

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



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DECAL By the Numbers

1,181 - Children participating in Phase Two of Georgia's Pre-K Evaluation

\$312 million - 2014 budget for Georgia's Pre-K Program

\$16 million - Estimated cost for reducing Pre-K class size by one student

\$5 billion - Lottery dollars invested in Georgia's Pre-K Program over 21 years

300 - Georgia child care programs now Quality Rated

83 - Quality Rated Three-Star Programs (CCS)

31 - Head Start agencies in Georgia



Quick Links

Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Bobby Cagle



The national electronics chain Radio Shack once used the slogan, "You've got questions...we've got answers." That slogan also aptly relates to Georgia's Pre-K Program over the past 21 years. Since its start in 1992, many people - including the Georgia General Assembly - have had questions about Pre-K: Is it worth the investment? Does it prepare young learners for Kindergarten? Are children learning the foundational skills for school success? Today, I am pleased to say that, thanks to recent studies, we've got answers, and those answers are a resounding "Yes!"

Last month, we received the results from Phase Two of a multi-year, comprehensive evaluation commissioned by DECAL at the request of the Georgia General Assembly. This study concluded that Georgia's Pre-K Program significantly improves school readiness skills in language, literacy and math. The study, conducted by scientists at the FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (FPG), included a one-time comparison group created using a sophisticated sampling technique previously used in similar studies of the Oklahoma and North Carolina Pre-K programs.

Average scores for children who participated in Georgia's Pre-K Program were above the national norm on key standardized measures of language, literacy and math skills. Average scores for the comparison group tended to be right at or slightly below the national norm. Researchers found results were most pronounced in key language and literacy skills such as letter knowledge, letter-word identification, and phonemic awareness - all crucial benchmarks in being proficient in later literacy skills. Participation in Georgia's Pre-K Program also resulted in positive effects on key math skills, including counting and problem solving, and children's general knowledge.

Governor Nathan Deal was very pleased. "Since taking office, I have made increasing the percentage of Georgia's third grade students reading at grade level a top priority, and this study proves that we are moving in the right direction," said Governor Deal in announcing the results at a Capitol event. "The results reveal that participation in our Pre-K program had significant positive effects on foundational skills that coincide with later reading proficiency. By acquiring these skills early on, students stand a greater chance of reading on grade level, which will better position them for future academic excellence."

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Read Across Georgia Month Celebrated in March

March was Read Across Georgia Month. On Wednesday, March 5, DECAL joined Governor Nathan Deal and First Lady Sandra Deal at the Capitol to support the Governor's Grade Level Reading Initiative, a push to have all Georgia third graders reading at grade level or better by the completion of third grade. Governor Deal also released the phase two results from a study conducted by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at UNC Chapel Hill, confirming that participation in Georgia Pre-K has significant positive effects on children's language and literacy skills.

In photos below, the Governor and First Lady pose with Georgia's Pre-K students from Legacy Academy. DECAL's (L-R) Deanna Hibbard, Laura Evans, and Sarah Beck helped distribute copies of the Pre-K evaluation and other agency materials.



Red Fez Reading Club Returns

While studies like this, showing that Georgia is laying a solid foundation for future learning, are gratifying, they also reveal areas where we can continue to enhance our services. My goal is never to be completely satisfied with where we are but rather to always strive to do better for Georgia's youngest learners.

I thank the close to 7,700 teachers and assistant teachers who make Georgia's Pre-K Program a model for the nation. I also thank our Pre-K consultants and support staff who work beside teachers, providers, and parents to support their efforts in every way possible. And I thank the legislators and current and former governors who have made Georgia's Pre-K Program a priority over the past 21 years.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that Pre-K still has issues to resolve, for example, salaries and benefits for Pre-K teachers and assistant teachers, and Pre-K class sizes. Because we know the quality of our teachers in large measure determines the quality of the educational experiences for our children, I assure the Pre-K community that we're working to make inroads in those areas as quickly as we can.

For now, though, let's celebrate this latest news! They had questions. We have answers. And the answers are great!

[Click here](#) to view the full report.

Examples of Pre-K School Readiness Skills

Naming Letters – Ability to recognize and name all 26 letters of the alphabet

Letter-Word Identification – Basic pre-reading and reading skills, including recognizing and identifying written letters and words

Phonological Awareness – Sometimes called "Word Attack;" sound awareness skills that are important pre-reading skills, such as rhyming

Phonemic Awareness – Knowledge of letter sounds and sound combinations

Vocabulary – Understanding and expression of language (receptive and expressive vocabulary)

Math Problem Solving – Using basic math skills, such as comparisons, counting, addition, and subtraction

Counting – Counting objects in a one-to-one correspondence

Basic Self Knowledge – Knowledge and communication of basic knowledge about themselves (full name, age, birthdate)

Social Skills – Teacher ratings of behaviors that promote positive interactions with others

Problem Behaviors – Teacher ratings of negative behaviors, some commonly occurring and others less commonly occurring, that interfere with social skills development

DECAL Priority:

Health & Safety

Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Training Deemed Empowering

Like many DECAL employees, Legal Services Officer Clare Michaud was reluctant to attend Darkness to Light's Stewards of Children training. "I put it off as long as I could," said Michaud, who was worried that the subject matter - child sexual abuse prevention - would make her cry. While the first hour of training was emotional, Michaud came out of the training feeling motivated and empowered.

"Instead of feeling sad, I came out of the training enthused," she explained. "The training offers concrete steps adults can take to prevent child sexual abuse. I have implemented those steps in my life and now want to help others do the same." Michaud was so inspired by the training and its message that she took the Stewards

of Children facilitator course and is now certified by Darkness to Light to present the Stewards of Children training. With the support of Commissioner Bobby Cagle, Michaud is working with DECAL employees

Once again this year, DECAL is partnering with the 2014 Yaarab Shrine Circus and Fair, May 16-26, 2014, at Jim R. Miller Park in Marietta, to promote early reading.

The Shriners are offering free circus tickets to children who join the "Red Fez Reading Club," created to encourage increased reading by young children and their families, friends and neighbors. Children who join the club will earn one circus ticket for each book read by or to them outside the classroom, with a maximum of five tickets per child.

More information and downloadable resources from the "Red Fez Reading Club" are available at www.redfezreaders.com. All children registered by May 25 will be eligible to win one of ten circus-themed children's books.



April Birthdays



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

- 3 - Shawnell Barlow
- 3 - Meggan Hemans
- 6 - Sharelle Cross
- 7 - Elizabeth Holland
- 7 - Tabitha Moreland
- 8 - Alice Jones
- 10 - Demetria Thornton
- 13 - Nadine Hollis
- 16 - William Cox
- 17 - Cassandra Jakes-Beasley
- 20 - Jennifer Taylor
- 21 - Robert O'Callaghan Jr.
- 25 - H. Ray Higgins Jr.
- 25 - Brianne Kersey
- 25 - Elizabeth Young
- 26 - Bridget Bunch
- 28 - Clare Michaud
- 30 - Johnathan Davis

Board of Early Care and

Bill Folsom, Georgia Thomas, Shawnell Barlow, and Elisabetta Kasfir to bring the Stewards of Children training to child care providers. The group is working on adding the training to the list of approved trainings providers can take to fulfill their required training hours.



Bill Folsom and Clare Michaud

If you are involved in any group that you think would benefit from the training (youth sports, church groups, girl or boy scouts, etc.), contact Michaud at 404-463-2567. The two-hour training is \$15 per person and can be conducted throughout the state.

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

In the spring of 1989, a grandmother from Virginia began a blue ribbon campaign as a tribute to her grandson, a three year old who died at the hands of his mother's abusive boyfriend. Since that time, concerned citizens all over the country have worn blue as a symbol of the need to prevent child abuse and neglect through supporting families and strengthening communities.

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. As the state agency responsible for protecting the health and safety of Georgia's youngest learners, DECAL employees recently joined together to raise awareness and show their support. Using their own social media pages, employees are posting this photo with the hashtag #GAwearblue on Friday, April 4.



DECAL Priority:

Quality

Georgia's Pre-K to Hold Summer Transition Program

For the fifth year in a row, DECAL will offer a six-week Summer Transition Program (STP) for rising kindergartners who either did not attend Georgia's Pre-K or Head Start, or attended but need additional support to be ready for Kindergarten next fall. The program is targeted toward children whose families are eligible for Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS).

"The goal of Georgia's Pre-K Program is to prepare four year olds to successfully enter Kindergarten, but some students either miss that opportunity or need additional help," said DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle. "Our teachers and

Learning

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

Board of Early Care and Learning

Kay Ford, Savannah
First Congressional District

Susan Harper, Albany
Second Congressional District
(Secretary)

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
(Vice Chair)

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

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) Louanne Hutcherson, Ray Higgins, Sarah Beck, Amy Browder, Shani Drake, Lisa Rasmussen, and Margaret Pringle.

providers make this program successful, and we appreciate their cooperation in once again joining us in offering classes this summer."

"This is a great opportunity for these young students to build their skills and confidence before moving into Kindergarten," added Susan Adams, assistant commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K. Adams said the six-week, high quality instructional program is proposed to begin on Monday, June 2.

Current Georgia's Pre-K providers were eligible to apply for the program beginning on March 13, with a deadline of March 31. Locations will be announced late this month.

Summer 2014 will be the fifth year DECAL has offered the STP. Each year the program has been evaluated by independent researchers, and results have indicated strong impacts for the children served, especially in crucial language and literacy skills.

Dole Sponsors Field Trip for Three-Star Nutritionists



North Carolina Research Campus

Nutritionists from thirty of Georgia's Three-Star Quality Rated child care programs will depart from the State Capitol in Atlanta tomorrow morning on a chartered bus bound for North Carolina and a Research Campus operated by Dole Packaged Foods. There the group will learn how to encourage good nutrition in their child care programs. DECAL is partnering with Dole and Lt. Governor Casey Cagle's Healthy Kids Georgia Program for the two-day visit, which includes dinner Wednesday night at the Charlotte Motor Speedway and a full day of activities on campus Thursday. The group returns to Atlanta on Thursday night.

"We know that even our youngest learners need to start understanding why healthy food choices and exercise lead to a path of lifelong health and well-being," said DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle. "That's why Dole Packaged Foods and Healthy Kids Georgia are making a real difference as they recognize Quality Rated child care programs committed to making health, nutrition and physical activity a priority."

During their visit, the group will hear from Dr. Nicholas Gillitt, Ph.D., Vice President of Nutrition and Director of the Dole Nutrition Institute. They will also tour the research campus and interact with other leading experts in the field.

In December 2012, Dole joined Healthy Kids Georgia and DECAL in announcing a partnership to promote good nutrition and increased physical activity in early child care and education programs.

"Georgia's childhood obesity epidemic is too large for any one organization or person to address alone. We must work together to collaboratively present our children and families with healthy lifestyle options so we can bring about real change and tackle this daunting challenge," said Lt. Governor Casey Cagle. "Innovative public-private partnerships that bring together state, private, and community resources to confront the troubling trends we face in childhood obesity will have a lasting impact on future generations."

One of the five Quality Rated standards provides early care and education programs the opportunity to reflect on their current health and nutrition criteria and identify areas that can be improved. Points are assessed based on the completion of the Nutrition and Physical Activity Assessment; written improvement plans with documentation of actions taken to complete the plans; and evidence that the program has met each of the requirements listed for the standard.

"We are thrilled to welcome Georgia's top child care nutritionists to the North Carolina Research Campus," said Marty Ordman, Marketing Communications, Dole Packaged Foods. "Even more exciting is the potential of what they can take back to their programs in Georgia --- hopefully some new and creative ways to expose young students to more fruits and vegetables on a daily basis --- the perfect fuel for learning."

DECAL Priority:

Organizational Excellence

All Staff Meeting Is This Month

"Leadership at All Levels" is the theme for this year's DECAL All Staff Meeting, set for Wednesday, April 30, and Thursday, May 1, at the Georgia International Convention Center in Atlanta. A meeting for managers and supervisors will be held Wednesday from 8:30 AM to 12:00 PM, followed by the All Staff Meeting Wednesday from 1:00 PM to 5:15 PM and continuing Thursday from 8:00 AM to 5:15 PM.

"While we strive to communicate well with staff on a daily basis, nothing replaces this opportunity to bring everyone together face-to-face and discuss the strategies, goals, legislation, and budgets that impact our daily work," said DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle. "This year I am also excited to discuss our \$51.7 million Early Learning Challenge Grant, which will be implemented over the next four years."

And DECAL has more to celebrate. "This May is the tenth anniversary of Governor Sonny Perdue signing the bill that changed our name from the Office of School Readiness to the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, effective July 1, 2004," said Robin Stevens, Director of Human Resources. "By Executive Order, Governor Perdue later added 'Bright from the Start.'"

First Lady Sandra Deal will be the featured lunch speaker on Thursday, May 1, 2014, at 12:30 PM, with the theme Celebrating 10 Years of Achievement. Mrs. Deal is a frequent guest in Georgia's Pre-K classrooms, reading to students in all 159 Georgia counties in support of Governor Deal's goal to have all students reading on grade level by third grade.



First Lady Sandra Deal

Stevens said the meeting will not only celebrate our first ten years, but through informative presentations and speakers, "help us plan for the next ten years." She called the agenda "stimulating, professionally challenging, educational and entertaining."

Once finalized, an agenda for the meeting will be sent to all employees.



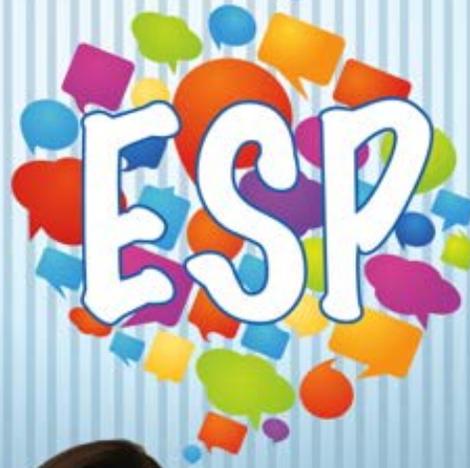
Georgia International Convention Center

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

We cannot read your

MIND.

That is why DECAL has



Jennifer Popadiuk RD,LD
Nutrition Project Manager

EMPLOYEE
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PROGRAM

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