

# Decidedly DECAL

*Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are*



Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning



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## DECAL

### By the Numbers

**30** - Organizations involved in last month's "United Against Childhood Obesity" rally at the State Capitol

**84,000** - Students enrolled this year in Georgia's Pre-K Program

**29,066** - Georgia children served by Head Start and Early Head Start 2011- 2012

**28,169** - Total number of books read for "Georgia Reads Aloud Day"

**48,000** - Children served each month by Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS)

**1,118** - Books read by winning school Lafayette Kids World Pre-K in Fayetteville

**60%** - Georgia four year olds enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K Program

## Commissioner's Corner

*by Commissioner Bobby Cagle*



When I was growing up in North Carolina playing high school sports, our coaches always tried to keep things in perspective. If the other team was bigger than us, maybe we were faster. If they had a great passing game, maybe our strength was the running game or a stronger defense. No matter what the outcome or final score, they kept us focused and placed things in perspective. I want to bring that same balance to last month's state audit of Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS).

Simply put, in its study of the program from FY 2008-2011 the Department of Audits and Accounts identified a need for improved business practices and the potential of waste or fraud. Frankly, that's disappointing. As state employees we all want to provide excellent customer service and be proud to stand behind the work we do every day. We also realize the CAPS Program benefits the most needy families and children among us, so this level of performance is totally unacceptable to me and to DHS Commissioner Clyde L. Reese.

Governor Deal moved CAPS from DHS to DECAL in July 2012, aligning the program with our focus on safe and healthy child care and early education. This has resulted in a better alignment of services, policies and communications. As Governor Deal put it, "Better program alignment for better outcomes." Under Deputy Commissioner for Programs Keith Bostick and Assistant Commissioner for Programs Carol Hartman, the CAPS team serves approximately 48,000 children per month, and they are committed to addressing and



## Spotlight on... New Employees

Dextral Austin has joined DECAL as Director of Audits and Compliance, reporting to Deputy Commissioner of Finance and Administration Ray Higgins. Dextral brings 24 years in various accounting and finance roles in the private sector and 10 years with the State's Retirement Systems. He and his wife Rosalyn have four children and nine grandchildren. They have lived in Rockdale County for nearly 34 years.



Bill Folsom has joined DECAL as Training and Organizational Development Specialist, reporting to Human Resources Director Robin Stevens. Most recently Bill served as HR Consultant/Trainer for the

Georgia Student Finance Commission (GSFC), conducting supervisory and skill based training programs. In his new role with DECAL, Bill will be responsible for coordinating the delivery of management, supervisory and employee development programs. Bill is the proud father of two sons, ages 16 and 21.

## All Staff Meeting Update

rectifying the issues identified through the audit.

Now for some perspective:

- Overall, considering the size of this program, the amount of money involved may be a relatively small percentage. However, no amount of waste or fraud will be tolerated. We will continue to turn these cases over for criminal prosecution and seek restitution wherever possible.
- DECAL had already initiated major changes to the CAPS Program including appointing a new Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Administrator; starting the expansion of DECAL's audit and compliance team; working with the State Attorney General, Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) and federal authorities to prosecute those commit fraud; and using enhanced technology to better administer the program. Make no mistake about it...where fraud can be proven, we will prosecute to the full extent of the law.
- A new 45-member task force, facilitated by a national expert, will review operations, policies and procedures of the CAPS program over a six-month period beginning this month and then make recommendations to DECAL for improvements.

As the lead agency since July 2012, DECAL accepts responsibility for correcting the noted deficiencies and will create a detailed corrective action plan to address all findings. This will include increased training for staff responsible for administering CAPS across the state, enhanced use of technology, and improved oversight. In addition we are expanding our internal auditing function and exploring a partnership with the GBI to increase investigations, prosecutions and fraud prevention.

I assure you that the future of the CAPS Program is bright as it continues to serve Georgia's youngest learners. And those who would take advantage of this program through fraud or deception have now been warned.

## DECAL Priority:

## Health & Safety

## State Senate Approves DECAL's National Background Check Bill

## What You Said at the All Staff Meeting by Bentley Ponder and Mark Waits

Last December DECAL gathered as one group for the first time in five years. This facilitated opportunities to reunite with old friends/co-workers and to meet new friends/co-workers. The meeting also provided time for fun, food, fellowship, and feedback from you. We apologize for taking so long to report on your feedback, but a lot of information had to be reviewed. Here we will provide a general overview of the results from the post-meeting survey and the table activity. We will post a more detailed summary from the table activity within the week.

The first batch of survey materials we reviewed was the overall evaluation of the event. Approximately 160 people completed the evaluation. The overall averages were high. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being low and 5 being high), the average for whether the all staff meeting was poorly or well conducted was 4.55 and the average for whether or not the staff meeting was a good use of your time was 4.05. While still high, the average for whether or not the meeting was useful or useless for your work was 3.95. This tells us that perhaps we can do a better job making sure all of the material is relevant for your work. Most encouraging to us was the question that asked whether or not staff wanted to continue the all staff meeting. The majority of staff members want to meet as one staff once a year, while 38% said twice a year. The survey also provided staff an opportunity to share any general comments. There is not enough space to share those here, but overall the comments were positive. We can also assure you that the comments have been shared with Commissioner Cagle and the planning committee. We will incorporate those changes in our planning for next year. If you would like the print-out from the survey, let one of us know.

Results from the table activity revealed your enthusiasm about the important work



The Georgia State Senate overwhelmingly passed in March a bill requiring all employees of Georgia's 6,000 child care facilities to undergo national fingerprint-based background checks.

HB 350 requires all employees in a child care program to have satisfactory national background checks based on fingerprints, not just a name search of Georgia records. By requiring only a state background check on employees, today it is possible for people with criminal backgrounds in other states to be cleared to work in Georgia child care programs.

The bill is sponsored by State Representative Alan Peake (R-Macon) and backed by DECAL. "This is a critical measure to improve child safety, not only in my district, but throughout all of Georgia," said Rep. Peake. "We are excited to achieve final passage today."

"This bill is vitally important to the safety of Georgia's most vulnerable and precious population," said Sen. Butch Miller (R-Gainesville), who carried the bill in the Senate. "This bill is family friendly, minimizes the impact on small business, and improves child safety."

HB 350 was supported in testimony by the Georgia Child Care Association (GCCA), VOICES for Georgia's Children, Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS), and the Interfaith Children's Movement. It is also supported by Quality Care for Children.

"Having full and reliable information about the criminal histories of employees in child care facilities is essential to assuring safety for Georgia's youngest learners," said DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle. "Collaboration between the Department of Early Care and Learning, the Georgia Child Care Association, and numerous other advocacy organizations yielded a bill that is good for children and families and enjoyed broad support. I commend Rep. Peake and Senator Miller for sponsoring the legislation and the General Assembly for overwhelmingly supporting the measure."

"This bill is a great step forward for child safety in Georgia," said Ray Higgins, Deputy Commissioner of Administration and Finance for DECAL. "We greatly appreciate the work of Rep. Peake and Senator Miller and thank the Legislature for their support."

Higgins said also on DECAL's 2013 legislative agenda is supporting Governor Nathan Deal's efforts to restore a full 180-day calendar for Georgia's Pre-K Program. DECAL also supported the recently passed HB 354, which primarily clarifies definitions regarding child care programs.

of DECAL as well as a lot of other substantive information. Some of the themes emerging from the activity related to breakdown and lack of clarity in communication (especially internal). Many reported that changes are rolled out too quickly and that providers/stakeholders receive information before staff. On a positive note, many remarked on the use of the DECAL newsletter. Responses to policy questions related to both internal concerns (workload) and to external needs (national background checks for all providers). Many comments noted the positive changes DECAL has made in improving health, safety and the quality of care and look forward to the department continuing in this direction. As we said above, a more detailed analysis is being finalized and will be posted within the week.

Overall, findings support that we all appreciated the opportunity to be together. It had been too long, and we applaud DECAL leadership for recognizing the need for an All Staff Meeting. Many of your recommendations have materialized (weekly updates for divisional staff; national background checks). The Commissioner and the Senior Leadership Team have reviewed the results and look forward to planning this year's event. If you have any questions, let us know. We look forward to attending your divisional staff meetings this year and sharing more of the work of the research unit.

## "Read Across Georgia" Kicked off in Conyers

Commissioner Bobby Cagle joined Governor Nathan Deal and First Lady Sandra Deal in March at Pine Street Elementary School in Conyers for the kick off of "Read Across Georgia." As part of the celebration, DECAL sponsored "Georgia Reads Aloud" Day on March 19. Classrooms across the state read 28,169 books --- more than double last year's total.

## Rally Held Against Childhood Obesity

DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle was a featured speaker at a rally held at the State Capitol for "United Against Childhood Obesity." DECAL joined more than 30 organizations in demonstrating a joint commitment to fight the epidemic of childhood obesity in Georgia.

For all ages, Georgia ranks second as the most obese state in the country, second only to Mississippi. About a quarter of the state's third-graders are classified as obese. So, too, are 15 percent of middle school students and 12 percent of high school students.

Below are some of the comments made by Commissioner Cagle during the rally:

*Improving fitness and reducing obesity will not be easy. When children are in our care outside the home in child care centers, Pre-K classrooms, schools, and after-school programs we need to be vigilant on three fronts:*



**Nutrition:** *There's no substitute for nutritious food. Our school lunch programs and meals served in child care centers deliver on that objective by offering healthy choices, but often children don't follow the lead. Our schools are ideal settings to teach children about making the choices that lead to good nutrition, and the Department of Education continues to make advances here. At DECAL, we work with child care centers on nutritional standards, and will continue to be a valuable resource to them in this area.*

**Exercise:** *Active children are healthy children, but we need to encourage more activity, especially in schools. Just as children need to adopt good eating habits, so, too, do they need to establish exercise habits early in life. A plan to add 30 minutes of physical activity to the school day for each elementary school child is a step in the right direction, but we can and must do more to encourage physical activity as part of the learning process.*

**Choices:** *Communities need to make intelligent choices on behalf of our children, choices that affect the availability of public recreation and nutritious food. Children themselves need to be taught how to make smart choices about food, exercise and lifestyle. Remember, parents are always the first teachers and we must lead by example.*

*Coalitions of private companies, government and non-*



## Quick Links

[DECAL on Facebook](#)

[DECAL on Twitter](#)

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## April Birthdays



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

- 3 - Shawnell M. Barlow
- 3 - Meggan A. Hemans
- 7 - Elizabeth M. Holland
- 7 - Tabitha Sutton Moreland
- 9 - Wanda Woodward Simkins
- 10 - Demetria W. Thornton
- 13 - Nadine J. Hollis
- 16 - William J. Cox
- 17 - Cassandra Jakes-Beasley
- 20 - Mona D. Jackson
- 20 - Jennifer McWhorter Taylor
- 21 - Robert S. O'Callaghan Jr.
- 25 - Ray H. Higgins, Jr.
- 25 - Brianna C. Kersey
- 26 - Bridget Gail Bunch
- 28 - Clare Michaud
- 30 - Johnathan D. Davis

## Board of Early Care and Learning

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

*government agencies and volunteer groups are working hard, in our schools and elsewhere, to make a healthier Georgia. Let's do everything we can to support them in this cause.*



DECAL's Christy McCray and Marissa Hamm at "United Against Childhood Obesity" rally at the State Capitol.

## DECAL Priority:

## Quality

### 20 Years of Transforming Lives

Fifteen of the original Pre-K programs in Georgia were honored last month with proclamations from Governor Nathan Deal and a reception at the Fernbank Museum of Natural History. The March 12 event was sponsored by the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) and Fernbank.



"This was a great opportunity to recognize the programs and people who have helped make Georgia's Pre-K Program a national example of the importance of early childhood education," said DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle. "Over the past 20 years, the State of Georgia has wisely invested close to \$5 billion in lottery dollars into Georgia's Pre-K Program in our efforts to improve school readiness and ultimately develop a strong 21st century workforce for businesses here in our state. Our recent research study showed that children, on average, make significant gains in

## Board of Early Care and Learning

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Vacant  
Ninth Congressional District

Janice Gallimore, Greensboro  
Tenth Congressional District

Victor Morgan, Cartersville  
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Vacant  
Twelfth Congressional District

Vacant  
Thirteenth Congressional District

Vacant  
Fourteenth Congressional District

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

**The Faces of DECAL**

language, mathematics, and social skills during their year in Georgia's Pre-K."



"GEEARS was thrilled to co-host such a special event," said Mindy Binderman, Executive Director of GEEARS. "We are proud of Georgia's history as the first state in the country to offer universal Pre-K for four year olds. This event was important to recognize and celebrate Georgia's past and future commitment to our earliest learners."

Georgia's Pre-K Program was created in 1992 after voters approved the creation of the Georgia Lottery for Education to support college scholarships and a voluntary prekindergarten program. In 1992 750 at-risk four year olds and their families participated in a pilot program at 20 sites. This year Georgia is investing over \$300 million to serve approximately 84,000 of the state's youngest learners, more than 60% of all four year olds. In February, President Barack Obama recognized Georgia's program in his State of the Union Address and the same week visited College Heights Early Childhood Learning Center in Decatur, Georgia.



Above, Commissioner Cagle congratulates representatives from 15 of the original Pre-K programs in Georgia. Programs included Bibb, Clarke, Coweta, Crisp, Glynn, Haralson, Jackson, Jefferson, Lamar, Muscogee, Randolph and Walton counties; Carrollton City and Decatur City, Ninth District Opportunity and North Fulton Child Development Association. Below on left, Commissioner Cagle thanks Bunny Shepherd for sharing her late husband, Charles Shepherd, with Georgia's youngest learners for more than 30 years. Below on right, Commissioner Cagle is shown with everyone's favorite inquisitive monkey, Curious George, who visited the State Capitol for the 20th anniversary party for Georgia's Pre-K program.

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Rita Lang, Christopher Sleeme, Louis Brienza, Kelly Stader, Niya Randolph, Bill Folsom, and Angela Butler.



## DECAL Priority:

# Organizational Excellence

## New Organizational Structure in Place for Georgia's Pre-K Management

Georgia's Pre-K Program recently announced a new organizational structure resulting in new positions for three longtime DECAL employees. Deputy Commissioner of Programs Keith Bostick and Assistant Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K Susan Adams welcomed Jackie Shivers to her new role as Pre-K Director for Quality Support; Pam Bojo to her new role as Pre-K Director for Field Operations; and Monica Warren as Pre-K Director for Program Initiatives.

"This new organization represents enhanced changes in leadership, oversight, functionality and better alignment for the Division and DECAL Programs," said Bostick. "We are excited about this structure and the positive experiences and outcomes it can render for DECAL, our staff and Georgia's earliest learners."



## Brienza Honored for Service by USDA

Director of Nutrition Services Lou Brienza was recently honored by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for 11 years of service with the Child, Adult, and Summer Nutrition Programs in Georgia. Brienza is retiring May 1, and his last day at DECAL is Tuesday, April 30, 2013.

"Your tireless commitment to administering exemplary programs resulted in Georgia serving an average yearly total of 81,032,504 meals in the Child and Adult Care Food Program and 3,538,014 meals in the Summer Food Service Program," said Donald E. Arnette, Regional Administrator USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Southeast Region.

Shown in photo below are (L-R) Lanna Kirk, Regional Director, Special Nutrition Programs, Southeast Region; Arnette, Brienza and DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle.

