
**Board of
Early Care and Learning**

Board of Early Care and Learning Meeting
Thursday, May 20, 2021 — 9:00 a.m.
Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning
2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive SE – East Tower
Oak Conference Room and via GoToMeeting
Atlanta, Georgia 30334
Amy M. Jacobs, Commissioner

Meeting Minutes

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| <u>Board Members</u> | |
| Susan Harper (Chair) | Debra Brock |
| Phil Davis (Vice Chair) | Kathy Howell |
| Kristy Beam | Kristin Morrissey |
| Jen Bennecke | Luann Purcell |
| Melissa Boekhaus | Cristina Washell |

Public Guests

Tracy Baynes, Angela Church, Yasmeen Diggs, Dana Driggers, Crystal Gebhart, Hanah Goldberg, Michelle Grant, Erin Greenberg, Emily Jones, Michelle Lank, Whitney Long, Mary Lyons, Marcia McCall, Chee-Christine Merritt, Ellaine Miller, Maggie Reeves, Brandi Swain, Jill Tarpey, Caroline White, Ben Worries

DECAL Staff

Amy Jacobs, Commissioner
Susan Adams, Deputy Commissioner for Pre-K and Instructional Supports
Dennis Brice, Chief Information Officer
Reg Griffin, Chief Communications Officer
Elisabetta Kasfir, Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs
Bentley Ponder, Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships
Rian Ringsrud, Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration
Ira Sudman, Chief Legal Officer
Quandra Collins, Special Assistant to the Commissioner
Jennifer Bridgeman, CCS Process and Quality Improvement Manager
Donna Johnson, CAPS Family Support Director
Shawnell Johnson, CAPS Program Administration Director, Operations
Carrie Ashbee, DECAL Foundation Executive Director
Larilyn Beyer, Quality Rated Assessor Manager North Metro
Gregory Brown, Legal Services Supervisor
Alethea Cicero-Brown, Legal Services Officer
Jennie Couture, Instructional Supports Director
Kimberly Davis, Quality Rated Assessor Manager South Central
Kori Dickens, Legal Services Officer
Faith Duncan, Pre-K Field Operations Director
Shayna Funke, Lead Research and Policy Analyst
Kristin Goetz, Professional Learning Specialist
Jessica Guarneros, Research Analyst
Randy Hudgins, Director of Research and Policy Analysis

Michelle Hughes, Quality Rated Assessor
Denise Jenson, Quality Rated Director
Tammy Jeune, Quality Rated Portfolio Assessor
Melinda Knowles, Quality Rated Assessor
Laura Lucas, Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Director
Susan Maude, Credentialing Specialist
Lindsay Miller, Quality Rated Manager
Anita Mohammad, Research and Policy Analyst
Christi Moore, Professional Learning Director
Sara Myers, Quality Rated Assessor
Jill O'Meara, Community Partnerships Manager
Martine Powe, Quality Rated Assessor
Anne Rein, Departmental Writer/Editor
Edward Rowell, Early Education Community Partnership Coordinator SW
Barbara Sanders, IT Analyst
Brittany Seltrecht, Quality Rated Assessor
Jackie Shivers, Director Pre-K Quality Support
Marcie Singletary, Standards and Assessment Specialist
Margrett Stephens, Professional Learning Specialist
Robin Stevens, Director of Human Resources
Diane Swift, Quality Rated Regional Coordinator Central Georgia
Megan Torello, Quality Rated Special Projects Manager
Amanda Vanmeter, CAPS Family Support Manager
Laura Wagner, QIP Director of Policy and Partnerships
Mark Waits, Senior Writer
Perri Walden, Pre-K Specialist Central East
Bridgette Washington, Early Education Community Partnership Coordinator Central West
Liz Young, Government Relations Director

The May 20, 2021 meeting of the Board of Early Care and Learning was held online via GoToWebinar.

1. Call to Order

At 9:06 a.m. Board Chair Susan Harper called the meeting to order.

2. Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Ms. Harper asked for a motion to accept the meeting agenda. Dr. Boekhaus moved to accept, and Ms. Purcell seconded. The Board accepted the agenda unanimously. Ms. Harper asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the February 18, 2021 meeting. Dr. Boekhaus moved to approve, and Ms. Bennecke seconded. The Board approved the minutes unanimously.

3. DECAL Staff Reports

DECAL leaders provided updates about the agency's work.

a. Commissioner's Update

Commissioner Amy Jacobs gave an update on how DECAL has spent/plans to spend funds that DECAL has received from three federal appropriations since March 2020. The intent of the funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act that DECAL received, \$144 million, was to stabilize child care, which was hit very hard by the pandemic. It has been spent as follows. Three

rounds of STABLE payments to child care providers totaled \$122 million. Another \$19 million funded CAPS emergency payment policies intended to provide a consistent funding stream for childcare. Emergency policies included continuing to pay providers whether they were open or closed and for children who were present or absent. The remaining \$3 million provided CAPS scholarships to an essential workforce priority group. Like the CARES Act, funding from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act is intended to stabilize providers by supporting the cost of providing child care and remaining open and to help families pay for child care so that they can go back to work. DECAL received \$403 million from the CRRSA early this year. Phase 1 spending, about \$200 million will go to child care supplements for CAPS families (ACCESS); \$1,000 POWER payments to child care professionals who work on site (including teachers and support staff); a fourth round of STABLE payments to child care providers; and competitive grants for school age programs (\$5 million). Providers who serve school-age students will be able to apply beginning this month for grants to help them pay for technology, materials, and possibly training. Most recently DECAL received \$1.57 billion from the American Rescue Plan Act in two funding streams to continue to support Georgia's early childhood and education system. Planning is underway now for spending \$604 million from the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF). CCDF funds can be used to support DECAL's current work, and some of these funds will be allocated to support families' access to child care, especially low-income families. The remaining \$968 million is for a child care stabilization program and comes with more specific guidelines. These funds will be used mainly to make STABLE payments to providers to help them continue operating. There are requirements for providers who accept these payments. They must provide tuition assistance to families who may not qualify for CAPS, and they are not allowed to reduce employee wages. DECAL leadership is working on a plan for spending these funds and engaging stakeholders to hear not just from advocacy organizations but also child care providers, the child care workforce, and families who need child care so that they can go back to work. Commissioner Jacobs emphasized that the funding from the American Rescue Plan Act is one-time only and spending must be carefully planned.

Mr. Davis asked for the grand total of relief funds that DECAL has received, and Commissioner Jacobs replied that DECAL has received about \$2 billion in a 12-month period. Mr. Davis asked, with respect to the stabilization program, whether DECAL is prohibited from using the federal funds over a string of years. The Commissioner responded that each funding source has its own deadline, either September 2023 or September 2024. DECAL has some flexibility with obligation and liquidation of the CCDF funds. However, the federal government expects a plan for spending 50% of the \$968 million for stabilization by the end of this calendar year.

Commissioner Jacobs announced the six finalists for Pre-K Teacher of the Year (TOTY). Two winners will be chosen in the fall, one from a public school and one from a child care program. From public schools, the finalists are Stephanie Curington from Kings Chapel Elementary in Houston County, Teresa Swaim from West Jackson Elementary in Jackson County, and Lisa West from Crisp County Pre-K in Crisp County. From child care programs the finalists are LaNita Carey from Jackson Creek Academy in Gwinnett County, Shelley Hoster from 1st Creative Learning Center #2 in Gwinnett County, and Marie Thebaud from Kiddie Kottage Academy in Cobb County. The selection process includes a virtual interview with each finalist, review of lesson plans, and observation of small and large group discussion. The winners receive \$3,000 for their own use and \$3,000 for a classroom makeover. DECAL also awards \$500 to the school for substitutes and travel expenses so that the winners can represent DECAL around the state. These awards are privately funded as are two new awards. Three recipients will be selected later this year for the Early Educator of the Year award, one each from infant, toddler, and

preschool classrooms. DECAL will also select two Scholars of the Year from participants in the DECAL Scholars program, one attending a four-year college or university and the other attending a technical college.

Ms. Harper said that it's exciting to see the new awards for teachers of children younger than Pre-K and for scholars because providing education to teachers is crucial in making sure we have quality child care in Georgia.

b. Finance and Administration Update

Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud reported that 34% of DECAL's funds for fiscal year 2021 remained unspent as of March 31, 2021, the end of the third quarter. As of that date, federal stimulus funds had been received but not spent. In April DECAL made the third round of STABLE payments to providers, and in May the ACCESS payments to providers for the benefit of families with CAPS scholarships are beginning. DECAL will finish the fiscal year on track with the budget, Mr. Ringsrud said. DECAL's appropriation for fiscal year 2022 exceeds the Governor's recommendation, which was shared with the Board at the February meeting, by \$5.3 million, bringing the agency's total budget for the year to just over \$912 million. CAPS will receive an additional \$3.5 million from state general funds to add 625 slots for eligible families to receive scholarships. Georgia's Pre-K program will receive an additional \$1.8 million in lottery funds, most of which will be used to increase Pre-K classroom operations by 2.5%. These funds go directly to Pre-K classrooms, which can use them for supplies, materials, and other administrative costs. The budget increase also restores a Pre-K Specialist position that was eliminated in the COVID-19 cuts last year. Mr. Ringsrud also reported that DECAL received another clean audit. The Audit Department has changed its procedures and will not be sending a letter to Board members.

Mr. Davis asked if DECAL knows the actual impact of COVID-19 on the agency's budget. Mr. Ringsrud responded that, while state revenues declined drastically while the state was shut down at the beginning of the pandemic, revenues are higher now than they were the year before last. He added that, because so much of DECAL's funding comes from state lottery revenues, which did not dip at all, and federal funds, the agency is in very good shape.

Ms. Harper thanked Mr. Ringsrud for the continued strength of no audit findings and for his team's dedication.

c. Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports Update

Deputy Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports Susan Adams shared details about the eligibility requirements and application process for the one-time \$1,000 payments called Providing Our Workforce Essential Recognition (POWER) that individuals who are working on site in the child care and early learning industry may apply for. Individuals must be working at least 20 hours a week at an eligible provider. Eligible providers are those licensed by DECAL or the Department of Defense, exempt Head Start or Early Head Start providers, and Georgia's Pre-K providers. Applications are being accepted now via KOALA, and payments will begin in June. Ms. Adams highlighted some of the activities and giveaways offered during the first annual Children's Mental Health Week which was held earlier this month. Some changes were made this year to the six-week, on-site Summer Transition Program to make sure as many children as possible can be served. Class sizes are smaller in the hope that families will feel more comfortable sending their children to a face-to-face program, and income eligibility requirements have been waived. Teachers and transition coaches will receive a \$500 bonus for their work. The rising Pre-K program is a bilingual program for children whose home language is

Spanish. There will be 70 classrooms serving 700 students in 18 counties. The number of classes for rising Kindergarten students has been doubled this year, from about 150 to 318 in 66 counties. Children who attended a virtual or hybrid Pre-K program will be given priority. Face-to-face instruction will also resume for Pre-K classrooms for the upcoming school year. Ms. Adams' team has reviewed all the applications from programs and made a first round of funding decisions. In considering applications for new and expansion classrooms the team considers need in the area; program enrollment; and program compliance and quality. DECAL has decided to fund 70 new or expansion classrooms for the upcoming school year, and Ms. Adams expects to fund more, ensuring that there are 84,000 Pre-K slots. Ms. Adams briefed the Board on a project the Inclusion and Behavioral Support Specialists and the Infant and Toddler Specialists (both from the Instructional Supports division) are working on to improve quality in Family Child Care Learning Homes (FCCLH). DECAL is making grants through the Social-Emotional Early Development Strategies (SEEDS) to family child care providers. The grants will include weekly coaching sessions from the Inclusion and Behavioral Support Specialists; four institutes (trainings) for which providers receive credit and stipends for attendance; and grant materials that include a technology package and materials about social-emotional development. Just over 40 providers will participate in Cohort 1 of this program which begins in July. Family providers are also eligible to apply this year for Lifting Infants and Toddlers Through Language-Rich Environments (LITTLE) grants that have been available to centers for several years. Grant components are similar to the SEEDS grants and include a 12-week LENA Grow Cycle in which providers receive feedback on their interactions with infants and toddlers based on the LENA talk chronometer.

Mr. Davis asked whether waiving the income eligibility requirement for the Summer Transition Program was specific to this year or something that will be evaluated every year. Ms. Adams responded that the requirement was waived this year because of the pandemic, to make sure that all children had an opportunity to attend. Ms. Adams said that, although future policy decisions have not been discussed, she anticipates that the program will go back to being a targeted program because it is designed to support a particular population. Mr. Davis asked whether any change was made to mental health week specific to the impact of COVID-19 on families. Ms. Adams replied that this was the first year DECAL has observed a mental health week focused on young children. The state has always had a Mental Health Day that brings awareness to mental health across ages. Director of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Laura Lucas participated in the state's Mental Health Day activities, many of which focused on the impact of the pandemic on mental health development. DECAL's kick-off of Children's Mental Health Week was more global in focus. However, Ms. Adams said, the agency last year began to do some work around trauma-responsive care. DECAL hosted a large virtual conference for families and teachers and plans for two more this year. DECAL has also continued to make trauma-responsive community grants and train DECAL and Resource and Referral Agency staff to help them understand the impact of trauma on teachers and children.

Ms. Purcell offered kudos to DECAL saying, "You have really moved forward instead of standing still during the pandemic. You've had such an empathy for providers, both in the centers and home-based. You've had so much compassion for families and, most importantly, our children." Ms. Purcell recognized Commissioner Jacobs for her leadership and thanked all DECAL staff throughout the state for going beyond what most people did during the pandemic, saying "I think we'll see a big impression on our children because of what you have done." Ms. Adams and Ms. Harper thanked Ms. Purcell for her comments.

e. Quality Innovations and Partnerships (QIP) Update

Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships Bentley Ponder began his presentation with an update about DECAL's Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership which will begin its seventh year on July 1. In the partnership with Quality Care for Children (QCC), DECAL serves as the administrative and management home while QCC serves as the Hub, helping the EHS providers meet the high Head Start regulations and requirements, especially with respect to family engagement and curriculum support. DECAL's EHS Director Maria Goss left recently to accept a position as Head Start's Regional Program Manager, a significant promotion. In the fall of 2020 DECAL conducted interviews in three languages with a representative sample of the families of 184 children who are served by the Partnership. Families expressed that they felt supported by the partnership in general and through the pandemic. DECAL awarded 13 Community Impact grants in April: five 2Gen Capacity Building grants (\$10,000 each), four 2Gen Implementation grants (\$25,000 each), and four Trauma-Responsive Care grants (\$10,000 each). A new program, funded through the PDG, offers \$75,000 Community Transformation Grants to communities to design and implement an initiative that addresses one of nine key focus areas identified through the PDG Birth to 5 needs assessment. DECAL received 34 letters of interest and invited 20 communities to apply. The agency received 18 applications and expects to award six grants. Dr. Ponder announced that all 2021 quality ratings will be awarded through the Temporary Alternate Rating Options (TARO). For the first three months of 2022, the QR team will pause and re-establish reliability for everyone on the team. TARO Option A, based on a provider's portfolio only, allows the provider to achieve up to a 1-star rating valid for one year. Option B includes portfolio submission and participation in the 12-week guided Quality Rated Virtual process. Option B participants may earn up to a 2-star rating valid for two years. Option C, available only to providers who have previously had a live observation, includes the portfolio, the QRVP, and a Live Observation-Virtual Experience. The evaluation of the Quality Rated Virtual Process (QRVP) pilot, which ran in the fall of 2020 with 36 participants, showed that providers had high scores on all five topic areas. The QRVP topics are based on the areas observed during live observations. Providers, DECAL staff, and TAs rated their experience as positive or very positive. The deadline for all CAPS providers to become Quality Rated is December 31, 2021, and DECAL will meet this longstanding goal, Dr. Ponder said. Currently 84% of children with CAPS scholarships are at a Quality Rated provider. Providers who achieve star ratings this year will receive rating incentive packages based on the TARO option they complete. Incentive amounts are somewhat larger than last year.

Ms. Harper said that it's exciting to see that DECAL is continuing to work very hard to improve all our child care programs.

f. Federal Programs Update

Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs Elisabetta Kasfir gave the Board an overview of the program for Awarding Child Care Education Scholarship Supplements (ACCESS). Funded by the CRRSA, the goal of the program is to expand access to high-quality child care by temporarily eliminating the financial burden of child care for CAPS families. Families with CAPS scholarships normally share in the cost of child care by paying a family fee plus the difference (if any) between the provider's published rate and the CAPS reimbursement rate. For the period from May 17, 2021 until October 2022, DECAL will pay providers their full published rates. To implement ACCESS the CAPS team collected current rates from all CAPS-eligible providers, updated CAPS scholarships to reflect current rates, established a method for paying providers without requiring them to change their billing practices, and conducted outreach about ACCESS to providers as well as the 30,000 families with CAPS scholarships. Outreach included letters to providers and families, posts on all social media channels, including a video that explains ACCESS to families. The CAPS team is in the process of adding a page

to the CAPS website that will include Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and a link to the video. Ms. Kasfir then introduced Donna Johnson, CAPS Family Support Director for Development and Partnerships. Ms. Johnson gave a presentation about the 2Gen Policy Acceleration Partnership Grant that DECAL recently received from Ascend at the Aspen Institute and the Liz Blake Giving Fund of the Blake Family Foundation. The purpose of the grant is to support cities, counties, and states committed to increasing economic mobility and well-being for students who are parents. DECAL's partner is the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG). The overall goal for the \$150,000 grant is to strengthen coordination across child care, post-secondary education, and state benefit services and align funding streams with program initiatives. The project has five specific areas of focus: defining shared goals and opportunities among state agencies; increasing the access single mothers and student parents have to state and community-level supports, including education; building coaching and case management skills for state employees; making sure parents are included in the process; and expanding the state's 2Gen Community. There will be a state leadership council, three community-based leadership councils, and a family advisory council. Leadership councils will have family advisory council representatives on them. The grant period began in March and runs through September 2022.

Ms. Harper said, "As always, our presenters are so well prepared, giving us information and updates; and these are exciting initiatives that are in the pipeline."

g. Child Care Services Update

CCS Process and Quality Improvement Manager Jennifer Bridgeman walked Board members through the process DECAL followed when deciding on and implementing the 2020 rule changes about supervision, food service, and mealtime requirements. CCS approaches rules changes with a view toward doing what's best for children in care and supporting providers in implementing any changes that are necessary in their programs. Proposed rule changes are based on identified needs and the Department's areas of focus and grounded in industry best practices, specifically *Caring for Our Children*, *National Health and Safety Performance Standards Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs* because these represent the best evidence, expertise, and experience in the country on quality health and safety practices and policies. For the 2020 rule changes, CCS also referenced Quality Rated expectations based on the ITERS and ECERS rating scales and compared what other states (Florida, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Washington) require. Before the rule changes were adopted, CCS offered two sessions of a provider webinar that were attended by 511 people. The webinar was also recorded and posted online. There was also a webinar for CCS employees to review the changes and discuss implementation. Implementation included TA for providers. CCS staff received training on intentional mealtimes provided in partnership with Strong 4 Life, the prevention arm of Children's Healthcare of Atlanta (CHOA). Staff learned about feeding habits and choking hazards and how to incorporate the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) into mealtimes to support teacher interaction and supervision. Once the rule changes went into effect on October 1, 2020, CCS published updated regulations and indicator manuals as well as an FAQ document. CCS staff received guidance about offering technical assistance in lieu of citations on the first regulatory visit after the new rules went into effect. CHOA created handouts and offered a one-hour provider webinar that was offered eight times and attended by 306 early childhood professionals and at least 143 programs. Feedback from providers after the training was positive and showed they were reflecting on best practices.

Ms. Harper said, "While the rest of the world has shut down, it's evident that DECAL has not shut down and continues to create new innovations to support our children. We thank everyone in the department for the great efforts they make in doing this."

4. Public Comment Period

Following the division reports, Ms. Harper asked whether anyone was physically present in the Oak Conference Room wanting to make comments or if any comments had been received through the GoToWebinar chat function. Board Liaison Quandra Collins replied that no one was physically present nor had any written comments been received.

5. Board Elections

Ms. Harper announced that she has completed her second two-year term as Board chair, and, as required by the by-laws, new officers must be elected. Officers are elected at the May meeting and officially take their positions at the August meeting. Vice Chair Phil Davis, who previously represented the 4th Congressional District, moved with his family to Savannah and resigned his seat but was reappointed to represent the 1st District and is thus eligible to serve as Chair. Ms. Harper asked for a motion to nominate Mr. Davis to become Chair. Ms. Purcell moved to nominate Mr. Davis, and Dr. Boekhaus seconded. Ms. Harper called for other nominations for Chair. There being none, she asked for a motion to close nominations. Ms. Howell moved to close nominations, and Ms. Washell seconded. The Board elected Mr. Davis as Chair unanimously. Ms. Harper called for nominations for Vice Chair. Ms. Howell nominated Ms. Brock, and Ms. Washell seconded. Ms. Harper called for a motion to close the nominations for Vice Chair. Ms. Purcell moved to close nominations, and Dr. Boekhaus seconded. The Board elected Ms. Brock unanimously. Ms. Harper called for a motion to re-elect Ms. Howell as Board Secretary. Mr. Davis moved to re-elect Ms. Howell, and Ms. Bennecke seconded. The Board re-elected Ms. Howell unanimously. Ms. Harper thanked all the Board members for their commitment, and Commissioner Jacobs congratulated Mr. Davis and Ms. Brock and thanked Ms. Howell for her continued service. The Commissioner thanked Ms. Harper for her four years of service as Chair, saying, "You have led the Board very well, and we appreciate you taking on that responsibility; and we know we can count on your continued involvement with the Board." Ms. Harper said, "It's certainly been a privilege of mine not only to be on this Board—it's been a passion of mine since I was appointed back in 2009—and I hope to continue for a while to represent the 2nd Congressional District, and it's been quite an honor to be Board Chair."

6. Adjournment

At 11:08 a.m. Ms. Harper asked if there was any other business for the Board; there being none, she announced the date for the next Board meeting, August 26, and adjourned the meeting at 11:09 a.m.

 8/26/2021
Board Chair, Signature Date

 5/26/21
Board Secretary, Signature Date