

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



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DECAL By the Numbers

23 - Targeted counties currently unserved by the Summer Food Service Program

6,125 - Licensed and registered early care programs in Georgia

3,815 - Georgia's Pre-K Program classrooms this school year

7 - Years of experience as lead teacher required to receive waiver for CCS education credential

10 - Days to investigate a CCS Category 3 Complaint

34.28% - Portion of Georgia Lottery dollars supporting Georgia's Pre-K Program

Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Bobby Cagle



Researchers at the FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill recently issued their report from the first phase of a Pre-K longitudinal study. This study, requested by the Georgia Legislature, measured child outcomes and classroom quality and identifies areas of strengths and challenges. Overall, the findings from the study clearly support the work accomplished by Georgia's Pre-K Program. Children in the program, on average, showed significant gains in language, math, and behavioral skills.

The results demonstrate that the Pre-K program benefits children, regardless of family income or other factors. The study also removes any doubts about Pre-K being "glorified babysitting." It provides solid evidence that Georgia's Pre-K Program is preparing students for Kindergarten and is placing them on a trajectory toward success in school.

The study also found that Spanish-speaking dual language learners experienced growth in skills in both English and Spanish. However, the growth was stronger in English which suggests that we can do more to help English language learners by providing more instruction and family support in children's home language. Another recommendation of the study is that we decrease class size, as Georgia's Pre-K Program has a higher teacher:child ratio than many other states.



Spotlight On... Employee Advisory Group

An employee advisory group that assisted with the logistics of the DECAL All Employee Meeting in December is now meeting monthly to strengthen communications between the agency's more than 200 employees and senior management.

Ray Higgins, deputy commissioner of finance and administration, asked Director of Human Resources Robin Stevens and Chief Communications Officer Reg Griffin to facilitate the group, which held its first meeting in January. The initial focus of that meeting was to provide feedback on the All Employee Meeting, create a mission statement, and determine objectives and responsibilities for participants. The group also will help plan and provide feedback for agency meetings and employee communications, like Decidedly DECAL, and will contribute suggestions for employee training and development needs.

Members of the employee advisory group are:

Sonja Adams - Nutrition
Cassa Andrews - Pre-K
Shawnell Barlow - Child Care Services
Stanley Cooper - Finance
Quatavius Copeland - Legal
Johnathan Davis - Quality
Mireille Emanuels - Quality
Shyreeta Hicks - Child Care Services
Rob O'Callaghan - Research
Jackie Shivers - Pre-K

Emanuels, help desk specialist for Quality Rated who has worked with DECAL for nearly 13 years,

We are still carefully reviewing the results of the study. Over the next few weeks, we will deliver copies to the Governor and legislative leadership. We are also planning webinars for the media, providers, and other stakeholders to discuss the highlights of the study and answer any questions they may have.

We've come a long way. In 1992, Georgia's Pre-K Program was piloted to 750 at-risk four year olds and their families 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.

As commissioner, I should never be satisfied with where we are, even when the results are good. This study will help us continue to improve Georgia's Pre-K Program AND many of our other programs and initiatives as well.

Congratulations on the results of this study. The work that each of us...and the thousands of early care and education professionals in our state...are doing is not in vain. Thanks for your commitment day after day to enhance the well-being of Georgia's children.

Read more about the study at these links:
www.ajc.com and www.wabe.org.

DECAL Priority:

Health & Safety

Under the Gold Dome: Improving Child Safety Tops DECAL Legislative Agenda

When the 2013 session of the Georgia General Assembly opened on January 14, 2013, a team of DECAL employees was already in place and ready to support Commissioner Bobby Cagle in representing the agency and the needs of Georgia's youngest children before state lawmakers.

Led by Deputy Commissioner of Finance and Administration Ray Higgins, the 2013 DECAL Legislative Team includes Director of Special Projects Dee Bolden, Chief Legal Officer Ira Sudman and Chief Communications Officer Reg Griffin. Ex-officio



*Mireille
Emanuels*

said she felt "humbled and valued" when she was asked to serve. "I hope the group can provide intentional, relevant representation of staff to management and vice versa."

"I hope the group is able to establish goals based on the mission statement that is in the process of being developed and, then, set in place tools for attainment," said Cooper, a financial compliance accountant who has been with DECAL for more than six years. "The first meeting went well. Primary discussion was centered on establishing a mission statement and what each individual member sees as our function and responsibility as a group."



Stanley Cooper

Adams, a nutrition programs administrator for four years, said her hope is "that we, to the best of our ability meet the priority needs of all employees in the areas of communication, team-building, and professional development - all with the overarching goal of generating peak productivity in a positive, highly-motivated environment."



Sonja Adams

"I knew this would be a great opportunity to improve the department's morale, but most



Shawnell Barlow

importantly unite the divisions," said Barlow, a quality improvement coordinator with Child Care Services for more than two years. "I hope we are able to establish programs and systems that

will increase staff engagement and employee recognition."

"I am excited to have this venue to vet

members are Deputy Commissioner of Programs Keith Bostick, Chief Information Officer Craig Detweiler, Assistant Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K Susan Adams, Assistant Commissioner for Quality Initiatives Carol Hartman, Nutrition Director Lou Brienza, Financial Services Director Margie Landers, Human Resources Director Robin Stevens, Director of Research and Evaluation Dr. Bentley Ponder, Child Care Services Director Kristie Lewis and Legal Services Officers Christy Bearden and Clare Michaud. The team meets weekly and at other times as needed during the session.

Collectively and individually, the group represents DECAL before legislative committees and representatives throughout the session. This year's DECAL legislative agenda includes supporting Governor Deal's efforts to restore a full 180-day calendar for Georgia's Pre-K Program.

Another legislative item on which DECAL is working with Governor Deal and the legislature is to require owners, directors and all employees in a child care program to have satisfactory national, state and local background checks based on fingerprints, not just a name search. By requiring only state and local background checks 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 team also monitors any legislation impacting early child care, such as a Senate bill that would change the birth month of five-year-old children entering kindergarten from September to December and a House bill that would make the current lawful presence verification law for receiving public benefits less stringent.

"We have a great team for the 2013 legislative session and feel very optimistic about our agenda," said Higgins. "It is our goal to support Governor Deal and Commissioner Cagle in every way possible as they work with the legislature in supporting the health, safety, and early education of our youngest learners."

DECAL has received extensive media attention on these legislative issues. Follow these links for more information:

www.ajc.com, www.georgiapolicy.org, www.cbsatlanta.com.

Watch for legislative updates from the team in future

ideas and exchange thoughtful dialogue on employee matters with members of the Employee Advisory Committee," said Stevens. "These meetings also will afford regular and frequent opportunities to gauge the pulse of our most valued resources."

For more information on the Employee Advisory Group, contact Robin Stevens at 404-651-7412 or by e-mail at robin.stevens@decalfga.gov. Also look for future updates from the group in Decidedly DECAL.

Kay Hellwig Retires



DECAL Bids Farewell to Hellwig
Child Care Services Director Kristie Lewis (right) with Assistant Commissioner of Child Care Services Kay Hellwig, who retired January 31, after 34 years with the state of Georgia

Center Achieves 3-Star Rating



Kudos to Ellijay First Baptist Church
DECAL congratulates Ellijay First Baptist Church Weekday Center on becoming Georgia's first 3-star Quality Rated child care center.

Sponsors Needed for Summer

editions of Decidedly DECAL.

Child Care Consultants Receive National Child Passenger Safety Certification

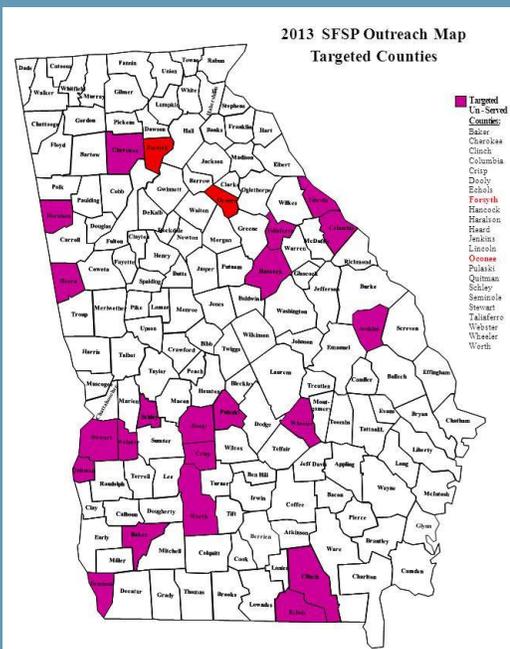
Several child care consultants from across the state participated in the National Child Passenger Safety Certification Training Program held in collaboration with the Department of Public Health, Office of Injury Prevention, and Safe Kids USA Coalition. The National Child Passenger Safety Certification Training Program certifies child passenger safety technicians who are qualified to conduct child safety seat checks where parents and caregivers receive hands-on assistance with proper use of child restraint systems and safety belts.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) developed the National Child Passenger Safety Training curriculum to ensure proper training of law and best practices to keep children safe while being transported. During the extensive interactive course, consultants were taught crash dynamics, injury prevention strategies, child restraint selection and installation, and vehicle occupant protection. Consultants participated in a combination of lectures, discussions, role-playing, and hands-on practice with a variety of child restraint and vehicle belt systems. At the end of each day, consultants completed written and hands-on exams to demonstrate their knowledge in child passenger safety.

Congratulations to the following consultants for receiving National Child Passenger Safety Certification:

Lucy Bailey, Shawnell Barlow, Wakisha Carswell, Jamie Carta, Colleen Covey, Jessica Grant, Melissa Herndon, Judy LaRue, Lacey Lewis, Suzanne Milford, Lindsay Miller, Nikiesha Neil, Delia Newell, Margaret Pringle, Carrie Spangler, Mari Springs, Garyon Stiggers-Butler, Jennifer Taylor, LaKeyshia Tucker, Ronnae Williams, and Shelly Yeomans.

Food Services Program



Unserved Counties Are Targeted

The DECAL Nutrition Team is looking for eligible non-profits to serve meals to children throughout Georgia this summer through the USDA-funded Summer Food Service Program. DECAL is targeting unserved areas like Cherokee, Haralson, and Heard counties in northwest Georgia and Baker, Crisp, Dooly, Pulaski, Worth, and other counties in southwest Georgia. For more information, call toll free at 855-550-7377 (SFSP) or email SFSP@decalfga.gov.

Quick Links

[DECAL on Facebook](#)



Among those who participated in child passenger safety training were (Back Row, L-R) Shelly Yeomans, Judy LaRue, (Front Row, L-R) Mari Springs and Yoeman's daughter, Cassie Jo Perkins.

DECAL Priority:

Quality

Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards Near Completion

The Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) are nearing completion. One of the last steps in the revision process is to post the standards for public review and feedback. We are developing a website that launches in late February. It will allow stakeholders to examine the GELDS and make comments. The website address will be www.gelds.decalfga.gov. Eventually, the site will serve as a portal for all GELDS information and resources. There will be links to the webinars we are producing with Georgia Public Broadcasting (GPB), opportunities for professional development, lesson planning ideas, and an area for parent resources. GPB also is gathering footage of model learning programs that will showcase exemplary teaching practices using the GELDS. We will be able to attach video clips to each indicator on the website to show what that indicator would look like in action. As we move forward with the GELDS roll out this year, this new website will be a valuable resource for all stakeholders.



February Birthdays



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

- 1 - Taquella L. Austin
- 1 - Bobby D. Cagle
- 3 - Erica L. Courson
- 3 - Janine J. Joseph
- 5 - Lauris W. Cooper
- 5 - Christina H. Mitchell
- 8 - Falita S. Flowers
- 8 - Canzata Prince
- 9 - Catherine M. Broussard
- 12 - Stanley E. Cooper
- 14 - Linda Barge
- 14 - Angelica L. Flucas
- 15 - Mireille Emanuels
- 18 - Christy McCray
- 18 - Beverly E. Pollard
- 20 - Judy A. Blasengame
- 24 - Carrie L. Spangler
- 25 - Michele Rauton
- 27 - Melissa K. Adams

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
(Secretary)

Kathy Howell, Carrollton
Third Congressional District

Phil Davis, Norcross
Fourth Congressional District

Carlene Talton, Decatur
Fifth Congressional District

DECAL Priority:

Organizational Excellence

Collaborative Unites Georgia's Education Community



In 2005, recognizing the power of collaboration, some forward thinking Georgians led by former Governor Sonny Perdue created the Alliance of Education Agency Heads (AEAHA). DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle serves on this alliance along with agency heads from the Governor's Office, the Georgia Department of Education, the University System of Georgia, the Technical College System of Georgia, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, the Georgia Student Finance Commission and the Governor's Office of Student Achievement.

Since its founding, the primary focus of the AEAHA has been to create a smooth education "pipeline" running from Georgia's Pre-K Program through K-12 and on to college and career, uniting the education community in Georgia. The AEAHA has always felt that its work was impactful and worthwhile, but last month it received solid confirmation from an objective and respected national source.

Each year, the national publication and website *Education Week* issues a report called "Quality Counts." This year's report shows Georgia leading the nation in connecting its K-12 education system with early learning, higher education, and the world of work. In fact, the state was the first ever in the country to receive a perfect 100 score in the category of transitions and alignment, jumping to first place from sixth place the year before. Georgia was one of only eight states in the nation to score an A in this section.

To achieve this score, Georgia had to prove itself across 14 policies, including curriculum alignment from Georgia's Pre-K Program through college and programs to help students not meeting school readiness benchmarks.

This is your report card, and Commissioner Cagle congratulates and thanks you for all of the efforts that made this possible. From ensuring the health and safety of children in over 6,000 child care programs statewide, to administering Georgia's Pre-K Program for 84,000 students in this 20th anniversary year, everyone

Dawn Henderson, Marietta
Sixth Congressional District

Vacant
Seventh Congressional District

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

Vacant
Ninth Congressional District

Janice Gallimore, Greensboro
Tenth Congressional District

Victor Morgan, Cartersville
Eleventh Congressional District
(Chair)

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

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Sarswathi Seelam, Dee Bolden, Robin Stevens, Mireille Emanuels, Leah Klatzker, Sonja Adams, and Michele Allen.

here at DECAL has helped achieve this impressive national attention for Georgia. You helped build the bridge that successfully transitions four year olds from Pre-K to kindergarten, elementary school, and beyond.

"What a privilege we have to serve Georgia's youngest learners at this crucial time in their lives," said Commissioner Cagle. "More and more, we can see how success in college and career in their late teens and twenties is rooted in their first five years of life."



The Alliance of Education Agency Heads (AEAH) includes (L-R) Bonnie Holliday, executive director of the Governor's Office of Student Achievement; Georgia School Superintendent Dr. John Barge; Ron Jackson, commissioner, Technical College System of Georgia; Hank Huckaby, chancellor, University System of Georgia; Kelly Henson, executive secretary, Georgia Professional Standards Commission; Bobby Cagle, commissioner, Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning; Tim Connell, president, Georgia Student Finance Commission; Kristin Bernhard, education policy advisor to Governor Nathan Deal; and Amy Mast, director, Georgia Alliance of Education Agency Heads.