

Waterford – Virtual Parent Meeting

Wednesday, September 2nd

Frequent Asked Questions

Theme 1: Data Privacy, Security, & Governance

1. What student data is collected? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Waterford collects only the minimum information needed to run the program, track each child's progress, and share that progress with teachers, district leaders, and families. For DCSD's Pre-K programs, this includes three kinds of information.

- First, basic identifiers the district provides so your child can sign in and be matched to the right classroom: first and last name, grade level, school, classroom or homeroom, teacher name, a district student ID number, and a Waterford username and password.
- Second, limited information is used to tailor instruction: gender and home language, plus which Waterford program your child is enrolled in within the platform.
- Third, learning data generated as your child uses the program: which activities were completed, how your child responded, progress through the skills sequence, and any work created inside an activity.
- Like any online service, the program also records routine technical information such as the device's IP address and the cookies that keep your child signed in within the program.

Waterford does not collect your child's date of birth or age, home address, phone number, email address, race or ethnicity, health, disability, or special-education information, or any parent or guardian contact information for the DCSD program.

Learning data is essential because it is what allows the program to adapt: without it, Waterford could not adjust the level of difficulty, offer the right practice, or show teachers and families how a child is progressing. Waterford does not use artificial intelligence to gather additional information about children, and we avoid collecting anything unrelated to learning or required reporting. Waterford does not use AI to collect additional data about children, and we do not gather information unrelated to learning or required reporting.

2. What student data is shared with Waterford? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

The district shares the following information: first and last name, grade level, school, classroom or homeroom, teacher name, district student ID number, gender, home language, and the Waterford program your child is enrolled in within the program.

3. How is student data stored? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

All student data is stored and processed in secure cloud data centers located in the United States; no district or student data is stored or processed outside the U.S.

4. How long is data retained? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Waterford keeps information only as long as necessary for the purpose it was collected, for our contractual obligations to DCSD, and for our legal and regulatory obligations. In practice, your child's identifiable data is retained for the duration of the district's agreement with Waterford and is securely deleted within 90 days after that agreement ends — or sooner if the district requests it, in which case deletion or transfer is completed within 60 days of the request.

5. What happens to the data when a child leaves the district? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

When a child leaves the district, the district deactivates the child's Waterford account, and the account can no longer be used to sign in. The child's identifiable data is then handled under the retention rules above: the district may direct Waterford to delete it at any time (completed within 60 days of the request), and it is deleted in any case within 90 days after the district's agreement ends. Parents may also submit a deletion request directly using the form described in Question 8.

6. What security measures are in place to prevent data breaches? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Waterford operates an information security management system certified to International Organization for Standardization, (ISO) and International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), 27001:2022, the leading international standard for information security; the certification audit was completed in October 2025. Specific protections include encryption of all data in transit (HTTPS) and at rest using customer-managed encryption keys; strict separation between each district's data, enforced with signed authentication tokens on every request; role-based access controls and least-privilege access for Waterford staff; annual FERPA and security training for all employees; and written data-protection requirements for every vendor or sub processor that supports the platform.

Waterford maintains a written incident response plan. Under our agreement with DCSD, if a security incident ever affected student data, Waterford would notify the district within 72 hours of confirming the incident so that families could be informed promptly.

7. Does Waterford sell, share, or aggregate student data or student information? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

No. Waterford never sells student data and never uses it for advertising, marketing to children, or building profiles of students or families. Waterford may use aggregated, de-identified data — information that cannot be linked back to any individual child — for research and to improve the program, as permitted by our agreement with DCSD and by FERPA.

8. Can parents request deletion of their child's data? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Yes. Parents and guardians may request a summary of their child's data or its deletion at any time using Waterford's request form: <https://www.waterford.org/data-summary-or-deletion-request/>. Because the district is the custodian of your child's education records under FERPA, Waterford processes these requests in coordination with DCSD to verify the request and complete it.

9. Is the data collected on student progress in the program being used by the county or the teachers alone? Is there a way for parents to opt out of sharing the data on student progress? I think my biggest concern is that this is a tool to collect data on student progress, and the lure of data is more compelling than the research around screen time for students. I'd also like more information on how any data being stored is saved, protected, and what entities it is shared with. Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Your child's progress data is visible to your child's teacher, and to the school and district administrators DCSD authorizes — for example, so a school can see how its Pre-K classrooms are doing overall.

10. Is there a camera on or recording while they are using Waterford? Are the children's voices recorded? Are those recordings stored? What are they used for? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

No. Waterford does not use a camera or microphone on any device. No audio or video of children is captured, recorded, stored, or transmitted, and Waterford collects no biometric data of any kind. What the program does record is your child's responses within activities — for example, which answer was selected — so it can decide what to teach next and report progress to the teacher.

11. How is data stored/secured? Is data aggregated and sold or used in another fashion? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Storage and security are described in Questions 3 and 6. Student data is never sold and is never used for advertising or profiling.

12. The website says that to use the program you must allow Google Analytics. What data is shared with and retained by Google? Why is this necessary? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Google Analytics is not used in the student learning program your child uses. It runs on Waterford's public website (waterford.org), which is what the opt-out link in our privacy policy refers to. Visitors to the public website can opt out of Google Analytics across all websites at <https://tools.google.com/dlpage/gaoptout>.

Schools sometimes see Google listed on Waterford's network allow-list (<https://help.waterford.org/for-admins/adding-waterford-urls-to-content-filter-approval-list>) and understandably ask why. The student program reaches Google only for two utility services: Google Fonts, which supplies the typefaces used to display text, and reCAPTCHA, which protects the sign-in page from automated bots. Neither receives your child's name, ID, or learning data.

13. Can we request our child's data to be deleted from Waterford at the end of the year? How would that impact their advancement/usage of the program the following year in kindergarten? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Yes — use the form in Question 8 at any time, including at the end of the school year. Please note that deleting the record also deletes your child's progress history, so the program would have no memory of the skills your child had already mastered.

Theme 2: Research, Evidence, & Efficacy

14. What data does the district have showing that Waterford is effective? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

A meta-analysis backing Waterford's effectiveness is supported by an extensive body of research that combines data from 38 studies involving over 48,000 children. This includes 10 gold-standard randomized controlled trial (RCT) studies—rigorous experiments where children are randomly assigned to either use the program or not, allowing researchers to conclude that Waterford directly causes the learning improvements.

The research consistently shows that Waterford's early reading and math programs help young learners make academic gains beyond standard yearly expectations.

Additionally, longitudinal data tracks students over several years to see how they perform long-term—demonstrates that the foundational gains children make in PreK hold up over time. Waterford is a proven, appropriate program that supports children of all backgrounds, including multilingual learners, children receiving special education services, and those from families experiencing poverty. You can learn more [here](#).

15. What studies have been conducted? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Waterford publishes its research studies, including study designs and results, at <https://www.waterford.org/research/>.

16. What peer-reviewed studies independent of Waterford support district-wide adoption? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Waterford has 69 peer-reviewed studies. You can review studies at <https://www.waterford.org/research/>.

17. What evidence exists specifically for in-school Pre-K classrooms rather than home-use implementations? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

A study of four-year-olds in Head Start classrooms showed that using the Waterford computer program at school for just 15 minutes a day helped children learn significantly more than standard classroom teaching alone. When tested at the end of the school year, children who used the reading and math software in class scored higher in key areas like vocabulary, phonological awareness, print knowledge, and basic math skills. These benefits held for boys and girls across various backgrounds, including children learning English and those with speech or language needs. [Read the study.](#)

18. What evidence exists for diverse urban populations like DCSD? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Waterford's effectiveness is backed by an extensive body of research that combines data from 38 studies involving over 48,000 children.

Among the racial and ethnic groups in our studies, Waterford is a proven solution for growing children's literacy skills. The effects of using Waterford were larger than what is considered educationally significant.

Black/African American students saw the most significant outcomes in reading, fostering learning gains beyond what they would have achieved in a year. For Latino/a students, the impact of using Waterford well exceeded the benchmark for meaningful growth in reading, and that was also the case for White/Caucasian students.

For children experiencing poverty, Waterford improves educational outcomes, helping students achieve reading gains beyond what they would have achieved in half a year. These strong results are demonstrated across seven studies, with nearly 2,500 students

On average, multilingual learners using Waterford advanced more than a full year beyond expected growth—results that show how the program can help underserved students make significant literacy gains.

Results show students receiving special education services saw large improvements in both reading and math and advanced more than a full year beyond expected growth when using Waterford.

19. Are other school districts in Georgia using the program? If so, what results have they reported? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

There are many Georgia districts using Waterford. Waterford is unable to share specific data from other districts.

20. What evidence shows that Waterford outperforms teacher-directed, play-based instruction for 3- and 4-year-olds? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Play-based instruction is essential for 3- and 4-year-olds. Waterford shouldn't replace play-based instruction or teacher-guided instruction.

21. Are there any 3rd party or external data that validates that Waterford is beneficial for kids this young? Are there any randomized trials? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Yes, Waterford has 35 third-party studies, 7 of which are randomized controlled trials. In total, Waterford has 10 randomized controlled trial studies, and 69 peer-reviewed studies support its effectiveness. <https://www.waterford.org/research/>

22. It was mentioned that the program has been around for 50 years, but is there solid data proving its effectiveness in increasing the literacy and/or numeracy rate across school districts that utilize the program? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

A [recent case study](#) offers compelling evidence. When Dr. Shawn Foster became Orangeburg County School District's first superintendent in 2020, only 18% of students entered kindergarten ready to learn.

After implementing Waterford Early Learning in PreK and expanding it through 2nd grade, the results were measurable and sustained. Kindergarten readiness grew by 115% and 3rd grade reading scores increased by 123%. For the first time, Orangeburg outperformed the state average.

The students who used Waterford from PreK through 2nd grade went on to post the district's greatest 3rd grade gains ever recorded.

Theme 3: Instructional Model, Pedagogy, & Screen Time

23. How does Waterford support social-emotional development when a child is interacting with software rather than another person? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Waterford activities have embedded [mindset skills](#) focused on executive function, self-awareness, social awareness, and citizenship.

Through tailored instruction and positive reinforcement, children build competence and confidence that fuel growth mindsets, intrinsic motivation, and a love of learning.

When children need extra encouragement to finish a task, Waterford provides support ranging from repeating instructions to offering encouragement and visual clues to step-by-step, follow-me instruction. This helps young learners develop persistence skills.

By reinforcing these skills through activities such as I Can Calm Down, Do I Have To? It's Not Fair, My Family, and more, it supports the social-emotional skills children develop through interaction with others.

24. What percentage of literacy instruction will be software-driven versus teacher-driven? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

The recommended use of Waterford Early Learning is 15 minutes per school day. The remainder of your child's literacy learning is teacher-led and play-based classroom instruction.

25. Is the intent of the program to assess whether students are grasping the concepts being taught? If so, is there a way to reduce the time to once per week instead of daily? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

The program's primary purpose is instruction, not assessment. Within the adaptive learning path, brief skill checks are woven into the activities themselves; when a child needs more time with a skill, the program re-teaches and offers additional support, and when a child is ready, it accelerates to more complex skills. Because the program teaches in short, sequenced steps, consistency matters: the research results described in Theme 2 are based on regular daily use of about 15 minutes.

26. How do you manage quick learners who progress through the material and master second-grade material? What comes next? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Some children develop skills at a faster pace. An adaptive learning path keeps these students on the edge of their learning curve through the end of the program. Instruction is accelerated as a

child demonstrates proficiency through a skill pre-assessment, triggering the adaptive learning path to bypass instruction and practice.

If a student completes the entire Waterford curriculum, Waterford professional learning consultants work directly with the child's teacher to leverage additional resources.

27. What specific value of tools does this program offer that a teacher cannot provide using traditional instruction, such as pen and paper or classroom board work? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

To determine precisely what PreK children know requires teachers to sit one-on-one with a child. For example, teachers need to show a child capital and lowercase letters to know if the child can identify them.

Waterford was built with a firm understanding of the research on how young children learn. Waterford provides instruction in ways that emulate how teachers teach in the classroom and are consistent with research on how young children learn best.

By providing in-the-moment, individual instruction personalized to the child's current skill level, Waterford complements the instruction being provided by the teacher. Furthermore, teachers have data to inform the instruction they provide to individual students and group instruction.

Theme 4: Assessment, Progress Monitoring, & Metrics

28. Will outcome data be publicly reported? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Waterford does not publish any district's results or name a district in any report without that district's prior written approval.

29. What does success look like with Waterford? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Success in Waterford means your child is building the academic foundations that prepare them for kindergarten and set them on a strong path toward third grade reading proficiency. As your child engages with Waterford, the program adjusts based on how they are progressing, providing individualized instruction that strengthens the early reading and language skills young learners need. Teachers can use real-time data to guide small group work, reinforce skills, and provide targeted support so the software complements classroom teaching rather than replacing it. When Waterford is working well, you see a child who is engaged, building skills over time, and showing clear growth in the early literacy foundations that set them up for long-term success.

30. I understand that the program is adaptive and dynamic with our child's progress. But what I didn't feel was addressed is how our students' progress on the program is being assessed, and what is that assessment being used for? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Waterford continuously checks your child's understanding as they interact with the program. If your child struggles, the program automatically steps in with extra help and simpler explanations; when they master a concept, it moves them ahead to more challenging skills. Teachers also get clear, simple updates on your child's progress, so they know exactly how to support them in the classroom. Watch [this video](#) to learn more about how the adaptive learning path works.

Theme 5: Artificial Intelligence (AI) Usage & Machine Learning (ML)

31. Is artificial intelligence used? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

Waterford's programs use a rules-based approach to sequencing. A child's learning path is guided by educator-designed rules—not by ML or AI driven models.

Waterford Assessment of Core Skills (WACS) uses Item Response Theory (IRT), a trusted psychometric method, to estimate proficiency and adjust item difficulty appropriately.

Waterford uses AI tools internally, in the same way many publishers do, to help its staff draft instructional materials. Every AI-assisted item is reviewed and approved by Waterford's education team before it appears in the product, and no student data or other personal information is ever provided to those tools.

32. Are student interactions used to train artificial intelligence models or algorithms? Response provided directly from Waterford Early Learning.

No. Your child is not being recorded; however, responses are recorded and used to provide the next appropriate item.

Theme 6: Other General Questions

33. It was unclear what the expectation was for time to use the program - is it 15 min per day in the classroom AND 15 min. per day at home? Is it 15min per day at home if there was not time to do the program in the classroom? If the latter, how will that be communicated to us?

The recommended usage within the platform is (15) minutes per day, (75) minutes per week, and (300) minutes per month via a traditional workday calendar which reflects (20) instructional days. The total time per week/per month will vary according to the instructional day variable. If students utilized the platform within the classroom setting, they wouldn't use it again at home because the (15) minute requirement was met at school. This communication would take place between the partnership established between the teacher and parents which will enhance the school to home communication connection.

34. The term "supplemental" was used a lot to refer to the program, and that it was meant to "reinforce" concepts. If our teachers believe that the limited class time, they have is better utilized teaching their curriculum concepts in a different way, are they penalized? If so, then can you better explain how this is supplemental and not required?

The resource is used in conjunction with the various instructional delivery models being deployed within the classroom setting. Teachers are expected to utilize the embedded resources to complete their instructional planning phase that they deem appropriate to support all scholars within their classroom setting. The resource is a seamless instructional tool because everything is aligned to the (GELDS). [Georgia PreK Correlation August 2025.pdf](#)

35. Is the data collected on student progress in the program being used by the county or the teachers alone? Is there a way for parents to opt out of sharing the data on student progress?

Monthly reports are analyzed to measure overall growth of student performance levels on specific content areas that students are exposed to within the platform. Teachers can utilize the various reports to provide instructional pivots, remediation, acceleration, etc. to support the learning progression of students within the platform which should mirror informal observation data within the classroom setting.

36. When did DCSD enter into an agreement with Waterford?

The Waterford program has been utilized by staff members and students as an instructional resource since 2018. For the 26-27 SY, the current agreement was approved by the Board of Education during the August 2026 board meeting.

37. What is the total annual cost and how much is DCSD paying for Waterford?

The annual cost is contingent upon the amount of licenses that are purchased for student use as a supplemental resource. The DCSD pays for Waterford via grant and general budget funds. For the 26-27 SY the cost is not to exceed \$130,000 which includes licenses for students and professional learning.

38. What funding source is being used to purchase Waterford?

The funding sources used to purchase Waterford during the 26-27 SY are the Pre-K4 Grant and General Budget Funds.

39. How long does the contract last?

For the 26-27 SY, the current agreement will operate as a supplemental resource from August 18, 2026 – August 17, 2027.

40. What other programs were evaluated?

Currently, the Waterford Supplemental Resource is the approved vendor by the Department of Early Learning and Pre-K Programs. Appropriate district procedures were followed, and

the current agreement was approved by the Board of Education during the August 2026 board meeting.

41. What specific evidence led the district to choose Waterford?

The research associated with the program that was highlighted in the previous questions and the current alignment to the Georgia Early Learning Development Standards (GELDS).
[Georgia PreK Correlation August 2025.pdf](#)

42. Was public input sought?

No public input was sought.

43. Are there any pre-existing relationships, of any type including personal and professional, between employees of the district?

No, there are no pre-existing relationships with the vendor.

44. What learning activities are being reduced to make room for Waterford?

No learning opportunities are being reduced within the classroom setting. Waterford is used to support instruction of a student's individual academic pathway via small group and free choice centers.

45. How will the district continuously evaluate whether Waterford is developmentally appropriate for both 3- and 4-year-olds and at what frequency will evaluations occur?

The Department of Early Learning and Pre-K Programs will monitor academic performance levels throughout the year, conduct informal observations, deploy timely surveys for feedback, etc. to assist with the evaluation of the supplemental resource that is aligned to the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards.
[Georgia PreK Correlation August 2025.pdf](#)

46. How will teachers respond if a child has difficulty engaging with or using the program?

Teachers assist students with building up their level of engagement with the platform until they get comfortable with navigating it via the Gradual release Model.

47. If success criteria are not met, will the district cease usage?

The platform is aligned to students' individual pathways. Success looks different for each student based on their performance within the platform. Informal observations, teacher feedback, and survey results from staff members and parents will continue to be utilized as data points to determine next steps.

48. Has the district evaluated total screen exposure across the entire day?

Yes. DCSD monitors the use of district-issued student instructional devices across all grade levels. The District reviews average daily usage and trends at the district, school, and grade

levels. Data collected during the second semester of the 2025–2026 school year established an initial baseline, and DCSD continues to collect and analyze current-year data. As this work continues, DCSD is taking a balanced, data-driven approach informed by research, district usage data, instructional needs, and stakeholder feedback. This information will help guide future decisions and ensure technology is used purposefully to support teaching and student learning.

49. Who is responsible for monitoring total classroom screen time.

The instructional staff and school leaders monitor instruction at the building level throughout the academic school year.

50. Is participation mandatory?

No, participation of students utilizing the Waterford platform is not mandatory.

51. How can parents opt out?

If a parent chooses not to allow their child to participate, they should email their school's principal informing them of this request. Upon receipt, principals will email the Department of Early Learning and Pre-K Programs to have the licenses removed from the assigned student.

52. If parents opt out, what alternative instruction will be provided?

There is no alternative option if a parent chooses for their child not to participate.

53. Will opting out affect grades, assessments, placement, services, or access to other learning opportunities?

No, not utilizing the Waterford platform doesn't impact assessments, grades, additional learning opportunities, placement, and services to students.

54. Will parents be asked to provide informed consent before their child begins using the program?

The program was purchased as a supplemental resource for all Pre-K (3&4) students and teachers. If a parent chooses not to allow their child to participate, they need to email their building level leaders stating that they don't want their child accessing Waterford. Upon receipt, they will email the Department of Early Learning and Pre-K Programs to have the license removed from the assigned student.

55. Are teachers being held accountable for ensuring students' hit milestones within the program?

No. Milestones achieved within the platform by students are driven by their individual performance level that's aligned to their individual pathway.

56. What kind of device will be used in the classroom? Is it one device shared among all students, or will each student have their own?

Each class is allocated a total of (4-6) chrome books that students utilize via an established rotation by the teacher within the classroom setting.

57. What will students be missing during the mandated 15 minutes? Will they miss phonics, math, and science education taught by their teacher in favor of this program?

No learning opportunities are being reduced within the classroom setting. Waterford is used to support instruction of a student's individual academic pathway within the classroom setting.

58. How is "kindergarten readiness" defined? What are the skills associated and how are they measured?

Skills that students develop across multiple domains and areas in preparation for their transition into a kindergarten setting. Skills associated with kindergarten readiness include cognitive, SEL, physical development, etc. Teachers often measure student's skill development via informal observations, anecdotal notes, matrices, running records, etc.

59. Do students' test scores follow them as they move to higher grades? How are those scores used as they get older?

No, students' scores don't follow them from grade to grade. The scores are only utilized by the teacher via reports that they can retrieve from the platform to support data driven decisions for students within the classroom setting.

60. What program within the Waterford platform are Pre-K3 and Pre-K4 students assigned to take during the school year?

Pre-K3 students will be assigned to the Smart Start platform and Pre-K4 students will be assigned to the Early Reading and Early Math platforms during the academic school year.

61. Has the district completed FERPA (family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) and COPPA (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act) reviews?

DCSD has established processes for reviewing FERPA and COPPA compliance as part of its ongoing technology, vendor, and application review process. Systems that collect or process student information are evaluated for appropriate data collection, use, sharing, access, security, retention, and deletion. Additional security, privacy, legal, and procurement reviews are conducted based on the system and the student information involved.

FERPA awareness is also included in the District's required annual compliance training for all staff. Because technology and vendor services continue to evolve, FERPA and COPPA compliance are reviewed on an ongoing basis rather than through a one-time districtwide review.