

# Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



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## DECAL By the Numbers

**5,001** - Licensed child care programs in Georgia

**80,814** - Students enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K Program

**995** - Quality Rated child care programs in Georgia

**38,585,591** - Meals served so far in FY2016 by Child and Adult Care Food Program

**\$346,179** - Child Care Expansion Grants awarded to four early childhood care and education organizations

## Quick Links

[DECAL on Facebook](#)

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## Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs

Dear DECALers,

In keeping with the special, statewide celebration with which May begins, my letter to you this month is all about YOU...and how much I **appreciate** your commitment, not just to DECAL, but, more importantly, to children and families in our state. To best convey my appreciation, below in italics are quotations related to expressing appreciation to staff...and then following in red is what I want to say to each of you personally.

*A group of people get together and exist as an institution we call a company [or in our case, a state agency] so they are able to accomplish something **collectively** that they could not accomplish **separately** - they make a **contribution to society**, a phrase which sounds trite but is fundamental. - David Packard (of Hewlett-Packard)*

**No matter where across this state you are based, your individual contribution as you work faithfully day in and day out ...added to the efforts of your co-workers ... is making a "contribution to society." Thank you for working TOGETHER to positively impact Georgia's society for decades to come.**

*A perfect employee is the one who **inspires** his boss as much as his boss inspires him.*

**Many of you, whom I've had the honor to meet, inspire me with your perseverance, patience, passion, and personal integrity and make me proud to be your commissioner.**

*The world of business [or in our case, of serving children and families] survives less on leadership skills and more on the commitment and dedication of **passionate employees** like you.*

**I highly value DECAL's dedicated leaders, but we all recognize and appreciate that our work would not get done without you.**



[DECAL on Instagram](#)  
[DECAL on Pinterest](#)  
[DECAL Website](#)



## May Birthdays



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

1 - Karen Mobley  
1 - Margaret Tarrant  
2 - Sharon Ashton  
2 - Margie Cook  
4 - Kriste Elia  
4 - Jill O'Meara  
6 - Clesia Jackson  
7 - Michelle Hughes  
7 - Twylah Tippett  
8 - Thea Stevens  
11 - Reg Griffin  
13 - Melissa Davis  
13 - Melissa Donovan  
14 - Lindsay Miller  
15 - Crystal Hoffman  
15 - Maria Reznik  
17 - Dianne Clarke  
17 - Kori Woodward-Dickens  
18 - Sandra McNeal  
19 - Robyn Parham  
20 - Mary Stoklas  
22 - Angelette Anderson  
24 - Iko Ezell-Blackmon  
24 - Lakeyshia Tucker  
25 - Jennifer Delorme  
26 - Shericka Blount  
26 - Margarita Scott  
29 - Amy Browder  
29 - April Brown  
30 - Sonya James  
31 - Grushan Robinson

## A Day in the Life of Valerie Blackmon

As Community Coordinator for  
DECAL's Bibb County Early

*No one who achieves success does so without **acknowledging the help of others**. The wise and confident acknowledge this help with **gratitude**.* - Alfred North Whitehead (mathematician and philosopher)

As commissioner of DECAL, I acknowledge...with gratitude...that any success our department has achieved or will achieve is possible **ONLY** because of your help. Since coming to DECAL almost two years ago, I've consistently told you that this department is considered by many in state government to be the gold standard of state agencies. That reputation isn't bestowed because of exemplary leadership or a perfectly written and executed strategic plan or substantive mission and vision statements. That reputation has been **earned** by those of you in every unit of this department who interact with each other, with providers, with families, with policy makers, and with the public. Thank you for your service.

With warmest thanks and appreciation,

## State Employee Recognition Week is May 2 - 6

Georgia's annual State Employee Recognition Week (SERW) will be observed May 2-6, 2016; and in concert with the celebration, several activities have been planned for our DECAL staff.

"The purpose of this week is to honor the thousands of loyal and hard-working individuals who make up the state's workforce," said Robin Stevens, DECAL Director of Human Resources. "DECAL is made up of more than 350 outstanding men and women dedicated to supporting parents, teachers and providers, and who know that investing in our youngest learners is critical to the long-term economic growth and potential of Georgia. During this particular week, we acknowledge the passion and drive of our employees who work so diligently to achieve and maintain the reputation of excellence our agency has earned."

Stevens said the DECAL Employee Advisory Group (EAG) brainstormed several suggestions and chose to sponsor the following events for the participation and pleasure of their colleagues:

- Casual Dress: Dress more leisurely throughout the week, unless conducting appointments with external clients.
- Virtual Bouquet: Express your appreciation of a fellow employee (based in the field or Atlanta office) to acknowledge their work, support, help, and guidance by sending a virtual bouquet of flowers with a personalized note.
- \*CALi's "Pet-A-Like" Photo Contest: Submit photos of yourself with your own dog, cat or other household pet(s) to our agency's new mascot, CALi, who with the assistance of her two legged friends, will determine which DECAL employees look most like their favorite pet(s).
- Candy Grams: Recognize and treat a DECAL employee(s) with the delivery of a pre-ordered candy or alternative snack.
- \*Instagram Splash: Display your favorite DECAL selfie by posting a photo of yourself at work (in your home office, child care program, Pre-K classroom, or Twin Towers) on your Instagram account using the hashtag: #decalserv. Note: Be sure to get permission from anyone

Education Empowerment Zone (E3Z), Valerie Blackmon spends much of her work day promoting Quality Rated.

E3Zs are regions of the state that work with DECAL and other state agencies to promote early education system reform initiatives and partnerships that support better outcomes for young children. An important part of that is increasing participation in Quality Rated.



Valerie Blackmon with First Lady Sandra Deal

"Some of the challenges I face is the lack of family and public awareness about Quality Rated; motivating child care learning and family home learning providers to complete the QR process; and (needing) a strong QR marketing plan to increase family and public knowledge," she said.

In April, the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) and DECAL introduced a statewide public awareness campaign for Quality Rated, and Blackmon believes the more that can be done in that regard, the better. If named DECAL Commissioner for a day, Blackmon said she would "find a donor to cover a marketing campaign for Quality Rated and its benefits to run every day, 24 hours a day."

In addition to working with the Child Care Resource and Referral team to develop strategies to promote Quality Rated, a typical day on the job for Blackmon involves attending meetings of the Early Learning Network, the Education Commission and the Quality Rated Peer Support Network; connecting providers with community resources or services; gathering data for community leaders; and distributing flyers regarding events or meetings.

Blackmon, who began working for DECAL in February 2015, said what she enjoys most about her job is "sharing with other community stakeholders and families the importance of quality child care settings, collaborating to develop sustainable and replicable systems within the community, and working with the local school system to support children's development and learning."

When not on the job, Blackmon enjoys calligraphy, writing, coloring, and cooking. The Texas native has three children - Billy Jr., Andrae, and Chloe - and a granddaughter, Kyla Wiley-Spears "who is my heart."

Her favorite quote is by Martin Luther King Jr.: "Intelligence plus character-that is the goal of true education."

## Take the Activity Challenge

else appearing in your photo.

- \*Baker's Choice: Demonstrate and share your "kitchen diva" talents by donating homemade treats for the purchase and delight of your DECAL family .
- "And the Winner Is:" Being an employee has its advantages! Twice a day, names will be drawn and gift cards awarded to active DECAL employees.

\*Participation in certain events automatically enters your name into a gift card drawing.

*Monies collected through the candy and bake sales underwrite the costs of the gift cards and candy purchases.*

## GEEARS and DECAL Introduce New Quality Rated PSA

The Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) and DECAL have introduced a new statewide public awareness campaign for Quality Rated. The message of the campaign is simple: Quality Rated helps families take the mystery out of searching for child care.

We will begin sharing this message early this summer with public service announcements on television and radio throughout Georgia and through online advertisements specifically targeting families searching for child care.



Parents and families need an independent, trustworthy resource to help them find high-quality child care, preschool and pre-K programs. That's where Georgia's Quality Rated comes in.

Quality Rated gives families greater confidence in their child care choice because they know that independent early education experts assess whether programs apply research-based best practices such as:

- Employing qualified and well-trained teachers
- Providing a safe, healthy and caring environment
- Implementing individualized instruction
- Offering a curriculum that prepares kids for kindergarten
- Including focuses on both active learning and social-emotional development
- Engaging families
- Providing a low teacher-student ratio

The new public service announcement can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kicekY217Zs&feature=youtu.be>

## "Look Again" News Conference is May 31 at the Capitol

Governor Nathan Deal and First Lady Sandra Deal are joining with DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs again this year in calling for families and caregivers of children to have heightened awareness of the dangers of leaving

The Wellness Committee challenges you to participate in a fitness challenge in Liberty Plaza on May 13th and May 20th at noon.

In the past months, several DECAL staff have joined in the fitness movement by participating in our Health and Fitness sessions after work, teaching Zumba classes, running marathons and triathlons, and bicycling in the evenings and on weekends. This Activity Challenge is right across the street from our offices and takes place during the work day...so it's easily accessible to everyone at Twin Towers.

The fitness Challenge will consist of a Relay Obstacle Course: 5 pushups, 10 sit ups, 20 Jumping Jacks, a bean bag toss, and skip to the finish line! Teams will compete for a prize, and we will have a Double Dutch contest.

Team up with your workout buddies and come "witness the fitness" with the Wellness Committee! (Actually it's more than just WITNESSING the fitness; more importantly, it's experiencing the fitness.)

To prepare for the Challenge, we will warm up to the "Let's Move Your Body" routine by Beyoncé! So, we also challenge you to learn the dance routine for the warm up by going to the video on YouTube: <http://conta.cc/1Wsm6nw>

Please bravely accept our Challenge and show up for Activity Challenge Day in Liberty Plaza on Friday, May 13th and May 20th from 12 noon to 1 p.m.

We promise: Not only will you feel better physically, you'll also have fun.

And don't forget to log in your daily steps in POLAR while you are having fun starting May 2, 2016.

Pictured below are members of DECAL's Health and Wellness Team. Front row (L-R) are Barbara Sanders, Saritha Gummadi, Brenda Haynesworth, and Kori Woodward-Dickens. Back row (L-R) are Connie Fisher, Julie Harnage, Craig Detweiler, Dorothy Mitchell, and Melissa Donovan. Not pictured are Gary Amos, Alisia Pickett, Demetria Thornton, Tammie Baldwin, Christie Bearden, Quatavius Copeland, Bridgette Merrett, Shani Drake, and Sharda Short.



children unattended in vehicles. Officials hope a new video, set to premiere at a Tuesday, May 31, 2016 news conference at the State Capitol, will help prevent children's heatstroke deaths this summer.

"During our state's hot summer months, there is a higher risk of serious injury or death as a result of a child being left alone inside a vehicle," Governor Deal stated at last year's event. "I ask all Georgians to join me in preventing future loss of life by being aware of your surroundings and never leaving a child in a car, even for just a minute. Lives can be saved if we take the time to Look Again."

Commissioner Jacobs said over 370,000 children in Georgia are cared for daily by approximately 5,000 child care centers most of whom regularly transport children. "When we receive calls about incidents where children are left in vehicles, we investigate each incident," Jacobs explained.

Jacobs said "Look Again" is a message not just to child care programs and teachers but to anyone caring for a child -- parents and grandparents, other family members, neighbors and friends -- to always account for the children in their care as they drive them from place to place. "When you arrive at your destination, check the front and back of your car, and after you've looked, just to be sure, look again. There is absolutely no reason for a child to suffer or die in these conditions," she stressed.

Officials ask the public to be their eyes and ears in the community, and if they see a child left alone in a vehicle, call 911 immediately; emergency personnel are trained to respond.



**Let Us Hear  
From You!**



*Governor Nathan Deal, First Lady Sandra Deal, and Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs recently recorded the new "Look Again" public service announcement for 2016. The PSA will be introduced on May 31 during the Look Again event at the Capitol.*

### **Fannin is First County with All Child Care Programs Participating in Quality Rated**

DECAL announced last month that Fannin County is the first county in Georgia where all eligible child care programs are Quality Rated or are working toward earning a Quality Rated star rating.

Those Fannin County child care providers are Mountain Area Christian Academy, MileStones Learning Center & Childcare, The Learning Depot, and Fannin County Head Start/Pre-K.

"This outstanding level of participation shows that child care providers in Fannin County are serious about providing high quality care and education to children and families in their communities," said DECAL Commissioner Amy. M. Jacobs. "Fannin County's child care providers can be proud of this accomplishment that ultimately benefits Georgia's youngest citizens."

"I appreciate the hard work and dedication of these child care providers to strive for the highest standards of care for the children of our area," said Speaker David Ralston (R-Blue Ridge), who represents Fannin County in the Georgia House of Representatives. "We know that early childhood

You know that great idea you have for our agency?

We cannot read your mind.

That is why DECAL has

# ESP

## 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:

#### 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

Dawnn Henderson, Marietta  
Sixth Congressional District

Vacant  
Seventh Congressional District

care and education have a profound impact on the lives of children and having access to these providers will make a significant, positive difference in their futures."

### Congratulations to the newest QUALITY RATED child care programs!

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| Appling County Head Start, Baxley ★               | ★★ Latrenda's World For Learning, Macon                      |
| Norma Bouchamoun, Marietta ★★                     | ★★ Miller Plaza Learning Center, Milledgeville               |
| Felisa R. Brown, Hinesville ★★                    | ★★★ Lisa M. Morris, McDonough                                |
| Buford Headstart/Pre-K, Buford ★                  | ★★ Dhandai Munna, Stone Mountain                             |
| Building Foundations Learning Academy, Mableton ★ | ★★★ Ninth District Douglas Head Start, Douglasville          |
| Rebecca V. Carter, Decatur ★                      | ★★★ Peterson Avenue Head Start/<br>Early Head Start, Douglas |
| Champions Christian Academy, Stone Mountain ★     | ★★★ Pookie Bear Learning Center, Savannah                    |
| Childcare Network #134, Norcross ★                | ★★★ Phyllis D. Redding, Bainbridge                           |
| Childcare Network #227, Macon ★                   | ★★★ Brenda A. Scott, Stone Mountain                          |
| Childcare Network #4, Columbus ★★                 | ★★★ Ollie F. Scott, Adel                                     |
| Coffee County Head Start, Douglas ★★              | ★★★ Seven Branches Academy, Alpharetta                       |
| Creative Achievers Learning Academy, Rex ★        | ★★★ Smart Kids Childcare/Learning Center, Lithia Springs     |
| Doodlebug's Child Learning Center, Guyton ★       | ★★★ Jestine M. Smith, Savannah                               |
| E T's Playhouse, Albany ★★                        | ★★★ Pamela R. Stokes, Valdosta                               |
| Five Forks Academy, Lilburn ★                     | ★★★ Valley Oaks Learning Center, Riverdale                   |
| Juliette Gadson-Kyles, Savannah ★★                | ★★★ Barbara Walton, Adel                                     |
| Janice L. Greene, Warner Robins ★★                | ★★★ Ware County Head Start Center, Waycross                  |
| Yvonne Guest, Albany ★★                           |  |

### The Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Christi Moore, Robin Currie, Darlene Sims, Karyn Presley, Cresia Jackson, Suzanne Harbin, and Lari Lyn Beyer.

Luann Purcell, Ed.D., Warner Robins  
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

Vacant  
Thirteenth Congressional District

Tangela Johnson, Cohutta  
Fourteenth Congressional District