

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



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DECAL By the Numbers

1,030 - Child care programs volunteering for Quality Rated.

126 - State senators and representatives visiting Pre-K classrooms in their districts during Georgia Pre-K Week, held Oct. 1-5, 2012.

50 - Print, broadcast and online media outlets throughout the state providing coverage on Georgia Pre-K Week.

509 - Telephone referrals for families seeking child care completed in September by the statewide Child Care Referral Center, All Georgia Kids.

827 - Web referrals for families seeking child care completed in

Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Bobby Cagle



October was a very busy month for Bright from the Start. It began with our second annual Georgia's Pre-K Week, sponsored by Voices for Georgia's Children and its Pre-K Partners. During that week, more than 150 state and local officials, including Governor Nathan Deal and First Lady Sandra Deal, visited Pre-K classrooms to see firsthand the crucial role that Pre-K plays in the education continuum. It was also a great opportunity to celebrate the program's 20th anniversary.

In every visit our message was clear: Research shows that the early education of children from birth to age five proves critical to their success in kindergarten and elementary school. As a result, we believe investing in our youngest learners is important not only to their personal success but also to the long-term economic growth and potential of Georgia.

During the week of October 8-12, our partners at Zoo Atlanta hosted their own Georgia's Pre-K Week, offering discounts on Pre-K field trips and special events targeted specifically to our four-year-old explorers. Zoo Atlanta already sponsors Educator Appreciation Days each fall and spring, so this special week was a very generous way to help us celebrate our 20th Anniversary.

We wrapped up the month with two exciting days with our new partners at PNC. First, on October 25, 2012, PNC joined the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* in presenting a community forum on Georgia's Pre-K. This roundtable discussion, moderated by AJC Editor Kevin Riley, was recorded for broadcast and aired on Georgia Public Broadcasting stations across the state on October 29 and again on November 4. I had the honor of serving on the panel along with Dr. Jeanette Betancourt from Sesame Workshop, Dr. Gary Henry from Vanderbilt University and Regina Bowie, a Pre-K teacher from Woodland Elementary School in Fulton County who really stole the show.

Then on October 26, 2012, PNC announced a \$1.2 million pledge to improve early childhood education in metropolitan Atlanta with a focus on education in science and the arts. Benefactors include Fernbank Museum of Natural History, Sheltering Arms Early

September by the statewide Child Care Referral Center.

289 - Child care programs across the state receiving inclusion technical assistance during the first quarter of the fiscal year from the Child Care Resource and Referral Inclusion Coordinators.

Employee Anniversary



Janine Joseph Celebrates 30 Years

Quality Rated Manager Janine Joseph recently celebrated her 30th anniversary working with the State of Georgia. She is pictured above with DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle.

On August 1, 1982, Janine began working as a senior child placement caseworker with the Polk County Department of Family and Children Services and later as a Resource Development Worker for foster and adoptive parents for Region 1 out of Gilmer, Bartow and Paulding counties. Janine joined the Child Care Licensing Division with the Office of Regulatory Services, Department of Human Resources in 1993 and was one of the first five Child Care Services Consultants for the Office of School Readiness (now DECAL) when it was created in 1996. When Standards of Care was started in 2003, Janine was the Training and Technical Assistance Coordinator and then the SOC Program Coordinator. Janine served as the Quality Initiatives Division Program Manager from 2004 until 2008 when she began serving as the Professional Development/Teacher Credential Program Manager. In March 2012,

Education and Family Centers, Young Audiences at the Woodruff Arts Center and our own Quality Rated program through the Georgia Family Connection Partnership. It is this type of public-private partnership that will allow Georgia to keep early education on the cutting edge.

We have so many reasons to be proud of our agency and the work we are doing to improve early education and protect the health and safety of children. Thanks for everything you do to make this work possible.

DECAL Launches Online Library Learning Initiative (OLLI)

DECAL is launching the Online Library Learning Initiative (OLLI), a virtual warehouse of online learning modules and video podcasts designed specifically for early childhood educators.

"With OLLI, we've created a collection of short courses and video podcasts designed to enhance the quality of education for Georgia's youngest students. Courses emphasize health and safety by improving the standards of practice for early learning," DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle explained. "In difficult economic times, early childhood educators can't always get to the latest seminar and budgets for new curriculum and materials are stretched more than ever. This resource allows everyone with Internet access to share in the latest materials both for classroom use and professional development, and it will be updated regularly." Materials for Georgia's Pre-K Program and Child Care Services (CCS) Core Licensing Rules are included on the site.

Commissioner Cagle said DECAL created OLLI in partnership with Georgia State University through a grant from the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009.

"OLLI makes professional development more accessible by increasing the number of online courses designed specifically for early childhood educators," explained Susan Adams, assistant commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K Program. "We think it's fitting in our 20th anniversary year to take our online professional development resources to the next level. I am confident that teachers, directors, consultants and parents will all benefit from this wise investment of federal stimulus funds."

To access OLLI, go to http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?e=001uBZfwJBTr8ZbGsZNnl0MwHogRBR5wLcxlH0YQ3NJK9wO3dRH_V7gL09g2ZDu-P-flckvknfistrXNSg6mKD1rKDMfj40sA0HfJ9gYoeU_M. Send feedback or comments to [Monica Warren](mailto:Monica.Warren@dec.state.ga.us).

Janine became the Manager of the Quality Rated Program.

"Many wonderful changes have occurred during these past 30 years to improve the quality of early childhood education, and I have enjoyed being a part of those changes," said Janine. "I look forward to many more years of participating on the dynamic team of professionals who are committed to providing the best experiences for children to lay a foundation for success."

DECAL salutes Janine Joseph for 30 years of dedicated service.

Spotlight on... Crystal Hoffman

People have been seeing less and less of DECAL Database Administrator Crystal Hoffman over the past year, and that's just the way she likes it. In June 2011, already concerned about her high blood pressure and cholesterol, Hoffman said she decided to get serious about fitness and weight loss.

"I had built a deck on the back of my house and, while I was shopping for accessories, realized that I was over the weight limit for most of the furniture I wanted," she said.

It was time for a change and Hoffman started a daily exercise routine of 20-minutes with a low-impact aerobic DVD every morning and a one-mile neighborhood walk every night. She's now lost 112 pounds with a goal of losing another 36 pounds.

Hoffman says when her evening walks increased to three-miles per night, a neighbor suggested she consider walking in a 5K. She's been participating in races at least two or three times a month ever since. Hoffman completed her first half-marathon on September 9, 2012, and plans to run the Atlanta Half Marathon on Thanksgiving. Hoffman finds that the races help motivate her to continue training.

"I eat fewer fried foods and more fruits and vegetables," Hoffman

Kay Hellwig Retiring; Keith Bostick Named as Successor

DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle has announced that Kay Hellwig, assistant commissioner for child care services will retire effective February 1, 2013, after more than 33 years with the State of Georgia. Hellwig began her career in August 1979 as a caseworker with the Fulton County Department of Family and Children Services assisting food stamp recipients.

"It has been my honor to work with Kay, learn from her and count her as a friend," said Commissioner Cagle.

Cagle has named Keith Bostick, most recently with the Georgia Department of Human Services, as Hellwig's successor. He joins DECAL on December 1, 2012.



Kay Hellwig

Bostick has held a variety of top leadership positions in a career spanning more than 30 years. Since 2006, he has worked for the Georgia Department of Human Services as director of the Office of Residential Services, director of programs and policy for social services and federal eligibility programs, and regional director for the Division of Family and Children Services. His experience also includes running his own consulting business. Bostick is a licensed clinical social worker and certified consultant on cultural competency. He holds a BA in child development and psychology from Morehouse College and a Master of Social Work from the University of Georgia.

"Having worked with Keith for a number of years in my previous role, I am sure you will find that he shares our passion for ensuring that Georgia's children have the very best in life and that he is a man of the highest integrity," said Commissioner Cagle.



Commissioner Bobby Cagle is pictured with Keith Bostick, who will join the DECAL team on December 1, 2012.

explains. "I don't exclude any foods. However, I try to make good choices. I find that if I eat fatter foods, I feel sluggish during my work outs. I track everything I eat. It makes me more aware of what I'm eating."

For Hoffman, it's more than just losing weight. "I've gained confidence, made new friends, and interact with my community on a completely different level. By participating in races, I've gotten to see communities and places I would normally not visit. For instance, this past weekend, I ran the Run like Hell 5K at the historic Oakland Cemetery."

"Crystal has really embraced this healthy lifestyle," said Craig Detweiler, Chief Officer of Operations and IT for DECAL. "She serves as a great example for those who want to make major changes to how they look and feel."

A 13-year Bright from the Start employee, Hoffman says she became interested in working for DECAL because "there was a need for an analyst with problem-solving skills." She says her job involves protecting the data collected and managed by DECAL.

For more information on her successful fitness plan, Hoffman says catch up with her whenever you can. But you better hurry. She's training for her first triathlon next June.



Crystal Hoffman before embracing a healthier lifestyle



Crystal Hoffman after getting serious about health and fitness

DECAL Commissioner Chairs Bus Trip

DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle served as the chairperson for the second leg of the annual Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (GPEE) Bus Trip Across Georgia conducted October 22-23, and October 29-30. Chris Clark, President of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, chaired the first trip.

The tour stopped at 10 schools, five during each week. Commissioner Cagle led almost 80 participants riding two tour buses as they visited K-12 classrooms at Marietta Center for Advanced Academics (Marietta City Schools), Loganville High School (Walton County Schools), Kelly Mill Elementary School, where he visited Pre-K classrooms, and South Forsyth High School, both in Cumming (Forsyth County Schools). The final stop was Lanier Technical College in Oakwood. There participants got an inside look at alternative post-secondary options available to Georgia citizens.

The purpose of this annual event, which began in 1993, is to celebrate achievement in public schools and to share best practices across the state. More information about the bus trip is available on the [GPEE website](#).



Tour group stops for "pinning" of their guide at Marietta Center for Advanced Academics

Georgia's New "Quality Rated" Program Marks Another Milestone

On October 22, DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle announced that in less than 10 months, more than 1,000 child care programs have enrolled in Quality Rated, Georgia's new voluntary system to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education programs.



Similar to rating systems for other service industries like restaurants and hotels, Quality Rated identifies early care and education programs that meet a set of standards exceeding the state's minimum licensing requirements. Quality Rated launched in January 2012. Quality Rated uses one, two and three stars to indicate programs that meet defined program standards beyond Georgia's minimum licensing requirements.

"Programs participating in Quality Rated support the whole child and prepare them for ongoing success in life," said Commissioner Cagle. "Now with over 1,000 child care programs voluntarily enrolling in less than ten months, you can see how Quality Rated is being enthusiastically embraced by early childhood educators all across the state." Cagle said

New Faces & Places

Zara Handsford has joined the Child Care Services Division as a Complaint Unit Consultant and will be conducting category 1 complaint investigations primarily in metro Atlanta area counties.



Zara has a master's of science degree in mental health counseling and an undergraduate degree in psychology. She has spent the last 12 years working for Bibb County Department of Family and Children Services first as a Case Manager conducting abuse and neglect investigations, and then as a Supervisor of a Child Protective Services investigations unit.

Originally from Macon, Georgia, she and her husband currently live with their two children in Lizella, but are in the process of moving to the metro area.

Meet Susan Harper



Susan H. Harper of Albany serves on the DECAL Board of Advisors for the Second Congressional District. She was appointed to the board in March 2009.

A retired teacher and library media specialist whose mother owned a kindergarten for 24 years, Harper has seen firsthand how low language skills in early childhood

programs choosing to participate in Quality Rated become eligible for free professional development, technical assistance, and financial incentive packages supported by foundations and businesses.

The initial incentive of \$1,000 worth of materials is available to programs participating in technical assistance programs with local child care resource and referral agencies. The second incentive of \$500 is awarded to participating programs submitting a completed Quality Rated portfolio thereby agreeing to an onsite evaluation within 90 days using the environment rating scales instrument. Bonus packages to support ongoing quality improvement are awarded to programs at each of Quality Rated's one, two or three star levels. The portfolio incentives and bonus packages are distributed by the Georgia Family Connection Partnership.

In September, Justus Kidz, a family day care home operated by Linda Davis in Buford, Georgia, became the first child care program in Georgia to be recognized for exceeding the state's childcare licensing requirements with a Quality Rating of two stars. In October, Suezenette McDonald's family day care Explorations Christian Academy in Lawrenceville completed its Quality Rated evaluation with an impressive three-star rating.



Cookie Monster from Sesame Street joined (L-R) DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle; Georgia Family Connection Partnership (GaFCP) Executive Director Gaye Smith and Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) Executive Director Mindy Binderman at the recent announcement of the PNC Foundation \$200,000 grant supporting Quality Rated.

Georgia's At Risk Afterschool Meals Program Is Available

DECAL announces the availability of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) At Risk Afterschool Meals Program at eligible afterschool programs throughout the state. Afterschool programs, child care centers and Head Start programs that offer an afterschool component are eligible to participate. The At Risk Afterschool Meals Program is a part of and funded through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

"Providing nutritious meals to children in child care and afterschool programs is part of DECAL's commitment to nurturing Georgia's youngest learners, keeping them safe and healthy, and to enriching their lives," said DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle. "We were very pleased to see the CACFP program expanded to include afterschool programs where many of our students are involved in educational and enrichment programs."

"Approved organizations receive cash reimbursement for up to one snack and one meal served to enrolled participants that are up to age 18, or whose 19th birthday occurs during the school year," explained Lou Brienza, DECAL Nutrition Services Director.

can hinder future academic success. This is an issue she hopes to help address by volunteering on the DECAL Board of Advisors.

"The low reading skills leads to a high drop out rate continuing the cycle of high poverty. Disparity of language development and school readiness needs to be diminished," said Harper. "In a recent conversation with my state representative, Winfred Dukes, he made the statement, 'These children do not hear enough words.' That needs to change."

Harper's vision for DECAL includes the following:

1. Expand the training and educational support to teachers and providers, emphasizing research based techniques.
2. Engage in more public/private partnerships such as the one with The Rollins Center for Language and Learning, helping to spread the message of the importance of early language learning and brain development.
3. Promote parent involvement, making them aware of ways to increase language development.
4. Promote public awareness of the connection of how early language development increases brain development and leads to academic success.

Harper said that seeing children interacting in meaningful learning activities and knowing that these activities are giving them foundational skills for a more successful academic future is the most rewarding part of serving on the DECAL Board of Advisors.

"I returned to Albany, my hometown, in 2004 after living in Atlanta. A friend made this statement to me, 'Make a difference.' I hope to do that," she said.

In Case You Missed It

In October, technical assistance specialists from DECAL's Georgia Program for Infant and Toddler

Programs eligible to participate in the At Risk Afterschool Meals Program include public or private non-profit organizations and eligible for-profit organizations located in an attendance area of a public school where at least 50 percent of the enrolled students are certified as eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Participating programs must provide educational or enrichment activities in an organized, structured, and supervised setting at the end of a school day, on weekends, or on holiday during the school day.

[Read about available training dates and venues](#) or contact the Nutrition Services Division at 404.657.1779. To find an At Risk Afterschool Meal Programs, please visit the [DECAL website](#).

Kate Nicolella: One Example of How Georgia's Pre-K Has Benefited Students

As Georgia's Pre-K celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, we are beginning to see living proof examples of how the lottery-funded program, along with the HOPE Scholarship, have benefited so many students all across Georgia.



For example, take Kate Nicolella, daughter of John and Patty Nicolella.

Today, she is an 18-year-old freshman at the University of Georgia in Athens, working toward a dual major in marketing and statistics. But in the fall of 1998, Kate's first school campus looked a lot different. It was a Georgia's Pre-K classroom at Kids-R-Kids in Stockbridge, Georgia.

"My teachers were Ms. Martha and Ms. Jackie, and they made learning fun," Kate explains. "We had our hands in one project or another almost every day."

Mom Patty says Georgia's Pre-K gave Kate an opportunity to begin her educational journey in a fun way: "Her teachers were great and very enthusiastic. They made their classroom one that the kids couldn't wait to get to every morning. This type of positive experience with learning set the tone for the years of education that Kate had ahead of her. Once she entered the public school system, she was ready and able to work in a classroom environment and made friends easily."

Since its inception in 1992 as a pilot program for 750 at-risk students, Georgia's Pre-K has emerged as one of the nation's preeminent prekindergarten programs available to all four year olds regardless of family income. "In the past 20 years the program has laid a foundation for learning for over one million students in Georgia," said Bobby Cagle, commissioner for Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning.

From Pre-K, Kate went on to Mount Carmel Elementary School, Luella Middle School and Luella High School, all in Henry County. Through it all, she says she enjoyed her foundation in Pre-K and the promise of a scholarship.

"Throughout high school, the HOPE Scholarship served as a motivator to work hard and keep my grades up. This will surely continue to do the same as I start into my college career," she said. "The money provided by the scholarship made it possible for me to attend a top notch college with a minimum amount of stress regarding financial obligations. It continues to be a motivator."

As a high school freshman, Kate traveled to China for 17-days with the People to People Ambassadors Program. She graduated in the top two percent of her senior class of 411 students from Luella High School.

After obtaining her bachelor's degree, Kate hopes to get a master's degree in market research.

Care in partnership with Georgia Public Library Service and the Rollins Center for Language & Learning began a series of "Read & Talk" conferences throughout the state for early childhood educators and parents. The conferences reinforce the understanding that relationships between teachers and young children coupled with intentional teaching practices are at the heart of language development.

DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle said, "Our youngest learners have the right to be exposed to language all day long. Parents and teachers have a unique opportunity to introduce vocabulary, pull out and extend language and to help our children become keenly interested in books, sounds, and words." [Read More](#)

Quick Links

[DECAL on Facebook](#)
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[DECAL Website](#)



November Birthdays



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

- 1 - Connie M. Fisher
- 2 - Robin M. Currie
- 2 - Mary J. Renfroe
- 3 - Rachel W. Fowler
- 6 - Joyce E. Collins
- 6 - Leah M. Klatzker
- 7 - Elizabeth C. Abdinooor
- 9 - Leslie P. Truman
- 10 - Shannon M. Carroll
- 13 - Colleen M Covey
- 13 - Andrea W. McFarland
- 14 - Jessica Renea Grant
- 16 - Shyreetta M. Hicks
- 16 - Nikiesha M. Neil
- 17 - George E. Davis
- 17 - Brenda L. Haynesworth
- 17 - Colette M. Upshaw
- 22 - Lisa Rambhajan
- 23 - Michael R. Chandler
- 23 - Monica L. Griffin
- 24 - Earlene P. Huston
- 25 - Lisa L. Casey

In her free time, Kate enjoys reading, traveling and working with the Georgia National Wrestling Alliance, organizing tournaments and helping to keep records.



Georgia's Pre-K and the Hope Scholarship helped Kate Nicolella succeed as a student from elementary school through college.

Interfaith Children's Movement Honors DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle

DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle was recently honored by the Interfaith Children's Movement for his efforts to protect the health and safety of children in Georgia. The award was presented at the organization's prayer breakfast held October 24, 2012, at The Temple in Midtown Atlanta.

"Commissioner Bobby Cagle has shown a genuine compassion for children who are at the most vulnerable stage -- early childhood," said Bettianne Hart, Board Chair for Interfaith Children's Movement. "His efforts to raise the standards of care that our children receive are to be commended. Interfaith Children's Movement supports Commissioner Cagle's mission to make Georgia a safe and healthy place for all children."



Commissioner Cagle with Bettianne Hart

"This was a great honor coming from the Interfaith Children's Movement and I am humbled by their recognition," said Commissioner Cagle. "I sincerely appreciate ICM's support and partnership in protecting our state's youngest learners."

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

25 - Wilda P. Pipkin
30 - Roslyn E. Coleman

The Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R)

Ray Higgins, Cassa Andrews, Takisha Aragones, Carol Hartman, Phillip Jesup, Jacquice Jones, and Wilda Pipkin.

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

Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning Advisory Board

Vacant

First Congressional District

Susan Harper, Albany

Second Congressional District

Kathy Howell, Carrollton

Third Congressional District

Carolyn Ormsby, Ed.D., Conyers,
Fourth Congressional District (Chair)

Carlene Talton, Decatur

Fifth Congressional District

Dawn Henderson, Marietta

Sixth Congressional District

Phil Davis, Stone Mountain

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
(Secretary)

Kay A. Ford, Savannah

Twelfth Congressional District

Maggy Martinez, Hampton,

Thirteenth Congressional District