

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



DECAL By the Numbers

- 4,347 - Licensed child care programs in Georgia
- 319 - Child care programs recently closed due to COVID-19
- 3,762 - Classes in Georgia's Pre-K Program
- 73,355 - Students in Georgia's Pre-K Program
- 33,116 - Followers on DECAL social media platforms
- 2,771 - Quality Rated child care programs in Georgia
- 30,001,604 - Meals served through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (July - December 2021)
- 2,086,477 - Meals served through Happy Helpings (July - December 2021)

Follow DECAL on Social Media



DECAL's social media audience continues to grow, especially during the pandemic.

Facebook	22,534
Twitter	3,971
Pinterest	456
Instagram	2,983

Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs



Dear DECAL Co-workers,

After two weeks being back in the office, I can say this about our "new normal": It is *new*...but it's not *normal*...**YET**. Most of your cubicles are empty; there's not much ambient noise as you walk through the office or down the halls. The parking lots are half full, and there's not much of a crowd when you go to the cafeteria.

BUT the following things ARE *normal*: One, we continue serving the changing needs of thousands of children and families AND the early care and education professionals in our state. DECAL's mission hasn't changed; our vision hasn't changed; the only things that have changed are the ways we're accomplishing the fundamental goals established by the department when it was created in 2004.

Two, the Georgia General Assembly is in session. Last week Governor Kemp delivered his State of the State speech in which he described a Georgia that is recovering from the pandemic faster than many states, and he thanked health care workers, first responders, local and state police forces, and state employees for working through this COVID nightmare.

Three, we're preparing to celebrate the annual **Inclusive Early Learning Week**, February 13 – 19; this year's theme is *Love Inclusion*. As the date approaches, you'll learn more about how you can promote, celebrate, and love inclusion in our classrooms, homes, and society.

So, while our business operations, professional relationships, and locations might not feel *normal yet*, we continue to operate. I've learned during my career in state government...and in life...that

YouTube 733
LinkedIn 1,393
CommJacobs Twitter 1,046

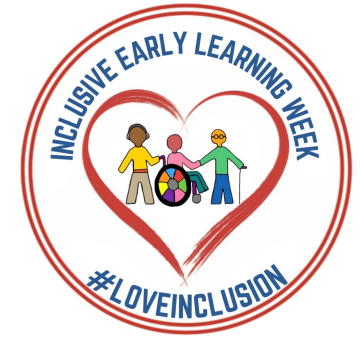
Don't miss out - Make sure you are following, too!

nothing stays the same forever. But, as long as I'm willing to accept and adapt to change, I/we will still make a difference in the lives of children, families, and the early care and education industry in Georgia...one child, one family, one provider, one sponsor at a time.

Respectfully,



Inclusive Early Learning Week Slated for February 13 -19



Mark your calendars for this year's Inclusive Early Learning Week, February 13 – 19, themed *Love Inclusion*. Inclusive Early Learning week promotes the importance of inclusion in early learning programs for providers, DECAL staff, and the community.

“At DECAL, we know that creating inclusive early learning environments benefits ALL children, not just those with disabilities. Inclusive Early Learning Week celebrates the power of inclusion and provides helpful information and resources along the way,” says Veronica Thomas, DECAL’s Inclusion and Behavior Support Manager.

In the lead up to Inclusive Early Learning Week, DECAL’s Inclusion and Behavior Support Unit will share information about inclusion through Inclusive Tip Tuesdays on DECAL’s social media and a Celebration Toolkit for providers. Providers can participate by pledging their commitment to inclusion on social media and participating in a flat CALi contest.

“We are excited to celebrate 2022’s Inclusive Early Learning Week” says Katie Hagan, the Inclusion and Behavior Support Supervisor for the south region. “We invite DECAL staff to join us as we promote, celebrate, and love inclusion.”

To learn more and access Inclusive Early Learning Week’s resources, visit [DECAL’s Inclusive Early Learning Week webpage](#), and check out #loveinclusion on DECAL’s social media.



New Episodes Every Wednesday



Summit Planned to Recruit Happy Helpings Sponsors

Food banks, schools, camps, churches, government entities, and nonprofit organizations may all be eligible to receive reimbursement for serving nutritious meals to kids and teens during the summer months through Happy Helpings, Georgia’s Summer Food Service Program.

Hosted by the Nutrition Services Division, organizations interested in learning more about Happy Helpings are encouraged to participate in the virtual Happy Helpings Summit on March 1 at 11:00 a.m.

DECAL Announces Georgia’s Early Childhood Educators of the Year for 2021-2022 School Year

on March 1 at 11:00 a.m.

Attendees will learn how the program operates and how to apply. Experienced Happy Helpings sponsors will also share their best practices with the program.

This year, the need for sponsoring organizations to provide free meals to children will be greater than ever as the pandemic has left many families facing hunger and poverty.

“Thousands of Georgia’s children are living with hunger right now because of COVID,” said Tamika Boone, Nutrition Services Director. “Happy Helpings is one solution that benefits the whole community by helping alleviate child hunger and providing local economies with federal reimbursement funds.”

If you know of eligible organizations that may be interested in learning more about Happy Helpings, encourage the interested party to contact Cindy.Kicklighter@decals.ga.gov. Together, we can help feed Georgia’s children!

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

DECAL and the Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning have named its inaugural Georgia’s Early Childhood Educators of the Year for 2021-2022. The infant winner is Diana Black from Pookie Bear Learning Center in Savannah; the toddler winner is Maria Claudia Ortega from My Little Geniuses in Marietta; and the preschool winner is Hannah Beth Reeves from the Academy for Little People in Chickamauga.

As Educators of the Year, Black, Ortega, and Reeves will receive \$3,000 for their personal use, \$2,000 for a classroom makeover, and up to \$2,500 for their school to cover travel costs and stipends for substitute teachers as the teacher fulfills their duties as Georgia’s Early Childhood Educators of the Year. Winners serve as ambassadors for Georgia’s Early Childhood Educators of the Year program through activities related to modeling effective classroom practices and public speaking appearances.

Congratulations



Diana Black
Pookie Bear Learning Center
Savannah, Ga

 **Infant**



Maria Claudia Ortega
My Little Geniuses
Marietta, Ga

 **Toddler**



Hannah Beth Reeves
Academy for Little People
Chickamauga, Ga

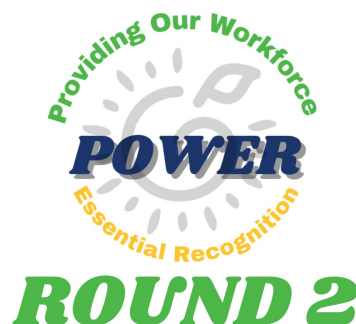
 **Preschool**

Georgia's Early Childhood Educators of the Year 2021

Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning **Georgia Dept of Early Care and Learning**

DECAL Announces Round Two of POWER Payments

For the second time in less than a year, DECAL is awarding \$1,000 supplemental payments to all eligible early learning professionals and staff in Georgia.



“Known as POWER (Providing Our Workforce Essential Recognition),



Governor Brian Kemp has appointed Kimberly Neville, Instructional Coach for Bulloch County Schools, to represent the 12th Congressional District on the Board of Early Care and Learning. Neville is married to Rawls Neville, and has two daughters, Kennedy and Caroline. Welcome aboard!

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

Board of Early Care and Learning

Phil Davis, Savannah
First Congressional District
(Chair)

Susan Harper, Albany
Second Congressional District

Kathy Howell, Carrollton
Third Congressional District
(Secretary)

Karla Zisook, Decatur
Fourth Congressional District

VACANT

these payments are a small yet significant way to recognize the dedication and hard work shown during the COVID-19 pandemic,” said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. “The early learning workforce always deserves recognition for the work they perform, but especially with the critical role they have played for the nearly two years of the pandemic. The dedication and passion of this workforce for children and their families is really what’s unprecedented.” Commissioner Jacobs said the first round of POWER paid \$33,405,000 to 33,405 early learning professionals and staff.

Applications for Round Two of the POWER payments will be open through February 18, 2022. These payments will be funded through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. POWER payments are available to Georgia’s early care and education professionals working in DECAL licensed child care programs, Department of Defense programs, Early Head Start and Head Start programs, or Georgia’s Pre-K Program lead teachers and assistant teachers in public schools.

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

Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Sherry Beckett, Matthew Jang, Jeannie Lippy, Nicole Cook, and Dasja Williams.

Employee Suggestion Program



**Visit the Virtual
Suggestion Box now!**

Fifth Congressional District

Kristy Beam, Atlanta
Sixth Congressional District

Kristin Morrissey, Cumming
Seventh Congressional District

Luann Purcell, Ed.D.,
Warner Robins
Eighth Congressional District

Cristina Washell, Ed.D.,
Cleveland
Ninth Congressional District

Joanna Hill, Watkinsville
Tenth Congressional District

Jen Bennecke, Atlanta
Eleventh Congressional District

Kimberly Neville, Brooklet
Twelfth Congressional District

Melissa Boekhaus, M.D.,
Smyrna
Thirteenth Congressional
District

Debra Brock, Calhoun
Fourteenth Congressional
District
(Vice Chair)

Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

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[Contact Us](#)



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

