

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



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DECAL By the Numbers

81,000 - Four year olds enrolled this year in Georgia's Pre-K Program

52,280 - Children served by Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Program

4,869 - Licensed child care programs in Georgia

Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs



Dear DECALers,

By the time you receive this letter, the 2017 session of the Georgia General Assembly will be over. Now DECAL and other state agencies will begin working to implement the decisions our state senators and representatives made. The following paragraphs highlight legislators' decisions relating to early care and learning for Georgia's children and their families.

First, regarding the Governor's budget. In the February issue of Decidedly DECAL, I mentioned three items in the Governor's proposed budget relating to early care and learning. While the Governor has not yet signed the budget, the General Assembly passed his budget with these three items still in it:

- 1) \$5.5M for tiered reimbursement for Quality Rated child care programs
- 2) \$2M for Early Language and Literacy Classroom Grants
- 3) \$2.7M to create the Georgia Center for Early Language and Literacy

Obviously, DECAL will be directly involved with implementing item #1, and we are excited to partner with others to implement items #2 and #3. Funding for these items clearly indicates that Governor Deal and state lawmakers understand the importance of early learning. We are grateful for their continued support.

Second, the passage of HB 463. House Bill 463 enables DECAL to create a nonprofit foundation that will allow for donation transparency and provide a tax benefit for donors. Because of our focus on children and early childhood, many corporate, charitable, and philanthropic entities want to donate to

3,863 - Georgia's Pre-K classes
1,259 - Georgia child care programs in Quality Rated
73 - Consultants in Child Care Services
34 - Consultants in Georgia's Pre-K Program
4 - Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs)

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Decidedly DECAL CALi Quiz Winner

DECAL's Helpdesk Assistant Jahmeka Jones is the winner of this month's Decidedly DECAL CALi Quiz. She won two tickets to the [World of Coca-Cola](#). Jahmeka's name was drawn from all employees who took the quiz and scored 100.



Jahmeka Jones

To win, read this issue of Decidedly DECAL and look out for the next quiz for your chance to score some fun prizes donated by local businesses!

2017 DECAL Activity Challenge



Gear up for the DECAL Activity Challenge 2017. The Activity Challenge (formerly the Walking Challenge) is a friendly fitness competition between DECAL departments to promote increased physical activity and optimal health. This year the Challenge will take place in May.

So locate and ensure that your pedometers, phone apps, Fitbits, Jawbones, Garmins, fitness bands, or other devices to measure physical activity are ready to go. If you've been on the fence about getting a fitness device, now is the time to do so.

support our programs (for example, private contributions for Quality Rated and the Pre-K Teacher of the Year).

We've been able to accept the generosity of the philanthropic community by working with a non-profit partner, but donors prefer to donate to a foundation or similar entity. Now, our new foundation will simplify this process.

Funding from the foundation will enable us to expand our support of and recognition of child care programs and early childhood educators. The funding will also allow the department to help child care programs and/or early learning communities during times of natural disaster when other funding streams may not be available. We've especially realized the need for this kind of flexibility to move quickly through the storms that devastated southwest and costal Georgia these past months.

The bill passed the House and the Senate unanimously, and Governor Deal has signed it into law. The name of the foundation: Georgia Foundation for Early Care and Learning to Promote Public-Private Partnerships...something this department has believed in and done since being created in 1996 as the Office of School Readiness.

So, as usual, we have a lot to do...implementing new projects and initiatives authorized by the Georgia legislature...while maintaining our on-going efforts to ensure the health and safety of children. Thank you for your part in fulfilling DECAL's mission and vision. I appreciate all that you do.

Warmly,

Two E3Z Georgia Counties Honored for Early Literacy Work

Colquitt and Whitfield counties, located in two of Georgia's Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs), have been honored as Pacesetters by the national Campaign for Grade-Level Reading (GLR). The counties were chosen for exemplary work in eliminating barriers to becoming proficient readers faced by children from low-income families.

In 2014 DECAL designated four E3Zs in the state. E3Zs are targeted regions of Georgia that agreed to work with DECAL and other state agencies to pilot early education system reform initiatives and partnerships to support better outcomes for young children. The E3Zs implement specific strategies to increase the quality of and access to early care and learning options and to support local efforts to coordinate key programs and services for young children and their families. Colquitt County is located in the southern E3Z, and Whitfield County is in the northern E3Z.



Kristin Bernhard

"One of the goals of the E3Z concept was to spark new, local initiatives to improve and better

Including more physical activity into your daily routine does not need to be complicated. Walking is one of the easiest, most convenient forms of exercise you can do. To walk, all you need is a comfortable pair of sneakers and motivation.

Because many of us do more than just walking, The Walking Challenge is now the Activity Challenge. For you, we have posted an "Activity Conversion" chart on POLAR. Refer to this chart to convert other physical activity, such as swimming, gardening, or yoga, into steps.

The DECAL Wellness Committee hopes this friendly fitness competition will encourage you to get up and be active. Increasing your daily activities can help you:

Maintain or achieve a healthy weight

Prevent or manage various conditions (type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, etc.)

Strengthen your bones

Improve your mood

Increase your energy

Boost your immune system

In addition to the benefits mentioned above, the winning team will maintain "bragging" rights for one year, and the top three individual walkers will win gift cards of \$50, \$30, or \$20.

"There could be a danger that we focus so much on the academic, social emotional, nutritional, and physical well-being of children, that we neglect our own physical well-being," said Commissioner Jacobs. "This activity challenge will encourage all of us to take better care of ourselves through walking and other physical activities. A month is plenty of time to begin a new life-lengthening habit."

Our goal for this challenge: Have fun while staying active and healthy!

April Birthdays



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

- 1 - Rapheal Betton
- 1 - Reisha Merriman
- 3 - Megan Hemans
- 3 - Shawnell Johnson
- 6 - Sharelle Cross
- 7 - Elizabeth Holland
- 7 - Tabitha Moreland
- 8 - Shonda Franklin

coordinate a system of supports for children from birth to age eight," said Kristin Bernhard, Deputy Commissioner for System Reform at DECAL. "This national recognition for counties in two of the state's four E3Zs signals that others are beginning to notice the way collaboration can lead to improved systems, and ultimately we hope, to improved outcomes for children."

Reading proficiency by the end of third grade is a critical milestone toward high school graduation and career success because it marks the transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." National tests show that two-thirds of U.S. fourth graders (four-fifths of whom are from low-income families) are not reading proficiently. Students who have not mastered reading by that time are more likely to drop out of high school and struggle throughout their lives.

Governor Creates Board to Oversee the Georgia Center for Early Language and Literacy at Georgia College and State University

DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs will serve on a nine-member board for the Georgia Center for Early Language and Literacy, an education and training center for developing literacy skills to be housed at Georgia College and State University (GCSU). Created by Gov. Nathan Deal in March, the board will oversee the center, working to enhance the state's ability to train educators and improve early childhood education. Deal announced this initiative in January 2017 as part of the Amended Fiscal Year 2017 (AFY 2017) budget.

"Early language development and literacy are vitally important to ensuring successful educational opportunities for Georgia's youngest learners," said Deal. "The Georgia Center for Early Language and Literacy in Milledgeville will work tirelessly to make sure our children and educators are equipped with the right tools and instruction to succeed. I am pleased that AFY 2017 budget allocated funds to bring this center's vision to fruition, and I look forward to working with the center and its governing board as they begin this great work."

In addition to DECAL, the board is composed of leaders representing the Technical College System of Georgia, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, the Georgia Public Library Service, GCSU, the Georgia Board of Education, providers of primary health care and education advocacy organizations across the state.

Board members were selected based on background and experience in advocating for early childhood care and education across the state. \$2.4 million was allocated in the AFY 2017 budget to create the Milledgeville center with an additional \$2.7 million proposed for the Fiscal Year 2018 budget.

Applications for New and Returning Georgia's Pre-K Classrooms Due April 21

DECAL has posted applications for new and returning providers of Georgia's Pre-K Program for the 2017-2018 school year, the 25th anniversary of the program. Providers of currently funded classes can request expansion classes via DECAL's PANDA website while new providers can receive information about the application review, award process, and grant funding at www.decals.ga.gov. The deadline for all applications is Friday, April 21, 2017, at 5:00 PM EDT.

10 - Aleta Gass
10 - Demetria Thornton
11 - Heather Bang
16 - William Cox
17 - Cassandra Jakes-Beasley
17 - Veronica Thomas
19 - Lisa Prather
20 - Jennifer Taylor
21 - Rob O'Callaghan
21 - Bridgett Walker
25 - Ray Higgins
25 - Melyn Smith
25 - Brianna Walters
25 - Liz Young
26 - Bridget Johnson
26 - Allison Setterlind
29 - Stephen Knighton

Day in the Life of Laura Wagner

Laura Wagner, who has worked at DECAL for two years, is a Family Support Director, a new position in Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services Program. Laura previously served as DECAL's Early Education Empowerment Zone (E3Z) Project Director. In talking about her new job, she used the words "exciting" and "meaningful," especially when referring to helping design the family support component of CAPS. She says her past E3Z work "has been really inspiring," and that her days were filled with "meaningful conversations."



Laura Wagner

If Laura were Commissioner for a day, she would "visit different TCSG and USG schools to talk with students enrolled in child development and early childhood studies," and would "want to talk about our shared vision for the success of young children across the state of Georgia and the variety of ways to make a difference in preparing young children to succeed in Kindergarten and beyond."

Her favorite quote is by Dale Carnegie: "If you want to conquer fear, do not sit at home and think about it. Go out and get busy." Outside of work, Laura loves to take long walks with her dog and bring her daughter Josie along in her stroller. She loves walking to Piedmont Park and playing with Josie. She also loves volunteering, which is how she met her husband!

"Since its beginning 25 years ago, Georgia's Pre-K Program has grown and improved to meet the ever-changing needs of Georgia's children and families," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "Recent research supports that, on average, children's skills in language/literacy, math, self-knowledge, and general knowledge gained during their Pre-K year were sustained through Kindergarten. These findings confirm that Pre-K provides the strong foundation needed for future learning."

For more information about becoming a provider in Georgia's Pre-K Program, call 404-656-5957 or 1-888-4GA-PREK and ask for the Pre-K Consultant of the Day.

Nutrition Services Celebrates National CACFP Week

Nutrition Services celebrated National Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Week Wednesday, March 15 with a cooking demonstration at A World of Knowledge Preschool & Academy in Atlanta, GA. National CACFP Week is an education and information campaign to raise awareness of how the USDA's CACFP works to combat hunger and bring healthy foods to the table for adults in day care and children in child care homes and centers, and in afterschool programs across the country.



Chef Asata Reid led the students through a "three from a tree" demonstration. Chef Asata's recipe consisted of cinnamon sticks, four types of apples, and maple syrup. She explained each ingredient's tree of origin.

The children were fully engaged learning about the origins of cinnamon from the bark of a cinnamon tree and maple syrup boiled from the sap of a maple tree. The demonstration culminated in a review of shapes and sizes with the students as well as introducing them to healthy snack options.

The event left gleaming smiles and energetic preschoolers demanding more cinnamon apples from Chef Asata.

Board Member Spotlight: Melissa Boekhaus

Melissa Boekhaus, MD, FAAP was appointed to the DECAL board this past fall to represent District 13. She is currently a general pediatrician at Wellstar Pediatric and Adolescent Center in Smyrna, GA. Dr. Boekhaus also serves on the board for the Georgia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

She completed her pediatric residency at Emory University and earned her medical doctorate from the Medical College of Georgia. She is a native Georgian and never plans to leave the state!

Let Us Hear
From You!

Got a great new idea for the Agency?
Share it through DECAL's

Employee Suggestion Program



Visit the Virtual
Suggestion Box
Now!

Board of Early Care and Learning

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



Melissa Boekhaus

Dr. Boekhaus is married to her college sweetheart, and they have three children, ages 5, 3, and 1. She enjoys traveling, baking, and hiking and is an active church member at Northside Drive Baptist in Atlanta. She has always loved working with children and is delighted to be a part of DECAL so she can use her expertise to improve the lives of Georgia's children.

Congratulations to the newest QUALITY RATED child care programs!

- White Oak Learning Academy #1, Forsyth ★ ★ Tender Years Learning Center #5, Bibb
- Peferred School Care at Parkside Elemntary, Fulton ★ ★★ Guiding Light Child Care Center, Treutlen
- Peferred School Care at L.O. Kimberly Elementary, Fulton ★ ★★ Cherrie D. Beasley, Fulton
- Fulton ★ ★ ★★ Sabrina R. Daniels, Fulton
- Little Stars Learning Academy, Fulton ★ ★★ Decatur Adventist Learning Center, DeKalb
- Dilsia Torres, Chatham ★ ★★ The Goddard School, Cherokee
- Dunwoody Academy & Infants of Dunwoody, DeKalb ★ ★★ Kids Ahoy, Houston
- Tender Years Learning Center #2, Houston ★ ★★ Kiddie Academy, Peach
- Rebecca P. Mac Pherson, Effingham ★ ★★ Agape Way Daycare, Peach
- Donna's Loving Care Child Care and Learning Center, DeKalb ★ ★★ Brown's Child Care Learning Center, Bibb
- ★ ★★ Dublin Head Start, Laurens
- Kidz of Paradise, Clayton ★ ★★ Bright Beginnings Learning Academy, DeKalb
- Tender Years Learning Center #1, Houston ★ ★★ Sandra G. Satterwhite, DeKalb
- Carter's Day Care Academy, DeKalb ★ ★★ The Sunshine House #76, Gwinnett
- Romper Room Playschool, Dougherty ★ ★★ Kimberly D. Byrd, Fulton
- Kids 'R Kids #12, Gwinnett ★ ★★ Lynette R. Raji, DeKalb
- Mommy Angels Daycare, DeKalb ★ ★★ Kids 'R' Kids #15, Gwinnett
- Aysha Khan, Fulton ★ ★★ ★★ Sylvan Hills Preschool Academy, Fulton
- Tender Years Learning Center #12, Lowndes ★ ★★

Board of Early Care and Learning

Kay Ford, Midway
First Congressional District
(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

Vacant
Seventh Congressional District

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Eighth Congressional District

Sheri Hooper, Gainesville
Ninth Congressional District

Janice Gallimore, Greensboro
Tenth Congressional District

Victor Morgan, Cartersville
Eleventh Congressional District
(Chair)

Jerri Kropp, Statesboro
Twelfth Congressional District

Melissa Boekhaus, MD., Mableton
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) Scott Hall, Emily Lankford Graham, Jeffery Arnold, Devon Porter, Sonija Bacon, Nathan Thompson, and Angela Byrd.



*Congratulations to all of our
QUALITY RATED™ child care programs
who've increased their star rating
in March!*

★★ **Brighter Tomorrows Child Development Center, Gordon (1 to 2 star)**

★★ **Tickle Me Pink Daycare and Learning Center, Lowndes (1 to 2 star)**

★★★ **Childcare Network #89, Lowndes (2 to 3 star)**

★★★ **Mother's Love Too, Tift (2 to 3 star)**

★★★ **Dayna C. Cross, Fulton (2 to 3 star)**

*Visit qualityrated.org to find
Quality Rated child care programs in your area!*

Coming this Month



Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning