

# Decidedly DECAL

*Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are*



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## DECAL By the Numbers

- 102,773** - Children served by Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Program in FY 2013
- 309** - Georgia child care programs that are Quality Rated
- 6.5** - Hours in a Pre-K school day
- 22** - Students in a Georgia's Pre-K class
- 196** - Head Start/Pre-K blended classes in Georgia
- 118 Million** - Meals served to date through CACFP/SFSP in 2013/2014



## Quick Links

## Commissioner's Corner

*by Commissioner Bobby Cagle*



Last month, a once well respected high school principal and child care center operator in Georgia pleaded guilty to stealing nearly \$2 million from the DECAL administered Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) that partially reimburses child care programs for the costs of meals served to needy children. According to an investigation by the U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta, from 2007 to 2010 Dr. Antonio T. Hurt falsified the number of eligible students and meals at his "Bright Star" child care centers and kept the inflated portions of the payments for himself - approximately \$1.8 million over the two-year period.

Dr. Hurt allegedly used fraudulently claimed reimbursement money to send his children to private schools, lease high-end luxury vehicles, buy expensive gifts and jewelry, and live well beyond his means in a six-bedroom home with a swimming pool. Sentencing is scheduled for June 18.

News of Dr. Hurt's conviction was carried extensively in the media, here and around the country, and I hope his conviction sends a strong warning to anyone who might consider taking advantage of this program through fraud or deception. As DECAL employees, I assure you that we are doing everything possible to prevent this sort of thing from ever happening again.

CACFP and our Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) represent a combined annual budget of over \$121 million and approximately 82 million meals served throughout Georgia. Similarly, Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Program represents nearly \$200 million, serving around 55,000 children each month. These monies are largely federal tax dollars, and we are doing everything possible to be good stewards of these resources so desperately needed by Georgia's most vulnerable citizens.

Our Senior Leadership Team is personally involved with me in these efforts. Assistant Commissioner for Quality Initiatives Carol Hartman serves as Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Administrator over CAPS; Deputy Commissioner Ray Higgins and Rian Ringsrud direct our expanded Audits & Compliance Team; Chief Legal Officer Ira Sudman has strengthened our relationships with the State Attorney General, Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) and federal authorities to prosecute anyone who commits fraud; and Chief Information Officer Craig Detweiler and his team are helping us use enhanced technology to better administer these programs.

Recent advancements in technology will help us prevent cases like Dr. Hurt's and Bright Star going forward. Using computer-based algorithms, we can regularly scan data for any irregularities in reporting and initiate audits based on discrepancies.

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## Special Shout Out for Georgia's Pre-K Program



Thanks to Monica Warren, Director of Early Learning for Crisp County Pre-K in Cordele, Georgia, and her students for spelling out their love for Georgia's Pre-K Program during the Week of the Young Child Celebration.

## Seeking Creative Input for New Portal Name

This article is to ask for your creative input as DECAL develops an exciting new feature that will support professional development in the early care and learning community.

In July 2014, DECAL will launch the first phase of its new web-based system that combines the calendar feature of Georgia Training Approval and newly-added training registration, with entry into the Professional Development Registry (PDR) for "one-stop shopping."

The first phase will capture internal trainings, those provided by or on behalf of CCS, Pre-K, GAPITC and Quality Rated. The new system will allow designated staff to schedule and monitor enrollment in classes; program directors, and/or individual teachers to register on-line for classes; and, after an ECE professional completes the class, the system will automatically enter the class and credit hour information directly into the participant's PDR profile.

What are the benefits of this new system?

- This will essentially eliminate the need for paper certificates.
- In onsite reviews, consultants will be able to view staff PDR profiles to determine if the required training hours have been met.
- Training listed in a PDR profile will decrease the incidence of misrepresentation and the production of fraudulent documents.

But to really succeed, we need the support of everyone at DECAL. Each of you - whether in the field, Twin Towers, or elsewhere - talk with providers and review reports every day. Remember the basic rule, "If you see something, say something." Report any suspicious activity to your supervisor, the Audits & Compliance Team, or to me personally. I will do everything in my power to protect the integrity of these programs.

## Special Message from Commissioner Cagle

Happy Anniversary! As you heard at the All Staff Meeting, May marks DECAL's 10th year in existence. In May 2004 Governor Sonny Perdue signed legislation that created Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning and appointed Marsha Moore as the first Commissioner. So much has happened in our first short decade. We continue to be one of only three state agencies in the nation dedicated to early childhood education, and our roles and responsibilities only continue to grow. I have never been more proud of an agency, its commitment to young learners, and its accomplishments. And I am honored and humbled each day to be called your Commissioner. I hope you share my excitement and optimism about the future.

Now, let's get started on the next ten years and make them even better!



*From our photo album: Governor Sonny Perdue is pictured above in 2004 signing legislation creating the new agency while his twin granddaughters look on. At right, Governor Perdue is shown with DECAL's first commissioner Marsha Moore.*



## DECAL Priority:

## Health & Safety

### DECAL Alerts Child Care Programs & Parents about Leaving Children in Vehicles

DECAL is alerting child care providers and parents about the dangers of leaving children unattended in vehicles after a five-year-old child was allegedly left in a child care van in Macon April 14 for more than four hours. A similar incident in Jonesboro resulted in the death of a child in June 2011.

In an April 16 letter to nearly 6,000 child care programs and over 30,000 parents, Commissioner Bobby Cagle wrote, "The provider [in the recent incident in Macon] completed the transportation paperwork indicating that adults had checked the vehicle twice. I submit to you that if the vehicle had been carefully checked by two adults, that child would not have been left in the vehicle."

DECAL will have a central database to collect and analyze training trends, gaps, and other workforce data.

HERE'S WHERE YOU COME IN: We need a name for this new portal or point of entry.

For example,

**Gateway Georgia -**

**Portal to Training and the Professional Registry**

Or

**Georgia TPR (Training and Professional Registry)**

So let's get the creative juices flowing. Please forward any ideas for names for the system to Georgia Thomas or Traci Bronner by close of business Friday, May 9. The project team, composed of staff across divisions, will review suggestions and select a name that communicates the function of the system and that people can remember.

Thanks for your support. We look forward to receiving your entries. Georgia Thomas will take the person submitting the winning entry to lunch in the Twin Towers cafeteria.

Sincerely,

Georgia Thomas, Professional Development Manager

Traci Bronner, IT Project Manager



Georgia Thomas and Traci Bronner

## May Birthdays



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

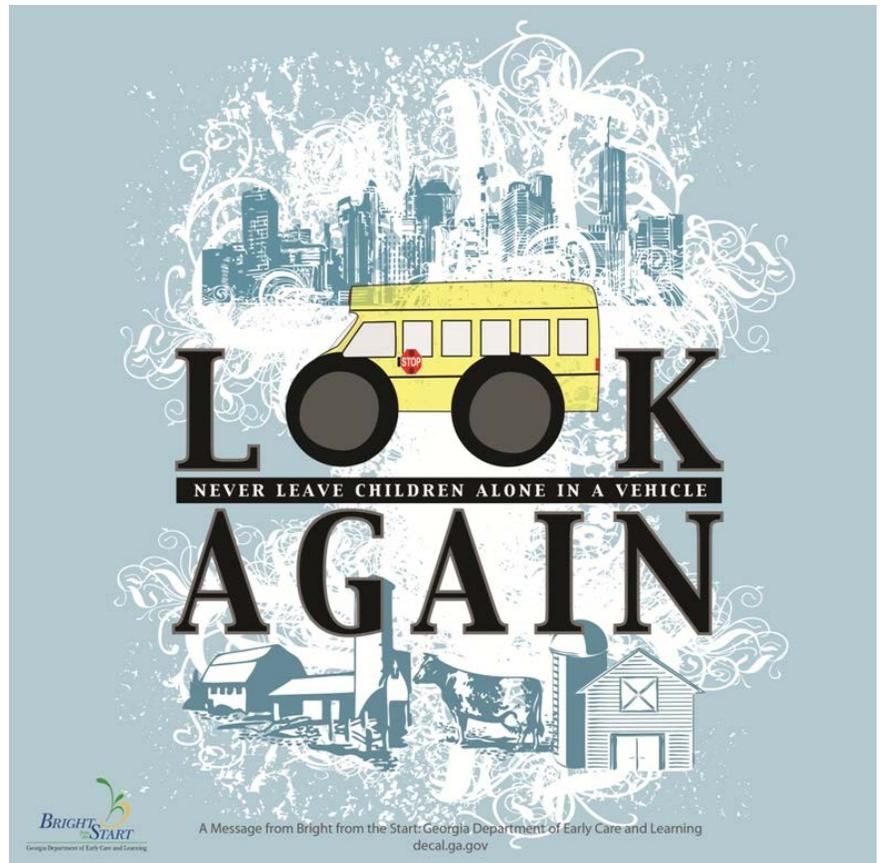
- 1 - Karen Mobley
- 2 - Sharon Aston
- 4 - Taurus Jackson
- 11 - Reg Griffin
- 13 - Melissa Davis
- 13 - Melissa Donovan
- 14 - Lindsay Miller
- 14 - Niya Randolph
- 14 - Judy Steigele
- 15 - Crystal Hoffman
- 15 - Maria Reznik
- 16 - Jennifer Bridgeman

Cagle said as a result of the April 14 incident, DECAL is re-issuing the directive originally issued last summer: Comply FULLY with all rules involving transportation or be subject to enforcement actions. According to DECAL records, in FY2012, 21 children were left in vehicles by child care providers; 17 in FY2013; and already 18 in FY2014.

"DECAL will take swift and decisive action when providers fail to comply with rules governing transportation, and we will use our enforcement authority to ensure that this trend does not continue," said Cagle. "I also intend to encourage criminal prosecution of those responsible for transporting children who fail to ensure that no children are left on the vehicle upon reaching their destination."

Cagle is asking parents to serve as Georgia's "eyes" in their communities and to contact local law enforcement if they ever see a child left unattended in a vehicle. "By carefully following the state's transportation rules and by remaining vigilant when transporting children, we can help prevent senseless tragedies and keep Georgia's children safe and healthy and their families intact."

DECAL has posted more information about the safe transportation of children and the dangers of heatstroke on its website at [www.decals.ga.gov](http://www.decals.ga.gov) and plans a major public awareness campaign around the issue called "Look Again" for later this month.



## In Step with the DECAL Walking Challenge

The DECAL Wellness Committee has announced the launch of "Witness the Fitness: DECAL Walking Challenge 2014," a friendly fitness competition between DECAL departments, with the goal of promoting increased physical activity and optimal health. Departments will be broken up into teams, which were introduced during the All Staff Meeting.

FREE pedometers were given out at lunch on May 1st, and Chief Information Officer Craig Detweiler introduced how to log daily steps in the new POLAR system. The competition will run during the entire month of May with the winning department and

- 18 - Sandra McNeal
- 19 - Robyn Parham
- 20 - Mary Stoklas
- 22 - Angelette Anderson
- 23 - Heather Reeves
- 24 - Iko Ezell-Blackmon
- 24 - Lakeyshia Tucker
- 29 - Amy Browder
- 29 - April Brown
- 30 - Sonya James

## 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, 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, 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

individuals announced on June 2.

"While participation is not mandatory, team walking averages will be based on the entire team's average steps," explained Jennifer Popadiuk, DECAL Nutrition Project Manager. "If someone on your team is not walking and recording their daily steps, team totals will drop dramatically, so they should encourage their co-workers to participate."

The winning DECAL department will maintain bragging rights for one year and the Wellness Committee will award gift cards to the three individuals with the most steps during the month of May.



*DECAL Wellness Committee members (L-R, top row) Jennifer Popadiuk, Melissa Donovan, Randy Hudgins, Margaret Pringle, (L-R, bottom row) Barbara Sanders, and Erika Sims.*

## DECAL Priority:

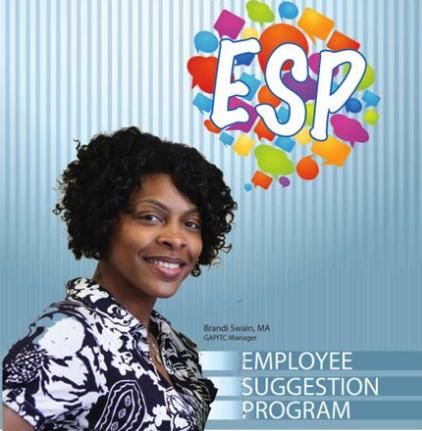
# Quality

### Pre-K, Early Learning Curriculum Review Underway

DECAL conducts a review of curriculum every three to five years in order to guide providers as they make curriculum decisions. A range of curriculum models are submitted for approval. Some curriculum models are highly structured and provide detailed instructions for teachers. Others emphasize guiding principles and expect teachers to determine how best to implement these principles. Regardless of their goals and the degree of flexibility, all curricula should be designed to promote consistency across early childhood programs using appropriate instructional techniques and early learning standards.

In response to the recent revision and implementation of the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS), DECAL initiated a curriculum review in fall 2013 that will be completed by summer 2014. The curriculum review helps determine which curriculum models best meet the needs of Georgia's youngest learners and provide optimal alignment with the GELDS. The process will result in an approved curriculum list for Georgia's Pre-K Programs and a recommended curriculum list for

You know that **great idea** you have for our department?  
 We cannot read your **MIND**.  
 That is why DECAL has



**EMPLOYEE SUGGESTION PROGRAM**

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*We are committed to nurturing Georgia's youngest children, keeping them safe and healthy, and to enriching their lives.*

Georgia's birth to five early learning programs.

### Nutritionists Laud Dole-Sponsored Educational Trip

Nutritionists from 30 of Georgia's three-star Quality Rated child care programs recently toured the Dole Packaged Foods Research Campus near Charlotte, North Carolina to learn how to encourage good nutrition in their programs. DECAL partnered with Dole and Lt. Governor Casey Cagle's Healthy Kids Georgia Program to host the bus trip on Wednesday and Thursday, April 2-3, 2014.

During their visit, the Georgia group heard from Dr. Nicholas Gillitt, Ph.D., Vice President of Nutrition and Director of the Dole Nutrition Institute. They also toured the research campus and interacted with other leading experts in the field. Participants raved about the experience and predicted long lasting impacts on their programs.

"We work just as hard providing healthy nourishment for the children as we do providing nourishment for their brains and we love it," said Antoinette Elliott of All Our Children Private Childcare, a three-star Quality Rated program in Lithonia, Georgia. "I learned half of a banana plus water every 15 minutes during exercise is better than any energy drink; crushed or milled chia seeds are better than flax for health boosts, and are safe for adding to the children's smoothies and cereal. I now believe our children will have an increased life span simply by eating healthy."

Michelle Cutler-Ervin, Director of the three-star Quality Rated Child Development Center at Central Georgia Technical College in Warner Robins, Georgia, agreed. "I enjoyed meeting so many other early childhood professionals who were passionate about providing an appropriate, well balanced menu for our youngest learners," Cutler-Ervin explained. "I appreciated the many partners that came together to support our continued learning regarding nutrition. The information gained from this trip will further enhance our program as we will be able to explain the nutritional science that supports the value of our menu."

Other participating programs included Butts County Head Start Program and Pre-K in Jackson; Child Development Lab at the McPhaul Center in Athens; First Baptist Church of Ellijay Weekday Program; Hinesville Child Care Learning Center; Lanette L. Suttles Child Development Center at Georgia State University; McIntosh Trail Early Childhood Development Council; Open Arms Christian Child Development Center in Kennesaw; Open Arms Lutheran Child Development Center in Atlanta; Sheltering Arms Model Teaching Center in Atlanta; Spalding County Head Start and Pre-K in Griffin; The Sunshine House #49 in Kennesaw; Wilkes County Head Start; and Family Day Care Home Providers Linda Davis, Antoinette Elliott, and Carolyn Pleasant.

### The Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Rejana Albertson, Ettoniet Anderson, Leigh Ann B. Hendrix, Sabrina Henry, Peggy Kosater, Rhonda Parker, and Reg Griffin.



Nutritionists pose at the Charlotte Motor Speedway.

**DECAL Priority:**

## **Organizational Excellence**

### **Landers Retiring; McPherson Named DECAL Finance Director**

Margie Landers, Financial Services Director for DECAL, has announced that she will retire from the State of Georgia in June 2014. Ray Higgins, Deputy Commissioner of Finance and Administration, has named Sharon McPherson, Accounting Manager, as Landers' successor.

Landers began her career with the state of Georgia in 1987. Over the past 27 years, she has held four different positions in three state departments, including the Department of Administrative Services and the Department of Human Resources, where she worked with Georgia Industries for the Blind.

"DECAL has been most fortunate to have Margie leading our financial team since the agency was created in 2004," said Higgins. "Under her leadership, DECAL has enjoyed 11 straight years of clean financial audits. Since Margie and Sharon have worked so well together as a team, naming Sharon as successor was an easy decision."



*Margie Landers and Sharon McPherson*

McPherson began her career with the state in March 1995 as an Accounting Tech I in the Accounts Receivable unit of the Department of Administrative Services. She met Landers shortly after that when she was promoted to the Risk Management Unit. She moved to the Office of School Readiness in March, 2002, as the General Ledger Accounting Manager under Landers. McPherson took on all accounting responsibilities in July 2004 with the creation of DECAL.

McPherson is a May 1990 graduate of Auburn University with a bachelor's degree in Nutrition and Foods and is a Certified Governmental Financial Manager (CGFM). She is an avid runner and active volunteer with the Boy Scouts

## "Leadership at All Levels" Theme of All Staff Meeting



More than 250 DECAL employees participated in the agency's annual All Staff Meeting this week at the Georgia International Convention Center in College Park. The meeting's theme was "Leadership at All Levels" and featured presentations by the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute, Georgia First Lady Sandra Deal, and Consultant Ann Cramer. In photo, (L-R) Deputy Commissioner of System Reform Kristin Bernhard discusses DECAL's Strategic Plan; Commissioner Bobby Cagle thanks First Lady Sandra Deal for serving as a lunch speaker; and the Employee Advisory Group's Shawnell Barlow (left) and Jackie Shivers dance to "Happy" during a skit highlighting all of DECAL's services.