

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



DECAL By the Numbers

- 3,235** - Child Care Learning Centers
- 1,143** - Family Child Care Learning Centers
- 71,538** - Students enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K
- 3,300** - Pre-K waiting lists
- \$6.4 million** - EXPAND Grants investment
- 2,902** - Quality Rated programs

Follow DECAL on Social Media



New Episodes
Every Wednesday

Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs

Dear Fellow DECALers,

DECAL today doesn't look anything like it did in 2004 when it was created. Why? Because our department has EVOLVED in response to the changing needs of Georgia's children, families, and the early care and education industry AND to emerging research on early childhood.



One of the most recent, exciting developments in our evolution is our focus on **infant and early childhood mental health**.

When most of us think about mental health, it's usually associated with adults. But, young children, especially those who experience trauma, loss, and other stressors, can develop mental health issues that result in challenging behaviors at home and in the classroom or the inability to form healthy relationships with other children and adults.

I agree with Kate Middleton, the Princess of Wales, who said, "A child's mental health is just as important as their physical health and deserves the same quality of support." I am proud that DECAL is providing quality support for children's mental health through our Infant/Toddler Program, Inclusion and Behavior Support Services, and the SEEDS for Success initiative.

Soon after you read this newsletter, we'll be celebrating **Children's Mental Health Week, May 6-10**, to help raise awareness about this important factor in a child's development. As you visit child care centers, family child care learning homes, or nutrition sponsors this week, encourage them to visit our website to learn more about enhancing infant and early childhood

**Celebrate
State Employee
Recognition Week,
May 5-11, 2024**



Georgia Dept
of Early Care
and Learning

mental health.

DECAL has always been about children's academic, social emotional, and physical development. Now our emphasis on identifying and resolving a child's mental health needs will make us even more effective in preparing Georgia's children ages birth to 5 for school...and for life.

Gratefully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Amy M. Jacobs'.

Luncheon Held to Celebrates Top Teachers of the Year

The Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning celebrated our Early Childhood Educators of the Year and Georgia's Pre-K Program Teachers of the Year with an April 19th luncheon hosted by the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and sponsored by the Georgia Lottery Corporation. The event included a performance by Coy Bowles of the Grammy-winning Zac Brown Band; special recognition of Stephanie Blank, founding chair of Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students; and a lively panel discussion featuring the Educators.

Pre-K Students Ready for Magnificent Field Trip with Governor & First Lady

When Author, Super Bowl Champion, and Valdosta Native Malcolm Mitchell sat down to write his second book for Georgia's Pre-K Program, he set the story at the Georgia Governor's Mansion where the First Couple welcomed students on a field trip to "The People's House." On Wednesday, May 8, 2024, thanks to Governor Brian Kemp, First Lady Marty Kemp, and DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs, this story will become a reality... down to every detail...for a group of Georgia's Pre-K Program students from Fulton County.

The book, entitled "A Magnificent Field Trip to the Governor's Mansion," follows the author and a group of students on a journey where they meet the Governor, First Lady, their dogs Rhett and Bailey, and even some chickens and bees who are part of a nature trail experience at the Mansion. This month, in real life, the Governor and First Lady will read the book to Pre-K students along with Mitchell, who is known for his outstanding performances on the football field with the New England Patriots and the University of Georgia Bulldogs.

"Sometimes when you're growing up, the only things that you see are what your neighborhood offers," Mitchell explained. "Books expose you to more information and new realities and in turn you begin to hope and dream of things that you may not see every day, and that's what I call the magic."

"Hosting Pre-K students at the Governor's Mansion is an enriching experience for all of us," said Commissioner Jacobs. "Their enthusiasm and curiosity are truly inspiring. This magnificent field trip perfectly captures the importance of firsthand learning experiences in early childhood education



instinctual learning experiences in early childhood education. From the rich history of the mansion, to interacting with honey bees and chickens, this will be a great day for everyone, and we appreciate the Governor and First Lady so much for opening their home.”

Pictured below are Georgia Governor Brian Kemp and First Lady Marty Kemp.



Robinson Leads Community Engagement & Partnerships for QIP



Dajuana Robinson recently joined the DECAL team as Community Engagement and Partnerships Manager, bringing with her a wealth of experience and enthusiasm that she will be sharing with our amazing team of six community coordinators. With her unique skills and perspective, Dajuana will undoubtedly make a valuable contribution to our projects and initiatives.

Dajuana comes to us as a dedicated program manager with experience fostering academic excellence and community engagement. She

Georgia 2Gen Academy Prepares to Graduate Second Class



The second class of a two-generation academy created by DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs is nearing an end with graduation set for June 7, 2024. The Georgia 2Gen Academy is presented each year by the Georgia Children’s Cabinet and facilitated by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia.

Twenty-six representatives from state agencies, including DECAL and advocacy groups for children and youth, are participating. This year DECAL participants are Nutrition & Physical Activity Supervisor Diana Myers, Head Start Collaboration Office Director

Allison Setterlind, and CAPS Family Support Director Amanda

received her a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education from Columbus State University and began her career as a K-5 teacher at Henry County Schools and Rockdale County Schools. Dajuana's impact extends beyond the classroom as she has actively worked to collaborate with community stakeholders to develop and implement initiatives that address the diverse needs of students and communities. In her most recent position as Educational Outreach Manager for Horizons Atlanta at Georgia Institute of Technology, she led the planning, development, and implementation of programs supporting K-9 students with a focus on math and literacy.

“Dajuana’s experience has demonstrated effective leadership in coordinating community-based initiatives that enhance educational opportunities for children,” said Jill Taylor, Director of Community Partnerships and 2Gen Outreach. “She also has experience coordinating with educational institutions, nonprofits, and businesses to create a comprehensive support network for early learning. Through her dedication to educational excellence and community engagement, Dajuana continues to make a lasting impact in the lives of students and families, ensuring access to quality education and opportunities for success.”

DECAL’s Early Education Community Coordinators include Clayton Adams, Tomisher Campbell, Glenda Davis-Canteen, Bridgette Washington-Collier, Edward Rowell, and Hannah Smith.

Vanmeter.

Allison calls the academy a “true growth experience for me, both personally and professionally.”

“I have loved learning how to embed a family-centered lens across all areas of my role with DECAL and Head Start,” Allison explained. “And personally, the connection made between all the leaders from Georgia’s state agencies involved will be lifelong for me. I have learned so much about how amazing ‘Team Georgia’ really is and respect all the good work happening in every agency caring for Georgia families.”

“The 2Gen Academy has provided a space that fosters growth both professionally and personally,” Amanda added. “We have been given the opportunity to make incredible connections, grow as leaders, and find more ways to ensure we all are prioritizing the voices of Georgia families in our leadership. We have been stretched and strengthened by the many training sessions such as building professional relationships with Emmergenatics, evaluating programs with logic models, and including and centering the voices of families in decision making processes. I am very thankful for the opportunity and to really see how much work Georgia is doing across the state. It really provides a different lens and feeling of pride to be a part of a much larger picture.”

Diana called participating in the Academy an incredible honor.

“The learnings, connections, and paradigm shifts happening throughout the Academy have broadened my horizons, both personally and professionally. This opportunity has opened doors of knowledge for linking systems while utilizing a two-generation lens to better strengthen programs,” Diana explained. “Being in the nutrition world, I work within one cog of the wheel of every individual's needs to thrive. The 2Gen Academy has provided the opportunity to link with other state agency and community partner colleagues to have a better understanding of Georgia’s landscape. I look forward to continuing to collectively move our states work forward with this knowledge woven in to nourish the roots of our communities and best serve each families unique needs.”

“Our goal is to develop leaders who can execute a collaborative strategy using a 2Gen approach to improve outcomes for Georgia’s children and families,” said Melinda Moore, with the CVIIOG.

Members of the Academy meet 11 times over the year, creating “capstone projects” looking at ways Georgia can serve children and families through a two-generation approach. Participants work in teams with a Family Project Advisor with lived experience in their focus area. This year’s projects include Trauma Informed Care, Parenting Skills, Social Media Video Impact on Literacy, Prenatal Care in Rural Georgia, and Home Visiting.

DECAL Style Book Now Available

We're happy to present the updated *DECAL Style Book*. A PDF is now stored in SharePoint [here](#) [FYI the full link is [here](#) for your use.

Along with a PDF of the *Style Book*, that library includes a number of helpful related resources, such as agency logos and branding guides; letterhead and presentation templates; links to stock photo files; and a PowerPoint with slides that present an overview of DECAL programs and a printable one-page handout. The IT team has given all DECAL staff read-only access to the *Style Book* and the other files in the SharePoint library, which allows users to download and print or store them. We hope you find the *Style Book* materials useful.

In 2016, Georgia was selected as one of five states to receive the Parents and Children Thriving Together (PACTT) grant from the National Governors Association and the Center for Law and Social Policy. With this grant, Georgia began to advance a two-generation approach to support children from low-income families with high-quality early learning, while supporting their families in attaining the education, training, and, ultimately, the jobs that lead to economic self-determination.

“Using a two-generation approach is one of the strategic goals we created for the Georgia Children’s Cabinet and this helps us achieve that goal statewide in everything that we do,” Commissioner Jacobs explained. “When successful, 2Gen creates a legacy of educational success and economic prosperity that passes from one generation to the next.”

Pictured below (L-R) are Commissioner Jacobs with Diana, Allison and Amanda.



LOOK AGAIN
GA • USA



NEVER LEAVE A CHILD
ALONE IN A VEHICLE

WWW.DECAL.GA.GOV

***Supporting and guiding
the mission and vision
of Bright from the Start:***

**Board of Early
Care and Learning**



Task Force Continues to Support Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health *by Laura Lucas*

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) is a young child’s developing capacity to:

- Experience, regulate and express emotions
- Form close and secure relationships
- Explore the environment and learn

All within the context of their culture and community. (Source: *Handbook of Infant Mental Health, 4th Edition*)

IECMH is the same thing as social emotional health and

Phil Davis, Savannah
First Congressional District
(Chair)

Susan Harper, Albany
Second Congressional District

VACANT
Third Congressional District

Karla Zisook, Decatur
Fourth Congressional District

VACANT
Fifth Congressional District

Kristy Beam, Atlanta
Sixth Congressional District

Kristin Morrissey, Cumming
Seventh Congressional District
(Secretary)

VACANT
Eighth Congressional District

Cristina Washell, Ed.D.,
Cleveland
Ninth Congressional District

Joanna Hill, Watkinsville
Tenth Congressional District

Jen Bennecke, Atlanta
Eleventh Congressional District

Kimberly Neville, Brooklet
Twelfth Congressional District

Melissa Boekhaus, M.D.,
Smyrna
Thirteenth Congressional
District

Debra Brock, Calhoun
Fourteenth Congressional
District
(Vice Chair)

development. Children are not born knowing how to express their emotions, much less knowing how to cope with stress; they learn emotional regulation from their caregivers, and that learning begins from the moment they are born. Children are born wired to connect, and the attachment that they form with their caregivers is an essential building block not only to their social emotional development, but to how they will see themselves in the world, how they will relate to others, and yes, how they will express themselves through behavior. We often find that young children exhibit challenging behaviors. While this can be tough for a caregiver, every behavior is actually an opportunity to understand how the child feels and thinks. Consider a child's behavior as a form of communication, which is so important especially when our youngest children are not able to even understand or verbally articulate their emotions. Behavior can be a window inside a child's mind and offer an opportunity for an adult caregiver to teach, model or support the child to build coping skills and regulate their feelings, over time, more effectively.

IECMH is about relationships. Every child deserves a strong, nurturing, safe and stable relationship and IECMH promotes the opportunity for all caregivers to make the effort to connect with children. Unfortunately, trauma occurs in the lives of young children or caregiver attachments don't always provide a safe, trusting space for a child to thrive socially and emotionally.

IECMH practices and services can help to heal these relationships with 2Gen practices that include the caregiver and the child (even infants) to heal from the wounds of trauma together. The IECMH Task Force was convened by DECAL in 2021 and includes partners from state child serving agencies, community behavioral health partners, advocates, family members and many others. Our common mission is to build an Early Childhood System of Care that promotes IECMH by reducing the stigma around mental health and educating caregivers and the workforce that infants and toddlers have mental health too.

Check out our Children's Mental Health Week website, new for 2024:

<https://www.dec.al.ga.gov/Prek/ChildrensMentalHealthWeek.aspx> . We also supported the creation of a new workforce training and support partner with the, The Georgia Association of Infant Mental Health - <https://aimh.gsu.edu/>. We also recognized that without IECMH treatment providers, access to IECMH services for children and families would not be viable, so we trained clinicians in IECMH evidence-based models and created billing toolkits to aid clinicians to be able to provide services.

We still have a lot of work to do, but we have come a long way in a short time. It starts with the simple recognition that mental health is important and that caring for our own social emotional health has a profound impact on the mental health of our youngest learners.

**Sign up for DECAL
text messages by**

texting DECAL to
474747

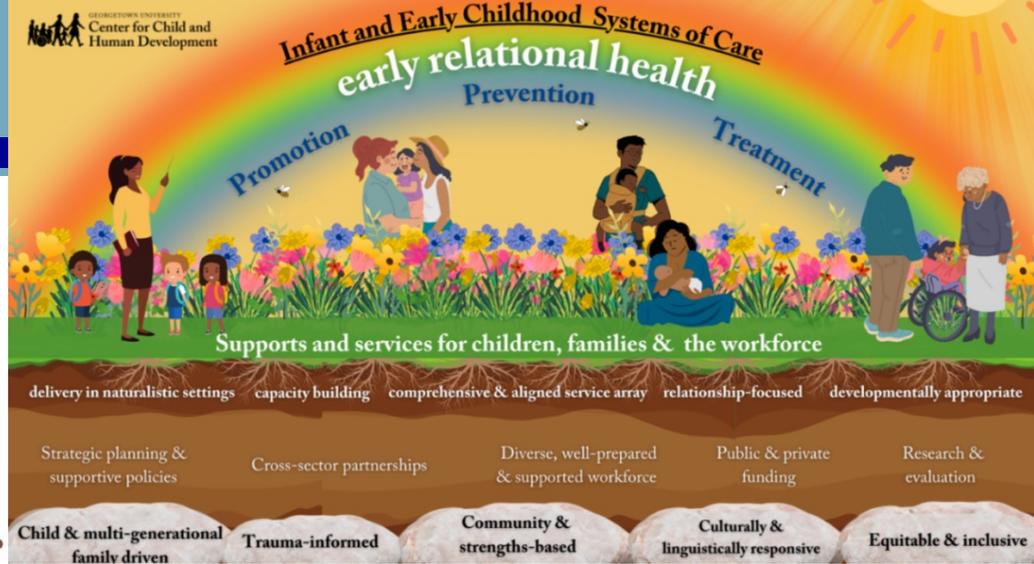
GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY
Center for Child and
Human Development

Infant and Early Childhood Systems of Care

Employee Suggestion Program



**Visit the Virtual
Suggestion Box now!**



Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Charmain McGahee, JoAnna Browning, Julie Edwards, Mariana Ortiz, and Xavier Williams.

Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive SE, 754 East
Tower,
Atlanta, GA 30334
404-656-5957



**Georgia Dept
of Early Care
and Learning**

BRIGHT FROM THE START



Contact Us