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## **Board of Early Care and Learning**

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**Board of Early Care and Learning Meeting**  
Thursday, August 24, 2023 — 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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#### **Board Members**

Kristy Beam, Jen Bennecke, Melissa Boekhaus, Phil Davis (Chair), Susan Harper, Joanna Hill, Kristin Morrissey, Luann Purcell, Karla Zisook

#### **Public Guests**

Myra Abdus-Saboor, Khadijah Bogle, Danielle Chappell, Ellyn Cochran, Sherri Curry, Ife Finch Floyd, Emily Hatchett, Terri Johnson, Isabelle Keenum, Shelly Lawson, Ana Magana, Elaine McCall, Lindsay McVicar, Angela Melton, Charlotte, Pelz, David Ribar, Amber Sansbury, Janice Slavin, Noni Walton, Laura White, Samantha Williams

#### **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 Project Manager  
Tamika Boone, Nutrition Services Director  
Jennifer Bridgeman, Director of Process and Policy-CCS  
Gregory Brown, Legal Services Supervisor  
Vanessa Brown, EHS Program Manager for Mental Health and Disabilities  
Leatha Bryant, Technical Assistance Coordinator/Trainer Nutrition  
Tina Crooms, CAPS Constituent Services Manager  
Kim Davis, Assistant Director of QR Operations  
Hayat Dergaga, Research Analyst  
Rebecca Ellis, Director of Practice and Support Services  
Brittany Fordham, QIP Quality Assurance Admin  
Shayna Funke, Lead Policy and Business Operations Analyst  
Michelle Garris, CCS School Age and Youth Program Specialist  
David Ginsburg, Contract and Procurement Attorney  
Kristin Goetz, Professional Learning Specialist  
Brian Griffin, Pre-K PANDA System Manager  
Moriham Hassan, Budget Analyst  
Denise Jenson, Director of Quality Rated

Jahmeka Jones, QR Standardization and Evaluation Anchor  
Selina Keith, CAPS Family Support Consultant  
Melinda Knowles, Quality Assurance Specialist, QR Operations  
Jarita Lawrence-Burdette, EHS Business Operations Specialist  
Dorisse Lester, CAPS Special Projects and Initiatives Manager  
Laura Lucas, Director of Infant Early Childhood Mental Health  
Andrea Marable, Professional Learning Specialist  
CynQueshia Martin, Pre-K Administrative Assistant  
Tyeichia Mason, Workforce Development Specialist  
Meghan McNail, Summer Transition Program and Outreach Manager  
Christi Moore, Professional Learning Director  
Miranda Murphy, Practice and Support Services Outreach Project Manager  
Amir Nilforooshan, IT Assets and Purchase Supervisor  
Rob O'Callaghan, Senior Research Analyst  
Quandra Obi, Special Assistant to the Commissioner  
Valerie Perez, Research Analyst  
Brenda Parker, STABLE Project Consultant  
Harika Polisetty, DocuWare System Administrator  
Chrissy Powell, CCS Exemption Unit Manager  
Kendria Reeves, CAPS QA and Payments Consultant  
Laura Reid, Professional Learning Community Manager  
Anne Rein, Department Writer/Editor  
Chekol Retta, IT Security Engineer  
Melissa Risenhoover, QIP Administrative Assistant  
Mike Rodgers, Director, Finance  
April Rogers, Director, CCS Enforcement Operations  
Edward Rowell, Early Education Community Partnership Coordinator SW  
Brittany Sams, CCS Director of Administrative Services and Special Operations  
Barbara Sanders, Business Analyst  
Allison Setterlind, Head Start Collaboration Director  
Angela Shelton, Professional Learning Specialist  
Sabrina Sims, CAPS Family Support Consultant SW  
Tommeshia Sims, CAPS Receptionist  
Melyn Smith, CCS Quality Assurance Consultant  
Sonja Steptoe, QIP Communications and Outreach Manager  
Amanda Tarpley, CAPS Family Support Director  
Jill Taylor, Community Partnerships and Projects Manager  
Briana Thomas, Georgia Foundation Intern  
Audreana Todd, QIP Special Projects Coordinator  
Mark Waits, Senior Writer  
Bridgette Washington-Collier, Early Education Community Partnership Coordinator CW  
Vicki Watts, Professional Learning Specialist  
Sheryl Wilhite, Director of Human Resources  
Liz Young, Government Relations Director

The August 24, 2023 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 8:58 a.m. Board Chair Phil Davis called the meeting to order.

**2. Welcome**

Mr. Davis welcomed Board members, DECAL staff, and guests.

**3. Approval of Agenda and Minutes**

Mr. Davis asked for a motion to accept the meeting agenda. Ms. Morrissey moved to accept, and Dr. Purcell seconded. The Board accepted the agenda unanimously. Mr. Davis asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the May meeting. Ms. Harper moved to approve, and Ms. Zisook seconded. The Board approved the minutes unanimously.

**4. Inspiration**

Ms. Hill reflected on her 30 years of experience in education, 29 of which were in early care and learning. Over the years she observed teachers who minimized the importance of their roles in children’s lives, and she made it a mission to let early learning teachers know how important they are. She praised DECAL for elevating the profession and read a poem called, “The Star Polisher” by Teah Becks about the role of teachers in helping all students shine.

**5. Board Member Updates**

Mr. Davis invited Board members to share updates on their recent activities. Ms. Bennecke shared her excitement with all the back-to-school activities in her district and her participation in the first Georgia Council on Literacy meeting in Statesboro, which she attended virtually. Ms. Zisook shared that one of her colleagues was asked to present her research on literacy, a professional honor. Dr. Boekhaus thanked Head Start Collaboration Director Allison Setterlind for helping the mother of one of her patients find a Head Start placement for her child. She also reported that she had joined an effort with the AAP to advocate for universal Pre-K funding.

**6. DECAL Staff Reports**

DECAL leaders provided updates about the agency’s work.

**a. Commissioner’s Update**

Commissioner Amy Jacobs congratulated the Georgia Lottery on 30 years of operation. In celebration of its 30th birthday this year and the 30th birthday of Georgia’s Pre-K last year, the lottery had new signs made for all Pre-K programs. The Commissioner announced the pilot of a new program aimed at helping child care providers recruit and retain staff. The program will pay for a portion of child care tuition for child care teachers and other staff. The pilot will include up to 30 providers. Applications will open in the fall, and participants will be selected randomly. DECAL continues to support the child care workforce through the DECAL Scholars program. Commissioner Jacobs also gave the Board an update about the two bills related to literacy passed by the General Assembly earlier this year. SB 211 established the Georgia Council on Literacy which has 30 members who have been appointed by the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Speaker. The Council is attached to the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, and it met for the first time in Statesboro in August. DECAL was represented by Deputy Commissioner for Georgia’s Pre-K and Instructional Supports Susan Adams. The Commissioner participates in the Alliance of Education Agency Heads which advises the Council. DECAL will be staffing and supporting the Council’s Birth–5 working group. The Council is a three-year council charged with making recommendations on literacy training for teachers, reviewing community-based literacy programs and recommending improvements, reviewing changes to the Quality Basic Education

(QBE) formula, reviewing statewide Birth–5 initiatives, and providing a report to the Governor, Office of Planning and the Budget, Speaker, and Lieutenant Governor that identifies needs and issues and recommends legislation and appropriations to support improved literacy outcomes. The Council’s first report is due November 30. The Birth–5 working committee will have its first meeting in September. The Georgia Early Literacy Act, HB 538, requires that, beginning in July 2025, some of the 10 hours of annual training for early learning teachers be on the subject of developmentally appropriate, evidence-based literacy instruction.

Ms. Morrissey asked whether the Council will submit a report each November. The Commissioner confirmed that it will. Ms. Harper asked whether the financial support for child care teachers goes to their salaries. The Commissioner responded that it will be used by teachers to help pay child care tuition for their own children. Ms. Harper commented about the persistence of the 30 million word gap between children in lower income families and those in higher income families. She mentioned the LENA vests and suggested that early vocabulary development be included in literacy projects. The Commissioner agreed with Ms. Harper and said that the recent legislation supports the work DECAL has been doing for 10 years to improve literacy. She also mentioned that the LITTLE program, which provides the LENA vests, is ongoing. She also said the hope for the work of the Georgia Council on Literacy is that it will reach children who are not in child care through community-based programs.

Mr. Davis thanked the Commissioner for her presentation.

**b. Finance and Administration Update**

Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud reported that DECAL spent 99% of its allocated funds for SFY2023 which ended in June and did not overspend in any category. The Pre-K program ended the year with a surplus of \$18, 649, 849 because enrollment was lower than anticipated. Those funds will be returned to the state treasury. Mr. Ringsrud walked Board members through three budget requests that require Board approval. For the amended SFY2024 budget (AFY 2024) instructions from the Governor’s office allowed agencies to request up to a 3% increase from state general funds and state lottery funds as well as request funds for projects that have no recurring costs. DECAL is requesting an additional \$8.745 million for several one-time projects, including \$8.1 million for literacy kits for all Georgia’s Pre-K and Summer Transition Program classes, support for the GA Association for Infant Mental Health, additional Happy Helpings startup grants, and IT equipment for Pre-K staff. The AFY 2024 request also includes three new positions to support Georgia’s Pre-K.

Ms. Morrissey asked Mr. Ringsrud to clarify which items are one-time projects. Mr. Ringsrud responded that all the items except the three new Pre-K positions are one-time projects. Ms. Bennecke asked for more detail about the literacy kits. Deputy Commissioner Adams responded that Pre-K classrooms already have some literacy materials, but her division receives requests from classrooms who need additional support. Her team has also identified specific materials they would like to provide to all Pre-K classrooms along with training for classroom teachers. There is a language study of Georgia’s Pre-K going on now that is helping to show which classrooms do better at developing young children’s language skills, and it will inform what goes into the kits. Distributing literacy kits is also a way for DECAL to make sure classrooms have consistent literacy materials. Dr. Purcell asked whether the budget request for additional Pre-K positions includes benefits. Mr. Ringsrud replied that it does, but the request for AFY 2024 is for funding for one quarter only, based on the timing when the AFY 2024 budget is signed.

For SFY2025 agencies were instructed to submit a budget request reflecting a 3% increase in state general and state lottery funds and a request reducing state funds by 1%. In the scenario with a 3%

increase, DECAL is requesting an additional \$2.25 million in state funds that will be paired with federal funds to increase CAPS provider reimbursement rates as well as fund the three Pre-K positions mentioned above. In the scenario with a 1% decrease, DECAL would reduce state funds by \$753,000 by reducing the number of CAPS scholarships by 125 and reducing some contracts.

Mr. Davis asked whether there is a rationale for the scenario requiring a 1% reduction in state funds. Mr. Ringsrud replied that while there is not an official statement, he believes that it reflects the unpredictability of the economy given the lingering effects of the pandemic and that the 3% increase is more likely and the 1% decrease is “just in case.”

Mr. Ringsrud also reported that the Nutrition Services team held three events over the summer to promote Happy Helpings, and he announced that Nutrition Services was awarded a USDA Farm to School grant.

Mr. Davis thanked Mr. Ringsrud for his presentation.

**c. Federal Programs Update**

Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs Elisabetta Kasfir gave the Board an update about the ACCESS program which has been extended through September 2024, the date by which all American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) funds must be spent. Beginning in October 2023 families with CAPS scholarships will resume paying their family fee. For most families this is about \$22 per week per child. Both ARP funds and Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA) have been used to fund the ACCESS program, and the ARP requires that families pay a fee. In January 2024 a 4.3% increase will be applied to participating CAPS providers’ published rates to account for forecasted child care price growth.

Mr. Davis asked whether all CAPS providers receive the same rate or if rates are based on the tuition providers charge. Ms. Kasfir responded that every provider is receiving payments based on the tuition they charge. Mr. Davis asked whether there is a check in place on providers that raise their rates solely because they know federal funds are available. Ms. Kasfir explained that providers have been required to fix their rates during the ACCESS program to make sure that doesn’t happen. In normal circumstances, she said, providers are not allowed to charge children with CAPS scholarships a different rate from other children, but during ACCESS providers may raise their rates for private pay children if they choose to. Ms. Bennecke asked Ms. Kasfir to clarify what the program will look like for families after September 2024. Ms. Kasfir said that DECAL will go back to paying state maximum reimbursement rates. An assessment of reimbursement rates is in process now, she said, and it may be possible to increase the reimbursement rate so that there will be a smaller differential between the rates providers charge and the reimbursement rate they receive from DECAL than there was before the ACCESS program started.

Ms. Kasfir reviewed the CAPS expansion initiative which also continues through September 2024. In November 2021 CAPS widened eligibility limits to 85% of state median income, the maximum allowed, in order to add 10,000 children for a total of 60,000. In December 2022 income limits returned to the typical 50% state median income. The typical eligibility limit was restored at that time so that the number of children served would return to 50,000 through attrition. CAPS is currently serving more than 70,000 children, Ms. Kasfir said. Mr. Davis asked for the age range of children served by CAPS. Ms. Kasfir said that the age range is typically birth to age 13, but some children with disabilities over the age of 13 are served.

Ms. Kasfir gave the Board an update on the CAPS Provider Relations unit. The new payment and provider management system now being developed will include more automation for CAPS staff and child care providers and more ways for providers to contact CAPS to support the goal of improved response times and reduced payment processing errors. Ms. Kasfir also gave an update about the student parent pilot project which is about to launch. The pilot is designed to provide student parents with faster, easier access to child care. CAPS established a student parent priority group in May 2022. Almost one in five current CAPS applicants identify as student parents, and 42% of their applications have been approved. Starting this fall the student parent pilot will have CAPS representatives on three Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) campuses to help student parents apply for CAPS scholarships and locate convenient child care. The goal is to process CAPS applications in real time as much as possible. It will run for 18 months to two years, and Child Trends will conduct an evaluation.

Mr. Davis asked Ms. Kasfir to confirm that if 42% of student parent applications are approved, 58% are not; and he asked for the principal reasons that applications are rejected. Ms. Kasfir confirmed the approval/rejection rates and added that the typical approval rate for all CAPS applications ranges from about 23% to 28%. The main reasons that applicants are rejected, she said, are not meeting income eligibility limits, not meeting approved activity requirements, or not supplying all required information. The latter is the reason for most rejections, and the hope of the pilot is that CAPS staff can explain clearly what pieces of information are required. Ms. Bennecke asked how CAPS is publicizing the student parent pilot. Ms. Kasfir responded that marketing materials have been developed to distribute on campus, and TCSG sites are already thinking about to promote the program, and on-campus student navigators are talking about it. There was a lot of publicity when the student parent priority group was introduced in 2022, and the percentage of student parent applicants has stayed relatively stable since then, indicating, Ms. Kasfir said, that student parents know about the program. Ms. Bennecke commented that it would be good for campus advisors and counselors to promote the program. Ms. Kasfir also provided push cards for Find Help Georgia for Board members.

Mr. Davis thanked Ms. Kasfir for her presentation.

**d. Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports Update**

Deputy Commissioner Adams briefly reviewed the changes made to the Summer Transition Program (STP) based on feedback from teachers and families. The program was shortened by one week; and teachers received salary increases. The program was able to serve significantly more children this year because lottery funds were supplemented with funds from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief fund (GEER). Ms. Adams highlighted the growth of the program over the past 10 years. The classes for rising Pre-K students and rising kindergarteners served almost 5,000 children this summer. Ms. Adams shared positive feedback from the Director of the Putnam County public schools Pre-K program who was very pleased that the STP was targeted for the children and families who need it most. Ms. Adams mentioned the start of Pre-K and the ongoing shortage of qualified teachers. More information about Pre-K enrollment will be available at the next Board meeting.

Ms. Adams introduced Practice and Support Services Director Rebecca Ellis who made a presentation about the SEEDS Helpline and training on the Pyramid Model, both of which promote healthy social and emotional development for young children. The SEEDS helpline is a resource for teachers and families to support social and emotional development as well as the inclusion of children with disabilities. It was established in 2019, and this year Shayla Lewis was hired as Helpline Coordinator. Requests to the SEEDS helpline increased 33% from school year 2022 to 2023. Most requests came from providers (58%) followed by families (21%). Most calls concerned challenging behavior, and most

related to Georgia's Pre-K classrooms. Nevertheless calls about infants and toddlers doubled from 2022 to 2023 as did internal referrals. There was also an increase in calls from DFCS about children in foster care who are about to be placed in child care. DECAL can send out a specialist to support teachers in the child's transition into child care. A strong majority of callers were satisfied with the help they received and would recommend the helpline to others. Another resource for teachers to support children's social and emotional development is training on the Pyramid Model. Training includes online modules and professional learning community (PLC) sessions. DECAL Specialists have completed a pilot for 48 administrators from public and private Pre-K programs. Administrators found the PLC sessions valuable and expressed eagerness for teachers to complete the training. The first cohort of teachers (more than 200 infant, toddler, preschool and Pre-K teachers) is underway and will be completed in September. Each participant who completes the training receives a \$500 stipend and \$175 through Class Wallet to purchase Pyramid Model materials. Child Trends is conducting an evaluation of the training series.

Ms. Zisook asked about specialists who go out to classrooms in school systems and how often that happens. Ms. Ellis replied that it doesn't happen frequently. Ms. Zisook asked Ms. Ellis to confirm that teachers may request the help of a specialist, and Ms. Ellis confirmed, clarifying that the specialists work with teachers, not directly with children.

Mr. Davis thanked Ms. Adams and Ms. Ellis for their presentations.

## **7. Break**

Mr. Davis recessed the meeting for a short break at 10:20 a.m. The meeting resumed and staff reports continued at 10:40 a.m.

### **e. Quality Innovations and Partnerships (QIP) Update**

Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships Bentley Ponder reported on an economic impact study now underway, similar to studies conducted in 2008 and 2016. The current study will be divided into phases for the purpose of understanding the impact of the pandemic and the COVID-19 relief funds. The first report will be released on September 30. It compares gross receipts between 2019 and 2020 and includes a chapter on DECAL's pandemic response. Providers were not surveyed for this study because they have been over-surveyed, Dr. Ponder said. Instead the study used DECAL administrative data, STABLE phase 1 and 2 application data, the 2021 survey of child care market rates, U.S. census data, and Georgia Department of Labor wage and employment data. Dr. Ponder highlighted three results from the first phase of the study. First, the study shows that the average annual decline in providers did not change much between the prior study of the years 2016 to 2019 and the current study of 2019 to 2020. However, the trend of consolidation into larger centers continues.

Ms. Morrissey commented that the funds DECAL spent to keep child care centers open had a huge effect.

A second survey finding is the comparison of children served by age group in 2019 and 2020. Numbers for 2020 include children who were physically present as well as those with CAPS scholarships who were enrolled but not attending. The third finding Dr. Ponder highlighted is the change in the portion of gross receipts paid by parents vs. federal, local, and state programs. In 2019 federal and state funds paid 40% of gross receipts, and in 2020 federal and state funds paid 60% of gross receipts. Dr. Ponder also quoted a finding from the Phase 1 report that as of December 2022 employment was still down by 18% from pre-pandemic levels and annual wages declined by \$3,200 on average between 2019 and 2020.

Mr. Davis asked why DECAL was paying for enrolled students who were not showing up. Dr. Ponder explained that it was part of CAPS policies to keep child care business afloat. Commissioner Jacobs added that it is considered best practice for a subsidy program to pay not on attendance but on enrollment. There are proposed federal rules being developed now that would require states to do that on a regular basis. Paying for enrollment, a temporary policy during the pandemic, costs more than paying on attendance, but it also gives providers a more stable income. Ms. Morrissey commented that the data show that financial support for providers was a worthwhile investment. Dr. Purcell said she is proud of DECAL's support for providers, and she said it was necessary to make sure providers were open when families were ready to return to using child care. Ms. Morrissey asked what had caused the decline in wages, and Dr. Ponder said he would get back to her on that question.

Dr. Ponder also announced the pilot of a new grant program, Expanding Parents' Access to Nontraditional Delivery (EXPAND). The impetus for the EXPAND grants came from stakeholder research conducted when DECAL first started receiving federal COVID-19 relief funding. There are three types of EXPAND grants. Three to five grants will be made to providers to allow them to expand their business hours. DECAL will also award three or four grants to for-profit businesses and three or four to community organizations for creative solutions that give families access to care during non-traditional hours. More than 220 providers applied for grants in the first category, and almost 70 for categories two and three combined. Dr. Ponder introduced QIP Communications and Outreach Manager Sonja Steptoe who announced the creation of the Thriving Child Care Business Academy, an online platform of free training for child care business owners and administrators to help them improve their business skills and become self-sustaining as federal COVID-19 relief funds wind down. The Academy will begin offering classes in the fall. Trainings have been developed by Civitas Strategies, the University of Georgia Small Business Development Center at Valdosta State University (UGA SBDC), and the National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance (NCECQA). Civitas will also conduct research about changing business models in the child care industry to give DECAL greater insight into the financial wellbeing of the industry. Dr. Ponder added that the Academy is a joint project of QIP and Pre-K/Instructional Supports. Ms. Morrissey asked whether providers will receive Quality Rated points for going through the Academy courses. Dr. Ponder replied that they will receive training credit which feeds into their portfolio requirements for Quality Rated. He added that DECAL is looking into incorporating the training into the process for providers with provisional and probationary Quality Rated status. Ms. Morrissey said that the Academy sounds wonderful.

Mr. Davis thanked Dr. Ponder and Ms. Steptoe for their presentations.

**f. Child Care Services (CCS) Update**

Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services Pam Stevens reminded Board members that it's important for DECAL to support providers who offer school age programs because these are very important to child care businesses. The school age room is often the largest room in a child care learning center and the most profitable. At any given time about 50% of CAPS scholarships go to school-aged children, and it is more challenging for providers to create meaningful experiences for older children. Ms. Stevens introduced CCS Director of Administrative Services and Specialty Operations Brittany Sams who gave the Board a report on the school-age grants DECAL made to providers from CRRSA funds between February and June of this year. CCLCs received grants ranging from \$1,720 to \$4,300 based on license capacity. FCCLHs received \$1,075. Grants were disbursed through ClassWallet to allow DECAL to monitor purchases from selected vendors to make sure grant funds were spent on age-appropriate materials and collect data about how funds were used. In planning the grant program



DECAL focused on the Georgia Afterschool and Youth Development (ASYD) Quality Standard 3: Environment and Climate which encourages providers to offer frequent access to nature and/or an outdoor play space. Top categories for purchases were arts and crafts supplies, playground equipment, games, and storage equipment. Providers that operate in shared spaces especially need storage equipment, Ms. Sams said. More than 3,000 providers participated, and a total of \$10,161,272 was spent. Feedback about the program was very positive.

Mr. Davis asked the reasons that eligible providers did not participate. Ms. Sams responded that there were several reasons. Some providers were in ownership transitions, she said, and others couldn't be reached by email. Ms. Stevens added that some providers will never participate because they don't want any extra involvement with government. Ms. Harper asked about after school programs that are not housed in a child care facility. Ms. Sams confirmed that such programs were eligible, and Ms. Stevens added that programs in shared spaces are often the ones that need furnishings and storage equipment so that they can make a place such as a school cafeteria a fun place to be.

Ms. Stevens briefly reviewed the proposed rule changes for CCLCs and FCCLHs. The proposed amendment to CCLC Rule 591-1-1-.07(2) adds language requiring that providers notify parents of any incident that puts a child's health or safety at risk (not just illness or injury). Examples could include instances in which a child goes missing from the program or is left on a vehicle. The proposed amendment to Rule 591-1-1-.16(g) allows DECAL to revoke a license if false statements are submitted to the Department. Ms. Stevens emphasized that the rule is not about mistakes. It is intended as a remedy for deliberate attempts to mislead. The proposed amendment to Rule 591-1-1-.36(7)(c)3 requires that transportation lists include dates. The proposed amendment to FCCLH Rule 290-2-3-.11(1)(b) adds language to match proposed CCLC Rule 591-1-1-.07(2).

## **8. Lunch and Committee Meetings**

Mr. Davis adjourned the meeting for lunch at 11:30 a.m.

## **9. Committee Reports**

Mr. Davis called the meeting to order at 12:55 p.m. for committee reports. Ms. Beam reported from the Program and Rules committee on rule changes being proposed by the federal Health and Human Services' Office of Child Care that, if adopted, will require changes to the CAPS system. A new Pre-K IT platform is in development that will include updated, modernized modules for grant payments, student and teacher rosters, and program visits. Happy Helpings awarded \$105,000 in start-up grants to sponsors who expanded summer meal service to 17 previously unserved Georgia counties.

## **10. Public Hearing**

At 1:00 p.m. Mr. Davis turned the meeting over to Legal Services Supervisor Gregory Brown who gave instructions for the public hearing on proposed rule changes and called the hearing to order. Mr. Brown noted that letters addressed to the Commissioner about the proposed rule changes had been received and shared with the Board. (See below.) Mr. Brown asked Board Liaison Quandra Obi whether anyone had signed up to comment about the proposed rule changes. Ms. Obi responded that no one had signed up. Mr. Brown asked Ms. Obi if anyone had submitted comments via the GoToWebinar chat function. She replied that no comments had been submitted. Mr. Brown closed the public hearing at 1:04 p.m. and turned the meeting over to Mr. Davis.

## 11. Public Comments

Mr. Davis asked Ms. Obi if anyone had signed up to make general comments or submitted comments through the chat function. Ms. Obi responded that no had signed up or submitted general comments.

## 12. Committee Reports (continued)

At 1:05 p.m. Mr. Davis called for Committee reports to resume. Ms. Hill reported from the Quality, Innovations and Partnership committee that the research unit is expanding to include an institutional research team and a research partnerships/business supports team to strengthen the capacity for DECAL-led research. Of the 4,520 eligible providers in the state, 2,900 are Quality Rated, 229 have provisional status, and 75 have probationary status. The Early Head Start program does not have full enrollment at the moment, but recruitment is underway. Ms. Morrissey reported that the Finance committee received an update on DECAL's expenses for the first month of FY 2024, and they are on budget. The agency continues to operate at a 91% efficiency rate. Ms. Morrissey also informed the Board that the finance committee recommended the Board approve the three budget requests presented by Mr. Ringsrud. Mr. Davis thanked the committees for their reports.

## 13. Rule Changes

Mr. Davis asked if there was any further discussion about proposed licensing rule changes for child care learning centers, Rule Chapter 591-1-1. Hearing no further discussion, he asked for a motion to approve the rule changes as proposed. Ms. Morrissey made a motion, and Ms. Hill seconded. The Board unanimously approved the proposed amendments. He asked if there was any further discussion about the proposed licensing rule change for family child care learning homes, Rule Chapter 290-2-3-.11(1)(b). Hearing none, he asked for a motion and a second to approve the rule change as proposed. Ms. Harper made a motion, and Ms. Bennecke seconded. The Board unanimously approved the proposed amendment.

## 14. Budget

Mr. Davis asked if there was any further discussion about the budget requests presented by Mr. Ringsrud. Hearing no further discussion, he asked for a motion to approve all three budget requests. Ms. Purcell made a motion, and Ms. Bennecke seconded. The Board approved the budget requests unanimously.

## 15. Dates for 2024 Board Meetings

Mr. Davis announced the proposed Board meeting dates for 2024: February 15, May 16, August 22, and November 21, and asked if there was any discussion by the Board. Ms. Zisook noted that she would be absent for the February meeting, and Ms. Harper noted that the August Board meeting is always the fourth Thursday rather than the third. Mr. Davis called for a motion to approve the proposed dates. Ms. Hill made a motion to approve, seconded by Ms. Beam. The Board approved the proposed dates unanimously.

## 16. Adjournment

At 1:15 p.m. Mr. Davis announced the date for the next meeting, November 16, 2023 and adjourned.

As noted above, two letters about the proposed rule changes were sent to the Commissioner and shared with the Board. In a letter dated August 23, 2023 CEO of the Georgia Child Care Association Ellen Reynolds wrote,

*Dear Commissioner Jacobs,*

*We submit the following comments regarding proposed changes to Rule Chapter 591-1-1 in the Rules and Regulations for Child Care Learning Centers.*

**Rule 591-1-1 –.07 Children's Health.** *While we acknowledge the importance of this rule change, we*

*believe there is potential for confusion due to the vague nature of the definition of “health and safety” which is subject to interpretation. Clarification of the specific circumstances the rule seeks to address in the rules would bring more uniform interpretation and help ensure compliance with the rule change.*

*There is also confusion as to whether only the parents of the child involved or whether every parent at the center must be notified based on the way the language is physically drafted on the page. We respectfully request revisions clarifying that notification only pertains the parents of the child involved.*

***Rule 591–1–1 –.16 Governing Body and Licenses.*** *We acknowledge and support full transparency by all individuals participating in the care and education of children under DECAL’s purview. However, the current wording of the rule allows DECAL to revoke a license if a false statement by is submitted by mistake. Thus, we respectfully request the wording “knowingly or intentionally” be added prior to the word “submitted” to accurately reflect the intended criteria for revocation. Otherwise, an owner’s livelihood could be taken through license revocation by a false statement submitted due to a mistake, or more likely, a material fact left out by omission. Intentionally misleading the Department is unacceptable and should be subject to revocation; false statements due to mistake should not. We would also like to see a method to cure any submitted documents that contain mistakes or false statements if later data comes to light.*

***Rule 591–1–1 –.36 Transportation.*** *It would be beneficial to include a notation to document the date of transportation on the transportation form provided by DECAL. This simple addition would help streamline record-keeping processes and ensure a comprehensive overview of transportation history for each child. Furthermore, we would like DECAL to offer the option of allowing these forms to be completed online as an alternative to paper. Electronic signatures are admissible in court, and we feel this might cut down on some mistakes in transportation paperwork if the person documenting procedures on the transportation checklist can do so in real time on an iPad or other electronic devise.*

*In conclusion, we appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on these proposed rule changes. It is essential to promote clarity, consistency, and accountability within the early care and learning sector.*

*Thank you for your attention to this matter. Ellen Reynolds, CEO*

An identical letter, also dated August 23, 2023, was signed by the following members of the Georgia Child Care Association: Early Care and Education Consortium, 5 Star Childcare, A Brighter Beginning Childcare, A Child’s Campus, A Fun Time-Out, A Kid's World Enterprises, Inc., ABC Another Bright Creation ELC, All Our Children Elite Childcare Academy, AppleTree Prep – Athens, AppleTree Prep – Bogart, AppleTree Prep – Watkinsville, Bells Ferry Learning Centers, Bemiss Academy Preschool, Inc., Big Blue Marble Academy, Bright Horizons, Bright Stars Primary Learning Academy, Brookhaven Christian Child Development Center, Cadence Education, Camden Academy, Cedars Preschools, Cherokee Academy at Clayton, Childcare Network Development Centers, Childtime Learning Centers, Chroma Early Learning Academy of Roswell, Discovery Point Cumming, Discovery Point Franchising, Discovery Point Suwanee, Dunwoody Prep, Endeavor Schools, Gainesville Academy, GASP! Georgia After School Program, Georgia Kids Academy, Inc., Goddard School of Peachtree City, Goddard School of Sandy Springs, Goddard School of Vinings, Great Beginnings,

Greenbrier Preschool, Harbins Preparatory School, Joyland Child Development Center, Kat's Little Angels, KIDazzle Childcare, Kids R Kids Cascade, Kids Community Learning Center, Kids R Kids International Franchisor, Kids R Kids Johns Creek, Kids R Kids Lawrenceville, Kids R Kids Mableton, Kids R Kids Marietta, Kids R Kids Norcross, Kids R Kids Peachtree City, Kids R Kids Roswell, Kids R Kids South Fulton, Kids R Kids Suwanee, Kids World Academy Bainbridge, Kids World Learning Center, KLA Schools of Chamblee, Kreative Kids Academy, La Petite Academy, La Petite Academy, Learning Safari, Little Caterpillars Development Center, Inc., Little Ones Learning Center, Little Tigers Academy, Milestone Education, MKS Learning Center, Montessori Unlimited Schools, Oak Grove Academy, Otter Learning, Parker-Chase Preschools, Pre-K Preparatory Learning Academy Inc., Reddings Kids Academy, Riverstones Academy Douglasville, Riverstones Academy Morningside, Schoolzin Schoolzout Christian Learning Center, Senoia Kids Academy, Seven Branches Academy, Richmond Hill Montessori Preschool, Sunshine House, Suzuki Schools, Teach O Rea Preparatory Preschool, The Academy at Ellison Lakes, The Children's Courtyard, The Legacy Centre Preschool, Towne Square Academy, Towne Square Academy at Green Valley, Inc., Towne Square Academy of Riverdale, Tutor Time, West Wieuca Day School.

  
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Board Chair, Signature                      Date                      11/16/23

  
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Board Secretary, Signature                      Date                      11/16/23