
Board of Early Care and Learning

Board of Early Care and Learning Meeting
Thursday, August 26, 2021 — 9:00 a.m.
Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning
2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive SE – East Tower
Dogwood Conference Room and via GoToMeeting
Atlanta, Georgia 30334
Amy M. Jacobs, Commissioner

Meeting Minutes

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

Public Guests

Molly Aziz, Daphne Babrow, Ivan Bennette, Mindy Binderman, Melissa Cole, Erin Greenberg, Charles Lane, Edelina Lane, Chelsea Morris, Joe Perreault, Maggie Reeves, Bernard Reynolds, Ann Rosenthal, Brigitte Willis, Jessica Woltjen

DECAL Staff

Amy M. 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
Pam Stevens, Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services
Ira Sudman, Chief Legal Officer
Jill O'Meara, Community Partnerships and Projects Manager
Shawnell Johnson, CAPS Program Administration Director, Operations
Quandra Collins, Special Assistant to the Commissioner
Carrie Ashbee, DECAL Foundation Executive Director
Clayton Bassett, Director, Preschool Development Grant
Lari Lyn Beyer, Quality Rated Assessor Manager North Metro
Tamika Boone, Director, Nutrition Services
Jim Butler, Cyber Security Attorney
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
Donna Johnson, CAPS Family Support Director
Melinda Knowles, Quality Rated Assessor
Rachale LaVoie, Early Education Community Partnerships Coordinator SE
Laura Lucas, Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Director
Susan Maude, Credentialing Specialist

Christi Moore, Professional Learning Director
Miranda Murphy, Training Approval Specialist
Sara Myers, Quality Rated Assessor
Rob O’Callaghan, Senior Research Analyst
Martine Powe, Quality Rated Assessor
Laura Reid, Professional Learning Community Specialist
Anne Rein, Departmental Writer/Editor
Michael Rodgers, Director of Finance
April Rogers, Director, CCS Enforcement Operations
Edward Rowell, Early Education Community Partnerships Coordinator SW
Angela Shelton, Professional Learning Specialist
Jackie Shivers, Director Pre-K Quality Support
Marcie Singletary, Standards and Assessment Specialist
Tahishe Smith, Coordinator, CCS Complaint Unity
Hannah Smith, Early Education Community Partnerships Coordinator SE
Margrett Stephens, Professional Learning Specialist
Robin Stevens, Director of Human Resources
Michelle Talley, Quality Rated Assessor South Metro
Laura Wagner, Director, QIP Policy and Partnerships
Mark Waits, Senior Writer
Vicki Watts, Professional Learning Specialist
Erin Watson, Quality Rated Assessor North
Jill West, Quality Rated Regional Coordinator North Georgia/Metro Atlanta
Liz Young, Government Relations Director

The August 26, 2021, meeting of the Board of Early Care and Learning was held online via GoToWebinar.

1. Call to Order

At 9:03 a.m. Board Chair Phil Davis called the meeting to order. He thanked outgoing Chair Susan Harper for her leadership over the past four years and especially during the last year as the Board learned to conduct virtual meetings.

2. Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Mr. Davis asked for a motion to accept the meeting agenda. Ms. Purcell moved to accept, and Ms. Bennecke seconded. The Board accepted the agenda unanimously. Mr. Davis asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the May 20, 2021, meeting. Ms. Howell moved to approve, and Ms. Morrissey 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 Jacobs informed the Board that DECAL’s plans to open the Atlanta office five days a week and resume site visits to child care providers have been put on hold temporarily because of the spike in COVID-19 cases associated with the Delta variant. DECAL’s office is open Tuesdays and Thursdays. The Commissioner gave an update on the federal stimulus funds DECAL has received, totaling almost \$2 billion. She emphasized that these are one-time appropriations, and DECAL has until 2023 or 2024 to obligate and liquidate these funds, depending on the source. (DECAL receives about \$380 million annually from the Child Care and Development Fund [CCDF] for ongoing operations.)

The \$144 million from the CARES Act was fully liquidated as of April 2021: \$122 million for STABLE payments to licensed child care providers; \$19 million to fund CAPS emergency payment policies; and \$3 million to support the CAPS Essential Services Workforce priority group. Of the \$403 million DECAL received from CRRSA, to date \$17 million has gone to the CAPS ACCESS program; \$37 million to POWER payments directly to early learning professionals; \$43 million to STABLE payments; and \$5 million to programs serving school age children. The total STABLE payments made to providers from the CARES act and CRRSA is \$165 million. DECAL has also received \$1.57 billion from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), \$604 million of which can be used for child care assistance activities. Most of these funds will go to CAPS to increase access to CAPS, and the details will be announced soon. The remaining \$968 million is to be used for a child care stabilization program similar to the STABLE grants. The agency is developing a plan to meet ARPA requirements. The plan will include stakeholder engagement with providers, advocacy organizations, teachers, and families. The Commissioner also announced the DECAL Scholars of the Year for 2021–2022, Ms. Edelina Lane, a family child care provider who is studying at Point University and Ms. Quinecia Styles Smith, Lead Teacher at Parker Chase Preschool North, who is studying at West Georgia Technical College. The awards were privately funded through the DECAL Foundation. The agency is accepting applications now for the Early Educator of the Year awards. These awards, one each from an infant, toddler, and preschool classroom, are also funded by the Foundation.

Mr. Davis asked whether there is a time limit on spending the federal stimulus funds. Commissioner Jacobs responded that the funds must be liquidated by September 2023 or September 2024, depending on the source. Mr. Davis congratulated the DECAL Scholars of the Year, Ms. Lane and Ms. Smith, and thanked the Foundation for their hard work.

b. Finance and Administration Update

Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud reviewed the agency’s financial performance for the state fiscal year (SFY) that ended June 30, 2021. Budget and expenses for the year totaled just more than \$1 billion. About \$3 million in state lottery funds allocated to Georgia’s Pre-K remained unspent because of lower-than-expected enrollment. These funds will be returned to the state treasury. The finance team is currently working with the state accounting office to complete the year-end forms and close the fiscal year. The Department of Audits has notified DECAL that the audit of SFY 2021 will begin soon. Mr. Ringsrud reviewed the amended SFY 2022 and SFY 2023 budget requests that the Board must approve before these can be submitted to the Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget. The Governor’s instructions called for flat budgets for both years. DECAL’s total proposed budget request is \$912.5 million for each year. Mr. Ringsrud also gave an update about the 2021 Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) that began in October 2020 and will run through August 2021. The program served almost 9 million meals at 1,001 sites in 84 counties. DECAL recently received \$15.1 million from the USDA to reimburse Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) operators for costs they incurred during the public health emergency. The average payment per operator will be about \$5,800.

Mr. Davis thanked Mr. Ringsrud for his presentation.

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

Deputy Commissioner for Georgia’s Pre-K and Instructional Supports Susan Adams reported on the six-week on-site Summer Transition Program. More children were served this year even though class sizes were reduced to mitigate the spread of the virus. Pre-K classes have started, with 84,000 slots funded. All classes will be held in person, with COVID-19 mitigation strategies in place. Ms. Adams showed a short video called *Tips from Teachers* made by DECAL Communications Specialist Jerry Brown. The

Pre-K program received almost \$4 million in additional funding for the current school year to support workforce development and non-instructional operating costs. Almost \$800,000 will be used to support higher salaries for teachers who increase their credentials. A little more than \$700,000 will fund supplements for Pre-K teachers based on their years of experience. A change in the Teachers Retirement System will cost about \$600,000 for public school certified Pre-K teachers in that system. Almost \$1.8 million will cover a 2.5% increase for non-instructional operating costs to help Pre-K grantees cover the cost of administering their grants. Many Pre-K programs are finding it difficult to recruit lead teachers with all the required credentials, and Ms. Adams' team has established a waiver process that will allow programs to hire teachers who are still completing their required degree. Georgia's Pre-K Week will be held virtually again this year, the week of October 4, and Board members are invited to participate. Ms. Adams also showed highlights of a campaign to promote the Social-Emotional Early Development Strategies (SEEDS) program. The campaign includes Behavior Tip Tuesdays, teacher testimonials, specialist highlights, online resources, a podcast, and a contest with prizes. Services are available for families, directors, teachers, DECAL staff, Board members, and the community at large.

Mr. Davis thanked Ms. Adams for her presentation and commented that it's so much fun to see the faces of children on their first day of school as toddlers become big kids. Mr. Davis said he hopes for a phenomenal Pre-K week and congratulated our various coaches for the success they're seeing in the field.

e. Quality Innovations and Partnerships (QIP) Update

Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships Bentley Ponder introduced Community Partnerships and Projects Manager Jill O'Meara who shared about the recipients of the \$75,000 Community Transformation Grants. Eight grants were awarded. Communities in Schools-Milledgeville/Baldwin County will increase access to high-quality early childhood programs for children in rural areas. The Cook County Family Connection Partnership will focus on reducing food insecurity. Georgia Organics will focus on reducing food insecurity in Ware County. The Greenbriar Children's Center will provide mental health services in Chatham County. Gwinnett Building Babies' Brains will increase access to high-quality early childhood programs for infants and toddlers. Quality Care for Children will focus on reducing food insecurity in Clayton County. The United Way of Central Georgia will increase access to high-quality early learning for dual language learners in Bibb, Crawford, Macon, and Peach counties; and the University of West Georgia College of Education Early Learning Center will focus on reducing suspensions and expulsions in Carroll, Haralson, and Heard counties. Mr. Ponder reported that the Quality Rated team is on track to rate 1,400 providers in 2021 and achieve the goal of having all CAPS providers become Quality Rated by December 31. Currently, 88% of children with CAPS scholarships are with a Quality Rated provider, and 78% of CAPS providers are rated. Currently, 99% of children with CAPS scholarships are with a provider who is either rated or on track to be rated by December 31, and 97% of CAPS providers are rated or on track to be rated. There are 99 CAPS providers who missed the August 31 deadline to sign up for a cohort and thus will not be rated this year. They have 419 children in their care, fewer than 1% of children with CAPS scholarships. Mr. Ponder also reported on the DECAL Early Head Start Partnership (DEHSP). There were no major findings from the federal Focus Area Two review in June. One minor area of concern is being addressed now. The search for the Early Head Start Director is almost complete. An administrative restructuring of the program bringing more of the oversight of comprehensive services inhouse to DECAL is underway and has been reviewed by stakeholders. Quality Care for Children (QCC) has served as the program's administrative hub managing comprehensive services to families. With the restructuring, DECAL will become the administrative home for these services, and QCC will transition to managing the family child care learning home network. QCC will also provide bilingual support to the program as needed.

The catalyst for the restructuring is a cost modeling analysis conducted for DECAL by Third Sector Intelligence. The analysis shows that costs for administering the program are high. The restructuring will reduce administrative costs and free up funds to strengthen direct services such as health and mental health services. The current estimated weekly cost per child to deliver Early Head Start services is \$274.75. The estimated cost in the restructured model is \$229.81. There will be fewer administrative positions with the restructuring, and DECAL will fund the positions being eliminated from external partners through the end of the year.

Mr. Davis commented that it's always great to see innovation driven by solid research and development that enables DECAL to be the effective agency that it is.

f. Federal Programs Update

Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs Elisabetta Kasfir informed the Board that the SOLVE program, which provided scholarships to school age children whose schools adopted a virtual learning model during the 2020–2021 school year, stopped accepting applications from new families on June 30. The program cost about \$11 million and awarded 5,631 scholarships. Ms. Kasfir also updated the Board about the ACCESS program, which pays the tuition-related fees and co-payments for CAPS families. The program saves families about \$1.5 million per week. It will run through October 2, 2022. Ms. Kasfir noted that one milestone on the path to having all CAPS providers become Quality Rated has passed. As of August 1, CAPS families seeking a new or different provider must choose one that is Quality Rated or participating in a 2021 cohort. She also noted that CAPS is in the process of relocating physical offices from the Department of Agriculture building to the sixth floor of the Twin Towers. Ms. Kasfir reported progress on developing a CAPS virtual lobby, using technology and organizational alignment to increase access and optimize the customer service experience. Phase I included creating the Customer Response Unit, Tier 1 support, the team that fields almost all the calls and emails coming into CAPS. In Phase II changes were made to the call routing system. As a result of these changes, the percentage of call answered by a CAPS representative has increased 14% in spite of a 20% overall increase in call volume associated with the beginning of the school year. The team is currently working on Phase III, establishing a Tier 2 support team and implementing the virtual lobby, which will allow CAPS families to have on-site video conversations with CAPS representatives. Phase IV will involve changes to the CAPS website. Ms. Kasfir introduced Shawnell Johnson, CAPS Program Administration Director for Operations, who shared about the new CAPS Customer Response Unit (CRU). A primary purpose of the CRU is to make it easier for families and providers to reach a CAPS team member on the first attempt. CAPS receives as many as 2,000 calls a week, many of which require in-depth conversations about eligibility, finding child care, annual renewals, making case changes, or uploading documents. The CRU has been in operation for about three weeks. In that time, 88% of calls to CAPS have been answered by a CAPS representative. All CRU team members are knowledgeable and experienced CAPS employees who have received customer service training that included a focus on empathy and compassion. In addition to telephone calls, the CRU responds to emails routed from the CAPS website and customers who walk in to the office.

Mr. Davis congratulated Ms. Kasfir and Ms. Johnson on the success of the virtual lobby development and said he looks forward to its continued development and success.

g. Child Care Services Update

Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services Pam Stevens reported on how the pandemic has affected child care and child care providers. There were 12% more children attending child care centers in the fourth quarter of FY2021 compared to the fourth quarter of FY2020, but there were 27% fewer children in attendance in the fourth quarter of FY2021 than in the same quarter in 2019. The funding to stabilize

child care providers thus continues to be critically important. Family child care learning homes saw no change in attendance between the fourth quarter of FY2020 and FY2021; but, compared to FY2019, there were 12% fewer children in attendance. There were 16% more staff in learning centers in the fourth quarter of FY2021 compared to the fourth quarter of FY2020, but there were 20% fewer than in 2019. Ms. Stevens also shared about the **School-Age Help and Relief Effort (SHARE)** grants. The pandemic highlighted the importance of school-age programs for children who needed to participate in virtual learning while their parents worked. The grants were open to exempt programs, such as summer camps that were allowed to stay open to support virtual learning, as well child care learning centers and family child care learning homes. CCS received 1,757 applications, 1607 of which were eligible. Those not eligible were not serving school-age children at the time. An important part of the grant was the opportunity to deliver high-quality professional development to providers of school-age care who don't often receive age-specific professional development. CCS partnered with the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network (GSAN) to offer four tiers of training and technical assistance. The first tier, a two-hour introduction to best practices in school-age care and development, was required of all grant applicants. Tier 2 training is a series of five webinars. It is optional and will be open to all grant recipients. Grant recipients will be able to apply for Tier 3, small group virtual coaching from GSAN. Up to 100 grantees will be selected. A subset of 25 Tier 3 participants will be selected to receive an external quality assessment from GSAN. The quality assessments will provide valuable information to CCS about school age care in Georgia.

Mr. Davis thanked Ms. Stevens for great work on the front lines of COVID support while continuing the fundamental work of her division and best practices development.

4. Public Comment Period

Following the division reports, Mr. Davis asked if anyone was physically present in the Dogwood Conference Room wanting to make comments. Board Liaison Quandra Collins replied that no one was physically present. Mr. Davis asked if any comments had been received through the GoToWebinar chat function, and Ms. Collins replied that no written comments been received.

5. Approval of DECAL Budget Requests

Mr. Davis invited discussion of DECAL's proposed budget requests for SFY 2022 (amended) and 2023. There being no discussion, Mr. Davis asked for a motion to approve the budget requests. Ms. Purcell moved for approval, and Ms. Harper seconded. The Board approved the budget requests unanimously.

6. 2022 Board Meeting Dates

Mr. Davis presented the proposed Board meeting dates for 2022: February 17, May 19, August 25, and November 17. He asked if there was any discussion of the proposed dates. There being none, he asked for a motion to approve the proposed dates. Ms. Harper moved for approval, and Ms. Howell seconded. The Board approved the 2022 meeting dates unanimously.

7. Adjournment

At 10:43 a.m. Mr. Davis asked if there was any other business for the Board; there being none, he announced the date for the next Board meeting, November 18, and adjourned the meeting.