



# Decidedly DECAL

*Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are*



## First Quarter 2019 - In This Issue

[By the Numbers](#)

[DECAL Download](#)

[Follow DECAL on Social Media](#)

[Georgia Awarded Preschool Development Grant](#)

[Governor Asks Jacobs to Continue to Lead DECAL](#)

[New Interns on Board for Spring Semester](#)

[Board of Early Care and Learning](#)

[Virtual Suggestion Box](#)

[Commissioner's Corner](#)

[Civic Dinners Spark Conversations on Literacy](#)

[Foundation Awards Grants to Programs Impacted by Hurricane](#)

[Person on the Street](#)

## DECAL By the Numbers

**601** - Full-time DECAL employees

**28** - Part-time DECAL employees

**97** - Vendor Temps

**5,344** - Sites in Georgia's Child and Adult Care Food Program

**4,616** - Licensed child care programs in Georgia

**1,689** - Quality Rated child care programs

**907** - Providers of Georgia's Pre-K Program

## Commissioner's Corner

*by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs*



Dear DECAL Co-workers,

Before Governor Deal appointed me Commissioner, I had a high-level perspective of what DECAL did because of my responsibilities at the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB). But it wasn't until I came to work here that I began to understand fully the breadth and depth of what we do every day. I've learned a lot the past 4½ years and am constantly amazed at all the ways we serve hundreds of thousands of children and families across our state day-in-and-day-out.

One area of our work I was not so familiar with when I worked at OPB is being celebrated later this month. February 11-15, 2019 has been designated Inclusive Early Learning Week...during which we will partner with child care providers to celebrate, inform, and reflect on serving children with disabilities and without disabilities to ensure that all Georgia's children benefit from high quality learning experiences.

Before joining DECAL, I hadn't really thought much about INCLUSION...what it means and why it is so important. I hadn't consciously considered how ALL children in Georgia should receive the same high quality early care and education...in the same classrooms if possible. I hadn't thought about the fact that ALL children, those who develop typically and those with disabilities, benefit when included in the same classroom.

My understanding of and appreciation for inclusion has changed dramatically, and I'm proud of the

83,346 - Student enrollment in Georgia's Pre-K Program

79,271 - Registrants to GaPDS

12,267 - LIKES on Facebook

## DECAL Download Top Podcasts

DECAL has posted 20 episodes of DECAL Download since the first podcast aired on September 24. Below are our top podcasts so far.

Episode	Air Date	Listeners
Chat with Commissioner Jacobs	September 24	158
CAPS Program	September 28	118
Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning	September 25	114
Meet Pam Stevens from Child Care Services	October 11	114
Inside Scoop with the Commissioner's Executive Assistant	October 12	106
Georgia Pre-K Week	September 27	101
Preview of the 2019 Georgia General Assembly	January 16	101

Access all of the episodes [here](#).



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work we're doing to encourage and support inclusion in Georgia's child care and early learning classrooms. As I have visited classes...including my own children's classrooms...I'm sensitive to accommodations being made to serve ALL children equally.

I look forward to celebrating Inclusive Early Learning Week as I visit classes and read books that celebrate diversity and promote friendship and acceptance among all children. If your work and schedules permit or as you are in centers or family child care learning homes during this special week, I encourage you to commend and support inclusion.

Our children, our work, and our state are better off when ALL children develop a sense of belonging and membership, form positive social relationships and friendships, and experience learning to reach their full potential.

Sincerely,

## Civic Dinners Focused on Literacy Held in DECAL's Six Regions

In partnership with the Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy, DECAL's six Early Education Community Partnership Coordinators hosted an event called *Civic Dinner: Literacy Changes Lives* in each of their respective regions. The mission of the Civic Dinners is to bring communities together around a meal to talk about the importance of literacy and the impact it has on the state's youngest learners and families. Each dinner, during which community stakeholders engaged in meaningful conversations around the topic of literacy, was a resounding success.

The civic dinner held in Savannah at Cohen's Retreat included attendees from the library system, Georgia Family Connection Partnership, and DECAL. Attendees of the South East Region dinner shared stories about the types of literature they enjoyed as children and about the people who inspired and encouraged him/her to read because it was an important part of their education.

In Social Circle, participants enjoyed dinner at the Blue Willow Inn. They shared memories of incentive programs in schools, such as the Book It program, and how those programs helped children find a passion for reading and literacy. The Central East Region's Community Partnership Coordinator Audrienne Smith said, "Hosting this civic dinner confirmed that literacy really does change lives."

Glenda Davis-Canteen, community partnership coordinator of the North West Region, described her dinner as "a night filled with stimulating conversation, laughter, and passion, sharing childhood memories from decades ago about how reading impacted the early education and literacy of all our lives."

At the Olive Tree Restaurant in Lithia Springs, Central West Region Community Partnership Coordinator Bridgette Washington was excited about her literacy dinner. "When I learned that I would be hosting a civic dinner, I looked forward to supporting First Lady Sandra Deal's mission," Washington said. The dinner included a parent from Cobb County, a former school teacher and two

## Georgia Awarded \$2.9M Preschool Development Grant

Georgia has been awarded a \$2.9 million Preschool Development Grant B - 5 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education. The funds will be used to help ensure that Georgia's children from birth to age five have access to high quality early childhood care and education (ECCE).

DECAL will serve as the lead state agency in executing the activities funded by the grant. While ultimately benefiting all children and families in the state, these activities will focus on the needs of children and families from vulnerable and underserved populations.

Using grant funds, DECAL will conduct a statewide ECCE needs assessment; develop a statewide strategic plan to strengthen Georgia's ECCE system; create resources to inform families about available programs and services; and develop groups and opportunities for early childhood educators to share best practices.

The initial grant award covers one year. Later this year, the states that received initial grants will be eligible to compete for additional funding of up to \$45 million over three years

## Governor Asks Commissioner to Continue to Lead DECAL

Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs will continue to lead DECAL under the administration of Governor Brian P. Kemp, who officially assumed office on January 14.

"I feel honored and humbled that Governor Kemp has asked me to remain in my position as Commissioner of DECAL," said Jacobs. "I look forward to working with him and his staff to further the work we've been doing to enhance the affordability, accessibility, and quality of early childhood care and education."

Jacobs, who was first appointed Interim Commissioner of DECAL in June 2014, said she also looks forward to and is grateful for the opportunity to continue working with her fellow DECALers.

"Because of you and your commitment to children, families, providers, sponsors, stakeholders, children's advocacy, etc., this department has set a gold standard for customer service, professionalism, and civil service," she said in a message to the staff.

"Thank you for who you are and what you do. By maintaining our work with each other...and with Governor Kemp, his staff, and the

leaders from the faith-based community. Stories flowed from the participants about experiences in school, how parents encouraged reading, and ways to motivate children to read.

Edward Rowell, Community Partnership Coordinator of the South West Region, said that the highlight of the dinner conversation centered around how some individuals grew up in areas where they did not have access to books and libraries and how this affected them individually. Now as adults, the participants love to read and model reading to their own children.

In the North East Region, Lead Community Partnership Coordinator Clayton Adams hosted a civic dinner in December where eight community partners sat around a table and talked about the earliest memories of reading books with their grandparents and the importance of the libraries in their local communities.

Civic dinners provide a valuable space for community partners to come together and share early memories of reading and the impact that literacy has on their lives today. To learn more about Civic Dinners, please go to [www.cividdinners.com](http://www.cividdinners.com) as well as [galiteracycenter.org](http://galiteracycenter.org)



## Foundation Awards Grants to Georgia Child Care Programs Impacted by Hurricane Michael

Over the past few months, the Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning administered 42 special mini-grants to licensed child care programs in Southwest Georgia impacted by Hurricane Michael, including the one pictured below. The funding was procured through the international organization Save the Children.

The mini-grants, totaling \$25,000, helped to support over 1,343 children and approximately 220 teachers across 20 Georgia counties approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for individual assistance.



Georgia General Assembly...the future continues to look bright for Georgia's children, families, and the early care and education industry in our state."

## New Interns on Board for Spring Semester

By Rehan Khaki

We are excited to announce the hiring of five new interns for the spring semester! Marissa Blankenship, Afrin Jahan, Joanna Hong, Preeti Chachlani, and I are all thrilled to be welcomed with open arms to this family and are eager for what is to come during our time with the agency.

To tell you a little bit about myself, my name is Rehan Khaki, and I will be serving as DECAL's Communications/Government Relations intern for the spring semester. I graduated from North Gwinnett High School last May and am now a proud freshman public policy student at Georgia Tech. While "public policy" may not be the first thing that comes to mind upon hearing Georgia Tech, I have found the program to be exceptionally rewarding thus far. Regarding my future plans, I aspire to pursue a law degree and eventually practice intellectual property law. While I am not studying or working, you may find me singing with Sympathetic Vibrations, Georgia Tech's premier all-male a capella group.

My colleague Joanne Hong recently took on the position of Marketing and Outreach intern with Nutrition. She recently graduated from Georgia State University with a bachelor's in marketing and a minor in hospitality and certificate in advertising. Before DECAL, Joanne worked in customer service for three years. While Joanne may currently be focused on learning how to plan, promote, execute, and evaluate our current outreach programs, she hopes one day to work full-time as a marketing coordinator. For fun, Joanne enjoys yoga, travel, and -- as I am sure we all can relate --eating an entire pint of ice cream!

Our new Practice and Support Services intern, Marissa Blankenship, is in the home stretch of her education and will graduate from Georgia State this May. She is currently finishing her bachelor's of interdisciplinary studies in human learning and development with a concentration in child growth, development, behavior, and learning disabilities. Over the past five years, Marissa has worked in several preschool centers, so she already has hands-on experience with DECAL's work.

"I enjoy helping people, especially children," she said. "I feel that there are so many children who just need someone to care about them and show that support."

"We are so grateful for the opportunity to come alongside these child care programs in their recovery efforts," said Sarah Tinsley, Foundation Advancement and Donor Relations Coordinator.

Foundation Executive Director Carrie Ashbee was recently interviewed by John Clark with Georgia News Network about the grants. [Click here](#) to listen.



### Person on the Street

**If you had to choose a word to guide your 2019, what would that word be and why?**



**Shaunda Mathieu, CCS Administrative Assistant**

My word for 2019 is **expansion**. I choose expansion because anything that is not growing is only occupying space and will eventually become stagnant and die.

In the long run, Marissa hopes to work full time at DECAL, her end goal being to work with children at the International Rescue Committee. During her free time, Marissa enjoys spending time with her family, camping, and attending music festivals.

Afrin Jahan, a graduate student at Georgia State, will be serving as our Research and Policy Analysis intern. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in public health with a concentration in biostatistics - an innovative area of study involving the interpretation and design of data for public health and medicine. With her degree, Afrin plans to work as an analyst for an agency for several years, eventually getting a Ph.D. in public health. Fun fact: Afrin, who originally hails from Bangladesh, is trilingual -- fluent in English, Bangla, and Hindi. She also enjoys vacationing with her family at the beach or the mountains along with cooking and watching movies.

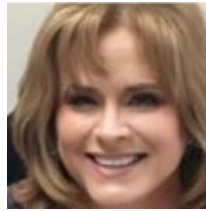
Finally, our new CAPS Data Analyst intern, Preeti Chachlani, is excited to be on board with DECAL. Preeti earned an MBA while living in India and went on to work for The State Bank of India, the largest public sector bank in the country. She is currently working toward a master's degree in economics with a concentration in quantitative economics. Her experience with data stems from her natural affinity for programming.

"I love working with data and using technical tools available to make meaningful conclusions about it," Preeti said, adding that this passion helps drive her toward her goal of a full-time career in data analysis. She also enjoys staying active by cycling, swimming, and hiking.

My colleagues and I truly appreciate the opportunity to work for DECAL and to contribute to all the work the agency will do in the months to come. We feel our diverse backgrounds, interests, and strengths will bring much to the table. We especially look forward to getting to know all of you over this semester



*Pictured (L-R) are Joanne Hong, Afrin Jahan, Rehan Khaki, Marissa Blankenship, and Preeti Chachlani.*

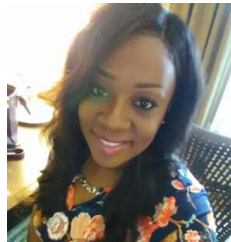


**Rita Lang, CAPS Scholarship Administration Director**  
**Gratitude** because you can never have enough or show it enough!



**Rochelle Holmes, CAPS Family Support Consultant**

That one word would be **trust**. Why? 2018 was turbulent year in some areas of my life... I have to believe, trust, and have faith it WILL get better 2019!



**D'Wana Walker, CAPS Family Support Consultant**

My word would be **fearless** for 2019: Fearless at work and in life. I want to be able to go beyond my comfort zone and embrace new challenges. I want to be fearless to achieve personal/professional goals and not allow defeated thinking or lack of confidence deter me from seizing the moment of opportunity when it presents itself.



**Bridget Ratajczak, Child Development Specialist**

My word of the year is **gratitude**. I want to focus on being more grateful for the many people and things that I have in my life.

## The Faces of DECAL

*DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Cindy Kicklighter, Alicia Young, Taylor Solomon, Mike Chandler, Anita Bonner, Emma Smith, and Kimberly Stoy.*

## Watch on POLAR

## Board of Early Care and Learning

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

### Board of Early Care and Learning

Vacant  
First Congressional District

Susan Harper, Albany  
Second Congressional District  
(Chair)

Kathy Howell, Carrollton  
Third Congressional District  
(Secretary)

Phil Davis, Stone Mountain  
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Fifth Congressional District

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Thirteenth Congressional District

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Fourteenth Congressional District



Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

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