

**Board of Early Care and Learning**  
**Meeting Summary**  
**August 24, 2023**

**Attendees**

**Board Members:**

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

**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:**

Commissioner Amy Jacobs, Rian Ringsrud, Susan Adams, Elisabetta Kasfir, Bentley Ponder, Pam Stevens, Dennis Brice, Reg Griffin, Ira Sudman, Quandra Obi, Chondra Bolton, Tamika Boone, Jennifer Bridgeman, Leatha Bryant, Gregory Brown, Vanessa Brown, Tina Crooms, Kim Davis, Glenda Davis-Canteen, Rebecca Ellis, Brittany Fordham, Shayna Funke, Michelle Garris, David Ginsburg, Kristin Goetz, Brian Griffin, Moriam Hassan, Denise Jenson, Jahmeka Jones, Selina Keith, Jarita Lawrence-Burdette, Dorisse Lester, Laura Lucas, Andrea Marable, CynQueshia Martin, Tyeichia Mason, Meghan McNail, Christi Moore, Miranda Murphy, Amir Nilforooshan, Rob O'Callaghan, Valerie Perez, Brenda Parker, Harika Polisetty, Chrissy Powell, Kendria Reeves, Laura Reid, Anne Rein, Chekol Retta, Melissa Risenhoover, Mike Rodgers, April Rogers, Edward Rowell, Brittany Sams, Barbara Sanders, Allison Setterlind, Angela Shelton, Sabrina Sims, Tommeshia Sims, Melyn Smith, Sonja Steptoe, Amanda Tarpley, Jill Taylor, Briana Thomas, Audreana Todd, Mark Waits, Bridgette Washington-Collier, Vicki Watts, Sheryl Wilhite, Liz Young

Mr. Davis called the meeting to order at 8:58 a.m.

The Board unanimously approved the proposed agenda and the minutes from the May 18 meeting.

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.

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 to advocate for universal Pre-K funding.

DECAL leaders provided updates about their areas of responsibility.

- Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs showed a photo of new Pre-K signs provided by the Georgia Lottery to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Georgia's Pre-K. She 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. 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 had its first meeting in Statesboro in August. DECAL was represented by Deputy Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports Susan Adams. HB 538 states that beginning in July 2025 DECAL must require that early learning receive training on developmentally appropriate, evidence-based literacy instruction as part of their continuing education.

- Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud reported that DECAL spent 99% of its allocated funds for SFY2023 which ended in June. 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 requests 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. The AFY 2024 request also includes three new positions to support Georgia's Pre-K. 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 Pre-K contracts. Mr. Ringsrud also announced that Nutrition Services was awarded a USDA Farm to School grant.
- Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs Elisabetta Kasfir gave the Board an update about the ACCESS program which has been extended through September 2024. Beginning in October 2023 families with CAPS scholarships will resume paying their family fee. For most families this is \$22 per week per child. This change is required by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) being used to fund ACCESS. In January 2024 a 4.3% increase will be applied to participating CAPS providers' published rate used to calculate ACCESS payments. The CAPS expansion, also funded by ARPA, will continue through September 2024 as well. Ms. Kasfir gave the Board an update on the CAPS Provider Relations unit. The new payment and provider management system now being developed will add new functionality to streamline customer service and payments. Ms. Kasfir also gave an update about the student parent priority group established in May 2022. Almost one in five CAPS applicants identify as student parents, and 42% of their applications have been approved. The student parent pilot project with CAPS representatives on three Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) campuses will launch in the fall and run for 18 months to two years.
- Deputy Commissioner Adams reviewed the changes made to the Summer Transition Program based on feedback from teachers and families and 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 introduced Practice and Support Services Director Rebecca Ellis who made a presentation about the SEEDS Helpline and training on the Pyramid Model which promotes healthy social and emotional development for young children. 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. A strong majority of callers were satisfied with the help they received and would recommend the helpline to others. Training on the Pyramid Model 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. A pilot for more than 200 infant, toddler, preschool and Pre-K teachers is underway and will be completed in September.

Mr. Davis recessed the meeting for a short break at 10:20 a.m. and resumed it at 10:40 a.m.

- 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, with the first phase focused on comparing gross receipts in 2019 and 2022 for the purpose of understanding the impact of the pandemic. The first report will be released on September 30. Dr. Ponder 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. 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.
- Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services Pam 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 Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA) funds between February and June. DECAL asked grantees to focus 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. 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 funds were spent on appropriate materials. A total of \$10,161,272 was spent. 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 a 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. 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).

Mr. Davis adjourned the meeting for lunch and committee meetings at 11:30 a.m. and called the meeting back 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.

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.

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.

At 1:05 pm. Mr. Davis called for committee reports to continue. 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. He 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.

Mr. Davis 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.

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.

Mr. Davis presented 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 Thursday. 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.

At 1:15 p.m. Mr. Davis adjourned the meeting.

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 device.*

*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.