

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



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DECAL By the Numbers

6,200 - Early care and education programs in Georgia

\$161 - Average weekly parent fee for infants in an urban child care center

75,000 - School-age children (5-13) served by child care programs in Georgia

67,000 - Jobs in Georgia's early care and education industry

80,592 - Children currently enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K Program

3,952 - Child & Adult Food Care Program (CAFCP) sites in Georgia

Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs

Dear DECAL Staff Members,

Last month, I began this letter by sharing my excitement over the fact that the Governor's Education Reform Commission had unanimously approved all the recommendations of the Early Childhood Education Subcommittee. On December 15, 2015, the full Commission presented ALL of its recommendations regarding public education in Georgia to Governor Deal for his consideration. Below is a photo of the Governor with the commission members. Now we wait to see which of the recommendations the administration will act on in the upcoming legislative session.



Go to <https://gov.georgia.gov/education-reform-commission> to read the full report that includes ALL the recommendations submitted to the Governor by the five subcommittees.

The big project currently consuming many of your DECAL colleagues is completing Georgia's State Plan for the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). Washington wants to know how the state is planning to use the significant funding we receive from them, particularly in light of the changes made in the legislation reauthorizing the CCDF.

The plan is due in Washington in March 2016. Between now and then we must finalize the plan; distribute/disseminate the plan to the public; conduct public hearings on the plan; and modify the plan as needed based on the public hearings. During the 2020 Employee Roundtable meetings, you heard how the CCDF impacts every one of DECAL's programs, so developing a successful plan is critically important.

We'll let you know when the plan is posted online and when/where the public hearings will be held so you can attend if your schedule/workload allows.

24,823 - Georgia children served by Head Start
3,681 - Georgia children served by Early Head Start

Quick Links

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January Birthdays



Best wishes go out to the following DECAL employees who celebrate birthdays this month:

- 1 - Stacey Foston
- 2 - Tu Bui
- 5 - Kimberly Mitchell
- 7 - Kristin Bernhard
- 9 - Taijha Harden
- 9 - Rashunda Williams
- 10 - Phillip Jessup
- 11 - Sherrie Mullis
- 14 - Elisabetta Kasfir
- 18 - Kiejuan Davis
- 19 - Sharon McPherson
- 20 - Nicole Cook
- 21 - Susan Breheny
- 21 - Amy Jacobs
- 21 - Margaret Pringle
- 24 - Chrissy Clayton
- 26 - Leigh Ann Hendrix
- 26 - Mary Jerrell
- 28 - LaQuita Clark
- 29 - Morgan Stahl
- 30 - Rosheda Doe
- 30 - Rhonda Parker
- 31 - Laura Reid

A Day in the Life of Lauris Cooper

As an administrative assistant providing front desk coverage for DECAL's sixth floor, Lauris Cooper interacts with the public almost constantly either by assisting people

2016 is off and running, and I'm excited about the opportunities and possibilities we'll have this year to support children, families, and early care and education professionals in our state.

The General Assembly begins on January 11; I'll keep you posted on any activity among lawmakers relating to our work. In the meantime let's just all keep doing our jobs to provide exemplary service to our customers.

Happy New Year,



Governor Nathan Deal received recommendations from the Governor's Education Reform Commission.

DECAL Seeking Nominations for Georgia's Pre-K Program Teachers of the Year

DECAL is seeking nominations for Georgia's Pre-K Program Teachers of the Year for 2016-2017. DECAL will select a winner from a local public school system and a winner from a private child care center. The nomination can come from a Georgia's Pre-K Project Director or a Pre-K teacher, but the nominated teacher must complete a teacher information page and respond to questions on the application.

"Now in its 23rd year, Georgia's Pre-K Program is nationally recognized as an exemplary early



who call into one of the agency's two main phone lines or by helping walk-ins.

In either case, she makes a point of greeting them warmly and listening to their questions or concerns attentively to effectively assist them herself or direct them to the appropriate person.

"I try to maintain a positive attitude, and I strive to make sure people are greeted with a smile when they come in the office no matter who they are or what they need," said Cooper.

As a frontline employee, Lauris believes it is important for her to "know something about almost everything that goes on and who does what within Bright from the Start's realm" so that she is empowered to deliver high quality customer service.

"I try to assist as many people as possible when they call or whenever they come in the door, which includes helping those who may have a concern or complaint about a provider or daycare," said Lauris. "I listen carefully to them and make sure they know their concern matters to us before I forward them to the appropriate person."

Many times, the questions she fields are related to opening a center.

"I'm ready to help them with basic information and refer them to our website for the majority of what they need," she said. "I always take a few minutes to show them where to find what they're looking for, so they're not overwhelmed when they get to the website."

And often she's tasked with providing directions which, in addition to dealing with many interruptions, is among the challenges of her job.

"The one thing I do almost every day that I actually laugh at, considering how directionally challenged I am, is I become a human GPS because I have people calling me from all over the state wanting to know how to get here. It's actually harder to tell someone how to get here from somewhere else in downtown Atlanta than it is from 50 miles away," she said.

Lauris typically starts her workday sending an email to the Child Care Services (CCS) team and others who would need to be directed to CCS letting them know the CCS intake consultants of the day. She then forwards any voicemails left the previous night in the general mail box to the appropriate people. Some of her other responsibilities include taking care of time sheets, opening mail and getting it to the correct people, scheduling conference rooms for meetings, interviews, etc., and helping with license fee payment process, among other things.

Lauris said she considers herself blessed to work with a great team of co-workers and knowing at the end of each day that she "contributed in some small way to the betterment of a child, which is also the future of

childhood education program for four year olds that significantly impacts school readiness skills in language, literacy, and math," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "The program's success can be attributed directly to the outstanding Pre-K teachers and assistants who implement this program daily. This is a small way for us to recognize their efforts."

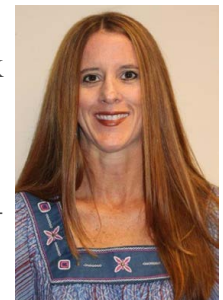
The application for Pre-K Teacher of the Year is available on the home page of the [DECAL website](#). Completed applications must be postmarked or hand delivered no later than 5:00 PM on Friday, January 29, 2016. Finalists will be announced in May 2016, with the winners announced in the early fall.

To be considered for Georgia's Pre-K Program Teacher of the Year, the nominated teacher must meet the following qualifications:

- Must have been employed as a Georgia's Pre-K lead teacher during the 2015-2016 school year.
- Must have taught as a lead teacher in a Georgia's Pre-K classroom for a minimum of three years.
- Must meet Georgia's Pre-K credential and Professional Development Registry requirements.
- Must be planning to continue as a lead teacher in a Georgia's Pre-K classroom during the 2016-2017 school year.
- Must be employed by a Georgia's Pre-K Program provider in good standing with all programs administered by DECAL. (Pre-K, Child Care Services, Childcare and Parent Services [CAPS] and Nutrition Services).
- Must be willing to serve as an ambassador for Georgia's Pre-K Program. Duties may include but are not limited to: public speaking, representing Georgia's Pre-K at meetings, and modeling effective classroom practices.
- Must be able and willing to travel as needed - including some overnight stays.
- Must be willing to have a classroom evaluation and interview conducted if chosen as a finalist.

For more information, contact Meghan McNail, Summer Transition Program and Outreach Coordinator, at meghan.mcnail@decals.ga.gov or 770-357-4911.

This school year approximately 84,000 four year olds attend Georgia's Pre-K Program. The voluntary, lottery-funded Pre-K program has been recognized as one of the top programs in the nation, based on quality standards, teacher qualifications, and enrollment. Georgia's Pre-K Program is universal - meaning that any age eligible child residing in Georgia may attend the program regardless of family income. Georgia's model for providing the Pre-K program is unique in that it is offered through a public-private partnership in local school systems, in private child care centers, and in other facilities.



Meghan McNail

Quality Rated Announces First Child Care Program to Receive Inclusion Endorsement

A Lawrenceville child care center has received the first Quality Rated Inclusion Endorsement in Georgia. By achieving this special endorsement, the D. Scott Hudgens, Jr. Early Education Center,

our state."

What would she do if named DECAL Commissioner for a day?

"I would create at least one position, possibly two positions, for a medical person such as a pediatric LPN," said Lauris, who has worked for DECAL for four years. "I receive numerous phone calls from providers and centers inquiring about the medical conditions of a child in their care, as well as from parents with concerns because their child may have just recently been diagnosed with something like diabetes or epilepsy."

While there are policies in place that address treatment for such children, Lauris believes having a medical professional on staff would improve DECAL's ability to assist in these type situations.

When not at work, Lauris enjoys spending time with her husband of 28 years, Stanley, their son Austin, 20, and their son Anthony, 24, along with Anthony's wife, Crystal, and their 17-month-old daughter, Brookelyn.

"As a family we enjoy going to the beach and camping in the mountains, and Stanley and I love riding on his Harley whenever we can," said Lauris. "We're very involved with our extended families and in our church. I enjoy singing, playing the piano and being around friends and family, especially during the holidays. I am a people loving person...the more the merrier."

located at 5150 Sugarloaf Parkway, has proven its commitment and ability to provide high quality inclusive environments to all children in their community, especially children with special needs.

Quality Rated is Georgia's tiered quality rating and improvement system, and is similar to rating systems for other service industries like restaurants and hotels. Quality Rated is a way to assess, improve, and communicate to families and communities the level of quality provided by early education programs.

After completing the Quality Rated process, early care and education programs receive a rating of one, two, or three stars. Only two and three star programs are eligible to seek the Quality Rated Inclusion Endorsement. The D. Scott Hudgens, Jr. Early Education Center earned a two star quality rating, after which it began pursuing the new Quality Rated Inclusion Endorsement.

A child care program seeking the Quality Rated Inclusion Endorsement first receives a baseline assessment using the Inclusive Classroom Profile, an observation scale from one to seven that assesses the quality of provisions and daily practices that support the developmental needs of children with disabilities in early childhood settings. After a baseline is established, the child care program receives free targeted technical assistance from DECAL. If the child care program scores above a five on the baseline or reassessment, the child care program receives the Quality Rated Inclusion Endorsement.

"The Quality Rated Inclusion Endorsement is a significant step in ensuring that child care programs and teachers are equipped to serve children from all backgrounds and needs in their classrooms," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "I am extremely proud of the D. Scott Hudgens, Jr. Early Education Center for being the first child care program in Georgia to receive the Quality Rated Inclusion Endorsement and for receiving above a five on their baseline, leading them to automatically receive the endorsement."

"We are so honored to be the first program to have earned the Quality Rated Inclusion endorsement," said Rebecca Olson, Director of the D. Scott Hudgens Jr. Early Education Center. "It is a wonderful testament to the work our teachers and staff do each day to meet the needs of ALL children. It is also a powerful example for our students here at Gwinnett Tech about the importance of providing inclusive care and learning environments for children from birth to five."

Quality Rated was formally launched by Governor Nathan Deal and DECAL in July 2013. Currently, 849 child care programs in Georgia (17% of eligible child care programs) are Quality Rated, with an additional 1,591 child care programs in the process of becoming Quality Rated.



DECAL Administrative Assistant Lauris Cooper

Introducing DECAL's New Mascot

DECAL now has its own mascot: Cali, Deputy Dog Commissioner of Hugs and High Fives. Recently "adopted" by DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs, Cali will help spread the word about Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports, Quality Rated, Nutrition, and the health and safety of Georgia's youngest learners in child care settings.

Expect to see Cali at events all around the state in her role as a Goodwill Ambassador. For more information, contact Liz Young, Director of Government Relations and Special Projects, at liz.young@decalfga.gov or 404-656-0916.



Quality Rated Director Pam Stevens presented a special gift to the director of the D. Scott Hudgens, Jr. Early Education Center Rebecca Olson.

New Grants Encourage Family Engagement

The deadline to apply for DECAL's new Family Engagement Opportunity Grants is Friday, January 22, 2016. The purpose of the grants is to provide educational opportunities that promote, encourage, and support community awareness and advocacy and to provide access to free, ongoing resources related to parent leadership and child development. Applicants can apply for a maximum of \$15,000 for a one-year program or project.

To qualify, legally operating early childhood care and education organizations must be located in



2016 Legislative Session Begins January 11

The 2016 legislative session of the Georgia General Assembly begins Monday, January 11, 2016. With breaks and holidays, the 40-day session can span into March or April. Education should be at the top of the agenda this year with recommendations from the Governor's Education Reform

designated areas of the state and must commit to providing quality family engagement programs, activities, and services to families with children ages birth to eight years old. Funding for these grants comes from the federal Early Learning Challenge grant.

"An effective partnership among families, communities, and educators helps lay a solid foundation for children's success in school," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "This grant opportunity provides resources that will equip communities to partner with families to create a better future for our youngest learners."

Successful grant applications will propose family engagement programs/projects that develop quality resources to be offered to families at least once a month free of charge. Programs or projects must fit in one or more of the following focus areas:

- Advocacy: Empower parents and families as child advocates and leaders
- Community Connection: Help families become well-connected to community resources and supports
- Education: Strengthen families as child's primary educators and nurturers and increase families' knowledge of child development
- Health & Safety: Support families as safe, healthy, and self-sufficient caregivers

Eligible applicants must also be located in one of the Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Z) or in certain Metro Atlanta counties: Bibb, Brooks, Catoosa, Cherokee, Clarke, Clayton, Cobb, Colquitt, Cook, DeKalb, Douglas, Echols, Fayette, Fulton (including the City of Atlanta), Gilmer, Gordon, Gwinnett, Henry, Lowndes, Murray, Rockdale, or Whitfield.

The full requirements, application, and submission instructions for this competitive grant opportunity are posted at <http://www.dec.al.gov/QualityInitiatives/Grants.aspx>.

Applications are due January 22, 2016 by 5:00 PM. Contact Carolyn Morkeh at Carolyn.Morkeh@dec.al.gov with questions regarding the Family Engagement Opportunity Grants.

Summit Educates on Summer Food Service Program

DECAL will host its Second Annual Summit on the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) on Wednesday, January 20, 2016 at the Loudermilk Conference Center in downtown Atlanta. The summit will provide information and resources to help potential new sponsors and experienced sponsors of the SFSP administer effective and efficient meal service during summer 2016.

The SFSP, funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), is administered in Georgia by DECAL. Approved community-based organizations may apply to serve free and nutritious meals to children in low-income areas during the summer months. Over 900,000 of Georgia's school-aged children are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Through the SFSP, thousands of these children have access to free meals to fill the gap when children are not in school and may not have access to well-balanced meals throughout the day.

Falita Flowers, DECAL's Director of Nutrition Services, details the importance of the SFSP and the benefit of the summit. "The Summer Food Service Program fills a critical need when children are out of school by providing free and well-balanced meals during the summer. We need more organizations to



Commission.

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Board of Early Care and Learning

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

Board of Early Care and Learning

Kay Ford, Midway
First Congressional District



Falita Flowers

provide these meals to children when school is out of session. The 2nd Annual SFSP Summit is a great way to learn more about how your organization can get involved."

To learn more about the SFSP and the 2nd Annual SFSP Summit, contact Shani Drake, Marketing & Outreach Manager at shani.drake@dec.al.ga.gov or 404-656-3221. For more information about becoming a SFSP sponsor, visit the DECAL website at <http://dec.al.ga.gov/Bfts/SFSPBecomingASponsor.aspx#Becoming>. Organizations that would like to register for the summit should [click here](#).

DECAL Celebrates Inclusive Schools Week

The Inclusion Services unit at DECAL recently celebrated Inclusive Schools Week in partnership with Parent to Parent of Georgia. During the week of December 7-11, 2015, DECAL sponsored panel discussions on inclusion in Athens, Atlanta, Dalton, Macon, Savannah, and Valdosta. In addition, DECAL partnered with Parent to Parent of Georgia to provide parent trainings on inclusion in Atlanta and each of the Early Education Empowerment Zones.

At each event attendees were encouraged to think deeply about what inclusion means, how their lives touch children and adults with disabilities, and the opportunities they have to advocate for inclusion in their communities. Attendees also learned about the importance of using people first language, and were invited to take a pledge to put People First when referring or talking to people with disabilities. All in all, it was a week filled with rich discussion, planning, inspiration, and enthusiasm for what the future holds for all of Georgia's children.

In photo, Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs reads a proclamation from Governor Nathan Deal designating the week as Inclusive Schools Week in Georgia.



(Secretary)

Susan Harper, Albany
Second Congressional District
(Vice Chair)

Kathy Howell, Carrollton
Third Congressional District

Phil Davis, Stone Mountain
Fourth Congressional District

Carlene Talton, Decatur
Fifth Congressional District

Dawn Henderson, Marietta
Sixth Congressional District

Sherron Murphy, Lawrenceville
Seventh Congressional District

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

Vacant
Ninth Congressional District

Janice Gallimore, Greensboro
Tenth Congressional District

Victor Morgan, Cartersville
Eleventh Congressional District
(Chair)

Jerri Kropp, Statesboro
Twelfth Congressional District

Judy Neal, Stockbridge
Thirteenth Congressional District

Tangela Johnson, Cohutta
Fourteenth Congressional District

The Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Kristin Bernhard, System Reform; Tikiyha Ancrum, Audits and Compliance; Paula Jones, Child Care Services; Julie Harnage, Human Resources; Paul Ominde, IT; Beverly Browning, Pre-K; and Alicia Young, Legal.

DECAL New Year's Resolutions

As we ring in 2016, we asked members of the Senior Leadership Team and Senior Management Team about their resolutions for the New Year:

"To do my safety quizzes on time...and spend more time with my parents and to value the time spent with them." - **Kristie Lewis, Assistant Commissioner for Child Care Services**

"To create a flag to be hung with pride that recognizes the great nation known as 'Ira land.'" - **Ira Sudman, Chief Legal Officer**

"Far away in the sunshine are my highest aspirations. I may not reach them, but I can look up and see their beauty, believe in them, and try to follow where they lead." - **Elisabetta Kasfir, Director of CCS Program Operations, quoting Louisa May Alcott**

"Keep at least half of my desk's surface visible at all times (i.e. stay up to date on my filing!). Attend at least one Birth-Eight Team meeting in each of our four Early Education Empowerment Zones. Hit 1,500 Quality Rated Child Care Programs by the end of 2016." - **Kristin Bernhard, Deputy Commissioner for System Reform**

"All 21 of the DECAL Early Head Start partner programs will achieve a Quality Rated star level in 2016. All of the other Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership sites in Georgia will be participating in Quality Rated and at least 50% will be rated by December 31, 2016." - **Carol Hartman, Home Visiting/Early Head Start Director.**

"Stop dating everything 2015." - **Craig Detweiler, Chief Information Officer**

"I resolve to reach 60% participation in Quality Rated and take a trip to a place I've never visited." - **Pam Stevens, Quality Rated Director**

Congratulations to the newest QUALITY RATED child care programs!

Atlanta Job Corps Center, Atlanta ★★	★ Chantelle R. Hester, Savannah
Kandolo B. Baze, Lawrenceville ★	★★★ Jackson Heights Christian Academy, Valdosta
Bella's Learning Academy, Leesburg ★	★★★ Kim A. Jackson, Valdosta
Bethesda Baptist Church Childcare Center, Ellerslie ★	★ Jamboree Early Learning Center, Atlanta
Vernida F. Bowman, Augusta ★★	★★★ Jeff Davis County Head Start, Hazlehurst
Toni Z. Braswell, Grovetown ★	★★★ Kids in ACTION at The Pencil School, Lexington
Leslie A. Brown, Savannah ★★	★★★ Kids 'R' Kids #25, Snellville
Patricia A. Butler, Stone Mountain ★	★ Kreative Kids Academy, Decatur
Lanoria Buttrum, Stone Mountain ★★	★ Latrenda's World for Learning, Macon
Ellen M. Carter, Talbotton ★★	★ Lawrenceville Hwy Early Childhood Development Center, Decatur
Childcare Network #213, Warner Robins ★★	★ Little Wild Cats Preschool, Villa Rica
Childcare Network #224, Columbus ★★	★ Michelle Ford, Albany
Childcare Network #233, Macon ★★	★★★ Mill Creek Day Care Center, Rocky Face
Chandra L. Clanton, Jonesboro ★★	★ Nance Daycare, College Park
Crabapple Montessori School, Alpharetta ★	★★★ Nursery Rhymes Daycare, Columbus
C-Three Childcare & Learning Center, LLC, Macon ★	★★★ Julia T. Penning, Athens
Ione W. Dailey-Hazel, Fairburn ★	★ Esther L. Perez, Hampton
Sherry A. Dawson ★	★ Play Palace Daycare, Statham
Discovery Point #5, Duluth ★★	★ The Potter's House, Tifton
Discovery Point #56, Fayetteville ★	★ Premier Preschool & Childcare Center, Stone Mountain
Early Learning Center, Albany ★★	★★★ Carla L. Proffitt, Douglas
Alma J. Grandy, Lithonia ★	★ Samantha J. Rawlings, Alpharetta
Carolyn N. Greene, Albany ★★	★★★ Solid Rock Academy, Fayetteville
Laura L. Griffin, Tifton ★★	★★★ Chastity Stanton, Lakeland
LaQuesha A. Harrell, Cairo ★★	★ Gloria M. Weathers, Hinesville
Kenya T. Hawkins, Atlanta ★★	
Maryella G. Haynes, Hinesville ★★	