

# Decidedly DECAL

*Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are*



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## DECAL By the Numbers

**25,749** - Georgia children funded by Head Start

**2,383** - Georgia children funded by Early Head Start

**1,515** - Fingerprint-based criminal record checks through February 16, 2014

**\$51.7** - Amount of Early Learning Challenge Grant awarded to Georgia

**84,000** - Four year olds attending Georgia's Pre-K Program

**3** - States with agencies dedicated to early childhood education

**165** - Average number of complaints received each month by Child Care Services (CCS)

**31** - Head Start grantees in Georgia



## Commissioner's Corner

*by Commissioner Bobby Cagle*



Now that Georgia's Pre-K Program has celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, showing significant impacts for students in language, math and behavioral skills, I am often asked about the "next frontier" in early childhood education in Georgia. There's no doubt that Georgia was a pioneer in Pre-K. But pioneers eventually settle and build...which is exactly what we've been doing these past years, especially through initiatives like the Georgia Early Learning Development Standards (GELDS) and projects under the Early Learning Challenge grant that focus on high quality services and school readiness skills.

I believe one of Georgia's next frontiers will be services for infants and toddlers, an area we are addressing through the Georgia Program for Infant Toddler Care (GAPITC). When we look back on early education ten years from now, the debate around the benefits of Pre-K will most likely be resolved. I believe one day people will look at Pre-K the way we look at kindergarten today and ask, "Why didn't we start earlier?"

That's why NOW is our opportunity to focus on children from birth to age three to help prepare them for Pre-K. Children who come from lower socio-economic households or non-English speaking families often need the benefits of high quality early childhood education earlier in life.

DECAL has always acknowledged that parents and guardians are children's first and best teachers. But because of economic situations, we know many children will depend on child care outside the home - around 370,000 here in Georgia. With this in mind, we must work with providers and teachers to "retrofit" environments from babysitting to quality early learning. Our research indicates that most infant toddler classrooms in Georgia are of low quality. That's why we're using Quality Rated to improve these educational settings and GAPITC to train teachers to better understand child development and the most appropriate lessons for the youngest children in their care.

More language is a key, even for infants and toddlers. Many children enter Pre-K or Kindergarten with a deficit in words heard and understood, which is a predictor of their reading proficiency later in life. But to fully embrace this opportunity, our teachers need more training. In 2009, DECAL changed minimum requirements for infant and toddler teachers from a high school

## Quick Links

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## Educator Appreciation Day at Zoo Atlanta

DECAL will again partner with Zoo Atlanta as they host Educator Appreciation Day on Saturday, March 22, 2014, from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM. Early care and education professionals throughout the state are encouraged to bring their guests to the Zoo for a day of fun-filled activities.

Educators will receive free admission and \$2 off general admission for each of their guests. Please note that educator identification is required. Types of ID include an employee ID with a photo; a pay stub or name badge imprinted with school name or county along with a state-issued photo ID; or a homeschool declaration of intent and a state-issued photo ID. Pre-registration is encouraged at [http://zooatlanta.org/educators\\_lounge](http://zooatlanta.org/educators_lounge).

"This is a great opportunity for educators all across the state to come and experience Zoo Atlanta, with free admission for them and discounts for their guests," said Commissioner Bobby Cagle. "In addition to the great zoo experience, educators can visit the Educator Lounge at the Ford Tent for private animal encounters and a chance to talk with the Zoo's education staff."

In addition, guests will receive a coupon for 10 percent off purchases in the gift shop and food outlets. More information on Zoo Atlanta's Educator Appreciation Day is available by calling 404.624.WILD or by e-mailing [education@zooatlanta.org](mailto:education@zooatlanta.org).



## Invitation to Join DECAL's Wellness Committee

diploma to an early childhood credential. This is great, as long as the teacher can afford higher education. Through our existing Scholarships and Incentives programs, and additional funding through the Early Learning Challenge Grant, going back to a technical college or four-year university is more affordable than ever. The teachers I have met will welcome these opportunities to enhance their professional credentials so they can do an even better job of caring for children.

By continuing to work with teachers, providers, parents, guardians, early childhood advocates and stakeholders, I believe Georgia can close the achievement gap for our very youngest learners. Those first three years of life are simply too valuable, and if we lose them, we can never get them back.

Thank you for working so hard to ensure that we don't waste a critical time in the development of Georgia's youngest citizens.

## Voices for Georgia's Children, Advocacy Partners Honor DECAL



Voices for Georgia's Children and 24 child advocacy partners hosted a legislative reception February 27 honoring Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. Held at the historic Georgia Railroad Freight Depot near Underground Atlanta, the event featured remarks by Governor Nathan Deal, First Lady Sandra Deal, and DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle. Shown in photo with members of the Board of Early Care and Learning are (L-R) Sherron Murphy, Dr. Luann Purcell, Commissioner Cagle, Governor Deal, Mrs. Deal, Pat Willis with Voices, Susan Harper, Judy Neal, Kathy Howell, Dawnn Henderson, and Phil Davis.

## DECAL Priority:

## Health & Safety

### Transportation Concerns Continue

DECAL is currently investigating a February 14, 2014, incident in which a four-year-old child was left unattended in a van for over an hour by a child care center in Southwest Georgia's Lee County. The child was not injured, but the incident reminds us of the continuing problem of transportation violations among child care providers.

"Among the 12 Core Rules that we inspect...and at the top of the list in my opinion...is the transportation of children," said Commissioner Bobby Cagle. "We have zero tolerance for any program or anyone who would place the health and



# Wellness Committee

**We need you. You need you.**

With many new faces joining DECAL, the Wellness Committee is inviting employees to participate in the Wellness Committee to help bring healthy initiatives to DECAL.

The Wellness Committee is a group of health-minded DECAL employees who work to bring various healthy activities to DECAL. Some of the initiatives you may be familiar with include:

- The Healthy Snack Baskets on each floor
- The Monthly Wellness Newsletter
- Wednesday Wellness Tips
- And more!

You do **not** need to have extensive nutrition, physical activity, or wellness knowledge to join the committee, just a positive attitude and a willingness to improve your health and the health of your co-workers. We meet about once a month and our next meeting will be March 11th at 2:30 pm in the Peachtree Conference Room on the 8th floor.

For more information, contact Jennifer Popadiuk at 404-463-4093 or [jennifer.popadiuk@dec.al.gov](mailto:jennifer.popadiuk@dec.al.gov).

## March Birthdays



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

- 2 - Mark Waits
- 3 - Christopher Sleeme
- 5 - Lajuana Williams
- 6 - James Holloway
- 7 - Glenda Hambrick
- 8 - Laurel Lynn Berryhill
- 9 - Susan B. Adams
- 9 - Angela A. Butler
- 10 - Kimberly A. Alexander
- 12 - Brian Griffin

safety of our children in jeopardy."

In the summer of 2011, a two-year-old Clayton County girl, Jazmine Green, died after being left unnoticed in a day care van following a field trip. Following that tragic incident, DECAL revised transportation rules in July 2012, including checklists requiring the first and last name of each child; initials and recorded times of each arrival and departure at each location; children being marked on and off the vehicle each time they enter or exit; a physical inspection of the vehicle including looking under seats; and then a second check of the vehicle by another staff person.

DECAL imposes the maximum fine allowed by law (\$299) on the first violation of transportation rules in incidents even when a child is not left in a vehicle. For every day the facility remains non-compliant, DECAL can impose additional fines. Sanctions increase in severity if there are future violations of these rules and can include the revocation of a provider's license to operate a child care facility.

If these policies are followed as they are written, every one of these incidents is preventable. Failure to follow these procedures is often predictive of more severe problems down the road.

Parents are encouraged to talk with their child care provider about transportation and see what's being done to protect their child. They should also check our website at [www.dec.al.gov](http://www.dec.al.gov) where health & safety inspection reports and revocation reports are posted.

## DECAL Priority:

## Quality

### Scope of Work Being Developed for Early Learning Grant

Since winning a \$51.7 million Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant in December 2013, DECAL staff members have been hard at work on the first major project of the grant: completing a scope of work to be submitted to the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

"The scope of work is essentially a detailed project management plan," said Kristin Bernhard, DECAL Deputy Commissioner for System Reform, who is leading implementation of the grant. "Our scope of work will describe exactly how and when we will spend the grant award over the next four years, and it will also specify when we will achieve specific goals and milestones we committed to in our application."

The scopes of work for all six states that won awards in round three of the Early Learning Challenge are due on March 31, 2014. After they are submitted, the federal government has three months in which to approve them. States may spend up to 10% of their total award before receiving federal approval of their scope of work.

"The scope of work development process is critical to successful implementation of the projects in our Early Learning Challenge grant," said Commissioner Bobby Cagle. "I am incredibly appreciative of the hard work of numerous DECAL staff members who have already spent long hours ensuring that we will have a high quality plan that will allow us to move forward with effective implementation."



- 12 - Sandra Lowe Kelley
- 15 - Brandi N. Swain
- 18 - Sondra M. Paster
- 19 - Bernice Henderson
- 20 - Shannen S. Grimes
- 24 - Jennifer A. McMichael
- 27 - Brandon S. Cason
- 27 - Amy L. Page
- 27 - Ashley F. Shirah
- 28 - Patricia D. Villard
- 30 - Shelly Yeomans
- 31 - Mari M. Springs
- 31 - Pamela D. Stoner

## 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, Savannah  
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Second Congressional District  
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Phil Davis, Stone Mountain  
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Tammy Lenkeit, Flowery Branch  
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

Vacant  
Fourteenth Congressional District

## March is "Read Across Georgia" Month



*Georgia First Lady Sandra Deal*

On Wednesday, March 5, 2014, DECAL will join Governor Nathan Deal and First Lady Sandra Deal for the kickoff of "Get Georgia Reading: The Georgia Campaign for Grade Level Reading."

The event will take place in the North Wing of the State Capitol, 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM, and everyone is invited. Mrs. Deal will read a proclamation announcing March as "Read Across Georgia" month and then read a book

to a class of Georgia's Pre-K students. DECAL will have a table at the event promoting all of our services for Georgia's youngest learners. This will be an important day as we share with legislators, the media, and the general public.

## DECAL Priority:

# Organizational Excellence

## Child Care Services Welcomes New Staff

Seen some new faces in Child Care Services (CCS)? It's not your imagination. Over the past month, the division responsible for licensing and monitoring Georgia's 5,600 child care programs has welcomed new staff members.

CCS Field Operations is divided into five regions based on a "weighted system" that considers the size and number of sites, travel required to serve each area, and a mix of urban and rural areas. Each of the five regions shares a portion of metro Atlanta. Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas and Gwinnett are served by separate regions.

The Central Region recently welcomed new Savannah Tramble, a former lead teacher at The Frazer Center, and Stacey Foston, formerly with EOA Head Start in Savannah. The Northeast Region welcomed Alva Huff, formerly with Bright Horizons; Marybeth McGee, who formerly worked with a child care training company; and LaQuita Clark, a former support specialist with 3C Institute. Patricia Villard, formerly with the Learning Care Group and Knowledge Learning Corporation, has joined the Northwest Region.

The Southeast Region welcomed Ashley Cunningham, a former lead teacher at the Clifton School; Keshia McNeal, recently with Statesboro Head Start and Child Care Network; and Brandon Cason, formerly with the Coastal Georgia Area Community Action Authority. Chastity Brand, formerly of Shepherd's Day School, and Alison Benson, formerly with Kids World Learning Center, have joined the Southwest Region.

In addition to the five CSS regions, there are five other specialized work units: Applicant Services Unit, Complaint Unit, Enforcement Unit, Quality Improvement Unit, and the newest addition, the Technical Assistance Unit.

The Technical Assistance Unit recently welcomed Melissa Davis as TA Unit Manager and Nikki McCray as Technical Assistance Coordinator (Lead). Both previously worked with Quality Rated.

TA Unit Consultants include former CCS Field Consultants Linda Barge, Mary Jerrell, and Mari Springs; Danna Foster, formerly with Nutrition Services; and

*We are committed to nurturing Georgia's youngest children, keeping them safe and healthy, and to enriching their lives.*



### **The Faces of DECAL**

*DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Diane Naranjo, Charles Gore III, Chasity Brand, Kristin Bernhard, Melissa Donovan, Rommel Telfair, and Laurianne McDonald.*

new to DECAL are Janna Albertson a former teacher, director, and parent counselor with the Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, and Alice Jones, a former private consultant and trainer, as well as Pre-K teacher, in California and Georgia.

Lisa Rasmussen, formerly with Georgia Regents University Child Care Resource and Referral Agency of Central Georgia, recently joined CCS as Applicant Services Unit Lead Consultant. Taquella Austin, formerly a nutrition training coordinator and CCS consultant, has joined the CCS Vacancy Pool. Elizabeth Holland, former lead for the Complaints Unit, now serves as Acting Manager of the Enforcement Unit.

"We are very pleased with the depth of talent and experience in these new additions to the CCS team," said Kristie Lewis, Assistant Commissioner for CCS. "We are also excited about adding the new Technical Assistance Unit and look forward to the benefits this team will bring for DECAL working with child care programs in the field."

CCS currently works with 2,919 Child Care Learning Centers, 2,467 Family Day Care Homes, and 235 Group Day Care Homes across the state.



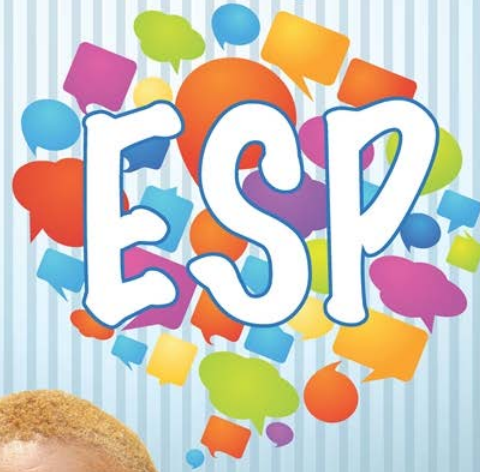
*The Northwest Regional CCS staff, led by Regional Director Rhonda Paker, is shown at the February 27, 2014 meeting held at State Offices South - Tift College in Forsyth.*

You know that **great idea** you  
have for our department?

We cannot read your

**MIND.**

That is why DECAL has



EMPLOYEE  
SUGGESTION  
PROGRAM

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