
Board of Early Care and Learning

Board of Early Care and Learning Meeting
Thursday, November 17, 2022 — 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

Board Members

Kristy Beam, Jen Bennecke, Debra Brock (Vice Chair), Susan Harper, Kristin Morrissey, Kimberly Neville, Luann Purcell, Cristina Washell, Karla Zisook

Public Guests

PJ Audenzia, Lauren Brodsky, Janet Cavin, Ife Finch Floyd, Hannah Goldberg, Lisa Hardt, Andie Herrington, Casmin Jenkins, Kimberly McDowell, Richard McElwain, Maria Ramos, Ann Rosenthal, Noni Walton, Jessica Woltjen

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
Pam Stevens, Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services
Ira Sudman, Chief Legal Officer
Chondra Bolton, CACDS Coordinator
Jerry Brown, Communications Specialist
Vanessa Brown, EHS Partnership, Education Program Specialist
Michelle Davis, HR Assistant
Glenda Davis-Canteen, Early Education Community Partnerships Coordinator NW
Hayat Dergaga, Research Analyst
Faith Duncan, Pre-K Field Operations Director
Rhonda Gunn, Senior Manager, HR
Iris Janet Herrera, Training Approval Specialist
Randy Hudgins, Director of Research and Policy Analysis
D’Juan James, Temp, Instructional Support Services
Jarita Lawrence-Burdette, EHS Business Operations Specialist
Laura Lucas, Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Director
Tyeichia Mason, Workforce Development Specialist
Ruby McTaggart, POWER Temp
Barbara McWethy, Workforce Support Manager
Christi Moore, Professional Learning Director
Abby Mozo, Professional Learning Operations Analyst

Amir Nilforooshan, IT Assets and Purchase Supervisor
Quandra Obi, Special Assistant to the Commissioner
Jill O'Meara, Community Partnerships and Projects Manager
Valerie Perez, Research Analyst
Anne Rein, Department Writer/Editor
Michael Rodgers, Director, Finance
April Rogers, Director, CCS Enforcement Operations
Brittany Sams, CCS Director of Administrative Services and Special Operations
Barbara Sanders, Business Analyst
Brittany Seltrecht, QIP Quality Assurance Admin
Allison Setterlind, Head Start Collaboration Director
Jackie Shivers, Director, Pre-K Quality Support
Hannah Smith, Early Education Community Partnerships Coordinator, CE
Nate Smith, Professional Learning Systems Manager
Sonja Steptoe, QIP Communications and Outreach Manager
Robin Stevens, Director of Human Resources
Amanda Tarpley, CAPS Family Support Director for Operations
Mark Waits, Senior Writer
Laura Wagner, Executive Director, DECAL Foundation
Bridgett Walker, Early Head Start Partnership Project Manager
Sheryl Wilhite, Senior HR Manager
Sheila Williams, CAPS Scholarship Administration Director
Kiera Willis, POWER Temp
Kori Woodward-Dickens, Legal Services Officer
Alexandra Young, Research and Policy Coordinator
Liz Young, Government Relations Director

The November 17, 2022 meeting of the Board of Early Care and Learning was held in the Oak Conference room and livestreamed via GoToWebinar.

1. Call to Order

At 9:09 a.m. Board Vice Chair Debra Brock called the meeting to order. She asked Board members and DECAL staff to keep Mr. Davis in their thoughts and prayers as he was absent because of a death in his family.

2. Welcome

Ms. Brock welcomed Board members, DECAL staff, and guests.

3. Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Ms. Brock asked for a motion to accept the meeting agenda. Ms. Purcell moved to accept, and Ms. Beam seconded. The Board accepted the agenda unanimously. Ms. Brock asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the August meeting. Ms. Harper moved to approve, and Ms. Morrissey seconded. The Board approved the minutes unanimously.

4. Inspiration

Ms. Morrissey read a short story adapted from author Ana Morris called *Why are Children So Important to Us?* about how children and adults enrich each other's lives through the exchange of imaginative playfulness and reassuring optimism.

5. Board Member Updates

Ms. Brock invited Board members to share updates on their recent activities. She attended the Quality Rated 10-Year Anniversary celebration in Dalton and reported that it was inspiring. Ms. Zisook reported that her school participated in Pre-K literacy week and the Read-To-Me-A-Thon designed to encourage family reading practices. The week culminated in a book parade. Ms. Beam announced that her grandson started attending a Quality Rated child care program.

6. DECAL Staff Reports

DECAL leaders provided updates about the agency's work.

a. Commissioner's Update

Commissioner Amy Jacobs reported on the Quality Rated 10th anniversary. Ten years ago 129 providers agreed to participate in Quality Rated, and now almost 3,000 have been rated, meaning that hundreds of thousands of young children are now receiving high-quality care. Celebration have so far included Quality Rated Day at the Braves and the regional celebration in Dalton with visits to two "Class of 2012" providers. Former Governor Nathan Deal, who instantiated the Quality Rated program 10 years ago, will be honored at the Atlanta area celebration on November 18. The Commissioner named the Georgia's Pre-K Teachers of the Year (TOTY), Shannon Gibson from Baldwin Elementary School in Baldwin and Alaina Jones from Akers Academy in Cumming. The Commissioner announced the finalists for Georgia's Early Educators of the Year. Finalists for Infant teachers are DiAnne Coggins from The Learning Village, LLC in College Park and Mary Williams from Kids Express Learning Center, Inc. in Hawkinsville. Toddler teacher finalists are Janet Thomas from the Right Start Early Learning Center II in Palmetto and Elianne Aguilera from Eli's Academy in Lawrenceville. Preschool finalists are Tierra Faulcon from Faulcon Prep Academy in Smyrna and Ashley Langley from the Waseca School in Athens. The Commissioner also reported on the launch of the Georgia Association for Infant Mental Health (GA-AIMH). GA-AIMH will serve as a hub for professional development opportunities for the early care and learning workforce, pediatricians, and clinicians.

Ms. Harper recalled that DECAL had partnered with an organization that gave college scholarships to young people. She asked Mr. Ringsrud if he recalled the name of the partner organization. He replied that it is Path2College. Ms. Harper said that a child in her district had received a scholarship for more than \$1,000 and his child care center also received a donation. Commissioner Jacobs explained that Path2College is Georgia's 529 plan, and it has partnered with DECAL for a long time. The scholarships are an outreach tool to promote the college savings plan. Ms. Brock thanked the Commissioner for her presentation.

b. Finance and Administration Update

Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud reported on DECAL's budget and spending. Because of federal COVID-19 relief funds, the budget for SFY 2023 is almost \$1.9 billion. As of the end of the first quarter of SFY 2023, September 30, 2022, expenses are on track with the budget with 76% of funds remaining. State auditors are on-site and have not yet wrapped up their work. Nutrition Services operates on the federal fiscal year which ends September 30. During federal fiscal year 2022 Happy Helpings served 2,833,818 meals at 875 sites in 86 counties. During the same period

the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) served 64,940,227 meals at 3,601 sites in 156 counties. DECAL received \$300,000 from the state in the amended SFY2022 budget to fund start-up grants to experienced sponsors to expand food service into unserved or underserved counties. Funds from start-up grants enabled sponsors to provide almost 30,000 additional meals at 27 new sites in 13 counties not previously served: Atkinson, Baker, Clarke, Early, Echols, Grady, Jasper, Lamar, Madison, Pike, Polk, Sumter, and Upson.

Ms. Brock 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 Georgia's Pre-K enrollment based on the first of four rosters collected over the school year. Before the pandemic, the program consistently served about 80,000 children. During the pandemic enrollment dropped to about 63,000. Last year saw an increase to about 72,000, and current enrollment is approaching 73,000. Pre-K enrollment is trending with other publicly-funded programs, Ms. Adams said; and, while she expects enrollment to continue to trend upward, there is uncertainty because the way families are making choices for their children is changing. DECAL will be working with one of its research partners to better understand the data.

Ms. Harper observed that an increase in homeschooling may be affecting Pre-K enrollment. Ms. Morrissey observed that more parents are staying at home. Ms. Adams agreed that both trends may be factors in enrollment, and DECAL will be looking at state and national trends as well as collecting more data about Georgia. DECAL is also in the process of building out a new IT system that will include a parent portal families can use to select a Pre-K program online. Ms. Beam commented that birth rates are also trending down. Ms. Adams agreed, saying that the downward trend in birth rates began before the pandemic. Ms. Zisook asked, "If Pre-K programs had to drop classrooms because of low enrollment, is it easy for them to get those classrooms back?" Ms. Adams responded that DECAL has closed some Pre-K classrooms because of low enrollment over the past few years but not as many as one might imagine. In deciding to close classrooms, DECAL looked at programs that had a history of low enrollment longer than the past few years in combination with other issues such as quality. This data helped to inform which classes to close. In situations where a Pre-K program had only one classroom, DECAL tried to let them operate with low enrollment so that children in that area would have access. Ms. Beam asked whether the data has been broken down to show where enrollment is low or dropping, e.g. metro Atlanta, rural areas, etc. Ms. Adams responded that there are some areas where all children are being served, other areas with waiting lists and no capacity to add classrooms—because there is no space or no provider—and other areas with low enrollment; but these do not trend geographically. This is one reason, she said, that DECAL will be working with the Research team and an external research partner to better understand the data. Ms. Harper asked about whether lower enrollment would allow for class sizes to be reduced to 20. Ms. Adams said that average classroom enrollment currently is about 20. Decreasing the maximum capacity to 20 requires a significant investment, she said, but it may be possible. Ms. Adams noted that there is a slight increase in Pre-K waiting lists, and the new IT system will allow DECAL to collect more information about families looking for Pre-K programs. Ms. Adams thanked Board members for their support of Georgia's Pre-K Week during the first week of October.

Ms. Adams introduced Christi Moore, Director of Professional Learning. Ms. Moore gave an update about DECAL's support for the early learning workforce in Georgia. After three rounds of POWER payments, DECAL has disbursed \$114,779,000 to employees of eligible providers. Over the course of

federal FY2022, the Professional Learning team added 20 courses to the Online Learning Library Initiative (OLLI), bringing the total to 50. OLLI courses are available to anyone in Georgia working to support children and families, including providers, directors, teachers, coaches, and technical assistance providers. The OLLI courses that are targeted for early learning teachers are available in English and Spanish. In the coming year DECAL will be using some of its ARPA funds to develop courses for substitute teachers, courses for CCLC directors, and courses about health and safety. Online and instructor-led courses provide knowledge. The skills to apply the knowledge to create a high-quality environment are developed through coaching, mentoring, direct technical assistance, or participation in a Professional Learning Community (PLC). The Professional Learning team offers a yearlong course to train qualified professionals to facilitate learning communities. Since 2016 392 people have completed that course. There is also a path to certification as a PLC facilitator that includes a second year of coursework and a portfolio, and 208 PLC facilitators have been certified. The program is now offered virtually, and certified PLC facilitators are allowed to offer training for credit.

Ms. Adams introduced Director of Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Laura Lucas who made a presentation about how an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health System of Care functions. When we talk about mental health services, she said, we're talking about meeting the social and emotional needs of young children and their families. Between nine and 14% of young children experience mental health issues; this is about the same rate as school-aged children. A system of care needs to offer services, supports, and a continuum of care that meets the child and the family where they are and provides what they need to be mentally healthy. DECAL established the Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Task Force with representatives from child-serving agencies to implement the recommendations of the Georgia legislative task force that established Ms. Lucas' position. Access to care was the most urgent issue identified by the cross-agency task force. Families were often turned away because their children were too young, or there were no providers trained in therapy for very young children, or there was no clear way for providers to bill Medicaid. The task force has made considerable progress on this issue, identifying existing pathways for clinicians to bill Medicaid for services to children from birth to age 6, educating clinicians about the age-appropriate DC:05TM diagnostic tool, creating a DC:05TM crosswalk tool, training clinicians in Child Parent Psychotherapy (CPP), establishing the Georgia Alliance for Infant Mental Health (GA-AIMH), and piloting an Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation service aimed at promotion and prevention. Ms. Lucas also announced that the third annual Children's Mental Health Week will take place May 1–5, 2023.

7. Break

Ms. Brock recessed the meeting for a short break at 10:07 a.m. The meeting resumed and staff reports continued at 10:21 a.m.

d. Georgia's Pre-K Week

Deputy Commissioner Adams introduced Maria Ramos, Special Project Manager at Voices for Georgia's Children, who shared pictures from the 12th annual Georgia Pre-K Week, held October 3–7. During Georgia Pre-K week 81 state leaders (including legislators and other dignitaries) made 110 visits to Pre-K programs, and 805 Pre-K programs in 143 counties registered and participated, Ms. Ramos reported. Over the course of 12 years, 73% (172 out of 236) of Georgia legislators have participated, she said. She will release a final report about Pre-K week in about a month.

Ms. Harper asked which counties did not participate, saying if they were in District 2, she would reach out to them next year. Ms. Ramos pointed out that a number of programs participate without formally

registering, so the total of 143 counties may be an undercount. Ms. Adams said that the report on Pre-K week will be shared with Board members. Ms. Harper commented that there are numerous rural counties in her district, and legislators represent large geographical areas. Ms. Brock thanked everyone who worked on Pre-K week and said that the importance of Pre-K cannot be overstated. She also praised the work on professional development and mental health.

e. Child Care Services (CCS) Update

Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services Pam Stevens gave an update about the School-Age Help and Relief Effort (SHARE) grants, the goal of which was to improve the quality of school-age classrooms. Quality is very important Ms. Stevens said because half of DECAL's CAPS funding goes to school-age care, and many children spend several hours a day in after school programs. The program had three parts: the grants, professional development, and assessments. DECAL approved 1,382 grant requests to providers serving more than 48,000 children. DECAL required all applicants to participate in training about best practices in school-age care and offered several optional training opportunities, all of which were very well received by participants. DECAL also offered small group coaching, and 50 participants from 39 programs completed the process consisting of five two-hour sessions. Those programs were offered external quality assessments, and 10 of them received quality assessments.

Ms. Harper said that unstructured, outdoor play is very important, yet she rarely sees children in child care centers playing outside. She acknowledged that parents want children to complete their homework during after-school programs and suggested that parents may need to be educated about the importance of outdoor play and what children learn from unstructured social engagements. Ms. Stevens agreed that unstructured outdoor time is very important, especially after a long school day. Licensing rules require providers to offer outdoor play, she said; but there is an ongoing challenge because parents want homework to be completed. Ms. Harper recommended a book called *The Last Child in the Woods* about what children learn and what they need from being outside. Ms. Stevens and Ms. Harper agreed that homework should be eliminated in elementary school.

Ms. Stevens introduced Child Care Services Director of Policy and Enforcement April Rogers to give the Board a preview of the family-friendly licensing dashboard that will be launched early next year. It is designed to make regulatory data easily accessible to families and is the first of its kind in the country Ms. Stevens said. Ms. Rogers provided an overview of the development process which included focus groups with providers and families, listening sessions with DECAL employees, planning with the development team. Ms. Rogers gave the Board a preview of the new dashboard. The new screens provide visual icons that indicate a provider's compliance status at a glance, allow families to dig deeper into compliance issues, and track compliance issues over time. The dashboard also includes a summary of each rule chapter in plain language.

Ms. Brock thanked Ms. Stevens and Ms. Rogers for their presentations.

f. Quality Innovation and Partnerships (QIP) Update

Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships Bentley Ponder gave an update about the Community Transformation Grants (CTG) awarded by DECAL. He shared some quotations from current grant recipients collected as part of an evaluation being conducted by a team at GEEARS led by Hannah Goldberg. Mr. Ponder introduced Janet Cavin, the Executive Director of Communities in Schools Milledgeville Baldwin County and the Project Director for the Baldwin County Board of Education CTG. Ms. Cavin made a presentation about her organization's accomplishments under the grant. Her organization identified 20 families with an incarcerated parent and addressed these families'

comprehensive needs, including clothing and food insecurity. They also focused on kindergarten readiness and parent support and delivered training to teachers about responding to families who have experienced trauma. She noted that 70% of children enrolled in the public school system live in poverty.

The Board applauded her work.

Dr. Ponder gave an overview about 2Gen work, an approach that designs services for children and families, aligns and coordinates these services, and tracks outcomes for children and adults. He briefly reviewed the research that supports a 2Gen approach.

g. Federal Programs Update

Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs Elisabetta Kasfir joined Dr. Ponder to discuss the goals and accomplishments of the \$150,000 2Gen Policy Acceleration Partnership Grant made to DECAL by Ascend at the Aspen Institute and the Liz Blake Giving Fund of the Blake Family Foundation. The Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) is a partner in the work. The overall goal for the grant was to improve and strengthen coordination across child care, post-secondary, and state benefit services to produce a strong alignment of resources. There were five specific goals: defining shared goals and opportunities at the state level; increasing access for single mothers and student parents to education and support services; strengthening coaching and case-management skills for state- and community-level staff; including parents in conversations and strategies to eliminate barriers and inform new policies; and expanding the 2Gen network in Georgia. Accomplishments include convening a state 2Gen Advisory Council and community 2Gen Advisory Council, completing an eligibility crosswalk, implementing the FindHelp Georgia resource and referral portal, training DECAL and TCSG staff in Family Centered Coaching, adding student parents as a CAPS priority group, interviewing student parents, and hosting a 2Gen Summit. Marjorie Simms, Managing Director of Ascend at the Aspen Institute, gave the keynote at the 2Gen Summit on October 19.

8. Lunch and Committee Meetings

Ms. Brock adjourned for lunch at 11:38 a.m.

9. Public Comment Period

At 1:07 p.m. Ms. Brock called the meeting back to order and asked Board Liaison Quandra Obi whether anyone had signed up to make a public comment. Ms. Obi replied that no one had signed up. Ms. Brock asked whether any comments had been received via the GoToMeeting chat function. Ms. Obi responded that no comments had been received via chat.

10. Committee Reports

Ms. Brock called for committee reports. Ms. Beam reported from the Program and Rules Committee about how CCS is working with child care providers to help them stay in compliance especially in the areas of health and safety. She also reported on the \$5,000 Pre-K classroom grants and the LITTLE grants, as well as the CAPS student parent priority group.

Ms. Morrissey reported that the Finance Committee received a report of expenses as of October 31, 2022, and expenses are still on track with the budget. She also reported that 94% of the funds DECAL receives are currently passed through. This percentage is higher than normal and will return to 89 or 90% when all federal relief funds have been spent.

Ms. Harper reported from the Quality, Innovations and Partnership Committee about Early Head Start enrollment, research about CAPS funded by ARPA, growth of the Quality Rated program, and the Community Transformation Grantees.

11. Adjournment

At 1:23 p.m. Ms. Brock announced the date of the next meeting, February 16, 2023, wished everyone happy holidays, and adjourned the meeting.

 2/16/23
Board Chair, Signature Date

 2/16/23
Board Secretary, Signature Date