

# Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



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## DECAL By the Numbers

- 84,000** - Slots funded through Georgia's Pre-K Program 2020-2021
- 3,803** - Classes funded through Georgia's Pre-K Program
- 175** - 2020 Summer Transition Program classes
- 4,479** - Licensed Georgia child care programs
- 2,337** - Quality Rated child care programs
- 95,267** - Registrants in Georgia Professional Development System

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## DECAL Welcomes New Communications Specialist

DECAL welcomes Jerry Brown as its new Communications Specialist.

Brown is an Emmy Award winning video journalist with 15 years of experience around newsrooms and professional sports franchises, covering breaking news as well as the NBA playoffs, Stanley Cup Finals, and NBA All-Star games. Most recently he worked with NBC Sports Washington and before that with NBC 12 News in Richmond, Virginia. He holds a broadcast journalism degree from

## Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs



Dear DECALers,

As I've thought about what I've continued to ask you (and myself) to do as civil servants in Georgia during the last six months...a word that comes to mind is PERSEVERANCE. How do we "stay the course" without feeling overwhelmed or discouraged in uncertain circumstances over which we have no (or little) control?

I confess: sometimes it's hard to stay positive...to feel at ease...to maintain hope. I understand.

So, out of curiosity I "googled" *perseverance during COVID-19* and was surprised to find some resources that really helped me shift my perspective. I want to share (paraphrase) some thoughts from an article written by Troy Nix for the Las Vegas Business Press in May 2020.

He reminded me that we do have the power to persevere through crises like the ones we're experiencing today: health, economic, and times of social unrest. And, he shared some important tips to help develop the kind of perseverance we need for these...and future...days.

1. **"Have a strong vision of the future."** The way things are today is NOT the way things will always be.
2. **"Understand how others have survived tough times."** I can think of many examples of difficult circumstances, financial hardships, and personal tragedies that my family or families I know have experienced...and emerged from stronger. . . If they can do it, so can I, so can we.
3. **"Be okay with being uncomfortable."** There is nothing wrong with feeling uncomfortable or a bit anxious when I don't KNOW the answers or how/when circumstances are going to get better. Persevering through the discomfort is the only way out of the discomfort.

None of us has ever lived through what we're experiencing today, and I predict we will always remember what it was like to live in 2020. My wish for you...for me...is that we will continue to persevere because the work we are doing is helping thousands of families and child care providers in our state also to persevere.

Thank you for your commitment and dedication...

Sincerely,

## 5 Million+ Meals Served to Georgia's Children during COVID-19

As school districts across Georgia announced system-wide closures to help minimize the spread of COVID-19, many families and advocates were concerned that children who rely on schools to provide healthy meals would be deprived of critically needed nutrition.

Fortunately, during unexpected school closures DECAL's Nutrition Division has the authority to approve emergency funding sites to operate through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSB), a program that

holds a broadcast journalism degree from Virginia Commonwealth.



Jerry Brown

"We believe Jerry will lead DECAL to new heights in our video production capabilities, and the overall use of our studio in the Agriculture Building," said DECAL Chief Communications Officer Reg Griffin. "He will work with me in Communications and Liz Young in Government Relations."

## DECAL Announces 2020-2021 Finalists for Georgia's Pre-K Program Teachers of the Year

The delivery may have been different, but the news was just as exciting as DECAL recently announced the six finalists for 2020-2021 Georgia's Pre-K Program Teachers of the Year. In past years, Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs and CALi, the agency's mascot, made surprise visits to the finalists' schools. This year, due to COVID-19 and social distancing, the visits were made via online Zoom meetings. Finalists are from Rome, Demorest, Lawrenceville, Duluth, Atlanta, and Hiram.

The 2020-2021 finalists are Heather Melillo from West End Elementary School in Rome; Deana Snowden from Demorest Elementary School; Tricia Floyd from Maxwell High School of Technology Pre-K in Lawrenceville; Genevieve Rodriguez from Discovery Point #3 in Duluth; D'Arri Moore from the Andrew and Walter Young YMCA in Atlanta; and Alderline Healy from the YMCA Paulding Early Learning Center in Hiram.

Each finalist received a \$500 cash prize from the Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning after their applications were reviewed and scored by a panel of impartial judges. Next, the six finalists will each receive a classroom observation by a Pre-K Specialist this fall, submit a small group video to be scored by outside judges, and face a panel for an in-office personal interview.

In September, DECAL will select a winner from a local public school system and a winner from a private child care center. They will receive a \$3,000 check for themselves, \$2,000 for a classroom makeover and supplies, and \$2,500 to cover out of the classroom costs while the teacher is away.

"All Georgians can be proud of Georgia's Pre-K Program that helps lay a solid foundation on which the academic careers of the state's four year olds can be built," said Commissioner Jacobs. "Since the program was piloted in 1992, more than 1.6 million children have entered kindergarten better prepared to succeed. That preparation, however, would not have been possible without the dedicated Pre-K teachers and assistants who implement this program every day. Recognizing these committed professionals by choosing Pre-K Teachers of the Year is one way to thank them for their efforts."

Among other requirements, candidates for Georgia's Pre-K Teacher of the Year must have been employed as a Georgia's Pre-K lead teacher during the 2019-2020 school year, taught as a lead teacher in a Georgia's Pre-K classroom for a minimum of three years, and must be planning to continue as a lead teacher in a Georgia's Pre-K classroom during the 2020-2021 school year. Winners will serve as ambassadors for Georgia's Pre-K Program including public speaking, representing Georgia's Pre-K at various meetings, and modeling effective classroom practices.

## DECAL Spotlights Dangers of Leaving Children in Vehicles

For the seventh consecutive year, DECAL is calling for families and caregivers of children to increase awareness of the dangers of leaving children unattended in vehicles. This year's "Look Again" campaign aligned with National Heatstroke Prevention Day on July 1, 2020, to ensure that families, child care providers, and the public understand how to prevent pediatric vehicular heatstroke.

"As more Georgians are getting back on the road, it is critically

important to ensure that emergency feeding sites to operate through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSF); a program that provides free, nutritious meals to children in low-income areas.

In response to COVID-19, SFSP sponsors stepped in to provide more than 5 million FREE meals to Georgia's children at a time when families needed it most. "We are so grateful to the SFSP sponsors who participated in emergency feeding during the pandemic. They played a huge role in providing food-insecure children with the nutrition they needed, and many are still serving meals in their communities," said Director of Nutrition Services Tamika Boone.

- 49 SFSP sponsors were approved to serve meals to children through emergency feeding
- 756 meal sites were approved in 62 counties
- 5,031,243 million free meals were served throughout Georgia

During the pandemic, the USDA granted many flexibilities to ensure children had access to meals while promoting social distancing and keeping families safe. SFSP sponsors found creative ways to serve meals such as grab-and-go service, preparing multiple days-worth of meals to be provided at once, and delivering meals at school bus routes.

Watch this video to see how SFSP sponsor Burke County Schools kept kids fed and safe during the pandemic: [Emergency Feeding: Burke County Schools responds to COVID-19](#)



important to remember that our children are our most precious cargo," said Governor Brian P. Kemp. "That's why Marty and I stand with the Department of Early Care and Learning in urging everyone to 'Look Again' and protect the health and safety of Georgia's children. Please join us in following these simple steps to make a difference and save lives."

DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs said more than 337,000 children in Georgia are cared for daily by approximately 4,500 child care providers, most of whom regularly transport children. This year, to prevent the spread of COVID-19, Governor Kemp issued an Executive Order limiting when child care programs are allowed to transport children. However, the need for child care providers to be vigilant still exists. In the United States, 52 children died from pediatric vehicular heatstroke in 2019. So far, 14 have died in 2020.

"When we receive reports of children left in vehicles by providers, we investigate each incident," Jacobs explained. "During FY2019, 19 children were left in vehicles by child care providers statewide. In FY2020, nine children have been left. Thankfully all of these children survived, but one child left unattended in a vehicle is one child too many, and, despite our best efforts, these numbers show we cannot become complacent."

Jacobs said technology is helping in the effort: "Sensors in car seats and vehicles and phone apps like Waze signal reminders when you reach your destination," she said. "These technological resources help build habits to check the backseat after driving. And if these aren't options, you can place a stuffed animal in your passenger seat as a reminder that your child is in the back."

State officials hope families and the public will access and share the Look Again PSA on social media accounts. Officials also remind the public to act responsibly and quickly if they see a child left alone in a vehicle by calling 911 immediately; emergency personnel are trained to respond.

### Pre-K Students Are Heading to Class



Macyn Stahl, daughter of Child Care Services Central West Region Coordinator Morgan Stahl, celebrated her #GaPreKFirstDay Monday at Reflections Learning Academy 2 in Dallas.

### Board of Early Care and Learning



Burke County Schools served on average between 4,000 to 5,000 meals per day since March 18. Every day, school buses delivered meals to 900 different families at 30 bus routes traveling 46,500 miles.



Quality Rated Assessor Brenna Rutherford's sons Clarke, Carter, and Cylas remind everyone to always #LookAgain.

### DECAL Offers Pre-K Guidance for 2020-2021 School Year

With the school year quickly approaching, DECAL has been working diligently to help Georgia's Pre-K centers prepare to welcome our newest learners. It's a delicate balance of maintaining a quality education along with protecting the health and safety of students as well as staff at Pre-K facilities. With information constantly flowing in, DECAL's Pre-K team reviewed recommendations from the Georgia Department of Education, the Department of Public Health, the CDC, and the American Academy of Pediatrics to provide

Supporting and guiding the *mission and vision of*  
*Bright from the Start:*

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Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

On the next ...

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This Week's Guests

guidance for Georgia's Pre-K providers. The guidance outlines three approved instructional models: traditional, hybrid, and full distance.

- Traditional: Children attend Pre-K onsite in the regular classroom setting each day.
- Full Distance: All instruction is provided through distance learning. Teachers provide instruction virtually and support families in providing hands-on learning activities at home.
- Hybrid: A combination of traditional and full distance learning.

"The models allow Pre-K Programs flexibility so that each program is able to determine the model that best matches the needs of their families and staff," says Susan Adams, Deputy Commissioner for Pre-K & Instructional Supports.

Each Pre-K classroom must select a model for at least the first nine weeks of school. Programs can choose to change their model if there is a need later in the school year. The models were developed to reduce the spread of Covid-19 and give families flexibility in a time when it's needed.

"The Pre-K Specialists are supporting teachers in developing lesson plans and conducting distance learning. We are focused on preparing our children for kindergarten," Adams stated.

Teachers are encouraged to develop a variety of age appropriate lessons, whether it be virtual story time, play time or hands-on materials.

The health and safety of children is a top priority, so plans are in place in the event of a Covid-19 case at a facility. DECAL encourages programs to contact their local health department and follow its guidance. In case a facility must shut down temporarily, teachers have been encouraged to prepare materials to send home to support families in learning activities while the program is closed.

"We are focused on providing a high quality Pre-K experience where children learn to love learning. They learn that school is a safe place and a place they want to be," said Adams. "We have a lot of people who are dedicated to making that a reality, even if it looks a bit a little bit different this year."

Click [here](#) for DECAL's Pre-K Guidance for the 2020-2021 school year.

## DECAL Awards Two-Generation Innovation Grants for 2020-2021

DECAL has awarded a total of \$80,000 in grants to help community partnerships in five counties pilot or expand programs that connect parents who are themselves students with high-quality early learning for their young children. Two-Generation Innovation Grants (two-gen) are intended to help communities develop strategies for reaching out to student parents, who face substantial hurdles to achieving economic security.

This is the third year DECAL has offered two-gen grants.

"Two-gen strategies generate long-term economic benefits not only for children and their parents, but also for local communities and the state of Georgia," said Amy M. Jacobs, DECAL Commissioner. "I am encouraged by the progress community partnerships have made, and I look forward to seeing the results of this funding cycle."

DECAL awards two-gen grants in two categories: Capacity-Building Grants and Implementation Grants. Capacity-Building Grants of \$10,000 are made to communities that are new to using a two-gen approach to foster partnerships between adult-serving organizations and child-serving organizations, evaluate existing resources, conduct needs assessments, and incorporate parent perspectives into planning two-gen policies.

Recipients of Capacity-Building Grants for 2020-2021:

- Black Child Development Institute-Atlanta and its community partners will conduct a needs assessment for student parents seeking workforce development resources and create a program called Powerful Families that can be evaluated by the partnership's two-gen collaborative advisory group.
- Gordon State College (Lamar County) and its partners will form a task force to conduct a needs assessment, create a new orientation for student parents, and plan for promoting workforce development opportunities at local child care programs and Head Start.
- Heard County Community Partnership has a team in place to design and conduct a needs assessment, host class reunions for parents, and incorporate a two-gen approach into existing operations to connect parents to resources for adult education, workforce opportunities, and quality child care.

Implementation Grants of \$25,000 each are awarded to communities with established partnerships already collaborating to advance two-gen policies and programming. Recipients of Implementation Grants are expected to launch or expand programs that connect parents of children in subsidized early childhood learning settings to workforce training or post-secondary educational opportunities and/or connect parents already enrolled in workforce training or post-secondary education to high quality early care and learning for their children.

Recipients of 2020-2021 Implementation Grants:

THIS WEEK'S GUESTS



**Allison O'Hara**  
Program Director of Inclusion & Behavior  
Support for DECAL



**Cheryl Benefield**  
Program Manager for Safe & Supportive  
Schools with the Georgia Department of  
Education

This Week's Topic:  
**COVID Considerations in Returning  
to School**

**The Faces of DECAL**

*DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Jim Keith, Cindy Kicklighter, Ben Appling, Dana Morrison, Cynthia Strong-McCarthy, Elim Tekie, and Aletha Cicero-Brown.*

- Children and Family Program at Kennesaw State University (Cobb County) will expand its Student-Parent Ambassador program to reach out to parents who have not considered post-secondary education for themselves because of perceived barriers associated with the rigors of coursework and childrearing. The partnership will offer an orientation for student parents and drop-in services.
- Community Foundation for Northwest Georgia (Whitfield County) will strengthen existing programs and improve resource-sharing by creating a Resource Center for student parents at Georgia Northwestern Technical College. These students will also be able to attend Life Skills classes at community child care learning centers. The Whitfield County partnership received a Capacity-Building Grant last year.

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