

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



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Governor Makes Jacobs Permanent at DECAL

After six months as Interim Commissioner, it's now official. On November 24, Governor Nathan Deal named Amy M. Jacobs as the permanent Commissioner of Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, effective immediately. She replaces Bobby Cagle who was named permanent director of the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS).

"I am humbled by this opportunity to continue to work with you, and I look forward to propelling our efforts forward to enhance services to children and families throughout the state," Commissioner Jacobs wrote in an e-mail to DECAL employees. "As a mother of two young children (Charlie, age 6 and Laine, age two), I know how important our work is. These are the critical years and we cannot waste a minute."

Formerly Director of the Education Division and the General Government Division of the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, Commissioner Jacobs said she has often referred to DECAL as the "gold standard in state government." "But I had no idea of the breadth and depth of your work nor of the incredibly high caliber and professionalism of you, the DECAL staff," she said.

Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Amy Jacobs

Dear DECALers,

As you know, in December 2013, Georgia received \$51.7 million through the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grant to broaden and deepen the scope of our work in a variety of areas. That work is well underway.

You may not know, however, that this December - 2014 - we will find out if we've won two additional federal grants: the Preschool Expansion grant, a multi-million dollar federal grant to expand Georgia's Pre-K Program in areas of high-need around the state, and the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Grant to expand access to high-quality services for infants and toddlers and their families. Grant winners will be announced on Wednesday, December 10, 2014, during a White House Summit on Early Childhood Education.



Once again, my thanks to everyone who worked diligently on our applications for these grants. Win or lose, your efforts are never in vain because the grant-writing process helps us to determine where we want to go as a department and to develop plans to get there. I continue to be amazed by the talent and dedication of the DECAL staff: those based in the Atlanta office AND those of you who work out of your homes in communities all over our state.

Another team effort of note is how we continue to promote greater participation in our Quality Rated Program. Thanks to the work of the CAPS team and our Child Care Services team, we are well on our way to meeting our IMMEDIATE goal of having 1,755 programs participating in Quality Rated at the end of this year. Our ULTIMATE goal is to have all programs participating by December 2017.

I am also proud to say that members of the philanthropic community continue to demonstrate their support for quality early care and education; just recently the Goizueta Foundation and the Zeist Foundation have contributed an additional \$2 million to help us provide incentives to programs when they become Quality Rated and receive their star rating.

I'll close this month's letter by wishing each of you and your families a warm, safe Happy Holidays and all the best for you personally and professionally in 2015. I always enjoy hearing from you in person or at amy.jacobs@decalfga.gov, and I look forward to working with you in the New Year.

Sincerely,

Amy

DECAL Priority:

Ensure Health & Safety

Commissioner Jacobs began her career at OPB in 2001 in the planning, research, and evaluation division focusing on strategic planning and program evaluation. Before that, she worked for two years in the Georgia Court of Appeals



Commissioner Amy Jacobs with Governor Nathan Deal

DECAL By the Numbers

80,637 - Enrollment in Georgia's Pre-K Program

26,518 - Enrollment in Head Start Georgia

1,755 - 2014 year-end goal for programs participating in Quality Rated

419 - Quality Rated child care programs in Georgia

5,985 - Inspections of child care programs for FY 2015

4,731,351- Meals served for FY 2015



Quick Links

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Cross Agency Child Data System

Prior to winning an Early Learning Challenge grant, DECAL had already begun constructing an early learning and development data system called the Cross

National Fingerprint Background Checks: One Year Later

January marks the one-year anniversary of a new state law requiring all employees of Georgia's child care facilities to undergo national fingerprint-based background checks. The law requires all new employees hired on or after January 1, 2014, to have satisfactory national background checks based on fingerprints, not just a name search of Georgia records. Existing employees hired before January 1, 2014, have until 2017 to meet the requirement, unless they move to a new child care facility. The law also applies to all DECAL employees, as well as temps or contractors whose work places them in a child care center.

Legal Services Supervisor Christie Bearden and her team oversee criminal background checks for DECAL. Bearden says the agency processed over 25,000 CRC determinations through mid-November. Average "turnaround time" for an application is approximately seven days.



Christie Bearden

"We expected around 20,000 of the approximately 60,000 child care employees in Georgia to have background checks in this first year," Bearden explained. "With a 30% turnover rate in the child care industry each year, we anticipate having everyone checked by 2017."

House Bill 350 was sponsored by State Representative Alan Peake (R-Macon) and carried in the Georgia Senate by Senator Butch Miller (R-Gainesville). The bill 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 was also supported by Quality Care for Children.

If you should receive questions concerning criminal background checks, please refer them to DECAL's CRC Hotline at 1-855-884-7444.

DECAL Priority:

Increase Quality & Access

Economic Impact Study Underway

DECAL has commissioned the University of Georgia and Georgia State University to study the impact of the child care industry on the economy of Georgia. The most recent such study, conducted in 2007, showed that child care programs in Georgia created over \$4.1 billion in revenues annually, while creating over 61,000 jobs.

"It has been seven years since our last economic impact study, and we know conditions have changed since then," said Commissioner Amy Jacobs. "The previous study revealed the significant impact the child care industry has on Georgia's economy. Now it is time to gather current data and to gauge the impact of the Great Recession on the industry. As Governor Deal continues to emphasize job creation in our state, it is important to understand the economic impact of the child care industry in Georgia and to recognize that it is a viable economic engine across the state."

Dr. Bentley Ponder, DECAL's Director of Research and Strategic Planning, said that all of the approximately 5,500 child care programs in Georgia are being asked to complete a comprehensive survey. A final report will be released in June 2015.



Dr. Bentley Ponder

"We assure child care providers that the survey is completely confidential and is for research purposes only," said Dr. Ponder. "DECAL will never have access to individual responses. Findings from the study, including workforce data, will be shared with other state agencies, legislators, and other policy makers to inform decision making and help with planning."

Researchers from the University of Georgia will design, conduct, and compile the results from the survey. Researchers from Georgia State University will analyze and interpret the results. The universities will work collaboratively to draft the final report.

Commissioner Jacobs encourages all child care programs to complete the survey when they receive it. "We must have as much complete data as possible to accurately understand and communicate the critical importance of the child care industry, not just on families

Agency Child Data System (CACDS). In 2010 with a State Advisory Council grant, the state held a Data Roundtable to bring together major stakeholders from the participating state agencies to identify key questions that a unified data system could help answer. Questions focused on child enrollment, child characteristics, child health and development (including whether the child is on track to succeed in school), information about programs and staff, and longitudinal connections (such as how a child enrolled in an early learning program does in K-12).

Initially, Georgia planned to use the research questions developed in 2010 to guide the Early Learning Challenge-funded expansion of CACDS, which includes adding data elements from the Department of Public Health, Department of Human Services, the Department of Education and Head Start and Early Head Start. However, the team soon realized that not only had key leaders in the partnering state agencies changed since the 2010 Data Roundtable, the policy priorities and objectives of those agencies had changed as well. Furthermore, though DECAL was and is both the physical and administrative home of CACDS, internal stakeholder knowledge had waned since 2010.

The Georgia team decided to begin with DECAL and host a learning session in October 2014 on CACDS for the combined Senior Leadership and Senior Management Teams of the agency. These 40 individuals represent the key personnel across all of the agency's programs (including administrative functions such as finance and audits). Two hours in length, the meeting was designed to not only share information about CACDS so that internal stakeholders could have focused answers to questions such as data governance and birth-five policies, but also to engage the members of the leadership team in the design of research and policy questions for CACDS to build excitement around the work.

From here, the state plans to host similar meetings with all of the participating state agencies throughout the remainder of 2014 and early 2015. The promise of CACDS to positively influence policies and programs for children in Georgia is great. The internal stakeholder informational and question drafting sessions have and will provide an opportunity to not only help develop the policy and research questions critical to the successful build-out of CACDS, but also to ensure that the "buy-in" exists to keep the work moving beyond the Early Learning Challenge grant.

November Quality Rated Programs

and providers, but on the overall health of Georgia's economy. The more providers who complete the survey, the better data we will have."

USDA Visits Georgia

Audrey Rowe, Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) Administrator with USDA's Child Nutrition Programs, was in Georgia last month visiting Little Ones Childcare Center in Forest Park to experience their Farm to Preschool Program.

Farm to Preschool is an expansion of the national Farm to School program and incorporates a variety of nutrition related programs and activities. The goal of Farm to Preschool is to influence the eating habits of young children while their food preferences are still developing. This program teaches children about healthy food choices by facilitating hands-on education and experiential learning through activities such as taste tests, cooking, and gardening. Farm to Preschool benefits children, caregivers, families, and the community.



Audrey Rowe is pictured with students at Little Ones Childcare Center in Forest Park.

DECAL Priority:

Foster Organizational Excellence

Parents Describe Impact of Quality Early Education

DECAL Board Members, staff and guests heard about the impact of quality early childhood education directly from parents at a recent meeting of the Board of Early Care and Learning. Deputy Commissioner for Programs Keith D. Bostick, L.C.S.W, introduced Channi Frazier, mother of a three-year-old son attending Kids World Learning Center in Statesboro, and Roy Robinson, father of a four-year-old son attending The Suzuki School in Atlanta.

Frazier, who joined the meeting by telephone, praised her three-star Quality Rated child care program in Southeast Georgia. She said parents were involved in the process from the very beginning. "We started off with a Quality Rated barbecue for the entire center, friends and family," said Frazier. "We were introduced to QR at the barbecue and then updated on our progress through our director's monthly newsletter. They really involved the parents. "My whole family now knows the proper way to wash your hands," she added with a laugh.

As a result of Quality Rated, Frazier said she personally noticed improvements in materials, family engagement, developmentally appropriate activities, and teacher-student interactions. She said her son Landon is more excited about learning and has shown significant development in language, social skills, and artwork. Frazier said she hopes more Georgia child care programs get involved with Quality Rated.

Robinson, whose son Douglas attends a Montessori program at The Suzuki School in Atlanta, also had praise for his provider. "My wife did a lot of research before selecting The Suzuki School and Douglas has flourished there...the experience has been great," he said. "Douglas is a bright eyed child who is always exploring and stretching his limits. This school gives him that opportunity."

Robinson said the Montessori program encourages independence and a sense of accomplishment in each of their students, offering a full day of instruction in a diverse environment. "It's been tremendous for us...he (Douglas) has been there since he was nine months old," said Robinson.

Bostick thanked both parents for their insights, explaining that it always helps DECAL to hear from the "end user." "We love to hear the passion from parents about the importance of quality



Keith Bostick



We are excited to announce the November 2014

Quality Rated Programs

- A. J. Ward Montessori Preschool, Inc., Savannah ★★
- Annmaria Gibbs, Grovetown ★★ ★
- Arrow Christian Academy of College Park, College Park ★
- Bert Thomas Head Start at the "Y", Augusta ★★
- Brenda J. Jackson, Decatur ★★
- Clara E. Jenkins Road Head Start Center, Augusta ★★
- Columbia County Head Start, Augusta ★★
- Cozy West Childcare & Learning Center, Augusta ★★
- Dawn Bradley, Dalton ★★
- Discovery Point #59, Covington ★★
- Discovery Point #61, Conyers ★★ ★
- Floyd Head Start (CSRA), Augusta ★
- KinderCare Learning Center #412, Chamblee ★★
- McDuffie County Head Start Center, Thomson ★★
- River Oaks Day Care, Inc., Mableton ★★
- Shepherd's Care Day School, Hamilton ★★ ★
- The Bradley School of Martinez, Martinez ★
- The Lady Bamford Early Childhood Education Center, Savannah ★★
- Wesley Community Centers CC, Savannah ★



December Birthdays



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

- 2 - Monique Chambers
- 3 - Lacey Lewis
- 6 - Faith Duncan
- 9 - Meghan McNail
- 10 - Megan O'Bara
- 11 - Woody Dover
- 14 - Deborah Kimbrough
- 14 - Laurianne McDonald
- 15 - Tamara Hall
- 15 - Shamonica Reese
- 16 - Bill Folsom
- 16 - Angela Melton
- 17 - Michele Allen
- 19 - Suzanne Milford
- 19 - Tammy Thompson
- 20 - Sonja Adams
- 25 - Margrett Stephens
- 27 - David Malik
- 27 - Angela Walker
- 29 - Ray Hudgins
- 30 - Tahishe Smith
- 31 - Sabrina Henry

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
First Congressional District

Susan Harper, Albany
Second Congressional District

early childhood education in their own lives," said Bostick. "In Georgia, child care is offered in an array of different settings, but quality is always going to be a top priority. We can have shiny buildings and the smartest instructors...but the key is how well quality experiences are transferred to families, their homes, and their day-to-day lives."

Employee Suggestion Program and Shining Stars

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

We cannot read your

MIND.

That is why DECAL has



Bill Folsom
Training & Org Development Specialist

EMPLOYEE SUGGESTION PROGRAM

The DECAL Employee Advisory Group meets monthly to strengthen communications between the agency's more than 200 employees and senior management. One of the ways we improve our agency is through the Employee Suggestion Program or ESP. Follow [this link](#) to leave a comment or concern. You may remain anonymous.

You are also encouraged to recognize a co-worker through our "Shining Stars" Program. [Click here](#) for more information.

(Secretary)

Kathy Howell, Carrollton
Third Congressional District

Phil Davis, Stone Mountain
Fourth Congressional District

Carlene Talton, Decatur
Fifth Congressional District

Dawnn Henderson, Marietta
Sixth Congressional District

Sherron Murphy, Lawrenceville
Seventh Congressional District

Luann Purcell, Ed.D., Warner Robins
Eighth Congressional District
(Vice Chair)

Tammy Lenkeit, Hoschton
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

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) Katie Hagan, Gary Amos, Jamie Carta, Bianca Staggs, Adrianne Hamlin, Liz Young, and Linda Norwood.