

# Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



## DECAL By the Numbers

- 3,122** - Licensed child care learning centers in Georgia
- 1,232** - Licensed family child care learning homes in Georgia
- 105** - Pending applications for licenses
- 3,342** - Students participating in the Rising Kindergarten Summer Transition Program
- 657** - Students participating in the Rising Pre-K Summer Transition Program
- 3,000** - Providers in Georgia holding a Quality Rated star rating as of 6/1/2022
- 600** - Providers working toward earning a Quality Rated star rating as of 6/1/2022
- 872** - Sites for the Happy Helpings Summer Food Service Program
- 3,287** - Student-Parent CAPS applications received between May 1, 2022 and July 22, 2022

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## Commissioner's Corner by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs



Dear Fellow DECALers,

As you read this, we are in what I have heard referred to as the “**dog days of summer.**” Not being exactly sure where that phrase came from, I went to a dictionary of idioms and learned the following: The dog days of summer refer to “*the period in the summer often thought to be the hottest and most unbearable,*

*usually considered (since Roman times) to be July through August.*” By extension, it means a period of **lethargy, inactivity, or stagnation.**

I agree with the part of the definition about the hottest days of the summer...but I take issue with this part of the calendar being a period of *lethargy, inactivity, or stagnation*...at least here at DECAL. This August and the following months will be some of our busiest times.

Georgia’s Pre-K Program for the 2022-2023 school year will jump into high gear as classes in public schools and child care centers begin. We’ll be preparing to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Quality Rated. CAPS will be busy modifying many of the waivers the program initiated during the pandemic. Happy Helpings, Georgia’s Summer Food Service Program, will be winding down. The Board of Early Care and Learning will convene for its third quarter meeting.

So, while the heat of summer will probably continue for a while, we will NOT be lethargic, inactive, or stagnant. And as we gear up, I hope you took (or are planning to take) some down time for yourself and your family. As I’ve always said, I am an advocate for work-life balance; we all need time to rest and recharge. Only then, can we adequately serve our customers.



**New Episodes  
Every Wednesday**

Thank you for your continued commitment to and passion for the work you do every day.

Gratefully,

P.S. For your learning pleasure: The “dog days” have nothing really to do with dogs. The canine connection refers to Sirius (the Dog Star) in the constellation Canis Major (large dog). In ancient history Sirius was seen to rise just before or at the same time as the sun during these months. Hence, the “dog days.” (Interestingly enough, however, for reasons only an astronomer could explain, Sirius is not seen at or before sunrise anymore.)

## **Nonprofit Renovates Rooms for Son of DECAL Employee**

The sounds of heavy construction have been heard for close to two months this summer in the home of CAPS Scholarship Administration Manager LaQuillia Hosley...but she’s not complaining. It’s the sound of a bedroom and bathroom makeover for her 19-year-old son MarQuis, compliments of Sunshine for a Ranney Day (SORD), a Roswell based nonprofit that builds custom rooms for children with special needs.

Supported through donations and partnerships, SORD provides no cost wheelchair accessible bathrooms, dream bedrooms, and in-home therapy rooms. The organization was founded in 2012 by Peter and Holly Ranney after they were inspired by a church sermon. LaQuillia, who lives in Villa Rica, has worked at DECAL for five years and the State of Georgia for 11 years. At 10 months old, Marquis developed a mitochondrial disorder and has been immobile and nonverbal ever since. In 2017, LaQuillia and

## **Quality Rated 10th Anniversary Kicks Off at Braves Game During Labor Day Weekend**



The statewide celebration commemorating the 10th anniversary of Quality Rated, Georgia's child care quality rating and improvement system, gets off to an exciting start on Sunday afternoon, September 4, 2022 at Truist Park when the Atlanta Braves take on the Miami Marlins.

DECAL has collaborated with the Braves on a pre-game program that spotlights Quality Rated’s “Decade of Stars,” the theme of its 10th anniversary celebration. The event will commemorate the successful development and implementation of Quality Rated's innovative 1-, 2-, and 3-star rating system to assess, improve, and communicate the quality of early care and education (ECE) in Georgia since its inception in 2012.

The highlight of Quality Rated Day at Truist Park will come just before gametime, when DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs throws out the ceremonial first pitch. She will be joined on the field by a group of Quality Rated providers and children receiving star-rated child care.

“We’re extremely proud that in its first 10 years Quality Rated has motivated thousands of providers to deliver high-quality child care and education that has put so many children on the path to future academic success and social emotional well-being,” said Commissioner Jacobs. “We’re looking forward to celebrating Quality Rated’s decade of star providers, young learners, and

ever since. In 2017, LaQuilla and her husband Kenya moved from Dougherty County in South Georgia with MarQuis's twin brother, MarKeith, and five-year-old sister, Skylar.

"We were referred to SORD by a physical therapist from Children's Healthcare of Atlanta during a wheelchair evaluation of our new home," LaQuilla explains. "At that time, applications weren't being accepted and I forgot about it until an equipment delivery guy told me about it again in March 2022. I went online and it was time for submissions. We applied and I immediately heard back from the agency within two weeks, and we were interviewed."

The family was recently notified they had been selected for the dream makeover. MarQuis will receive a new bedroom and bathroom designed especially for him, with his favorite colors throughout.

"It is definitely a blessing to receive help of this magnitude and at no expense to our family," said LaQuilla.

"We are so excited to get started on the project for MarQuis," said Joe Lane, Executive Director of Sunshine on a Ranney Day. "The goal of renovating his space is to give him a little independence back and allow him to move freely from his bedroom to the bathroom and easily maneuver around both spaces. It will also help his parents navigate their daily routine with at least some reduction in the physical requirements needed to complete MarQuis' daily care."

For more information about Sunshine on a Ranney Day, visit

Quality Rated's decade of star providers, young learners, and families, and cheering for the Braves batters as they aim for the stars at Truist Park."

Before the festivities begin inside the ballpark, fans can stop by the Quality Rated tent located near the 3rd Base Gate Entrance to learn more about the star rating system and the supports that DECAL provides to help families find high-quality child care that fits their needs, such as the online search tool at <http://qualityrated.org/> and the toll-free helpline 1-877-ALL-GA-KIDS (1-877-255-4254) operated by Quality Care for Children.

"We are proud to partner with DECAL to celebrate Quality Rated's 10th Anniversary," said Jim Allen, Atlanta Braves Senior Vice President, Corporate & Premium Partnerships. "This event will provide much-needed resources and educational opportunities for Braves Country families who can benefit from the Quality Rated child care rating and improvement system. The Braves remain committed to supporting educators, parents, and our youngest fans on their educational journey."

As of July 1, 2022, more than 3,000 providers in Georgia hold a Quality Rated star rating and another 600 are working toward earning one. Additionally, 96% of young learners with Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Scholarships are enrolled in Quality Rated programs, putting DECAL ever closer to realizing its vision that every child in Georgia regardless of their family income or geographic region has equal access to high-quality early care and education.

To earn a Quality Rated 1-, 2-, or 3-star rating, providers must meet a list of rigorous requirements. They demonstrate their commitment to structural quality by submitting a portfolio with evidence of qualified administrators and staff; high standards for child physical, emotional, and developmental well-being; robust family engagement activities, and intentional teaching practices. Applicants must also show that they adhere to process quality standards during on-site classroom observations conducted by credentialed Quality Rated assessors. During the visits, the assessors evaluate the quality of teacher-child interactions; the accessibility of materials and equipment; and the room's physical layout.

Following the Braves game, DECAL will host anniversary events celebrating the star-rated providers who have delivered high-quality child care and engaging the stakeholders and community partners who have supported Quality Rated over the past 10 years. DECAL will announce details of those events in the coming months.

**Nice to See You: New Employee Orientations Are Back In Person**



*MarQuis is pictured above and also below with his family.*



DECAL's New Employee Orientation returned to in-person meetings last month for the first time since March 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic forced the Human Resources team to hold these meetings virtually for more than two years with 145 employees receiving virtual orientation, according to Sabrina Henry, HR Operations Supervisor.

New Employee Orientation welcomes new employees and acclimates them to the history, culture, and business practices of DECAL. The two-day training includes getting set up on new equipment, including smart phones and computers. There is also training on open records requests, responding properly to media requests, completing travel reimbursements, and enrolling in State-offered benefits. In addition, new employees receive training on sexual harassment prevention, human trafficking recognition, and safe driving tips.

After hosting 54 online sessions, Henry says she is glad we are returning in-person meetings.

"You can't replace the value of face-to-face interaction and the personalization of the presentations," she explained. "If there is an equipment or technical issue, no longer does one have to share their screen to get assistance...and everyone attending sees one another and has the added benefit from making that personal connection; staff were not required to be on camera for previous virtual orientation sessions. Also, the agency eliminates the expense of shipping equipment all over Georgia via UPS or FedEx."

Over the past few years, DECAL has grown to a team of more than 700 employees with the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) team being the largest division.

## Wagner to Lead Foundation

Laura Wagner, Quality Rated Policy and Partnerships Director at DECAL, has been named Interim Director for the Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning. Wagner replaces Carrie Ashbee who relocated to Mobile, Alabama, recently with her husband and daughter. Wagner takes on the new role beginning August 1.



Founded by Governor Nathan Deal and the Georgia General Assembly in 2017, the Foundation makes strategic investments to improve and expand high-quality early education to help ensure

all children in Georgia are prepared to succeed when they enter



#GaSummerTransition  
PHOTO CONTEST

**WINNER**

McEver Arts Academy  
Gainesville, GA



kindergarten regardless of family income or location. The Foundation supports education excellence by partnering with families, communities, the early care and education industry and stakeholders. Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs serves as Chair of the Foundation’s Board of Directors.

“I’m thrilled to announce that Laura Wagner has accepted the job as Interim Executive Director for DECAL’s Foundation,” said Commissioner Jacobs. “Laura is the perfect fit to lead the Foundation to the next level to fully support DECAL, child care providers, teachers, and families.”

Wagner held various positions at DECAL since joining the department in late 2014. She served as Early Education Empowerment Zone (E3Z) Director, CAPS Family Support Director, and Community Outreach and Partnerships Director. Before joining DECAL, she worked as Research Director at GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students. Wagner holds a Masters of Education degree from Vanderbilt University.

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

## Board of Early Care and Learning

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Cristina Washell, Ed.D.,  
Gainesville

## Second Harvest & DECAL Partner to Promote Summer Meals

Second Harvest of South Georgia and DECAL recently partnered to host a spike event for Happy Helpings, Georgia’s Summer Food Service Program. Held in Valdosta, the event focused on the importance of summer meals for children across the state and on the access to nutritional meals in local communities in the area.

“We’ve found that not enough families know about Happy Helpings,” said Tamika Boone, Director of Nutrition Services. “Hosting this event is one way we can bring awareness to the issue of summer hunger and educate parents and guardians on how they can locate free nutritious meals and snacks for their children during the summer months.”

About 40 kids came out for a nutritious meal and snack at the July event. They also learned about the importance of drinking water to stay hydrated in the summer heat. A Hydration Station was set up where the kids selected a variety of fresh and local fruits to put in their water. Physical activity was incorporated with hula hoops, jump ropes, and toss and catch games to encourage fun and movement.

Families can locate a Happy Helpings meal site in their area until school starts by texting “Summer Meals” to 914-342-7744 or calling the Hunger Hotline at 1-866-348-6479 (English) 1-877-842-6273 (Spanish).



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## Faces of DECAL

*DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Ann Panzica, Carl Glover, Daverney Freeman, Deborah Helms, and Devon Porter.*

## Employee Suggestion Program



**Visit the Virtual  
Suggestion Box now!**

**Sign up for DECAL text messages by  
texting DECAL to 474747**

**Georgia Department of Early Care and  
Learning**

2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive SE, 754 East Tower,  
Atlanta, GA 30334  
404-656-5957



**Georgia Dept  
of Early Care  
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**BRIGHT FROM THE START**

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