

# Board of Early Care and Learning

## Board of Early Care and Learning Meeting

Thursday, November 15, 2018, 9:00 a.m.

Bright from the Start

Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning  
2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive SE – East Tower,

Oak Conference Room

Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Amy M. Jacobs, Commissioner

## Meeting Minutes

### Board Members

Susan Harper  
Melissa Boekhaus  
Carlene Talton

Phil Davis  
Kathy Howell  
Victor Morgan

### Public Guests

Maryum Gibson, Cali Jahn, Katie Landes, Joe Perrault, Erica Sitkoff, Vett Vandiver, Elizabeth Madrigal-Walker, Paul Walker, Kayla Washington

### Bright from the Start Staff

Amy Jacobs, Commissioner  
Rian Ringsrud, Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration  
Elisabetta Kasfir, Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs  
Kristin Bernhard, Deputy Commissioner for System Reform  
Susan Adams, Deputy Commissioner for Pre-K and Instructional Supports  
Pam Stevens, Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services  
Bentley Ponder, Senior Director of Research and Policy  
Allison Setterlind, Director of Head Start Collaboration  
Craig Detweiler, Chief Information Officer  
Christi Moore, Director of Professional Learning  
Reg Griffin, Chief Communications Officer  
Ira Sudman, Chief Legal Officer  
Carrie Ashbee, Executive Director of Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning  
Carol Hartman, Director of Policy and System Reform  
Liz Young, Director of Government Relations & Special Projects  
Denise Jenson, Hearing Officer  
Faith Duncan, Director of Pre-K Field Operations  
Jill O'Meara, Community Coordinator  
Laura Wagner, Director of Quality Rated Policy & Partnerships  
Brandy Locchetta, Inclusion Manager  
Tajha Harden, Subsidy Manager  
Laura Reid, Professional Learning Community Specialist  
Jackie Shivers, Director of Quality Initiatives

William Cox, Director of Infrastructure  
Tamika Boone, Compliance Manager  
Sonja Adams, Nutrition Program Administrator  
Nilia Lalin, EHS Partnership Specialist  
Bridgette Walker, EHS Partnership Coordinator  
Pamela Hall, Workforce Development Specialist  
Clayton Adams, Community Coordinator  
Vanessa Brown, EHS Education Specialist  
Mary Stoklas, Quality Rated Operations Coordinator  
Audrienne Smith, Community Partnership Coordinator  
Robin Stevens, Director of Human Resources  
Kati Cosby, Community Partnership Coordinator  
Patty Malone, CCS Consultant  
Katherine Vernet, Contracts Attorney  
Woody Dover, Budget Administrator  
Connie Fisher, Application Development Manager  
LariLyn Beyer, QR Assessor  
Mike Rodgers, Director of Finance  
Nia King, Special Projects & Business Operations Manager  
Reneé Lind, CAPS Scholarship Administration Manager  
Demetria Joyce, Instructional Learning Manager  
Shayla Lewis, Inclusion Specialist  
Darra Jackson, CACDS Coordinator  
Rhonda Parker, CCS Field Operations Director  
Marsha Ruiz-Crosby, CCS Regional Manager  
Rukiya Thomas, CCS Consultant  
April Rogers, Director of Program Operations  
Jennifer Taylor, CCS Regional Manager  
Lisa Rambhajan, Facilities Coordinator  
Barbara Sanders, Business Analyst  
Edward Rowell, Community Partnership Coordinator  
Keturah Washington, Program Support Coordinator

Bridgette Washington, QR Assessor  
Emmanuel Asumadu, Administrative Assistant  
Glenda Davis-Canteen, Community Partnership  
Coordinator  
Ebony Kern, Intern  
Kimberly Davis, QR Assessor Supervisor  
Gary Bass, Application Developer  
Paul Ominde, Developer  
Saritha Gummadi, Application Developer  
Sarswathi Seelam, Application Developer

Sunil Gavini, Application Developer  
Teja Nedunuri, Application Developer  
Anne Wearing, Business Analyst  
Marcy Maioli, Project Manager  
Ben Appling, Audit Project Coordinator  
Zara Handsford, Complaint Unit Manager  
Jennifer Waters, QR Assessor  
Jennifer Delorme, QR Assessor  
Quandra Collins, Executive Administrative Assistant  
Sonja Steptoe, Departmental Editor and Writer

1. Call to Order

Board Chair Susan Harper called the meeting to order.

2. Welcome

Ms. Harper welcomed the board members, Department of Early Care and Learning staff, and public guests.

3. Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Ms. Harper asked for a motion to accept the day's agenda. Phil Davis moved to approve, and Kathy Howell seconded. The Board approved it unanimously. Ms. Harper next asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the August 16, 2018 meeting of the Board. Carlene Talton moved to approve, and Melissa Boekhaus seconded. The Board approved the minutes unanimously.

4. Inspiration

Ms. Harper provided the inspiration. She read a poem she wrote several years ago titled "My Fading Garden." She said it was a favorite poem for this time of the year.

5. Board Member Updates

Members of the board provided updates on their activities.

- Ms. Howell attended a reception for one of the Georgia Pre-K Teachers of the Year.
- Ms. Harper was interviewed on Channel 10 in Albany, Ga., about Pre-K Week. She said she hopes to appear on the station again next February to promote Georgia's Pre-K registration.
- Mr. Davis attended an Alzheimer's research event and learned that Georgia is a national leader in the field.
- Ms. Harper told the audience that the damage inflicted on Southwest Georgia by Hurricane Michael is massive. In Albany, where she lives, the debris is overwhelming. In Seminole County many people still don't have power. She reminded everyone that many child care center teachers and consultants who live in the impacted areas need support and help. She asked everyone to keep the victims of Hurricane Michael in their thoughts as they recover from the traumatic experience.

6. Bright from the Start Presentations

Members of the executive staff provided updates on their program areas:

**a. Commissioner's Update**

Commissioner Jacobs presented DECAL's plan for spending \$93 million in additional discretionary funds the agency received from the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). She explained that the unexpected funds will support DECAL's strategic priorities and its commitment to bolstering families, supporting the early care and education workforce and providers, and facilitating access to high-quality early education for all regardless of income. The extra funds were awarded while DECAL was in the middle of the public comment period for its updated CCDF plan. The agency was able to apply the input provided during the comment period to develop the spending plan for the additional funds. The expenditures will raise child care quality and increase access to high-quality early childhood education with an emphasis on infant-toddler care; expand inclusion services; increase workforce professional learning supports and maintain high safety standards. Specifically the agency's 7-point plan calls for using the funds to: Increase tier

reimbursement rates to 10, 20, and 40% of the payment rate for providers with a 1-, 2-, and 3-Star rating. The Commissioner noted that this is a huge increase that will continue DECAL's efforts to promote access to quality child care all over the state.

Recognizing that families need to be addressed in the plan, DECAL will reduce family fees for CAPS families under a simplified fee structure. This is important for families receiving CAPS, who must pay fees that in the past were determined by family size and income under a very complicated structure. She also said that the fees were too high because families were paying between 8% and 18%, or in some cases 26%, of their income. These are families with low incomes who are receiving CAPS so that parents could go to school or go to work and their children can be in child care. As a result, DECAL has simplified the family fee structure and lowered the fees on the theory that families shouldn't pay more than 7% of income on family fees. She provided an example of the impact the new structure will have on a family of four with an income of \$25,000. Previously they would pay about 13% or \$61 a week in family fees for child care. Under the new structure that family will pay \$24 a week, which is about 5% of their family income, for a total savings of over \$1,900 a year. Commissioner Jacobs called that "a huge impact" for families looking for child care. She also noted that families will get an additional 15% discount on their family fee if they enroll their child in a center that is Quality Rated (QR). DECAL will expand number of Quality Rated Subsidy Grant (QRSG) slots by 500, bringing the total to 3,000, and will increase QRSG reimbursement rates to 50% above base rate. The higher reimbursement rate will help the providers meet the higher standards and administrative responsibilities associated with the Quality Rated program.

DECAL will also increase supports for teachers in addressing children's social-emotional needs. This expands the inclusion services DECAL provides through specialists throughout the state. The Commissioner said one of the most common requests from child care providers is for support to address and serve appropriately children with challenging behaviors. DECAL has provided supports for the past several years but wanted to do more. This funding will be used to add staff and develop a multi-tiered approach to serving these youngsters. The enhanced services will be rolled out in January and will include additional inclusion and behavior specialists to work more directly with the children than before, and a new triage hotline that will provide referrals to appropriate services for the children.

The plan to expand workforce professional development and learning supports centers is designed to incentivize early child care and education professionals and leaders to stay in the field and to seek additional credentials through the DECAL Scholars Program, the newly created DECAL Teach Program targeted to teachers, and the DECAL Lead Program. The expanded supports will also roll out in January. DECAL requires providers to conduct fingerprint and criminal records checks for new employees. The cost of the background checks for an employee is about \$50 and providers have told the agency that the expense is sometimes a barrier to employment. To address that concern, DECAL will use some of the CCDF funds to cover the baseline cost of comprehensive background checks for the next 2 years.

The Commissioner said she believes the plan comprehensively addresses everything DECAL has heard from public comments and stakeholders and helps the agency move forward in achieving its goal of ensuring that all children have access to high-quality learning while supporting providers, the workforce, and families. She also noted that because the funding allows DECAL to promote and support quality across several areas, it appeared at a good time for the agency, as the Dec. 31, 2020 deadline for all eligible providers serving families that receive CAPS to be Quality Rated looms. She added that while DECAL feels comfortable that the funding will continue for the next three to four years, the agency took a conservative approach in planning the expenditures and will continue to monitor Congressional action regarding CCDF funding. DECAL has advised its providers that it will continue the funding for the initiatives listed in the spending plan for as long as it can.

Commissioner Jacobs also reported that Becky Thomas-Haden from Mulberry Creek Elementary in Harris County was named Georgia's Public School Pre-K Teacher of the Year and Stephanie Westhafer of Georgia Kids Academy in Jackson County was named Child Care Center Pre-K Teacher of the Year. The Commissioner said the teachers are selected based on evaluations of their classroom performance and have distinguished themselves by their excellence. The awards are privately funded and both teachers received a trophy and monetary prizes for themselves and for their classrooms. Additionally, they will serve as ambassadors for early learning and Pre-K and will appear at a number of events during the first quarter of 2019, including the February Board Meeting.

She recognized DECAL employees who recently received Spirit of DECAL Awards at the agency's regional staff meetings in October and November. The recipients were nominated by colleagues for best embodying the agency's values of delivering stellar customer service, exhibiting organizational excellence, creating positive relationships, always valuing others, and leading the way. The 10 winners are: Shayla Lewis, Inclusion Specialist; Angela Melton, CCR&R Contract Manager; Meghan McNail, Georgia's Pre-K Program Summer Transition and Outreach Manager; Liz Young, Director of Government Relations and Special Projects; Roslyn Williams, CCS Consultant; Jill West, Quality Rated Standardization & Evaluation Anchor; LariLyn Beyer, Quality Rated Assessor Manager; Brandy Locchetta, Inclusion Manager; and Renee Lind, CAPS Scholarship Administration Manager.

She also praised Gary Bass, Connie Fisher, Marcy Maioli, Anne Wearing, Paul Ominde, Sarswathi Seelam, Sunil Gavini, Saritha Gummadi, and Teja Nedunuri of DECAL's Information Technology Department for receiving the Georgia Technology Authority (GTA) Georgia Innovation Award at the 2018 Technology Innovation Showcase for developing both the KOALA Provider Self-Service web-based mobile app that has streamlined the process of meeting numerous compliance requirements and interacting with DECAL, and the Quality Rated.com web portal that displays information and data to help parents search for high-quality licensed child care providers. Finally, the Commissioner announced that Child Care Services Consultant Patty Malone is retiring after 30 years as a state employee.

#### **b. Finance, Legislative, and Administrative Update**

Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud delivered his regular quarterly financial update. His report included a report on the budget for the first quarter of the state's 2019 fiscal year. He reported that as of Sept. 30, 2018, with 75% of the fiscal year remaining, 75% of DECAL's funding remains to be spent. He also announced that DECAL is involved in an ongoing audit from the state auditor, which he said is part of the standard work the office does every year to prepare its annual financial report. DECAL was selected this year to have its transactions tested for accuracy and compliance to confirm that state agency financial reports are reliable. Mr. Ringsrud said he expects the audit to be completed by the end of November and for the report to be released by the end of 2018. He informed the Board members that they likely will receive a report of the audit results.

He also summarized the 2018 Summer Food Service Program and reported that 4,881,499 meals and snacks were served at 1,643 DECAL-funded meal sites in five targeted counties. Overall 9.3 million meals and snacks were served at a total of 142 counties in partnership with the Georgia Department of Education. He highlighted the summer food initiative DECAL operated in partnership with Second Harvest of South Georgia that provided 231 meals to children impacted by Hurricane Michael at four approved feeding sites located in Dougherty and Seminole Counties. He said he was proud that in addition to the meals, DECAL and Second Harvest were able to offer nutrition, comfort, and a sense of normalcy through the program. Although the program is designed to operate in summer months when children are out of school, DECAL used a little-known provision in the regulations that allow the sites to operate in disaster situations for the first time in the state. He also shared photos of some of the children from Seminole County Elementary who benefitted from the program. Ms. Harper said that she has visited the school and read to the Pre-K class there. She said that the community greatly appreciated the program because power in the area was out for a couple of weeks and the schools were closed for a week and a half due to damage, which meant some children might have gone without nutritious meals otherwise.

#### **c. Georgia's Pre-K/ Instructional Supports Update**

Deputy Commissioner of Pre-K and Instructional Supports Susan Adams provided details of the plan for using the additional CCDF funds on reorganizing and expanding DECAL's inclusion services to enhance and expand the support focused on fostering positive social-emotional development, reducing challenging behavior, addressing trauma care, and increasing behavior management strategies in early education environments for children in the birth to 5 age group. The project will be funded with some of the additional CCDF Funds the agency received, as outlined by the Commissioner during her presentation. Ms. Adams explained that currently the inclusion specialists are regionally based working in classrooms to coach teachers to improve classroom climate, to ensure that all children in the class are included in activities and to work on challenging behavior issues. She reported that children are much more likely to be expelled from early learning programs than from K-12 programs. This new multi-tiered system will strengthen social-emotional support for early childhood professionals, families, and children to reduce challenging behaviors significantly with the ultimate goal of reducing incidents of suspension and expulsion of children from early leaning programs. DECAL's goal is to construct a system of supports, move from reactive to proactive in a way that supports teachers and families; develop a

process to triage support and services that will take in information from a parent, teacher, or center director, or staff; and collect the data and determine what the best response should be. The new system also creates opportunities for staff professional development, continuing education, and career advancement. Ms. Adams says DECAL wants to retain more of its knowledgeable, specially trained staff through these new opportunities.

In explaining the new three-tier, pyramid-shaped model for the supports DECAL will provide, Ms. Adams explained that the agency already provides Tier 1 universal supports that include professional development, consultation, and technical assistance that all children in all programs in all classrooms need. A new support line to handle intake and perform triage will be added to the first tier. Tier 2 will consist of other services DECAL currently provides, specifically general classroom level supports for all classroom teachers and children. About 90% of kids will receive the supports they need for intellectual, social, and emotional development at this level. The services in this tier are beneficial because they are the kind of support teachers say they need most. Ms. Adams recalls that in her training to be a teacher she learned how to instruct and even to write on a chalk board, but she didn't get training in how to help a child with social-emotional behavior issues, or to help a child who was experiencing trauma. At this level, inclusion specialists will provide individual coaching, broad technical assistance covering all classrooms across the entire center, or on-site targeted training, as needed. They will also be able to refer a student to a special education program for children with disabilities if necessary. Tier 3, at the top of the pyramid of supports, is smaller because it offers services that fewer students, families, and teachers will need. This level encompasses the new services DECAL will offer through a new cadre of specially trained staff that will carry the behavior specialist job title. The specialists will develop and oversee implementation of a facilitated behavior support plan for the students who have outbursts, who aren't interacting well with peers, or who are being suspended. They will also serve as a liaison for other types of supports that are needed, such as connecting the child's family with a school system or mental health consultations, or referrals to clinical supports. Adams stressed that the services in the system are designed to help children continue to learn and to participate in the early learning classroom activities and to be successful in the early learning environment. The services will not cross over into the lane occupied by child and family therapists.

To implement this new system DECAL is modifying the organizational structure within inclusion services. It will consist of a newly created position of Program Director, who will report to Jennie Couture, the Director of Practice and Support Services, and a Program Manager. The structure separates the state into three regions with inclusion specialists and behavior specialists assigned to each region. Ms. Adams also said the new triage line will allow DECAL to collect better data about what's going on in programs and to help design better support needs.

The timeline calls for hiring and onboarding new staff and developing policy and processes that began in fall of 2018. The leaders will think about the additional training that's needed for the new staff and the launch of the triage line and the roll out of new services during the first quarter of 2019. By March 2019, Ms. Adams expects to be fully staffed up and providing services across the state.

Mr. Morgan asked about the plans for retaining and paying the staff if the additional funding that set up the new system is not continued. Ms. Adams said DECAL has been working on the plan for a long time and is committed to continuing it and the staffing levels even after the additional funding is spent. He also asked how the agency will train behavioral specialists and teachers to move to new skill levels in handling problem behaviors. Ms. Adams explained that DECAL has an existing training and support system in place across the state that looks at using the pyramid practices that align with the K-12 positive behavior and interventions support. The agency also has a module where staff go out and train teachers and programs that can become a model. Coaching and intervention are also available under the model. DECAL is also working with the U.S. Department of Education and an organization that looks at mental health services for children. They are paying DECAL to do training across the state in the pyramid practices. She expects to train close to 2,000 teachers. The inclusion specialists have already been out doing that training. The staff know that they are signing up for pre-school behavior, and social-emotional training. Still, some middle school teachers have also signed up for the training because they realize they needed support in working with kids with problem behaviors in their classrooms. It is evidence of the movement in Georgia to think about and address the social-emotional development of children all the way through high school and understanding how important that is to their long-term, lifelong success.

Ms. Boekhaus asked how the new structure relates to early intervention services. Ms. Adams said DECAL is working to see that its program aligns with those services. Its work is focused on supporting a child to be successful in the early learning environment. But it will coordinate with the early intervention service if the child already has an IFSP or IEP to

make sure the center is aware of the school's efforts and to think about opportunities to add services like child therapy in the classroom. Teachers can watch and learn from those services. Also, when behavior specialists and inclusion specialists are working with children with problems, they are receiving training on how to refer the children to intervention services if necessary.

Ms. Adams introduced Director of Professional Learning Christi Moore, who reported to the Board on the upcoming launch of the upgraded Georgia Professional Development System (GaPDS) that will include all aspects of Georgia Training Approval that was accomplished in collaboration with the IT Department and the Professional Learning Unit. She reminded the board that GaPDS is a successful web-based application that serves as an online registry for teacher trainings, credentials, and degrees that keeps their professional profiles all in one place. It currently supports DECAL trainings facilitated by child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs), Georgia State University, and DECAL staff. It has 97,000 users, which is higher and reflects more activity than many other states. Ms. Moore said DECAL is targeting a 15% increase in users each state fiscal year. It met the goal in 2017. The Phase II upgrade will combine two online systems into one that will include all aspects of the Georgia Training Approval System for state approved trainers and includes trainer and training applications. It will also include all training offered for DECAL credit by independent trainers and approved entities and will launch on January 7, 2019. The new streamlined system puts everything related to training approval, managing registrations, tracking attendance, and keeping record of continuing education in one location. For large- and small-scale trainers, it will also provide opportunities for more early learning professionals to find training offerings they can take to meet annual requirements.

Ms. Adams introduced Erica Sitkoff, executive director of Voices for Georgia's Children, who recapped the numerous activities held during Georgia Pre-K Week, October 1-5, 2018, and throughout the month. She explained that Georgia Pre-K Week gives leaders from across the state a chance to visit Pre-K classrooms in their districts where they can read to a Pre-K class and tour the child care center. It is an opportunity to highlight the importance of Pre-K and the investment that Georgia has made in it, and highlight that Georgia has been a national leader in that effort and in its investment and commitment to high-quality early care and education services. She said a record-breaking 712 Pre-K centers participated in the eighth annual Georgia Pre-K Week in 2018. She reported that a total of 138 state leaders made a total of over 200 visits to Pre-K centers. The group included 41% of the Georgia Senate; 47% of the Georgia House, as well as Governor and First Lady Deal, seven state agency heads, and several members of Congress. She said 586 Pre-K centers registered to host their own events with mayors, city council members, local businessmen, first responders, and members of the Armed Forces. She thanked the DECAL staff members who helped with programming and logistics for Pre-K Week. Each year Pre-K Week highlights a special program in early education. This year, the event spotlighted the Summer Transition Program; Nutrition; Physical Activity; and Farm to Early Childhood Education Connection. She described some of the activities that comprised each endeavor and explained how public officials were involved. She said the platform for Pre-K continues to grow and discussed a number of special promotion activities that Voices developed to publicize Pre-K Week across media platforms.

Ms. Harper mentioned that during her television interview about Georgia Pre-K Week she provided answers to the reporter's questions about the event, but wanted to say more and share more information.

#### **d. Federal Programs Update**

Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs and Eligibility Elisabetta Kasfir presented an overview of the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Program, its structure, activities, and the rising numbers of children and families served now that CAPS has fully transitioned into DECAL. She discussed the volume of matters that CAPS handles in its day-to-day operations. As of the end of October 2018, CAPS has approximately 51,500 children from nearly 29,000 families with active scholarships. CAPS made and received 51,056 phone calls in August and 58,742 in May, which were two of the busiest months. Since the rollout of Georgia Gateway in February 2017, the integrated eligibility system families use to apply for scholarships, CAPS has processed 155,000 applications.

She explained that CAPS is divided into three functional areas: program administration, scholarship administration and family support. CAPS has 144 staff members supporting new applications, 88 family support staff supporting existing families and 38 staff supporting operations and systems for a total of 269 staff. Ms. Kasfir described program administration functional areas. It has six units, including quality assurance and training, which does onboarding and trains all new staff. That area also conducts quality reviews. The administrative services unit provides administrative support to the entire division and registers all new applicants. A team works with the Georgia Gateway system. The team

works to improve the system and fix issues that arise. The data team provides workload and operational data and handles federal reporting, and answers a variety of data inquiries. It also includes a policy and process team that evaluates and leads the effort to revise and improve CAPS processes to make them more efficient. The division also includes an adverse actions and claims unit that handles all eligibility and appeals, working closely with audits and the legal division. She then provided details and statistics on the activity volume handled by each of the various units.

Moving to Scholarship Administration, Ms. Kasfir explained that it is divided into four groups, including the intake group that is the largest and is responsible for processing new applications. The special teams group processes referrals from DFACs and works with families that have special situations to process their applications as quickly as possible to get them needed services. Scholarship Administration also has an applications status team that manages calls concerning applications. The CAPS support team assists with other issues that arise as well as walk-ins and customer concerns. She then provided details on that division's volume of activities. The Family Support division in CAPS renews scholarships, makes changes to cases, connects families with resources and information to help them make informed decisions about a child's care. If they have other needs, the staff helps to guide them. Family Support also serves as CAPS' boots on the ground for implementing the Two-Generational (two-gen) Strategy including connecting families with educational opportunities at technical colleges, and assisting student parents in obtaining child care. She then provided details and statistics on the activity volume handled by each of the various units.

Ms. Kasfir noted that continuity of care is a premise of the Child Care and Development Fund that supports CAPS' operations. Assuring high quality learning experiences for children is also a foundational goal. By retaining children in the CAPS program, DECAL helps to ensure the continuity of care and a stable, consistent learning experience for children. Historically in CAPS, retention was low. It has increased to 78% by implementing new processes and by partnering with providers in renewing scholarships. She said CAPS is working hard to build relationships in communities between family support consultants and the providers in the area by assisting with renewals, which helps to ensure continuity of care.

Ms. Harper recessed the Board meeting for a short break at 9:57 a.m., and reconvened it at 10:05 a.m.

**e. Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning Update**

Executive Director of the Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning Carrie Ashbee reported that the Foundation has received a \$25,000 grant from Save the Children to help licensed child care providers in the disaster zone damaged by Hurricane Michael. The zone is defined as the 20 counties that have been approved for individual assistance. Most of the centers affected are in Southwest Georgia. She said as of the morning of the Board meeting, DECAL had received 24 requests for assistance, in response to a letter sent by the CAPS and CCS teams to all providers in the areas. The process will start with the Foundation scoring the requests based on the information the programs provide in their packets, including photos of the damage, extent and value of the damage, the number of children served – Ms. Ashbee made it clear that the student population information won't be considered in the scoring because DECAL wants to be able to help all of the affected programs – and whether the center is able to continue operating. The Foundation has received 12 completed packets so far. Each minigrant will be for a total of \$1,000 to \$1,500 to help the providers get up and running again. She reported that some centers have power and children are back in classrooms, but the kids can't go outside and play because it's not safe for them. The deadline for submissions is Monday, November 19. She encouraged the Board members from the impacted regions to share the information with centers in their areas so that they can apply for minigrant funds. She said she hopes that this will be just the first phase of funding. The Foundation plans to apply for other grants that are available in the near future. She said Save The Children also hopes to make more support available for this emergency.

Ms. Ashbee then discussed the Foundation's Moonlight Through the Pines fundraiser held in October. Many Foundation partners, DECAL staff, and Foundation Board members, Gov. Deal and his family attended the event that was held on a 4,000-acre tree farm conservancy in Jones County. The group heard performances from songwriters whose songs were made famous by major country music artists. The food was prepared by five chefs from the Atlanta area. She expressed gratitude to the Governor and First Lady for speaking and for the DECAL staff and volunteers who attended and helped with preparations. She said the Foundation plans to hold a similar event next year that will be twice as big as the 2018 fundraiser.

Ms. Harper asked Pam Stevens, Deputy Commissioner of Child Care Services, to let the child care providers in the affected regions know about the available minigrants because communication with them is difficult due to power outages and other disruptions to those areas.

**f. Head Start Collaboration Update**

Allison Setterlind, Head Start Collaboration (HSC) Director, reported on DECAL's efforts to support children from families experiencing homelessness, which she said is a priority group for eligibility for Head Start Services and Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) subsidies administered by CAPS, based on the Office of Head Start rules. Last year, as HSC brought CAPS into its program, she examined this group of children. She explained that there are many groups that deserve priority, such as families with very low income, grandparents raising grandchildren, and children with disabilities, all of which makes it hard to determine who should be given it. But she said HSC needed to wrap its brain around the immediate needs of children and families in the homeless population. Research shows that more than half of the children in homeless shelters are under the age of 6 and young children who experience homelessness are more likely than their stably housed peers to experience an array of risk factors that touch on a lot of areas covered by DECAL, such as mistreatment, lead exposure, chronic health problems, food insecurity, and social-emotional and learning delays. This makes it important that all DECAL programs be very intentional about their work with this group. As part of that intentional focus, the Commissioner has created the Interagency Committee on Child and Family Homelessness that includes representatives from Nutrition Services, Georgia's Pre-K, Instructional Supports, Research, IT, CAPS, Child Care Services, DECAL Foundation, and Head Start. The group meets quarterly and part of its work involves staying on top of the CCDF state plan to keep track of the goals DECAL has set about serving children and families in the homeless population and efforts to meet the benchmarks it outlined. The committee also promotes homelessness awareness across the agency through charitable activities, such as sock drives and stuff-the-stocking events during the Christmas holiday. The Committee is also studying the research about the issue. The US Interagency Council on Homelessness has created evidence-based strategies that states need to consider in caring for these children. She said she is proud that over the past year DECAL has improved so much, collectively, as an agency and within the individual units, in this regard. She said DECAL is doing a better job of identifying children experiencing homelessness. Instructional Supports and System Reform have helped educate child care providers about the definition of homelessness based on legal standards and trained them on onboarding and supporting the new CAPS staff who work with families who apply for subsidies. DECAL is also changing the way it identifies who is homeless and who isn't by realizing the importance of talking to families and asking the pertinent questions after receiving their applications. CAPS is also making changes to address barriers and increase access, including altering the application form that asks for housing status. The changes also involve new ways to alert the staff to crises situations that need urgent attention and to communicate and stay in touch with families that are transient and don't have access to traditional communications devices such as phones, email, and postal mail services. She also said DECAL is working with the Atlanta Metro Continuum of Care, which has devoted over \$1 million to delivering services to 100 families in that population, to assist with their child care needs and to help connect the families with other resources they need. Additionally DECAL is looking at ways to adopt recommended strategies to create a seamless transition for these students all the way through secondary education. Data from the Georgia's Child-Agency Cross Data System (CACDS) is helping the group understand how the students and families in the population transition through federal programs. New community partnership specialists in the System Reform division are embedded in regions across the state that are building relationships with housing specialists to partner with them to serve needs and address barriers and access issues. DECAL is also fulfilling its outreach plan goals by following recommendations to educate the community about DECAL and its services to help families, partner agencies and neighborhood groups understand how to get access to the agency's services around child care and education. To that end, Ms. Setterlind, CAPS leaders, and others from DECAL have recently made presentations at conferences to educate, train, and share success stories with homelessness services providers about the Department.

Turning to other developments in HSC, Ms. Setterlind announced that Head Start is expanding Early Head Start (EHS) with new national funding opportunities. DECAL has submitted applications for the new grants to expand its EHS services in center-based programs and in home-based services, and is awaiting a decision. She also reported that in FY2018, Georgia received funding for 2,961 infants and toddlers in EHS at an average rate of \$13,714 per child. Also the state received funding to serve 1,237 infants and toddlers in the DECAL EHS-Child Care Partnerships (DEHSP) at a rate of \$13,437 per child.



### **g. System Reform Update**

Deputy Commissioner of System Reform Kristin Bernhard introduced Carol Hartman, director of policy and system reform. Ms. Hartman updated the Board on the progress of DEHSP, which promotes school readiness by providing early childhood education, child development and health services, and family support services to promote school readiness for infants and toddlers from families with very low incomes. She began by reminding the Board that DEHSP is one of nine Early Head Start (EHS) Partnerships in the state. Eight other state agencies have these partnerships. EHS promotes school readiness. It provides high-quality early childhood education with meals and snacks funded by DECAL's child and adult care food program. It also includes family engagement, linkages to health care, medical care, insurance, and family support services. It also includes a lot of family engagement services for the parents. In many ways, it's the original two-gen strategy work, she said. It serves children from birth up to age 3 and eligibility is for families whose income is at or below 100% of the federal poverty level. Children with disabilities, who are in foster care, and children who are homeless receive priority for services. It provides a nurturing, supportive learning environment, as well as family support and engagement that all contribute to school readiness. Ms. Hartman shared some of the latest DEHSP performance indicators. The program considers continuity of care to be an important indicator of how many families are getting the full benefit of the DEHSP services. For the year ended June 30, 2018, 252 children were enrolled and 82, or 32.5% of them transitioned out and did not re-enroll. But the vast majority of them, 83%, left because they aged out of the program, meaning they left to go to a pre-school program or a Head Start program. Only 14 children were enrolled for less than 45 days, which was a positive sign. Ms. Hartman shared the list of DEHSP partners. It's a diverse group that serves a lot of vulnerable families that might not traditionally be able to access early care and education. For example, one of the partners is Atlanta Technical College. Most of the children there are children of students at the school. Another partner, Our House Genesis, is located in a homeless shelter that has a child care center embedded in it. The center receives DESHP funding from DECAL and serves 32 children. Scottdale Early Learning, Inc., in DeKalb County, serves a high proportion of children from refugee families who live in the area and have high needs. DECAL is unique in that it's the only DEHSP in Georgia that includes family child care learning homes (FCCLHs). She said 48 children are enrolled in the 13 FCCLH partner programs. That group includes children and providers who are dual language learners. DEHSP has two early education centers that serve as hubs and oversee delivery of the comprehensive services for the families and children in EHS. The hubs also provide professional development and technical assistance for the provider partners so that they can meet the EHS standards and engage in continuous quality improvement.

Ms. Hartman introduced Maryum Gibson, executive director of Scottdale Early Learning, Inc., who discussed the positive impacts of the child care learning center's participation in DEHSP. Scottdale is Quality Rated and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredited. It has 16 children in EHS. Ms. Gibson said participation in DEHSP has been transformational for Scottdale in meeting its mission, and helping it to do more and help more families in the community in a deeper way. The program began in a public housing development to serve families who can't access or afford high-quality child care. At least 51% of the children enrolled are from low-to-moderate income families. The center's mission is to provide early education that fosters the intellectual, creative, social, emotional and physical development of its students and to mitigate socioeconomic disadvantages through high-quality education, family involvement, and community engagement, ensuring that all students are ready for kindergarten. Since it began participating in DEHSP in 2015, Scottdale's ability to serve low income families has increased from 52% to over 82%. The center has also had access to a pool of funds to help make renovations and improvements, to hire additional teachers and support staff, to increase professional development and staff expertise, and to build positive relationships with families and fathers. As a result, the center has been able to focus on innovation and excellence and its Quality Rated star rating has increased. Ms. Gibson says the infants who were in the first group of DEHSP classes are now in Pre-K and they are excelling. Because of Scottdale's participation in DEHSP, all EHS students can remain at the center from birth through Pre-K, giving them continuity of care. She also provided success stories of several children who are enrolled at the center. Ms. Harper thanked her and said the Board appreciated hearing a firsthand report from a person in the field.

Ms. Bernhard returned to the podium to discuss recent work in the System Reform division. She updated the Board on the growth of the Quality Rated (QR) program, reporting that over 1,600 programs, or 72%, of eligible programs are participating in QR and 34% of eligible programs are now star rated. She also shared data showing that 93% of all children who receive child care subsidies are in programs that are participating in QR. As of November, a total of 53% of all children are in programs that are star rated. Ms. Bernhard said the growth in these data is impressive and reflected steady and sustained progress and strong gains for a program that serves 50,000 children each month. Furthermore 32% of all children receiving subsidies are in 2- or 3-star rated programs. Ms. Harper asked for clarification of what QR

participation means. Ms. Bernhard explained that it represents providers that have engaged with the QR process at any level from starting the application to receiving a star rating.

Ms. Bernhard also reported growth in the number of providers that are maintaining or increasing their star ratings when they are reassessed. She attributed the growth to the increased quality of the technical assistance being provided. She also highlighted the new opportunity community groups and agencies have to receive funds for developing and implementing strategies to help families improve their economic stability and to support student-parents in pursuing secondary education goals while receiving subsidized child care through the Two-Generation Innovation Grants (TGIG) DECAL will distribute in 2019. The grants will provide up to \$15,000 to fund the development of capacity-building strategies by communities, and up to \$35,000 for implementation of those strategies in other communities that are already at work on two-gen projects. Applications for both grants are due November 30, 2018.

Ms. Bernhard also shared that the successful Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs) DECAL created through the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant to drastically improve system coordination and early childhood outcomes for children from birth through age 8 will now be supported, sustained, and expanded. Originally DECAL identified 12 counties in four targeted regions of the state to implement reforms and interventions. Those efforts have unfolded so beautifully, Ms. Bernhard said, in part because community leaders came together and devised strategies to expand the scope of the grants beyond the original concepts. As a result DECAL has developed a new scheme to support community collaborations around early learning and scale up the projects in all areas of the state. She announced that DECAL has designated a team of coordinators to serve the Early Education Community Partnership (EECP) regions the agency has set up to support, sustain, and expand the successful E3Zs. The EECP regions were drawn to overlap with and be identical to the territories and counties in DECAL's pre-existing R&R, CCS and newly created Inclusion regions. Under the plan, each county in the state will be part of an EECP region and will have an assigned EECP coordinator who will help those communities connect to all available DECAL services and resources to support their work. Likewise, every DECAL program will be able to take advantage of the community partnerships. She shared the names of the new coordinators and encouraged the Board members to contact them. She described them as another benefit to help communities connect with DECAL and as "non-regulatory customer service entry point for all of DECAL's programs and services. The coordinators have been on board and involved in training since September. They are responsible for being at the table to help communities collaborate around early learning. They will work on building internal DECAL staff collaboration; acting as a liaison between DECAL and Georgia Family Connection Partnership at the state, regional, and local levels; promoting awareness of Quality Rated; coordinating early childhood professional development; and supporting fundraising and resource development.

Ms. Bernhard then introduced Senior Director of Research and Policy Bentley Ponder, who reported on the findings from the third of four segments of the Quality Rated (QR) Validation Study. He said the validation study tells DECAL how well the tools developed for and being used in QR are working to create the desired impact in terms of meaningful environmental ratings and portfolio evaluations and how well QR is achieving its goals. He first recapped the key findings from the first and second segments of the validation study that showed that few programs would have received a different rating if the environmental rating score from classroom observations alone had been considered, indicating that the portfolio evaluation was contributing very little to the quality rating process. But he noted that the findings couldn't determine whether the process that programs go through to complete the portfolios were contributing to higher classroom observation scores. The validation also revealed that programs are more likely to be highly rated if they had Georgia's Pre-K, if they received HS funding, and were NAEYC accredited. Programs were more likely to be lower rated if they had at least one CAPS scholarship and served infants and toddlers. Additionally, lower rated programs were more likely to receive higher ratings during the rerating process than higher-rated programs. Mr. Ponder then turned to the new third report segment, which surveyed 156 FCCLH providers, 177 CCLC directors, 173 CCLC preschool teachers, and 143 CCLC infant-toddler teachers and was designed to determine the programs' motivations for joining QR, programs' perceptions of QR and the rating process, and the QR supports programs use and find most helpful. The results showed that the most common motivation among all respondents for joining QR was a desire to be recognized as a high-quality program. They also show that all staff types tended to have positive attitudes toward QR, with staff at higher-rated programs agreeing slightly more on average than staff at lower-rated programs. Also, when asked to rank all the supports received, almost half of center directors and over half of FCCLH providers said that technical assistance from their CCR&R was the most helpful support. Over half of comments explaining participants' overall impression of Quality Rated related to improvements made to their program or practices. But he noted that some commented that the QR

application process is time consuming and some requested more technical assistance. The recommendations the researchers made to DECAL based on the QR Validation Study include collecting perception data after programs receive ratings, surveying non-participating programs to learn about their perceived barriers to participation, and surveying programs that have applied but not yet completed the portfolio to learn more about what supports they need.

#### **h. Child Care Services Update**

Ms. Harper welcomed Deputy Commissioner of Child Care Services (CCS) Pam Stevens to her new position.

Ms. Stevens began her presentation by discussing the process of communicating with providers in the areas impacted by Hurricane Michael. She said CCS is working with the Resource and Referral Specialists on Angela Melton's team to reach the South Georgia providers but it is difficult because the DECAL staff in those areas have also been affected. Ms. Harper said she understood the challenges. Both she and Ms. Stevens said they wouldn't give up on the important effort.

Ms. Stevens reported that there are 4,663 licensed facilities in the state, comprised of 3,117 CCLCs and 1,546 FCCLHs. DECAL has conducted over 4,800 regulatory visits to date. She then described what she has learned about the Child Care Services (CCS) division during her first three months in the new role, including its structure, high standards, and reputation as a national leader in child care licensing and regulation. She observed that DECAL's licensing role is easy to take for granted. She described it as the foundational piece of the work CCS does. It opens doors because a provider has to do well in licensing to be able to participate in QR and earn a star rating. They also have to be in good standing to apply for a Pre-K classroom. She said she has learned that Georgia has a lot to be proud of in the licensing area. DECAL does it differently than other states. Starting with the staffing structure, she explained that the use of specialty units within CCS is innovative and unique. She said other states have reached out to DECAL CCS to ask questions and get feedback on the unique structure. Also, CCS staff have made presentations about its internal structure at national seminars. She described the various CCS Specialty Units that help the division operate efficiently and they consist of Complaints, Intake, Enforcement, Process & Policy, Applicant Services, Technical Assistance, Quality Improvement and Training, and Exemptions. Other states do not break their operations into units. She pointed out that the structure also allows the staff to have a unique career pathway within licensing and capitalizes on the strengths of the staff to support the greater good and do their best work. DECAL also works with programs that are exempt from licensing regulations but receive CAPS funding because those programs still must be monitored for health and safety. CCS has worked with the child care research and data firm, Child Trends, to gather data about health and safety practices in those programs and analyzed it to determine how best to support them. The data also informed monitoring plans for those programs. Child Trends commended DECAL for its commitment to using data to inform its decision making. CCS is also a leader in the national licensing landscape. The agency has provided extensive feedback on national briefs and technical assistance resources and has been featured in a licensing brief on caseloads. Additionally, Georgia is one of only three states invited to participate in the Licensing Expert Panel facilitated by the National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, in Fall 2018 and one of just a few states accepted to participate in the first round of best practices assessment by the National Association for Regulatory Administration, in Spring and Summer 2016. The assessment found that DECAL met or exceeded 75% of the 65 indicators of best practices. One of the few areas that needed improvement, more adult learning and professional development for its consultants, is now a part of the CCS performance goals. She recognized the sustained hard and stellar work of the CCS managers and field consultants. The consultants have also provided insights for Ms. Stevens about how they make an impact, which she shared with the Board.

Ms. Harper adjourned the meeting for lunch and committee meetings at 11:55am.

#### **7. Committee Meetings and Lunch**

Ms. Harper called the meeting back to order at 1:00 p.m. When the meeting reconvened, Ms. Harper invited speakers to speak during Public Comment Period.

#### **8. Public Comment Period**

No one came forward and the Comment Period ended.

#### **9. Committee Reports**

##### **a. Programs & Rules**

- Ms. Boekhaus reported that the Program and Rules Committee heard about Nutrition Services working with Second Harvest of South Georgia to provide emergency meals at four approved sites to families in need after the hurricane damage. Nutrition Services is planning for the Summer 2019 Food Program and renewing partnerships, stakeholders, and sponsor relationships, after providing 76.6 million meals in Summer 2018. DECAL Commissioner Jacobs presented the inaugural Baby Golden Radish Award to Bleckley County School District for its outstanding and innovative work in creating effective Farm to Early Care Education programming for children in EHS, HS, and Georgia’s Pre-K. Head Start is applying for an expansion grant and conducting training. One grantee relinquished its grant and therefore some HS locations may change. DECAL’s IT team has completed some infrastructure and security upgrades. Georgia’s Pre-K is working on efforts to reduce the waiting list, which currently has about 5,000 children, by understanding the barriers and access issues better through surveys and research. CAPS is also building and bolstering its internal and external partnerships around two-gen strategies, and monitoring practices targeting QR and CAPS subsidy grantees among licensed, exempt, and informal programs.
- Ms. Harper commented that one of the reasons for the long Pre-K waiting list is that many parents apply to a single facility that doesn’t have open slots and they are only willing to place their child in that specific one. She says the research surveys being done will help to understand the parental choice issues, as well as other reasons, such as shortage of available spaces in facilities with high demand, and lack of transportation to centers in rural areas.

**b. Budget & Finance**

- Ms. Talton reported that the Budget and Finance Committee heard about the completion dates for the Finance Department’s field work, which will be end of November 2018, and audit work, which will be the end of the calendar year.

**c. System Reform**

- Mr. Davis reported that the System Reform Committee heard about updates on the Quality Rated (QR) policy and partnerships, the DEHSP, and QR operations. System Reform’s Early Education Community Partnership team is partnering with the Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy to host a series of “Civic Dinners” throughout Georgia over the next six weeks on the theme “Literacy Changes Lives.” Through this partnership, there will be one Civic Dinner hosted in each of the six DECAL regions. Anyone interested in signing up for these events should consult the DECAL Facebook page, which has details listed under “events.”
- By late November, the System Reform team will have conducted 13 regional Question & Answer sessions focused on QR and CAPS. These meetings have been conducted in partnership with regional Family Support staff from the CAPS program. These meetings continue to be instrumental in DECAL’s ability to reach communities throughout the state with information about the QR/CAPS 2020 deadline.
- The QRSG Team has just completed a new cycle of awarding subsidy grant slots to QR providers throughout the state. The grants use Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) money to support income- and activity-eligible families with children aged birth to 4 in their efforts to gain access to high-quality child care. There are now QRSG slots in just over 140 QR child care programs, serving approximately 3,000 children.
- Turning to DEHSP, the team told the committee that a federal announcement soliciting applications for Early Head Start Expansion and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Grants was issued on October 30. Applications for these five-year, competitive grants are due on November 30. The Office of Head Start estimates that about 60 applications will be funded. DECAL will apply for an additional Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership grant to provide services in targeted South Georgia counties clustered around Warner Robins and Valdosta. The plan is to replicate the successful family child care hub model by partnering with the local CCR&Rs and Quality Rated FCCLHs to deliver high quality comprehensive services to approximately 72 infants, toddlers and their families. The estimated grant amount is \$1.5 million annually.

- In terms of QR, 61% of programs statewide are participating in QR and 1,650 programs statewide have received a 1-, 2-, or 3-Star rating. Over 90% of children receiving CCDF subsidies are enrolled at QR-eligible providers. Of these 93%, slightly more than half, 52%, are enrolled in programs that have a current 1-, 2-, or 3-Star rating. This number continues to increase each month as more programs are receiving their ratings.
- Additionally, assessor staff from QR worked in North Carolina, Georgia, and Washington with the authors of the rating scales on the revision of the Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS-3). System Reform had the opportunity to offer input on the revision of the items within the scale, and assisted the authors with the re-wording of several indicators. Staff are currently engaged in conducting 15 field test observations to provide data to the authors to ensure the reliability of the instrument prior to its publication next summer.
- System Reform also reported to the committee that staff are seeing a steady increase in the number of portfolios submitted each month. The number received in October 2018 was more than double the amount submitted in July 2018. In July, 50 portfolios were submitted for a total of 89 individual observations. August saw 65 portfolios submitted for a total of 112 observations. In September 101 portfolios were submitted with 167 observations required. For October, 113 portfolios were submitted for a total of 188 required observations.

Ms. Harper thanked the staff for the helpful supplemental information supplied to the Committees.

#### 10. Additional Board Actions/Business

Following the committee reports, Ms. Harper asked for a motion to approve the 2019 Board Meeting dates of February 21, May 16, August 15, and November 21.

Mr. Davis made a motion and Ms. Talton seconded it. The Board unanimously approved the proposed 2019 meeting dates.

#### 11. Closing Remarks/Adjournment

Ms. Harper wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas, and safe New Year's and adjourned the meeting at 1:15 p.m.

*Susan W. Harper*  
*Board Chair*  
 2-21-19

*Kathy B. Howel*  
*Secretary*  
 2-21-19