
Board of Early Care and Learning

Board of Early Care and Learning Meeting
Thursday, February 18, 2016, 9:00 a.m.
Bright from the Start
Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning
2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive SE – East Tower, Oak Room
Atlanta, Georgia 30334
Amy Jacobs, Commissioner

Meeting Minutes

Board Members

Victor Morgan, Board Chair
Susan Harper, Board Vice Chair
Kay Ford, Board Secretary
Phil Davis
Dawn Henderson

Kathy Howell
Jerri Kropp
Sherron Murphy
Luanne Purcell
Carlene Talton

Public Guests

Melissa Johnson
Joe Perreault

William Willoughby
Revette Thomas

Bright from the Start Staff

Amy Jacobs, Commissioner
Susan Adams, Assistant Commissioner for Pre-K and
Instructional Supports
Kristin Bernhard, Deputy Commissioner for System
Reform
Craig Detweiler, Chief Information Officer
Reg Griffin, Chief Communications Officer
Ray Higgins, Deputy Commissioner for Finance and
Administration
Kristie Lewis, Assistant Commissioner for Child Care
Services
Brian Collin, Research and Policy Analyst

Meghan Pendergast, Research and Policy Analyst
Woody Dover, Budget Administrator
Falita Flowers, Nutrition Services Director
Janice Haker, Head Start State Collaboration Director
Carol Hartman, Policy and System Reform Director
Sharon McPherson, Accounting Manager
Pam Stevens, Quality Rated Director
Robin Stevens, Human Resources Director
Laura Wagner, Early Education Empowerment Zone
Director
Mark Waits, Special Assistant to the Commissioner
Christi Moore, Director of Professional Learning

1. Call to Order

Board Chair Victor Morgan called the meeting to order. He welcomed board members, Department of Early Care and Learning staff, and guests.

2. Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Kay Ford moved to accept the day's agenda. Phil Davis seconded. The agenda was unanimously accepted. Kathy Howell moved to approve the minutes of the November 12, 2015, meeting of the board. Carlene Talton seconded. Minutes were unanimously approved.

3. Inspiration

Susan Harper shared a poem about parents' language with children. She related the poem to her own experiences with her children and their first words. She emphasized the importance of using language with young children.

4. Board Member Updates

Members of the board did not have any updates.

Victor Morgan announced Sherron Murphy's resignation from the board to take the position as the director of the new Early Childhood Education Center at Johns Hopkins University. Victor Morgan read and presented Sherron a commendation from Governor Deal.

5. Bright from the Start Presentations

Members of the executive staff provided updates on their program areas.

- a. **Presentation: Child Fatality Review Panel:** Commissioner Amy Jacobs introduced Trebor Randle, GBI Special Agent in Charge, to present her work on the Child Fatality Review Panel. Ms. Randle provided board members an electronic copy of the recently released 2014 Child Fatality Review Panel Report (available [here](#)). She discussed the necessity for providing information about child (ages 0-7) deaths in Georgia. Ms. Randle explained that in July 2014 legislation moved the Child Fatality Review Panel to the GBI and discussed the rationale behind and benefits from this move. GBI investigates death and violent crimes (particularly against children). The agency now conducts autopsies and child fatality prevention for 152 of the 159 counties. Ms. Randle discussed the way systems can fail and the necessity to train law enforcement to help decrease the prevalence of preventable child fatalities. Ms. Randle presented findings from the recent report (see slides). Ms. Randle showed a video (available [here](#)) called *Saving Georgia's Children* which discussed sleep related child fatalities and how to prevent them. Ms. Randle commended Commissioner Jacobs for her faithful and dutiful service to the Child Fatality Review Panel. Ms. Randle opened the floor for questions. Jerri Kropp, asked about data from other countries where co-sleeping is prevalent? Trebor Randle responded that it comes down to population deaths per capita, the population of children, and cultural differences which make it difficult to compare sleep related infant fatalities internationally.
- b. **Commissioner's Update:** Commissioner Amy Jacobs discussed the importance of educating parents about Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Syndrome (SUIDS). DECAL is partnering with the Department of Public Health to give Medicaid eligible families a small bassinet and a onesie that says "This Side Up" on the front as an alternative to sleeping with an infant. Commissioner Jacobs then presented updates on her activities (see slides). She presented the Governor's FY2017 budget recommendations. The Governor has recommended a \$36.5 million increase in lottery funds for Pre-K. DECAL will have a Pre-K Teacher of the Year for the first time. The review of the 49 applications will begin in the spring/summer 2016 by DECAL and external reviewers. Commissioner Jacobs introduced DECAL's new mascot, CALi, and invited attendees to be a part of Read Across Georgia and Children's Day at the Capitol. Commissioner Jacobs opened the floor for questions.
- c. **Finance and Administration Update:** Ray Higgins presented updates on the department's finances (see slides). Mr. Higgins reported current fiscal year expenditures and gave legislative updates. He explained that the budget is currently being discussed and will be on the floor tomorrow. The department is monitoring House Bill 915, which helps extend criminal records check processes; Senate Bill 310, which requires agencies seeking a grant over 10 million dollars to seek legislative approval; and House Bill 905 that is largely a DFCS bill regarding the Child Abuse Registry.
- d. **System Reform Update:** Kristin Bernhard presented updates on System Reform (see slides). Ms. Bernhard presented an overview of Quality Rated's star-level ratings. Ms. Bernhard updated the board on participation and ratings in Quality Rated and noted that 41% of eligible child care facilities in Georgia are now participating in Quality Rated. She also emphasized that 102 programs have received their first Quality Rated rating. Ms. Bernhard identified several key changes in the Quality Rated Manual. Ms. Bernhard also presented the timeline for the Quality Rated marketing campaign. This campaign conducted in conjunction with Family Connection Partnership and GEEARS will help inform parents about indicators of quality child care and what a Quality Rated star rating means. Ms. Bernhard opened the floor for questions. Phil Davis asked for more information about why it is more difficult for public school Pre-Ks to participate in Quality Rated than Pre-K in private centers. Kristin Bernhard replied that Pre-K is already well established and currently has multiple accountability measures, and the department doesn't want to overwhelm the current programs or produce a measure that isn't informative for the population it serves. Mr. Davis asked if parents have any way of knowing that their child is going to a quality program. Ms. Bernhard replied that the Great Schools rankings allow parents to see quality in the K-5 sector, but it doesn't parse Pre-K out in that measure. Victor Morgan said it would be great to have some type of measure that looks specifically at Pre-K. Mr. Davis said people will just assume that the public school is good. Kathy Howell said that sometimes parents don't have a choice about where their child will go if it is in the public

school. Ms. Howell pointed out that we help some parents who choose Quality Rated programs with financial help. Kristin Bernhard confirmed that we use subsidies to help with this.

- e. **Head Start Update:** Janice Haker presented updates on Head Start (see slides). Head Start is looking at children's attendance rates. This past year, 100% of Georgia Head Start programs responded about their attendance rates. Ms. Haker reported on a research project to pilot a new tool related to toxic stress that Head Start children experience. She shared that she presented at the National Head Start Association Conference on Head Start's participation in Georgia's longitudinal data system and compliance with FERPA. Ms. Haker mentioned that Head Start has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Human Services that will help ensure Head Start slots for children in foster care. Ms. Haker reported that 41% of all Head Start centers are participating in Quality Rated (22% rated one star; 52% rated two stars; and 26% rated three stars). Ms. Haker announced there an institute on the third competency on home visits. Dawnn Henderson asked what kinds of experiences create toxic stress. Ms. Haker responded: poverty, alcoholism, children with disabilities, parents in prison, and that even Head Start staff members are impacted by toxic stress.
- f. **Child Care Services Update:** Kristie Lewis presented updates on Child Care Services (CCS) and the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) state plan (See slides). She presented an overview of the history of CCDF and the requirements of its 2014 reauthorization. DECAL is working on finalizing the State Plan in time for the federal deadline of March 1, 2016. The target date for submission is February 26, 2016, with implementation to begin on June 1, 2016. Ms. Lewis' slides clearly outlined the sections of the state plan. DECAL is ahead of many states in meeting the requirements of CCDF reauthorization. In some areas, however, the department will seek rule changes to meet some of the new CCDF requirements. She pointed out that the stakeholders and the public were given an opportunity to respond to/comment on the Plan at a series of public hearings and by e-mail. Public comments were overall positive. One concern expressed by stakeholders related to how the number of children served using CCDF monies will be affected by the new requirements. Ms. Lewis then reminded the board that at their next meeting they will be asked to act on the new enforcement and compliance rules and on any rules that might need to be adopted or amended to comply with the new CCDF requirements.
- g. **Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports Update:** Susan Adams presented updates on Georgia's Pre-K Program and Instructional Supports (see slides). Ms. Adams reported on this year's Rising Kindergarten Summer Transition Program for which Pre-K programs can apply. She clarified that Pre-K program participation in the Rising Pre-K Summer Transition Program is by invitation only. Georgia's Pre-K Program application will go out March 28, 2016 and will be due April 22, 2016. There is no funding in the budget for new classes, but applications will be considered because of the turnover of Pre-K classrooms. Ms. Adams also highlighted the DECAL SCHOLARS program that supports increasing the quality of our programs through a more credentialed and well trained workforce. DECAL SCHOLARS include the SCHOLARSHIPS program, the INCENTIVES program, and GA AWARDS (a one-time bonus) for those pursuing ECE credentials.
- h. **Nutrition Services Update:** Falita Flowers presented updates on Nutrition Services (See slides). Ms. Flowers reported on the Child Nutrition Program Reauthorization. Recommended changes in the reauthorization include an "Out of School-Time" program to allow after school programs to seamlessly participate in the Summer Program without having to reapply. Nutrition Services is working to increase and expand CACFP in afterschool programs and adult care facilities. Ms. Flowers reported a successful summer of 2015 and noted the desire to do better next year to reach the intended population. Goals for the summer 2016 include increasing visibility and promoting the campaign by partnering with outside agencies. She also reviewed GA ATLAS, Nutrition Services new computer program that allows, among other functionalities, a sponsor to complete one application for CACFP and SFSP. Currently, Georgia is the only state in the region that has developed this capability.
- i. **Legal Update:** Christie Bearden discussed legal updates specifically relating to background checks (see slides). The time for processing background checks has decreased significantly since 2014. Also, recent legislative changes, such as no longer requiring fingerprint clearance for parents and grandparents to volunteer in the classroom, and not requiring background check applications to be notarized, have expedited processing time. Temp staffing agencies no longer need to acquire the director's signature and can submit background check applications through DECAL independently. Ms. Bearden reported that DECAL's phase II of the DECAL KOALA online portal launched in January 2016 is making the online submitting and processing of background checks even more efficient. The feedback from DECAL KOALA phase II has been overwhelmingly positive.

6. Committee Meetings and Lunch

Victor Morgan dismissed board committees for their meetings. Committee meetings were held in separate rooms over lunch. All committee meetings were open to the public.

7. Committee Reports

Committees reported on their work.

- a. **Budget & Finance:** Carlene Talton reported for the Budget and Finance Committee. Ms. Talton reported that everything was great.
- b. **Programs & Rules:** Sherron Murphy reported for the Programs and Rules committee. Ms. Murphy said the committee discussed how the different aspects of programs and rules can be used to impact quality. She emphasized the importance of cross-department communication when determining how to use the CCDF funds. She thanked the board for letting her serve. Dr. Jerri Kropp will replace Ms. Murphy as the chair of the Programs and Rules committee.
- c. **System Reform:** Susan Harper reported for the System Reform Committee. She mentioned that Early Head Start has a limited number of spaces available, and there is a need for a pilot to assess where Head Start services will be most effective. The committee discussed that school age programs in child care are now eligible to participate in Quality Rated.

8. Public Comment Period

Dr. Revette Thomas, from Totally Committed INC. (TCI), alleged that several incidences of child abuse by a Pre-K lead teacher had occurred while she was serving as his/her assistant at a La Petite Academy. Dr. Thomas stated that the lead teacher admitted the allegations to the director, and the lead teacher was told that he/she could not threaten or handle the children (no official forms were filed). Dr. Thomas said the teacher caused injury to a four-year-old autistic child. Dr. Thomas then bypassed the director and called the child's parent. The director placed Dr. Thomas on administrative leave. She called Dr. Thomas into her office to discuss the details of her administrative leave. Instead, the director gave Ms. Thomas a letter of termination. Dr. Thomas reached out to Child Protective Services and to Bright from the Start about the alleged abuse. Dr. Thomas received word that BFTS consultant Beverly Pollard would be investigating the incident, but stated that she has yet to hear back from Ms. Pollard/Bright from the Start. Dr. Thomas read from the Bright from the Start website to support her disappointment that Bright from the Start has not responded in the way the website indicated the department would. Dr. Thomas read a quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil...Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act." Victor Morgan thanked Dr. Thomas for sharing her concerns with the board.

9. Adjournment

Board Liaison Mark Waits thanked the board for completing the survey about the current board format and content. He mentioned that the responses were generally positive. He informed the board that before the next board meeting he will send each board member the board self-assessment instrument to determine the board's effectiveness for the past year. Victor Morgan asked if there were any more comments or questions before the meeting was adjourned. Luanne Purcell praised DECAL for its success in departmental communication. Victor Morgan reminded the board that their next meeting will take place May 12, 2016. The meeting was adjourned at 1:19 p.m.