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## **Board of Early Care and Learning**

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**Board of Early Care and Learning Meeting**  
Thursday, May 14, 2020 — 9:00 a.m.  
Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning  
2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive SE – East Tower  
Oak Conference Room and via GoToMeeting  
Atlanta, Georgia 30334  
Amy M. Jacobs, Commissioner

### **Meeting Minutes**

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#### Board Members

Susan Harper (Chair)	Kathy Howell
Phil Davis (Vice Chair)	Theresa Magpuri-Lavell
Kristy Beam	Kristin Morrissey
Jen Bennecke	Luann Purcell
Debra Brock	Cristina Washell

#### Public Guests

Kathy Alexander, Tiffany Allen, Rebecca Anderson, Roma Anderson, Shantreze Anderson, Donna Aranson, Uzma Azhar, Kim Barnett, Ashleigh Bailey, Edna Barrera, Ann Barry, Richard Bartlett, Tracy Baynes, Lisa Belliston, Mindy Binderman, Amanda Blakely, Angela Brown, Karen Brown, Tim Cairl, Gloria Calhoun, LaTonia Camp, Virda Catalano, Abbie Chaddick, Alethea, Cicero-Brown, Andrea Cline, Melissa Cole, Jennifer Collins, Carolyn Colon, Gina Cook, Rebecca Cowan, Moakina Cunningham, Katie Davis, Molly DeBorde, Craig Detweiler, Yasmee Diggs, Edye Summerfield Disner, Haley Dopson, Jacqueline Dougherty, Priscilla Drain, Dana Driggers, Kaitlyn Duttry, Diane Early, David Fleming, Natalie Feagin, Rochelle Forbes, Cindy Foster, Sharon Foster, Jessica Gaines, Kathy Garrett, Bonita Gary, Aleta Gass, Tamara Glass, Hannah Goldberg, Debra Graham, Kristen Groover, Kathy Hagen, Alana, Hardison, Diane Heilmann, Japera Hemming, Gwennet Henry, Beverly Johnson, Donna Johnson, Hows King, Michelle Lank, L. Regina Little, Kate Locke, Mary Lyons, Deziree Mattocks, Polly McKinney, Cindy McNeil, CheeChristine Merritt, Bryan Miller, Ellaine Miller, Terenia Moody, Michele Mullins, Trent Nichelson, George Nixon, Cheryl Odom, Brandon Ogden, Wande Okunoren-Meadows, Nadia Orfali Hall, Harry Patel, Attallah Pamoja, Joe Perreault, Julie Phillips, Celeste Phoenix, Martine Powe, Jaime Rechkemmer, Maggie Reeves, Kim Reid, Ellen Reynolds, Inge Robb, Ann Rosenthal, Pam Runkle, Enchante Sanders, Joy Sanders, Kevin Schnell, Sarah Shinsky, Kelcie Silvio, Talia Simon, Christopher Smith, Amy Southers, Cindy Spann, Joanne Stokowski, Cynthia Strong-McCarthy, Pam Tatum, Tanisha Terry, Angelique Thomas, Christina Thompson, Doreen Tingle, Chermaine Tolbert, Kristy Turner, Caitlin Vadini, Jane Vlahos, Mark Waits, Cera Wallace, Kayla Washington, Callan Wells, Laura White, Hannah Williams, Jessica Woltjen

#### Bright from the Start Staff

Amy Jacobs, Commissioner  
Susan Adams, Deputy Commissioner for Pre-K and Instructional Supports  
Dennis Brice, Chief Information Officer  
Reg Griffin, Chief Communications Officer  
Elisabetta Kasfir, Deputy Commissioner for Child Care and Parent Services  
Bentley Ponder, Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships  
Rian Ringsrud, Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration  
Pam Stevens, Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services

Ira Sudman, Chief Legal Officer  
Ben Appling, Audits and Compliance Director  
Carrie Ashbee, Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning Executive Director  
Pamela Barner, Professional Development System Administrator  
Chasity Baugh, Quality Rated Analyst  
Larilyn Beyer, Quality Rated Assessor Manager  
Tamika Boone, Nutrition Services Director  
Vanessa Brown, Early Head Start Program Specialist  
Jessie Bruno, Research Analyst  
Quandra Collins, Special Assistant to the Commissioner  
Jennie Couture, Instructional Supports Director  
Woody Dover, Enterprise Projects Director  
Faith Duncan, Pre-K Field Operations Director  
Maria Goss, Early Head Start Director  
Tajha Harden, Quality Rated Subsidy Manager  
Anita Hasni, Research Analyst  
LeighAnn Hendrix, Compliance Manager  
Melissa Herndon, CCS Regional Manager  
Amy Hill, Compliance Supervisor  
Randy Hudgins, Research Director  
Alexis-Breanna Jefferson, GaPDS User Support Rep  
Denise Jenson, Quality Rated Director  
Donna Johnson, CAPS Family Support Director  
Shawnell Johnson, CAPS Family Support Director  
Arun Kandel, Chief Information Security Officer  
Sonia Ladd, Business Operations Specialist  
Marcy Maioli, IT Project Manager  
Susan Maude, Credentialing Specialist  
Doris McQuiller, GaPDS User Support Rep  
Angela Melton, CCR&R Contract Manager  
Reisha Merriman, CAPS Specialist  
Lindsay Miller, Quality Rated Manager  
Christi Moore, Professional Learning Director  
Dana Morrison, CCS Director  
Rob O'Callaghan, Research Manager  
Jill O'Meara, Community Partnerships Manager  
Crystal Munoz, Research Intern  
Rhonda Parker, CCS Director  
Martine Powe, Quality Rated Assessor  
Laura Reid, Professional Learning Specialist  
Anne Rein, Departmental Editor  
Alphonso Rembert, IT Specialist  
Michael Rodgers, Finance Director  
April Rogers, CCS Director  
Brittany Sams, QR Coordinator  
Barbara Sanders, IT Analyst

Tamisa Sapp, Quality Rated Analyst  
Allison Setterlind, Head Start Collaboration Director  
Jackie Shivers, Pre-K Director  
Marcie Singletary, Professional Learning Specialist  
Carrie Spangler, CCS Manager  
Sonja Steptoe, QIP Manager  
Robin Stevens, HR Director  
Tanisha Stewart, Early Head Start Specialist  
Melvia Usury, Finance Administrator  
Keturah Wafer, Training Coordinator  
Laura Wagner, QIP Director  
Bridgett Walker, EHS Project Manager  
Chrische' Walker, Quality Rated Analyst  
Jennifer Waters, Quality Rated Supervisor  
Demetrius Wilburn, IT Specialist  
Liz Young, Government Relations Director

The May 14, 2020, meeting of the Board of Early Care and Learning was held online via GoToWebinar.

**1. Call to Order**

Board Chair Susan Harper called the meeting to order at 9:12 a.m.

**2. Welcome**

Ms. Harper welcomed board members, Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) staff, and other guests. She explained that the agenda would be condensed and limited to updates on the Department's response to the COVID-19 crisis and its plans for complying with the Governor's mandated budget reductions.

**3. Approval of Agenda and Minutes**

Ms. Harper asked for a motion to accept the day's agenda. Phil Davis moved to accept, and Luann Purcell seconded. The Board accepted the agenda unanimously. Ms. Harper asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the February 20, 2020, Board meeting. Jen Bennecke moved to approve, and Mr. Davis seconded. The Board approved the minutes unanimously.

**4. DECAL Staff Reports**

The Commissioner and members of the executive cabinet provided updates about DECAL's response to the public health emergency and presented proposed budget cuts for FY 2021.

**a. Commissioner's Update**

Commissioner Amy Jacobs reviewed the timeline of Governor Kemp's public communications and executive orders, beginning with his announcement of the first confirmed case in Georgia on February 26, 2020 and continuing to his most recent order, effective May 14, allowing larger gatherings and requiring continued compliance with CDC guidelines.

The Commissioner described the Department's initial response to COVID-19. She and her executive cabinet created a war room where they met 10–12 hours a day for two weeks to articulate communication and policy changes necessitated by the pandemic. She praised DECAL employees for stepping up to the challenge of working remotely and maintaining high productivity, and she reported

that there were no customer service issues during the transition. She also recognized the IT team for quickly getting about 100 DECAL employees set up to work from home.

The executive team focused a lot on communication with stakeholders, the Commissioner said, because there were so many unknowns, and things seemed to change on a daily basis. Four provider webinars have been held, and more than 1,000 providers tuned in. Weekly stakeholder calls provide information; DECAL staff answer stakeholders' questions; and some stakeholders have offered help. The Department created a COVID-19 web page that includes an FAQ document that is updated daily and currently runs 69 pages. The page also displays data DECAL is collecting about COVID-19 and the policy memoranda for the changes that have been implemented. The Department also posts all updates to social media.

The Commissioner showed slides of the COVID-19 web page, DECAL's social media accounts, and the daily data report. The daily report shows all temporary closures, broken out by Child Care Learning Centers (CCLCs) and Family Child Care Learning Homes (FCCLHs); the number of licensing applications received; the number of new sponsors for and the number of meals served through the emergency feeding program; the Quality Care for Children (QCC) call volume; and the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program workload.

The Commissioner briefed the Board about the Short Term Assistance Benefit for Licensed Entities (STABLE) grants. She recognized Woody Dover, who serves both as DECAL's Enterprise Project Management Director and as co-Child Care Services (CCS) Administrator and is our link to the federal government, for designing the program.

Georgia received about \$144 million from CARES Act funds to help stabilize child care businesses in Georgia. Federal guidelines allow for funds to be used for regular operating expenses, increased cleaning or sanitation costs, and tuition assistance for families.

The goals for STABLE were to make it easy for providers to apply, award funds quickly, and base rates on current data. Rates, based on February attendance, depended on whether the center was open or temporarily closed and whether it had received CAPS or Georgia's Pre-K funding. DECAL has continued to make scheduled payments to CAPS and Pre-K providers regardless of whether they are open or temporarily closed.

Payment maximums are based on the licensed capacity of the center. An FCCLH could receive as much as \$1900. A CCLC with an enrollment of 100 children, (which is average for a center), that remained open and had not already received CAPS or Pre-K payments could receive as much as \$24,000.

Providers were invited to apply between May 1 and May 15. As of May 13, almost 3,300 or 75% of providers had applied for a total of \$34 million. DECAL estimates that \$50 million would be awarded as STABLE grants. The application asked for a budget allocation which will be used to help design further funding opportunities.

Ms. Harper thanked the Commissioner for her report.

#### **b. Nutrition Services Update**

Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud reported that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) authorized states to operate emergency summer feeding programs early in March of this year. DECAL began recruiting sponsors in mid-March. Currently there are 40 sponsors in Georgia operating more than 400 sites in 51 counties. As of May 12, sponsors have served over 1.2 million meals. The agency is authorized to operate the program through June 30. The program may be extended by the USDA.

Ms. Purcell expressed her appreciation for DECAL's emergency feeding program, saying that it has been crucial and critical.

**c. Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Update**

Deputy Commissioner Elisabetta Kasfir described the emergency policies CAPS has implemented to support child care providers and families with young children. The emergency policies and policy waivers were enacted, for the most part on March 16 and are in effect until May 22. CAPS staff members review these every two weeks and extend them in two-week increments, monitoring the needs of providers and families as well as the resources available to DECAL.

CAPS payments are normally based on attendance, but emergency payment policies allow providers to bill based on enrollment. A child care provider can bill at the highest rate, whether the program is open or closed and whether a child is in attendance or not, as long as the child attended at least once since March 1, 2020. DECAL has also waived some CAPS eligibility requirements for families. If parents lose their jobs or have their work hours reduced, they will not lose their eligibility for CAPS. Similarly, if a family comes up for renewal, it will not lose its CAPS eligibility if a parent is not in a state-approved activity (typically work or school.)

Using CARES Act funds, CAPS also created 500 slots for a new priority group, essential services workers (ESW). The group has two tiers. The first, for medical personnel, first responders, child care workers, and pharmacy employees, opened April 1. The second, for all workers in the food supply chain, opened May 1. To qualify, at least one adult in the family must be working 24 hours per week in an essential service role and meet other eligibility requirements, e.g. income and residency. CARES Act funding.

As of May 8, CAPS has received 2,133 referrals, 29% of which have been dispositioned. If families qualify for another priority group, CAPS staff assign them to that group in order to reserve slots for essential services workers who would not otherwise qualify for CAPS. So far, 46 families and a total of 73 children are being served in the ESW group, and 45 families are being served in other priority groups.

Mr. Davis asked, "Is there any sense of when some of the closed facilities will reopen and where we might be in the September/October time frame?"

Ms. Kasfir responded that there are too many unknowns to make predictions. She said Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services Pam Stevens might have some insights.

Ms. Harper said, "We do appreciate all the effort your staff has put into compiling this information and getting it to us here at this board meeting."

**d. Child Care Services (CCS) Update**

Deputy Commissioner Pam Stevens gave a briefing on the policy and procedural changes DECAL has implemented to limit exposure to the virus. These align with CDC recommendations and guidance from Governor Kemp's office, and they apply to all CCLCs and FCCLHs.

Because it isn't possible to care for young children from six feet away, DECAL limits group size. No more than 10 people, including children and teachers, have been permitted in a classroom, and those in the classroom stay together throughout the day, including lunch. The same limit has applied to FCCLHs, meaning that the total number of occupants in the house cannot exceed 10. Effective May 14, by order of the Governor, group size can be increased to 20.

Many requirements have been temporarily changed in response to the pandemic. Already-stringent sanitation requirements have been made more stringent, and children receive daily health screenings before they enter a child care facility. Staff members, rather than parents, now sign children in and out; and parents and other visitors are no longer allowed. Field trips have also been suspended. A few rules have been temporarily relaxed. For example, DECAL is temporarily allowing children who are due for immunizations to attend school because many pediatricians are not conducting office visits. Similarly, providers are temporarily being allowed to operate as long as one person onsite has current CPR credentials because CPR classes are not being offered at this time.

CCS has expanded support for providers. CCS consultants are reaching out to providers to offer support and answer questions, and they have created a checklist to help providers comply with all the changes to regulations. CCS has also worked with IT to develop virtual site visits. In phase 1 providers are uploading to KOALA documents that CCS consultants normally check in person. In phase 2, consultants will conduct virtual visits to monitor providers' compliance with COVID-19 procedures.

DECAL IT also helped CCS create a function in KOALA for providers to indicate whether they were open or closed. This helps providers who are open and families who need child care to find each other more easily. It also allows CCS to observe whether there are geographic areas where there are no providers open and, if necessary, incent providers to open. As of May 14, 2020, 2,082 providers (45%) are open.

Mr. Davis asked, "I know you guys are providing as much financial assistance as you can. Do we have any understanding of how much economic distress some of these closed centers may be in, and really the open ones as well?"

Ms. Stevens answered that while DECAL is doing what it can to support providers that are feeling the impact, it may not be possible to understand how much financial distress providers are experiencing until the pandemic is over. She said DECAL wants there to be capacity so that those who can return to work will have options when they do.

Commissioner Jacobs also responded to Mr. Davis' question, citing national studies and a survey fielded in Georgia that show providers have between two weeks and two months of cash reserves to continue paying staff and other bills. This information guided the decision to get the STABLE grants to providers as quickly as possible.

Mr. Davis asked whether we have any sense from the providers that are open whether there's been any uptick or tracking of infection rates.

Ms. Stevens explained that DECAL does not have complete data on infections because providers are required to report infections of teachers or their family members to DECAL, but they are not required to report infections of students.

**e. Pre-K and Instructional Supports Update**

Deputy Commissioner Susan Adams reported that all Georgia's Pre-K programs were closed as of April 6, 2020, the same day that Georgia schools closed. DECAL has continued to make payments to all Pre-K programs. This is, in part, a teacher retention strategy; and Pre-K teachers have stepped up to check on their students virtually and provide lessons and other activities for parents to lead.

If a Pre-K student needs child care while Pre-K programs are closed, Pre-K funds can be used to pay for the child's care for the 6 1/2 hour instructional day through the end of the school year. The deadline for Pre-K programs to expend FY2020 funds has been extended through September 30, 2020.

The summer transition program will be shortened from six weeks to four this year, and programs must follow current COVID-19 guidelines. DECAL will provide virtual training, coaching, and monitoring for summer transition programs.

Ms. Adams gave examples of the instructional supports her team has created to support parents as well as teachers who are engaging virtually with Pre-K learners. Georgia Pre-K @ home is a very popular daily post with a variety of age-appropriate learning activities, such as outdoor activities, story time, and screen-free activities. Toddler Time at Home has also been very popular. The activities are specifically designed to use common household items and require very little preparation. DECAL's Family Child Development team developed Chat About Children for parents to learn about how they can monitor their child's development and support children during this stressful transition. The Inclusion and Behavioral Support team has also developed resources for families and teachers to support children in understanding all the changes necessitated by the pandemic. DECAL staff have also created resources for school age populations professional learning; and the Professional Learning team has created webinars for DECAL staff about engaging students virtually as well as a SEEDS webinar series and an Infant-Toddler webinar series that are available to teachers for credit.

Ms. Harper asked, "In areas where we have very little access to technology, is there any way we can determine if any of our prepared support is being delivered? And if so, how?"

Ms. Adams responded that DECAL has also been offering low-technology support. Many Pre-K teachers have been developing packets and books for families to pick up. DECAL specialists have been working to provide on-the-ground support. Some Pre-K programs have arranged for families to pick up instructional materials at emergency feeding sites. Also, all the virtual materials are accessible via smart phone because many families, even if they don't have access to a computer, do have internet access over their smart phones. Many teachers are also reaching out to children by phone, and DECAL specialists have been doing teleconferences and coaching by phone.

Ms. Harper said, "Thank you very much. That's outstanding."

Debra Brock said, "Speaking from the perspective of a building-level principal and a grandparent as well of a Pre-K student, I wanted to let you know that our teachers here have used these resources that you've been providing a lot with parents and the students we have here in Pre-K, not just at my school but at all the schools here in Gordon County, and we've had lots and lots of positive feedback about those resources. Also, Jae Boyd our specialist here in Gordon County has been very helpful in providing support to our Pre-K teachers. I just wanted to let you know it has been a very positive experience with our Pre-K students."

Ms. Harper said, "Thank you Debra. That's very meaningful to me to see that our efforts are certainly being utilized."

**f. Quality Innovations and Partnerships (QIP) Update**

Deputy Commissioner Bentley Ponder provided updates on the work of each of the four QIP teams. The Quality Rated (QR) team has extended the deadline for all CAPS providers to achieve a star rating from December 2020 until at least July 2021. The team wanted to give the providers a specific date but remain flexible because there are so many unknowns about the public health emergency. QR assessors have been doing overviews and trainings related to the Environment Rating Scales to strengthen the reliability of our observations. The team is developing post COVID-19 policies and orientation materials.

QR observations have been suspended until at least June 30, 2020, and several adjustments have been made to allow providers additional time to submit their materials and be rated.

On the Community Outreach and Partnerships team, all of the Community Coordinators created community engagement networks with the providers in their regions. The idea for these networks came from the work of DECAL's Head Start State Collaboration Director, Allison Setterlind. In the past two weeks the team has also partnered with Quality Care for Children to create six business support webinars for providers. Over 1,000 providers have participated. QIP's Research and Communications Teams have also been able to revamp the data received from the 1-877-ALL-GA-KIDS call center and expand opportunities for families to seek referrals.

As an Early Head Start grantee DECAL has continued to pay providers for Early Head Start services. The Early Head Start Child Care Partnership team submitted the continuing non-competitive application on April 1 and has continued to work with Georgia Quality Care for Children (QCC) to continue to engage and support families.

The Research and Policy Analysis team created new data and data visualizations as well as the internal daily report the Commissioner mentioned earlier. The team continues to develop a research agenda and to think through some of the bigger questions, such as what cracks in the system this emergency revealed and how DECAL can address them. Mr. Ponder thanked the team for stepping up to do whatever was needed, including the webinar in process.

**g. FY 2021 Budget Update**

Mr. Ringsrud shared DECAL's proposed budget cuts. All state agencies received instructions on May 1, 2020 to cut 14% from their FY2021 budgets. These plans are not being treated as new budget submissions, and thus the Board will not be asked to vote on DECAL's plan. The 14% reductions apply to all state funds, which, for DECAL, are the lottery funds in the Pre-K program and state general funds in the Child Care Services (CCS) program. Unlike prior budget reduction exercises, this time there are no exemptions. The 14% reduction will come from DECAL's 2020 base budget rather than the 4% and 6% reductions that the Board has already approved.

The DECAL proposal cuts a total of \$61,676,324. A reduction of \$8,657,791 from the state general funds will be applied to CCS spending; and a reduction of \$53,018,533 will be applied to Pre-K spending.

CCS receives federal as well as state funds. Thus, the \$8,657,791 represents a 14% reduction in state funds but only a 3.2% reduction in total funds. The cuts will be made by eliminating one open employee position, redistributing funding for salaries and benefits from state funds to federal funds, and shifting all 3,000 Quality Rated Subsidy Grant (QRSG) slots to traditional CAPS slots. DECAL's QRSB program is an opportunity for 2-star and 3-star Quality Rated providers to receive higher reimbursement rates for providing care to CAPS-eligible children. The grant model allows providers to be guaranteed a certain number of slots each year so that they can have a fixed revenue stream. In exchange for the increased reimbursement rates and guaranteed revenue, providers in the QRSB program conduct eligibility determinations themselves. In traditional CAPS, DECAL does the eligibility determinations. This plan allows DECAL to continue to serve the same number of children.

To achieve a 14% budget reduction in the Pre-K program DECAL will make cuts to both the formula side, i.e., the funds that are passed to Pre-K programs, and the administrative side. In prior budget reductions, DECAL was able to make cuts only to the administrative side. The specific reductions are as follows:

- Classroom instructional days will be reduced from 180 to 167
- Teacher planning days will be reduced from 10 to 4
- The number of funded Pre-K slots will be reduced from 84,000 to 80,000, which means there will be 180 fewer Pre-K classrooms. This is about a 5% reduction in the number of children and the number of classrooms.
- The use of lottery funds for extended day programs for CAPS-eligible children will be eliminated. These programs will continue to receive some federal funds.
- The lottery funding for the summer transition program will be eliminated for the summer of 2021.
- On the administrative side, Pre-K will reduce some contract expenses, eliminate two vacant positions, and reduce some computer charges.

Mr. Ringsrud said that the executive team's purpose was to propose reductions in such a way that would minimize the impact to children, families, teachers, child care providers, and Georgia citizens. The team also tried to propose reductions that are temporary and do not make structural changes to DECAL's operations, so that when the state recovers from the economic fallout of COVID-19, these funds can be restored.

Kristin Morrissey said, "First, I think this is an amazing amount of work you've done, and I applaud your efforts. It is heartbreaking to see these necessary reductions, but we have to comply with what we were given to do, which is a mandate to cut 14%. Reducing the instructional days and the teacher planning days mirrors conversations going on in the K-12 world."

Ms. Brock asked when the proposed budget cuts would be communicated at the system level.

Mr. Ringsrud answered that DECAL must submit our proposals to the Governor's office and the Legislature by May 20, 2020. After that proposals from all the state agencies must go through the entire legislative process and eventually into an appropriations bill that the Governor signs. Until the bill is signed, changes can be made. There may be decisions to cut more, cut less, or cut something different. Until DECAL receives a final bill signed by the Governor, it will be difficult to communicate changes, but we will communicate as soon as we know. As soon as we know something, we will communicate with the Board.

Cristina Washell said, "Thank you again for the very informative presentation and also just to see the commitment we have for our children and our communities in trying to work through the challenges that are in front of us in this moment. I want to thank you for that. It's obvious in your presentation that that is leading the decisions we are making." Ms. Washell also asked whether the proposal is a one-time cut or a permanent budget cut.

Mr. Ringsrud responded that the Governor will decide. He said that the instruction DECAL has received from that office applies only to the FY2021 budget and that the agency doesn't yet know what will happen in the future.

Kristy Beam asked whether the ELA adoption going on now could be put on hold in order to save some of the Pre-K slots that will be cut.

Ms. Adams responded that, with respect to the Pre-K curriculum funds, those funds were already allocated for a specific purpose and have to be expended in FY2020 and thus could not be used for the budget cuts for FY2021.

Ms. Brock asked how the Pre-K slots will be reduced from 84,000 to 80,000. Will the maximum class size of 22 be reduced? Or will the number of classrooms be reduced?

Mr. Ringsrud responded that the number of classrooms will be reduced. Given 22 children in a class and the plan to eliminate 4,000 slots, about 180 classrooms will be closed.

Ms. Brock asked how DECAL will determine where the classrooms will be eliminated.

Ms. Adams responded that DECAL had to close some classrooms during a budget reduction about eight years ago. There will be a two-tiered process. First, we will determine where in the state classrooms can be closed without eliminating access in any geographic region. Then we'll establish criteria to determine which classrooms to close and communicate the criteria to programs. Ms. Adams' team is already looking at programs that are reporting they're going to close classrooms. Other criteria may be classrooms that have had lower enrollment or quality issues.

Ms. Brock said, "I totally understand. We're in the same type of scenario right now, looking ahead to what our school year might look like. There's no way we can know that now. We're just having to come up with scenarios so that we can be prepared whatever the case may be. I'm just thinking ahead. We just had our lottery yesterday; and I may hold off sending out acceptance letters until we know a little bit more."

Ms. Adams responded that some programs have contacted DECAL, and we are recommending that as they think about registration and determining children they're going to serve, in their communication to families they add the language indicating that registrations are pending approval of the state budget, and the slots won't be finalized until after that.

Theresa Magpuri-Lavell said, "Thank you for being thoughtful in these reductions. This is definitely a difficult time, but we can see that there's a commitment to the children, focused on the human capital. These were not straight across the board cuts but being very strategic for these one-time measures. Also, we know this is a moving document. This is a plan we've all had to put in place, and there will be changes."

Ms. Magpuri-Lavell also asked how the Board will be kept abreast of the changes that are made to the plan DECAL is submitting.

Mr. Ringsrud responded that he would work with Ms. Harper to communicate via email unless something arises that requires a Board meeting

## **5. Public Comment Period**

Ms. Harper asked Special Assistant to the Commissioner Quandra Collins whether any comments for the Board had been received from the public during the meeting. Ms. Collins responded that three comments were received via the chat box in GoToWebinar, and she read the following:

Edge Summerfield Disner wrote "As a provider of a licensed childcare learning center, I must share HUGE compliments to the success of DECAL's communication through this national health emergency. The FAQs, emails, webinars, and quick response from our Consultant has been outstanding. THANK YOU!"

Harry Patel wrote, "The kids not moving from class to class means we have to have teachers manning class from first child arrives to last leaves in each class. Payroll \$\$\$"

Ellen Reynolds wrote, "On behalf of the Georgia Child Care Association (GCCA), we want to thank Commissioner Jacobs and the entire DECAL staff for their hard work during this unprecedented time. From speaking with other state associations across the country, no state has done a better job in providing ever-

changing guidance to keep children and staff safe as well as providing financial assistance to stabilize the child care industry so that capacity will exist when the economy fully reopens. Multiple states have reached out to GCCA to ask for advice on how Georgia (DECAL) has been so successful in supporting providers and the families we serve. We routinely have providers who tell us that they are so thankful they operate in Georgia after talking to their peers across the country who have received no aid from their licensing agencies. In anecdotal experience the 30% of providers who remained open throughout were only serving 10 - 30% of their normal capacity. Working with DECAL, to collect data on capacity last week, we learned that providers who remained open are seeing a steady increase in the number of families who are bringing their children back to child care settings. However, for providers who made the difficult decision to close, we're finding there is a need for significant communication by providers to parents before parents believe it is safe enough to bring children back to a center. For example, one school who opened this week in a lower socioeconomic urban Atlanta area only had two teachers show up to work on the day they reopened. Fortunately, they only had six students show up, so there was not a ratio concern; but the provider had expected all teachers and parents to return to work, and we expect to see that in other areas if providers who closed have failed to stay in communication with families. To let you know what providers are worried about, they are worried about whether teachers will come back to work given that stimulus unemployment benefits pay many of our staff much more than providers can afford to pay. (Stimulus maximum unemployment benefits pay at the rate of approximately \$25.00 per hour.) Plus, a large number of our workforce are older and, therefore, at greater risk for COVID. This is a concern. While background checks have been down, we expect those to rise as we reopen. At one point during the pandemic there were only 15 locations in the state where background checks could be obtained, so this is of serious concern to providers as the economy reopens. Again, we cannot speak highly enough of all the efforts DECAL has put into supporting child care providers and the families they serve during this pandemic. They have been incredibly responsive to any needs we have presented with thoughtful, data-driven solutions that have helped our providers survive this unprecedented time. We appreciate DECAL's continued leadership."

There were no other comments. Ms. Collins noted that questions were received throughout the meeting and DECAL will provide responses on the website FAQ pages.

**6. Adjournment**

At 11:01, Ms. Harper asked if there was any other business for the Board, and, there being none, she announced the date of the next meeting, August 27, 2020, and adjourned the meeting.

*Jusan H. Harper* 8-27-2020  
Board Chair, Signature Date

*Kathy B. Howell* 8/27/2020  
Board Secretary, Signature Date