

Board of Early Care and Learning
Meeting Summary
February 17, 2022

Attendees

Board Members:

Jen Bennecke, Debra Brock (Vice Chair), Phil Davis (Chair), Susan Harper, Joanna Hill, Kathy Howell, Kristin Morrissey, Kimberly Neville, Cristina Washell

Guests:

LaNita Carey, Stephanie Curington, Alyssa Foskey, Lisa Hardt, April Jones, Blanche Lamb, Kari Lovell, Joe Perreault, Dana Rickman, Melissa Ross, Brandi Swain, Dwayne Ward, Jessica Woltjen

DECAL Staff:

Commissioner Amy Jacobs, Carrie Ashbee, Rian Ringsrud, Pam Stevens, Catherine Broussard, Susan Adams, Elisabetta Kasfir, Bentley Ponder, Dennis Brice, Reg Griffin, Quandra Obi, Clayton Bassett, Laura Boham, Kimberly Brickey, Jennifer Bridgeman, Jim Butler, Patricia Carlson, Karla Crawford, Erin Darley, Glenda Davis-Canteen, Jennifer Delorme, Faith Duncan, Bart Ellington, Rebecca Ellis, Megan Fickes, Michelle Flynn, Carol Fordham, Mary Frederiksen, Shayna Funke, David Ginsburg, Kristin Goetz, Aneshia Harris, Moriam Hassan, Randy Hudgins, Matthew Jang, Denise Jenson, Donna Johnson, Lashanda Kirkland, Laura Lucas, Nakilia McCray, Meghan McNail, Christi Moore, Sara Myers, Jill O'Meara, Amir Nilforooshan, Martine Powe, Anne Rein, Mike Rodgers, April Rogers, Edward Rowell, Brenna Rutherford, Barbara Sanders, Angela Shelton, Jackie Shivers, Hannah Smith, Sonja Steptoe, Robin Stevens, Diane Swift, Alysse Swiney, Michelle Talley, Megan Torello, Keturah Wafer, Laura Wagner, Bridgette Washington, Jennifer Waters, Liz Young

At 9:06 a.m. Mr. Davis called the meeting to order and announced that Kimberly Neville has been appointed to the Board representing the 12th congressional district.

The Board unanimously approved the proposed agenda and the minutes from the November 18, 2021 meeting.

Ms. Harper provided inspiration, reading a poem on the theme of inclusivity.

Board members provided updates on their recent activities.

DECAL leaders provided updates about their areas of responsibility.

- Commissioner Amy Jacobs thanked IT Specialist Amir Nilforooshan for his support of the meeting and his support of the agency throughout the pandemic. The Commissioner announced that Moonlight Through the Pines, the primary fundraiser for the DECAL Foundation, will be held this year for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic. She introduced Carrie Ashbee, the Executive Director of the Foundation, who gave a brief history of the Foundation and invited Board members to support the fundraiser, a concert at Bobby Jones Golf Course, on Wednesday, March 26, at 6:00 p.m. Commissioner Jacobs presented nine recommendations made by the Urban Institute as a result of the stakeholder engagement process they conducted to help DECAL determine how to spend the remaining federal pandemic relief funds of several hundred million dollars. She introduced the Georgia's Pre-K Teachers of the Year, Stephanie Curington and LaNita Carey. They made brief remarks, and Mr. Davis presented each of them with a Board resolution recognizing their achievements.
- Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud reported that DECAL's expenses for the first half of SFY 2022 are running 7% under budget. The reason for the small discrepancy, he said, is that spending for initiatives funded by federal pandemic relief did not start until last fall. He announced that DECAL received another clean audit for SFY 2021. Mr. Ringsrud also reviewed the Governor's recommendation for Amended SFY 2022, which exceeds the funding request approved by the Board in August 2021 by \$416,000. The amount will fund \$5,000 pay increases for full-time, benefit-eligible employees in Child Care Services and Georgia's Pre-K. The Governor's recommendation for SFY 2023 calls for a \$21 million increase to DECAL's budget. This amount includes \$3.14 million for an increase in the required state match of federal funding to the CAPS program; an \$18 million increase in the Pre-K budget to fund \$2,000 pay increases for lead teachers and

assistant teachers; and a \$2 million reduction to the Pre-K budget resulting from a change to the Pre-K formula. The Governor's recommendations require legislative approval, and there likely will be changes to the numbers.

- Deputy Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports Susan Adams reported some highlights from Inclusive Learning Week and invited Board members to sign the Inclusion Pledge committing to support inclusion in early care. For the first time this year DECAL is offering a three-part, paid virtual training for providers on the foundations of inclusion. Ms. Adams reviewed the State Multi-Tiered System of Supports and announced that a new cross-sector state leadership team is collaborating to resolve barriers and implement Pyramid Model practices into statewide systems. In December 2021, 31 Family Child Care Learning Homes (FCCLH) completed a six-month grant program focused on helping FCCLH providers develop strategies to support strong social emotional development. Feedback from providers was overwhelmingly positive, Ms. Adams reported. Ms. Adams also reviewed enrollment data for Georgia's Pre-K program. The second roster for the year shows enrollment rebounding, and Ms. Adams expects continued improvement. Applications are being accepted now for a second round of \$1,000 POWER payments to the early learning workforce. A third round will go out in the spring.

Mr. Davis recessed the meeting at 10:30 a.m. It resumed at 10:43 a.m.

- Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services Pam Stevens reviewed the timeline for implementing licensing rule changes. At the February Board meeting CCS announces the general areas in which rule changes will be proposed. At the May meeting specific rule changes are presented. In July CCS holds public webinars about the rule changes. At the August Board meeting a public hearing is held, and the Board is asked to approve the rule changes. The rule changes go into effect on October 1. The rule changes proposed for this year include a change in language that references the Division of Family and Child Services; a requirement that providers notify families of any communicable disease that is identified as part of a public health emergency; and a new rule specifying types of evidence that providers must preserve and make available to DECAL. Ms. Stevens introduced CCS Director of Policy and Process Initiatives Catherine Broussard who told the Board about the Bridge to Quality (BTQ) project for newly licensed providers that her team of eight consultants designed and implemented because they noticed that 14% of new providers fall out of compliance with licensing rules and regulations within one year. BTQ includes a needs assessment, individualized coaching, core rules training, management training, and information about how rules are enforced. Ms. Stevens announced that Ms. Broussard is retiring after 23 years of service and asked the Board to wish her well.
- Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs Elisabetta Kasfir reviewed the CAPS expansion plan that will add 10,000 children to the program. The program began in November 2021 and will continue until October 2024, after which the program will gradually return to 50,000 scholarships. As of January 31, 4,800 additional children are using CAPS scholarships. Historically, about half of CAPS scholarships have gone to school-aged children, but the distribution of the new scholarships has been about 30% school-aged and 70% younger children. The new scholarships are going to most parts of the state, both urban and rural. Ms. Kasfir also noted the final CAPS/Quality Rated milestone has passed. As of December 31, all families with CAPS scholarships are required to select a star-rated, provisional, or probationary provider.
- Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships Bentley Ponder announced that 1,087 providers received ratings of 1, 2, or 3 stars during 2021, the largest number ever rated in a single year. As of December 31, 2021, 93% of children with CAPS scholarships are cared for by a Quality Rated provider, and 86% of CAPS providers have achieved at least a 1-star rating. An additional 155 providers have either a provisional Quality Rated status (because they are newly licensed or new to CAPS) or a probationary status (because they went through the rating process and did not earn enough points to earn a star rating, or they allowed their ratings to expire). DECAL is accepting applications now from 2- and 3-star rated providers who want to participate in the second cohort of the Quality Rated Language and Literacy Endorsement. The program will begin in April with endorsements expected to be awarded in April 2023. Mr. Ponder introduced Early Head Start Director Megan Fickes and announced that comprehensive EHS services were brought in house as of January 1, as planned.

Mr. Davis adjourned the meeting for lunch and committee meetings at 11:38 a.m. and called the meeting back to order at 1 p.m. He opened the public comment period. There were no public comments.

Committee Reports:

- Ms. Howell reported that the Program and Rules Committee received an update about the CAPS Aspen Policy Acceleration Partnerships Grant. They also learned that CCS is retraining staff to return to onsite visits and developing a family-friendly approach to licensing reports. The deadline for programs to apply to Georgia's Pre-K was February 16. Existing programs are given preference over new programs.
- Ms. Morrissey reported that the Finance Committee reviewed the budget and expenditures in more detail. She also reported that DECAL is on track to pass through more than 90% of federal funding, keeping only about 6% for DECAL operations, an impressive accomplishment.
- Because Ms. Bennecke had to leave the meeting early, Mr. Ponder reported that each of his direct reports made a brief presentation about their projects to the Quality Innovations and Partnerships Committee.

At 1:13 p.m. Mr. Davis announced the date for the next Board meeting, May 19, 2022, and adjourned.