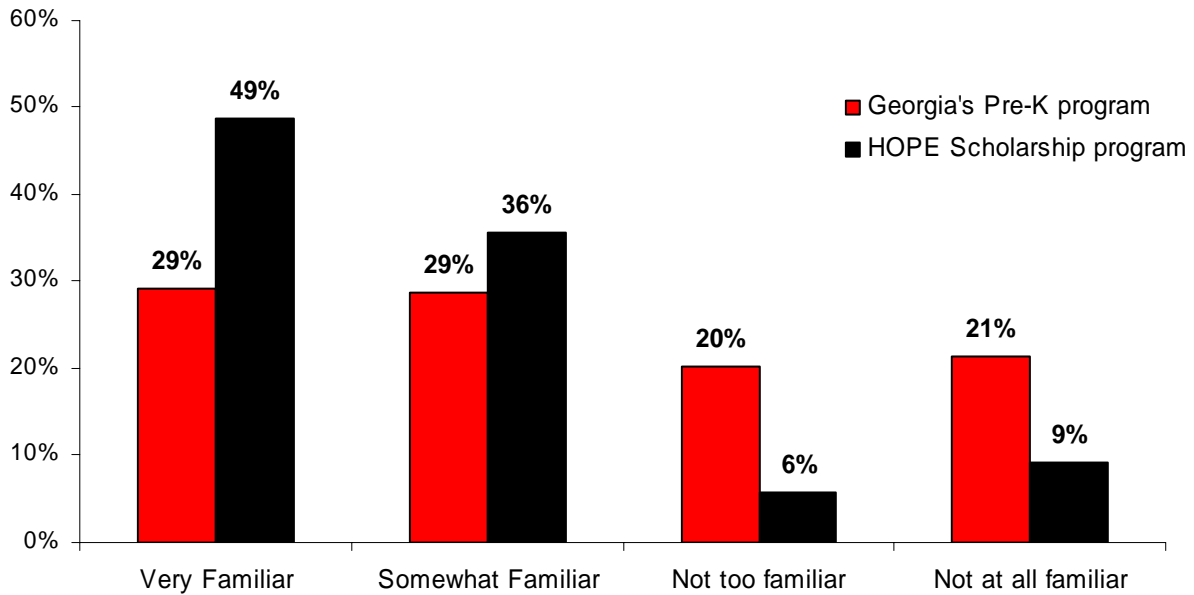
### Influence of Familiarity with the Pre-K Program on Respondents' Impressions of the Program



Although 58 percent of Georgians are either very familiar (29 percent) or at least somewhat familiar (29 percent) with the lottery funded Pre-K program offered by the state, the familiarity with Pre-K does not nearly approach the levels of familiarity with the HOPE Scholarship program, which is funded by the same lottery revenue. Eighty-five percent of the public is at least somewhat familiar with the HOPE Scholarship.

The reason it is important to consider the public’s assessment of the Georgia Pre-K program along side its impression of HOPE is because both programs are funded from the same source: revenue from the state lottery. While the lottery has been a sufficiently dependable source of revenue to fund HOPE Scholarships, HOPE Grants, and the Pre-K program as these programs have grown, experts expect that the costs of the combined programs will exceed lottery revenues in a matter of years. When this occurs—or more likely before it occurs—state policymakers will have to make difficult decisions affecting the scope or breadth of these efforts to increase educational opportunities for Georgians.

**How familiar are you with ...**

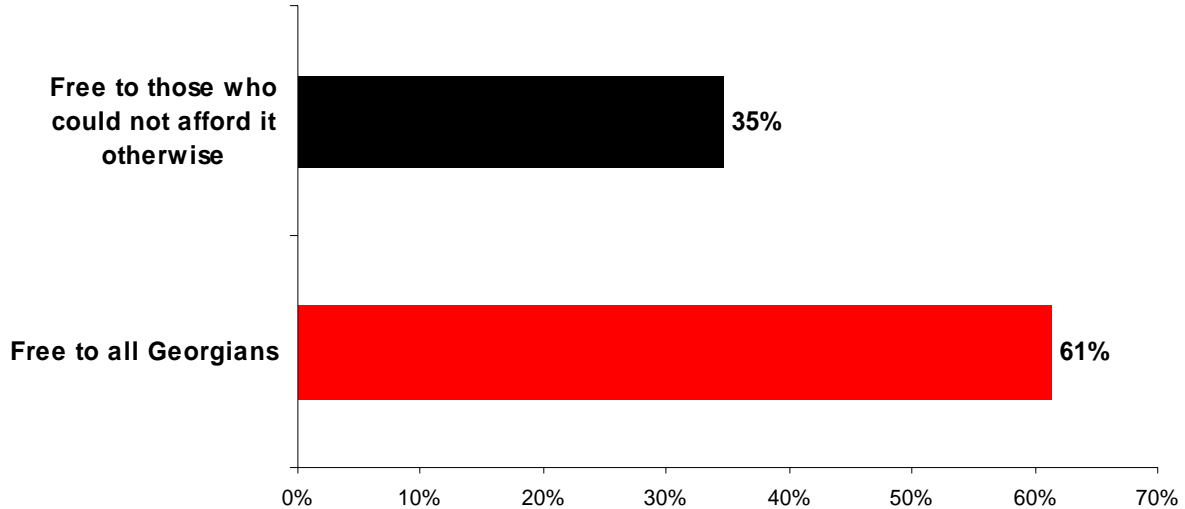


In August 2003, the Peach State Poll asked the public its impression of the HOPE Scholarship Program, and 80 percent of the public expressed a positive view, 48 percent “extremely positive” and another 32 percent “somewhat positive.” Only 8 percent expressed a negative view of HOPE. Thus, while both HOPE and the Pre-K program are viewed very positively, the public holds a slightly more positive impression of HOPE.

Slightly more than one in three Georgians support limiting access to the Georgia Pre-K Program based on financial need; the notion behind creating the needs-based criterion is to make the funds for the program go farther for those who, without the program, may not have the opportunity to send their four-year-old child to a Pre-K program. Nevertheless, a majority of the public (61 percent) say that the program should be free to all Georgians. There is very little difference in support for making it free to all Georgians based on income except that those with incomes above \$100,000 are more likely to oppose a needs-based criterion.

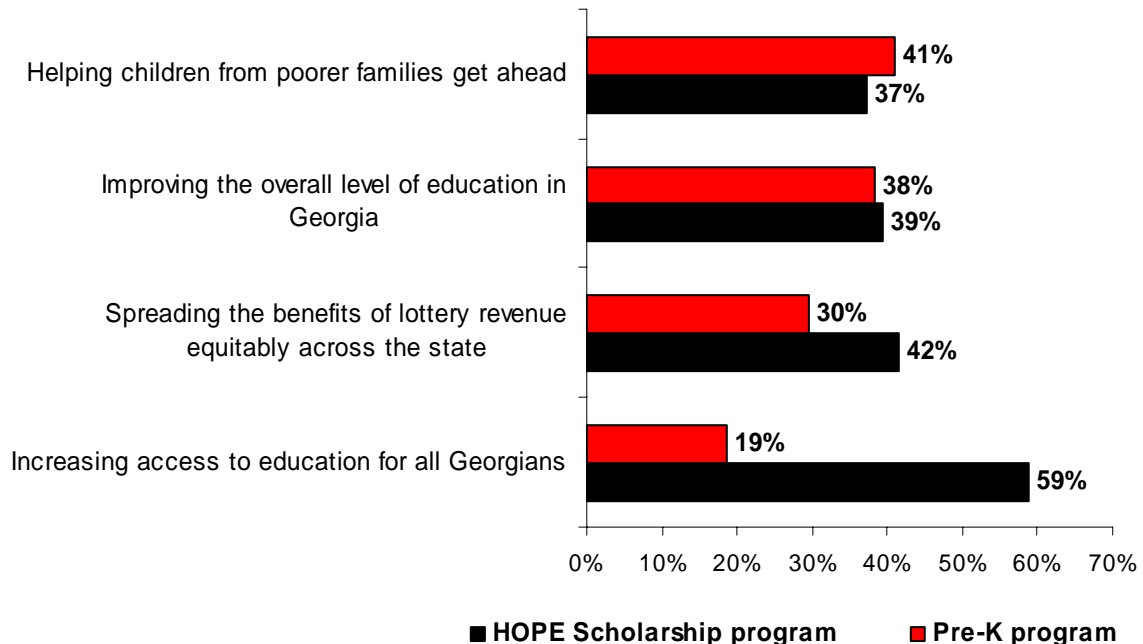
Even those who identify themselves as politically liberal are more likely to support access to free Pre-K programs for all Georgians (57 percent) than to support making access free for just those who could not otherwise afford it (42 percent). Liberals, however, are more likely to support a needs-based criterion for the Pre-K program than are moderates (31 percent) or conservatives (33 percent).

**Should the Lottery-funded Pre-K be free to all Georgians or to those who could not afford it?**



Not only is the general public more familiar with the HOPE Scholarship program than with the Pre-K program, but Georgians believe that HOPE does more for increasing access to education than does the Pre-K program. The only area where the Pre-K program is seen as better suited than the HOPE scholarship is in helping children from poorer families get ahead.

**Which program is better better suited for ...**



The public is about just as likely to see the Pre-K program as it is to see the HOPE scholarship improving the overall level of education in Georgia. Thirty-eight percent say that the Pre-K program is better for improving the overall level of education in the state, 39 percent say that the HOPE scholarship program is better suited for this, and another 15 percent say that the two programs are equally suited to meeting this goal. Despite research showing that low-income Georgians are less likely to benefit directly from the HOPE scholarship program than are upper-income Georgians,<sup>4</sup> the belief that the Pre-K Program is better suited for improving the overall level of education is more prevalent in upper-income respondents.

In general, Georgians are much more likely to say that the HOPE scholarship is better at increasing access to education than is the Pre-K program. Even those respondents with children ages five or under are more likely to give HOPE more credit for increasing access.

It is not too surprising that the public has a more positive impression of the HOPE Scholarship program than it does of the Pre-K program. First, the HOPE Program is more widely known than is the Pre-K program. Second, more people directly benefit from the HOPE Scholarship program in a given year than from the Georgia Pre-K program (see Table 1), and third, the monetary value of the HOPE award granted to scholarship recipients exceeds that of the Pre-K participant.

**Table 1: Number of Participants in HOPE and Pre-K Programs for 2002 and 2003**

	2002	2003
<b>Total HOPE Scholars (both public and private)</b>	<b>91,765</b>	<b>99,150</b>
<b>Public HOPE Grant DTAE</b>	<b>5,912</b>	<b>7,358</b>
<b>Pre-K (both public and private)</b>	<b>63,613</b>	<b>68,226</b>

Fifteen percent of respondents say that either they or someone they know was unable to place a child into the state-funded Pre-K program due to a lack of space. Those who say that either they or someone they know were unable to place a child into the program do not differ in any meaningful way from the rest of the population in terms of race, income, or the probability of living in a rural area.

The data presented in this report are taken from a Peach State Poll conducted by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government between June 8 and June 14, 2004. The poll included 801 telephone interviews of randomly selected adults in Georgia. For a sample of this size, the margin of error at the 95 percent confidence level is +/- 3.5 percent. Although sampling error is only one source of potential survey error, all precautions have been taken to minimize other sources of error for this survey.

<sup>4</sup> Cornwell, Christopher, and David B. Mustard. "The Distributional Impacts of Lottery Funded Aid: Evidence from Georgia's HOPE Scholarship." Draft August 2001, pending publication in the *Journal of Labor Economics*. Accessed online (<http://www.terry.uga.edu/hope/hope.lottery.pdf>), October 4, 2004.

The Carl Vinson Institute of Government, a public service and outreach unit of the University of Georgia, has as part of its mission to provide policymakers with systematic, objective research to inform policy decisions. In accordance with that mission, the Peach State Poll aims to give voice to the public on important policy matters and issues pertaining to political, social, and economic life in Georgia.

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