

# Decidedly DECAL

*Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are*



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## DECAL By the Numbers

**12** - Projects in Georgia's \$51.7 million Early Learning Challenge Grant

**370,000** - Children enrolled in Georgia child care programs

**14** - Emergency Closures in FY2013

**35** - Revocations in FY2013

**558** - Transportation Citations in FY2013

**331** - DECAL stories placed in media during 2013



## Quick Links

[DECAL on Facebook](#)

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## Commissioner's Corner

*by Commissioner Bobby Cagle*



There's a joke about a tenacious dog who chases a bus every day. One day he catches it and says, "Now what?"

A no less tenacious team of DECAL staff worked together every day for seven weeks chasing the "Early Learning Challenge" bus...the same team who crafted the previous Early Learning Challenge grant application. From late August through mid-October 2013, we were laser-focused on creating a superlative, competitive application proposing a variety of projects to improve services to Georgia's children from birth to age five and their families. We were determined to succeed this time...

And succeed we did. In December, we learned that we "caught the bus," (to the tune of \$51.7 million) but **UNLIKE** that old dog, we knew what to do: the work identified in the grant application clearly informs DECAL's direction for the coming years. And we've slowly, intentionally, thoughtfully begun the work.

As previously announced, one of the first things I did was ask Kristin Bernhard from Governor Nathan Deal's Office to join DECAL as Deputy Commissioner for System Reform to administer the Early Learning Challenge grant. Kristin served as the Governor's Education Policy Advisor and represented Governor Deal in administering the federal \$400 million Race to the Top grant focused on K-12 education.



*Kristin Bernhard*

We have also had several conversations with our partners at the U.S. departments of Education and Health and Human Services, the administrators of the grant, in which they shared instructions on how to get started and on their expectations for implementing and reporting on the grant's progress.

Georgia has three months to submit a scope of work for each of the 12 projects included in the grant. Federal DOE and HHS will then have three months to approve the scopes of work. Georgia can begin expending funds (up to 10%) before the scopes of work are approved. DECAL is now working with each participating agency to finalize agency scopes of work, interagency agreements, and budgets. Our partners include the Governor's Office, Governor's Office for Children and Families, Governor's Office of Student Achievement, Georgia



## State of the State Address Includes Focus on Education

Governor Nathan Deal focused a significant portion of his fourth annual State of the State address on education and the importance of early learning, stating that Georgia must continue to work to make sure students are reading on grade level by the end of third grade and "following through as they continue their education journey."

The governor expressed appreciation to his wife, Sandra Deal, for her contributions toward these efforts.

"Let me take this opportunity to thank my wife, the First Lady, who visited every school district in the state to read to Georgia's children in order to emphasize the importance of learning to read," Deal said in his January 15th address at the Georgia Capitol.

Governor Deal also discussed the Early Learning Challenge grant recently awarded to Georgia by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

"Because of the progress we have made and Georgia's existing 20-year investment in what is now recognized as one of the best Pre-K programs in the country, we have been awarded an Early Learning Challenge Grant of over \$50 million," he said. "This money will be used to accelerate the reforms that we implemented last year."



First Lady Sandra Deal (Center) is welcomed to Social Circle Elementary School by (L-R) Georgia Pre-K Consultant Robin Currie and Principal Ronda Estes. The First Lady has read to children in every school district in the state to emphasize the importance of learning to read.

## DECAL Expanding Summer Food Service Program

Department of Community Affairs, Georgia Department of Economic Development, Georgia Department of Education, Georgia Department of Public Health, and Georgia Public Broadcasting.

After the scopes of work are approved, we will begin implementing the exciting projects proposed in the grant...projects that, if successfully accomplished, will positively impact early care and education (and thereby children and families) in Georgia for decades to come.

The 12 projects include Grant Management; Early Education Empowerment Zones; Quality Rated Access and Availability; Quality Rated Validation; Dissemination of Georgia's Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS); Comprehensive Assessment System; Statewide Family Engagement and Community Grants; Supporting Families through Center-Based Home Visitation and in Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care; Workforce Knowledge and Competencies; Supporting Early Educators; Kindergarten Entry Assessment; and a Unified Data System.

I don't think any of the projects mentioned in the previous paragraph is a surprise to you. All of them are based on our previous work and keep us moving in our strategic direction. But, the infusion of an additional \$51.7 million will allow us to ramp up more quickly than we could have otherwise, including adding additional staff and partnering with other state agencies to help us accomplish many of these innovative initiatives.

So, as we begin implementing these new efforts, I assure you that we ALL have a part in accomplishing the goals of the grant. And, I thank each of you for the faithful, tenacious ways YOU help ensure that Georgia's children receive quality early childhood services in healthy and safe environments every day.

## DECAL Priority:

## Health & Safety

### Data Shows Improved Focus on Health and Safety

At DECAL, our top priority is the health and safety of the approximately 370,000 children who depend on roughly 6,000 child care programs in Georgia.

We believe that Georgia children in child care programs today are safer than at any time in our history thanks to the efforts and support of Governor Nathan Deal and the State Legislature. They have given us a national fingerprint-based criminal background check for all employees in a child care program and authority for the emergency closure of facilities where children are in imminent danger.

Recent data clearly shows that our agency is aggressively pursuing better health and safety in Georgia child care programs: in 2013 Fines were up by 322% -- more than \$200,000 over 2012 (\$65,947 in 2012); Emergency Closures were up 56% (14 in 2013 compared with 9 in 2012); and Revocations in 2013 were up 75% (35 in 2013, 20 in 2012).

These statistics demonstrate DECAL's increased focus on health and safety over the past 2-3 years. Child care providers know we're serious.

Our Child Care Services (CCS) Division licenses and regulates child care programs in Georgia. Every licensed program in the state is inspected twice each year. We focus on 12 key areas that help ensure the health and safety of children: Diapering, Discipline, Hygiene, Infant Sleep Safety, Medication, Physical Plant, Playground, Teacher-Student Ratios, Supervision, Swimming, Transportation, and Field Trips.

DECAL is hoping to serve more nutritious meals to children this year through its Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), administered by DECAL and funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Beginning February 1, 2014, the agency will offer a special grant program to help feed more children. DECAL is partnering with the Georgia Food Bank Association's *Feeding for a Promising Future - No Kid Hungry* campaign to offer capital investment grants to entities participating in the SFSP.

The grant awards will range from \$4,000 to \$20,000 and can be used for food preparation, equipment and supplies, storage, and delivery of meals and snacks. The funding will allow DECAL to expand existing site and service areas, as well as serve more children through a backpack program and mobile meal strategies.

To be eligible for the grant, sponsors must be approved to provide meals/snacks for summer 2014; must agree to maintain prior year sites and meal service, and expand services by establishing a backpack program, serving more meals than served in the prior year; and/or to establish a mobile feeding site in the following counties: Baker, Ben Hill, Columbia, Early, Echols, Hancock, Haralson, Heard, Lee, Lincoln, Marion, Peach, Schley, Seminole, Stewart, Taliaferro, Taylor, Warren, and Webster.

To learn more about the Summer Food Service Program and this special grant opportunity, contact DECAL's Nutrition Services Division, toll free at 1-855-550-SFSP (7377), or by email at [SFSP@decals.ga.gov](mailto:SFSP@decals.ga.gov).

## February Birthdays



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

- 1 - Taquella Austin
- 1 - Bobby Cagle
- 4 - Kimberly Smith
- 5 - Lauris Cooper
- 8 - Falita Flowers
- 8 - Charles Gore, III
- 8 - Canzata Prince
- 9 - Catherine Broussard
- 11 - Tamika Stubbs
- 12 - Stanley Cooper
- 14 - Linda Barge
- 18 - Christy McCray
- 18 - Beverly Pollard
- 19 - Bianca Staggs
- 20 - Judy Blasengame
- 24 - Carrie Spangler
- 25 - Lisa Rasmussen
- 25 - Michele Rauton
- 27 - Melissa Adams

In addition, when our agency is contacted with complaints or concerns about a specific child care program, we open investigations into those programs, conduct additional inspections, and determine appropriate actions from fines, provisional licenses to license revocations or emergency closure.

*The public is encouraged to report any complaints or concerns about child care programs to our agency. They can do this anonymously by calling 404-657-5562 or by e-mailing [ccscomplaints@decals.ga.gov](mailto:ccscomplaints@decals.ga.gov).*

| ADVERSE ACTIONS TRACKING 2010-2013 |             |            |            |           |              |                |
|------------------------------------|-------------|------------|------------|-----------|--------------|----------------|
| ADVERSE ACTIONS                    | 2013        | 2012       | 2101       | 2010      |              |                |
| Administrative                     | 237         | 100        | 70         | 0         |              |                |
| Continued Non-Comp                 | 77          | 22         | 8          | 5         |              |                |
| Incident/Injury                    | 131         | 128        | 151        | 86        |              |                |
| Other                              | 6           | 0          | 0          | 0         |              |                |
| Transportation                     | 558         | 19         | 0          | 0         |              |                |
| <b>TOTALS</b>                      | <b>1009</b> | <b>269</b> | <b>229</b> | <b>91</b> | <b>1008%</b> | <b>2010-13</b> |
| Fine Amounts                       | \$277,993   | \$65,947   | \$63,853   | \$35,417  | <b>367%</b>  | <b>2010-13</b> |
| Emergency Closures                 | 14          | 9          | 2          | N/A       | <b>600%</b>  | <b>2011-13</b> |
| Revocations                        | 35          | 20         | 83         | 8         | <b>337%</b>  | <b>2010-13</b> |

## DECAL Priority:

# Quality

## Georgia One of Five States Selected for Early Education Technical Assistance

A team of public and private early education partners from Georgia has been selected by ZERO TO THREE to attend its technical assistance conference.

ZERO TO THREE, a national early education not-for-profit organization, selected teams from only five states: Georgia joining Louisiana, Michigan, Rhode Island and Wisconsin. The conference will support leaders who address the needs of the state's infants and toddlers through the development of a comprehensive policy agenda.



The Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) and DECAL took the lead on the infant-toddler policy agenda.

"While we have certainly made great strides in improving our infant and toddler systems, what is lacking is a clearly articulated agenda and policy priority for our youngest citizens," said Mindy Binderman, executive director of GEEARS.

The state hopes to accomplish three goals through the participation in this technical assistance opportunity:

- Develop a concise set of infant-toddler priorities within Georgia's quality rating and improvement system in four critical areas: workforce development, family engagement, cultural competency and health;
- Develop specific plans for turning Georgia's infant-toddler priorities into reality;
- Expand the current state infant-toddler initiative (GAPITC) and resources into Georgia's rural areas.

"Our current program implementation practices are strong," said Dr. Laura J. Johns, Quality Initiatives Director of DECAL. "Now with this opportunity we will be able to match that strength with policy priorities that provide a foundation for our technical assistance and workforce development efforts."

## 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  
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Eleventh Congressional District  
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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.*

## Cagle Stresses Importance of Reading Proficiently by Third Grade during 27th Annual Southern Conference on Children

DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle was the featured speaker at the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Southern Conference on Children, held on January 25 at Georgia Southern University (GSU) in Statesboro. The one-day conference attracted over 350 attendees with valuable information on early child care and education, featuring speakers in family and child studies, early childhood education, and related fields working with young children.

Commissioner Cagle addressed illiteracy among young children across the state and efforts to reach children from birth to age 8. "This is a crisis for all Georgians, and the consequences are serious," said Commissioner Cagle. "Nearly 70% of Georgia's 8 and 9 year olds are not reading proficiently. This problem undermines our children's health, our state's economy, and our national security. And we already know that the years between birth and five years old are critical because of the dramatic brain development we see during that time."

Cagle said Georgia is preparing to launch a campaign this spring to raise the bar for academic success for all children. "Get Georgia Reading" is a coalition of public and private partners, community groups and advocates committed to ensuring that all Georgia children are proficient readers by the end of third grade.

"This is a priority for Governor Deal and the First Lady, and I believe early childhood educators and the families we serve play a major role," he said.

Pictured below (top photo, left to right) are Dr. Cynthia Johnson, Chair, School of Human Ecology at GSU; Dr. Barry Joyner, interim Dean, College of Health and Human Sciences at GSU; Dr. Katy Gregg, assistant professor of child & family development and planning committee member at GSU; and DECAL Commissioner Cagle.

In the bottom photo (left to right) are Mrs. Candace Iavarone, director of the Child Development Center (CDC) at GSU; Mrs. Tinnie Lee, lead teacher at the GSU CDC; Commissioner Cagle; and Ms. Jessica DeLaigle, lead teacher at the GSU CDC.



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## The Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Tahishe Smith, Carrie Spangler, Adrienne Hamlin, Miranda Murphy, Tamkia Stubbs, Woody Dover, and Shelly Yeomans..

## DECAL Priority:

# Organizational Excellence

## "Shining Stars" Help Recognize DECAL's Team Players

DECAL's Employee Advisory Group (EAG) is taking office "attaboys" to a whole new level. The team, made up of representatives from each division, has created a new page on Sharepoint called "Shining Stars." It is here where DECAL employees will be recognized by co-workers, supervisors, and managers for their successes, accomplishments, and helpfulness.

"If a co-worker has gone out of their way to help you, or you just want to highlight that something special that someone brings to the agency, this is the place to do it," said Bill Folsom, DECAL's Training and Organizational Development Specialist and a member of the EAG. "We also want to make this process as easy as possible so more employees can be recognized."

To recognize a co-worker, simply send their name, title, division, and a brief description of their accomplishment or helpful act to the Employee Advisory Group e-mail. Just type "Employee Advisory Group" into the TO: line of an e-mail. All comments will be reviewed for appropriateness and posted to <https://sharepoint.decals.ga.gov>.

Examples of employee appreciation and recognition include someone who volunteers to go above and beyond their typical job responsibilities; someone who develops creative and effective ways to perform tasks more efficiently; or someone who takes ownership of customer issues and actively seeks ways to improve services provided by DECAL. The possibilities are endless.

Got someone in mind? Then take a moment now to stop and send an e-mail to the Employee Advisory Group. You are encouraged to craft your comments around one of our three DECAL themes of Health and Safety, Quality and Organizational Excellence. For more information, call Bill Folsom at 404-463-2868. Your star may be shining right now!



*EAG members Shawnell Johnson (left) and Shyreeta Hicks proposed the idea for "Shining Stars."*

