

Local Goddard School has survived tough economy

County is home to 9 of the centers

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SUWANEE — After her children were born, Erika Hill saw a need for early childhood education near her home in Gwinnett County and an opportunity to do something about it.

The Duluth resident worked in the corporate world for years after graduating from Georgia Tech with a degree in electrical engineering. The arrival of her children, who are now 7 and 8, put her on the path to a new career.

"I was looking for a childcare solution for myself, and I saw the void here," Hill said.

That, coupled with her desire to own a

business, led her to open a franchise location of The Goddard School. Located on Satellite Boulevard in Suwanee, Hill's center opened in 2008.

Despite the economic downturn that followed, Hill's business has survived, providing early childhood education for infants through pre-kindergartners and after-school care for kids up to age 10.

"Child care — I wouldn't say it's recession-proof, but it's recession tolerant," Hill said. "The dips are not as deep as in other industries."

Some families have had to make adjustments — for example, moving from full-time enrollment to coming to the school part time, Hill said. Early childhood education is a blend of academics and socialization that is



Staff Photo: Jason Braverman

Preschool students at The Goddard School, including from left, Kaitlyn Evans, Jacob Coombs and Miles Griffin listen as teacher Kayla Thompson goes over a lesson on Tuesday morning.

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hard to replicate at home, she said.

One thing that makes Hill especially proud is that the 4-year-olds who finish the pre-K program leave the school knowing how to read, and many families feel that is worth the investment.

Throughout the nation, The Goddard Schools have fared generally well, said Joseph Schumacher, president and CEO of the Pennsylvania-based Goddard Systems Inc. There are more than 360 franchised schools in 34 states. Gwinnett County is home to nine of the centers.

"Early childhood education is the last thing people want to cut down on," he said.

Safety is the No. 1 priority of the schools, Schumacher said. The company has a stringent quality assurance process that focuses on safety, health and security.

The school also offers an academic program designed to help children develop a



Staff Photo: Jason Braverman

Ashley Coleman, a pre-kindergarten teacher at the Goddard School in Suwanee, asks Chase Haynes about his eyes as he works on a lesson about colors and numbers.

lifelong love of learning, he said. The curriculum is based on play-based learning.

"Research shows children learn best through dramatic and creative play," Schumacher said.

Classes at The Goddard School are taught by teachers who are familiar with the developmental milestones

appropriate for their class, Hill said. The lead teachers for the 3-year-old and 4-year-old classes also have at least a bachelor's degree.

To reinforce to parents that there is a purpose behind the play, lesson plans are posted outside of each classroom. The teachers also blend traditional methods, such as circle time, with the

play-based learning.

After pre-K student Austin Guest completed an assignment that involved him identifying his eye color and highlighting items he likes to look at, he said he was "having fun."

When asked why he thought school was fun, he said, "because you learn there."