

**Board of Early Care and Learning Meeting**  
 Thursday, November 19, 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

**Board of  
 Early Care and Learning**

**Meeting Minutes**

<u>Board Members</u>	
Susan Harper (Chair)	Theresa Magpuri-Lavell
Phil Davis (Vice Chair)	Kristin Morrissey
Kristy Beam	Luann Purcell
Jen Bennecke	Cristina Washell
Kathy Howell	

Public Guests

Lisa Belliston, Gloria Calhoun, Maya Carter, Andrea Cline, Melissa Cole, Ophelia Datcher, Yasmeen Diggs, Tonya Ferguson, Pamela Fields, Kathy Garrett, Hanah Goldberg, Katelyn Harlander-Locke, Emily Jones, Tonya Lee, L. Little, Jatisha Marsh, Ellaine Miller, Lisa Newman, Charlotte Pelz, Joe Perrault, Maggie Reeves, Sally Rich, Cindy Spann, Chuck Stone, Brandi Swain, Christina Thompson, Callan Wells, Laura White, Jessica Woltjen

DECAL 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 Federal Programs  
 Bentley Ponder, Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships  
 Rian Ringsrud, Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration  
 Randy Hudgins, Director of Research and Policy Analysis  
 April Rogers, Director of Child Care Services Enforcement Operations  
 Allison Setterlind, Director of Head Start Collaboration  
 Clayton Adams, NE Early Education Community Partnership Lead  
 Angelette Anderson, CCS Coordinator SE Region  
 Jennifer Avera, CAPS Compliance Examiner  
 Carrie Ashbee, DECAL Foundation Executive Director  
 Farouk Baksh, Senior Director of Information Technology  
 Larilyn Beyer, Quality Rated Assessor Manager North Metro  
 Laura Boham, Quality Rated Assessor  
 Jerry Brown, Communications Specialist  
 Quandra Collins, Special Assistant to the Commissioner  
 Jennie Couture, Instructional Supports Director  
 Karla Crawford, Quality Rated Assessor

Katie Davis, Compliance Examiner, CAPS  
Kimberly Davis, Quality Rated Assessor Manager South Central  
Glenda Davis-Canteen, NW Early Education Community Partnership Coordinator Lead  
Woody Dover, Enterprise Projects Director  
Faith Duncan, Pre-K Field Operations Director  
La Sonia Evans, Quality Rated Assessor  
Jasmin Godding, Central East Early Education Community Partnership Coordinator  
Jessica Guarneros, Research Analyst  
Rhonda Gunn, Senior Human Resources Manager  
Anita Hasni, Research Analyst  
LeighAnn Hendrix, Compliance Manager  
Melissa Herndon, CCS Regional Manager  
Amy Hill, Compliance Supervisor  
Randy Hudgins, Research Director  
Denise Jenson, Quality Rated Director  
Donna Johnson, CAPS Family Support Director  
Shawnell Johnson, CAPS Family Support Director  
Melinda Knowles, Quality Rated Assessor  
Laura Lucas, Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Director  
Susan Maude, Credentialing Specialist  
Barbara McWethy, Workforce Support Manager  
Angela Melton, CCR&R Contract Manager  
Lindsay Miller, Quality Rated Manager  
Christi Moore, Professional Learning Director  
Dana Morrison, Director of CCS Field Operations  
Miranda, Murphy, Training Approval Specialist  
Sara Myers, Quality Rated Assessor  
Jill O'Meara, Community Partnerships Manager  
Martine Powe, Quality Rated Assessor  
Anne Rein, Departmental Writer/Editor  
Edward Rowell, Early Education Community Partnership Coordinator SW  
Barbara Sanders, IT Analyst  
Brittany Seltrecht, Quality Rated Assessor  
Angela Shelton, Professional Learning Specialist  
Carrie Spangler, CCS Regional Field Operations Manager  
Robin Stevens, Director of Human Resources  
Diane Swift, Quality Rated Regional Coordinator Central Georgia  
Michelle Talley, Quality Rated Assessor  
Elim Tekie, CCS Comp. Consultant  
Kristy Turner, CAPS Subsidy Analyst  
Melvia Usury, Finance Administrator  
Keturah Wafer, Training Coordinator  
Laura Wagner, QIP Director of Policy and Partnerships  
Bridgette Washington, Early Education Community Partnership Coordinator Central West  
Jill West, Quality Rated Regional Coordinator North Georgia/Metro Atlanta

Sheronn Williams, CAPS Family Support Manager Central West  
Kori Woodward-Dickens, Legal Services Officer  
Liz Young, Government Relations Director  
Sheryl Young-Wilhite, HR Senior Manager

The November 19, 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. Approval of Agenda and Minutes**

Ms. Harper asked for a motion to accept the day's agenda. Phil Davis moved to accept, and Melissa Boekhaus seconded. The Board accepted the agenda unanimously. Ms. Harper asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the August 27, 2020, Board meeting. Luann Purcell moved to approve, and Jen Bennecke seconded. The Board approved the minutes unanimously.

**3. DECAL Staff Reports**

DECAL leaders provided updates about the agency's work.

**a. Commissioner's Update**

Commissioner Amy Jacobs presented results of the child care provider survey conducted for DECAL by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia. The purpose of the survey was to get feedback from providers about how they were impacted by the pandemic, what their needs are, and their experience applying for the Short Term Assistance Benefit for Licensed Entities (STABLE) grants, the one-time payments that DECAL made available to providers from the CARES Act funding. The first round of STABLE payments was issued in May. DECAL awarded more than \$38 million to 3,800 providers. The survey was emailed to 4,087 providers in July, and 1,988 (49%) responded, a very good response rate for any survey. The survey asked providers why their enrollment was lower during the pandemic. Their top three reasons were parents being out of work, voluntary absence due to families not needing care, and voluntary absence due to perceived health risks. When asked about their most immediate needs, 32% of providers said additional funds and 27% said increased enrollment. More than 90% of respondents reported that the STABLE application was easy to complete. More than half of providers reported that they had used all of their STABLE funds, 38% reported having used some of the funds. The top three spending categories were facilities expenses (rent, mortgage, utilities, etc.), supplies to comply with executive orders and CDC guidelines, and classroom materials and supplies. Asked whether STABLE funds allowed them to reopen or remain open, 90% agreed or strongly agreed. About 76% of providers are now open.

DECAL recently announced a commitment to send out \$55 million to licensed providers in STABLE Round 2 payments. The application process opened on November 16 and will close on December 2. More than 2,100 providers (almost half of all eligible providers) have already applied. Round 2 grants will be available only to providers who are open. The payment rate of \$240 per child is the same as in Round 1. Round 2 payments will be based on October attendance, and there will be a minimum payment of \$2,000. DECAL hopes to issue the payments by December 31.

The Commissioner closed her presentation by recognizing Georgia's Pre-K Teachers of the Year, Heather Melillo from West End Elementary in Rome and Alderine Healey from the YMCA Paulding Early Learning Program in Hiram. Foundation funding provides cash awards to the two teachers, one

from a public school and one from a private school. Teachers receive \$3,000 each to spend as they choose and \$3,000 for a classroom makeover. Schools receive funding for substitutes and travel expenses so that the teachers can serve as Pre-K ambassadors.

Ms. Harper commented that it is encouraging to see that child care facilities are reopening.

**b. Finance and Administration Update**

Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud gave a financial update for the first quarter of state fiscal year 2021 which ended September 30. DECAL's expenses are on track with the budget. With 75% of the fiscal year ahead of us, we have 73% of funds remaining. At this time last year, we had 72% of funds available. Minor variations in the rate of spending by program occur because federal funds were released on October 1, the beginning of the federal fiscal year. Similarly, a state spending order policy requires that when state funds are used to match federal funds, the federal funds are to be expended first, so state funds and general funds get spent a little more slowly than federal funds. The state auditor has begun the regular annual audit of state fiscal year 2020, and the results should be available at the February Board meeting.

Mr. Ringsrud highlighted the ongoing success of the emergency feeding programs. The final tally for the emergency summer feeding program that DECAL oversaw between the middle of March and June 30 is 5.5 million meals. The regular summer feeding program began July 1, and the USDA has extended it to run through June 30, 2021. As of September 30, DECAL had served 3.2 million meals at over 1,600 sites in 81 counties.

**c. Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports Update**

Deputy Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports Susan Adams reported on the success of Georgia's Pre-K Week. She thanked Board members for reading to students and reported that even though the celebration this year was virtual, a record number of more than 800 Pre-K classrooms participated.

In her update about Pre-K, Ms. Adams informed the Board that Pre-K enrollment is down from last year from about 80,000 children (or 60% of 4-year-olds in Georgia) to about 63,000 (or 46% of the population). There are also about 1,800 fewer children on the Pre-K waiting list for SY 2021 than there were in SY 2020. Parents typically place their children on the Pre-K waiting list because there isn't a program in their area or there isn't a slot at their preferred classroom. This year, possibly because of very high numbers of COVID-19 cases in their communities, some parents are choosing to keep their children on the waiting list until later in the school year or until next year, when they would start Pre-K as 5-year-olds.

Ms. Adams reviewed the three instructional models that Pre-K classrooms may choose from. About 65% are providing traditional in-classroom instruction; 10% are using a hybrid model; and 25% follow a full distance learning model. Teachers may deliver literacy lessons or hold circle time virtually in a large group. They are required to use small groups or individual instruction for specific skills that children need.

In response to lower enrollment, Pre-K payment policies for the current school year have been adjusted to encourage providers to remain open. DECAL typically prorates payments based on the number of children enrolled in a program. This year reimbursements will be based on the provider's grant agreement with DECAL and the Lead Teacher's credentials. Similarly, as classrooms are reviewed for potential closure because of low enrollment, Ms. Adams' team will look at classrooms with fewer than

11 students rather than 16-18 as they usually do. Classrooms are not automatically slated for closure because of low enrollment. Low enrollment in the prior year may indicate that there are more classrooms than are needed in a geographic area. In deciding which classrooms to close, the team considers classrooms where there are credential issues with the lead teacher; and, before closing a classroom, they look at the impact of closure on the projected enrollment for the coming school year and whether parents will have access to classrooms with the instructional model they prefer.

Ms. Adams announced that the Online Learning Library Initiative (OLLI) has been moved to a new platform. It is crucial now for DECAL to be able to deliver professional learning virtually. The new platform allows teachers to receive credit for the courses they take. The Professional Learning team will also offer two virtual summits, funded by the Preschool Development Grant, on child care resilience and understanding the impact of trauma on children.

Ms. Adams also reported on the planned expansion of the SEEDS for Success program, which supports teachers in providing positive social emotional environments and nurturing social/emotional and mental health growth for young children. Two additional field positions have been funded in the state budget for Inclusion and Behavioral Support Specialists. The SEEDS helpline is a one-stop shop for families, providers, Head Start programs, and teachers to get resources, professional development, and coaching for children with persistent behavior problems. The SEEDS team has converted many trainings to an online format, and the Inclusion and Behavioral Support Specialists have been successful delivering coaching online. Since the beginning of the current school year the helpline has received 152 calls; 52 classrooms are receiving virtual coaching; 48 trainings have been offered virtually; and almost 600 teachers have received training. The new Early Infant Mental Health Director position has been filled by Laura Lucas. Ms. Lucas will work with other state agencies to address the lack of mental health services for very young children and develop a plan to fund the needed support.

Mr. Davis asked how effective distance learning is for children of Pre-K age. Ms. Adams responded that the research about distance learning for very young children focuses on the amount of screen time in a child's day. Young children learn from interaction, she explained, so her team guides teachers to plan lessons that involve children talking and using materials they have at home. The team also helps teachers develop hands-on lessons that don't rely on screens for children to do at home. Ms. Adams also pointed out that most Pre-K students are in traditional classrooms and 75% receive at least some in-person instruction.

Ms. Harper asked whether allowing parents to enter 5-year-olds in Pre-K is a new policy. Ms. Adams answered that parents have always had that option; but Pre-K programs set their own enrollment policy, and some choose not to enroll 5-year-olds. DECAL's Pre-K team will be hosting webinars for Pre-K grantees to discuss the coming school year and will convey the importance of communicating enrollment policies to families and encourage grantees to offer flexibility because of the pandemic.

Ms. Harper also asked whether parents are permitted to hold their children back for a second year of Pre-K. Ms. Adams answered that although parents may not decide on their own to hold their child back, there is a policy and practice that allows for programs to request that a child be retained in PreK. Reasons for requesting that a child be held back include that a child missed a substantial number of days or has a disability and the IEP recommends a second year of Pre-K. Ms. Adams' team reviews these requests every spring and requires documentation about the reason for the request. Not many requests are approved.

Ms. Bennecke thanked Ms. Adams for her leadership and the leadership of her team during the pandemic and asked whether final decisions were being made about classroom closures. Ms. Adams responded that only about 20 classrooms have been slated for closure based on the first enrollment roster. These classrooms will remain open until the Thanksgiving break. After the break, the children will join new classrooms. There may be additional classrooms slated for closure after the second roster is received. If so, the classrooms will remain open until the winter break. Ms. Adams emphasized that her team tries to minimize disruption for families and children and acknowledges that each classroom closure puts a lead teacher and assistant teacher out of work. She also said she expects Pre-K enrollment to rebound next year.

d. **Quality Innovations and Partnerships (QIP) Update** Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships Bentley Ponder presented a map showing the concentration of Quality Rated providers by county. In 52% of Georgia counties more than half of providers are Quality Rated, which reflects the exponential growth in Quality Rated that has occurred over the past five to six years. With respect to the goal of having all CAPS providers become Quality Rated, 82% of children with CAPS scholarships are now at Quality Rated providers, and 70% of CAPS providers have at least a 1-star rating. Even more CAPS providers are participating in Quality Rated, meaning that they have started the process of earning a star rating; 99% of children with CAPS scholarships are at a participating provider, and 96% of providers are participating. Quality Rated classroom observations remain suspended through at least July 1, 2021. If it becomes safe for assessors to return to the field before that time, DECAL may work with providers to conduct observations primarily for training purposes. DECAL pays incentives for CAPS providers who receive their first star rating. These payments have begun and will continue into 2021.

Earlier in the year Quality Rated implemented a process for providers to receive an initial 1-star rating, good for one year, based on their portfolio score. So far this year the QR team has rated 506 providers; 299 received 3-star ratings good for three years, and 207 received temporary (one-year) 1-star ratings. The temporary rating program has been so successful that it is being expanded, and Dr. Ponder recognized Quality Rated Director Denise Jenson and her management team for developing the Temporary Alternate Rating Options (TARO). In addition to the option to receive a temporary 1-star rating, providers will have the opportunity to participate in the guided Quality Rated Virtual Process (QRVP) for the opportunity to earn a temporary 2-star rating. That program is being piloted now with 37 participants. The QRVP contains five topic areas, all based on the Environment Rating Scales. Participants complete four out of five with guidance from their CCR&R TA and a Quality Rated Improvement Guide.

On the Community Outreach and Partnerships team led by Laura Wagner, the community coordinators revived the regional Birth–8 teams that were first convened during the Early Learning Challenge Grant. They also created regional child care engagement networks and are conducting financial planning workshops with Quality Care for Children. The Cross-Agency Child Data System (CACDS) team is working with KSM Consulting to develop a strategic plan for the CACDS database. Work on the Language and Literacy Endorsement, put on hold early in the pandemic, will resume with a provider webinar for pilot participants on December 1. Professional development for the pilot participants will begin early in 2021.

Maria Goss leads the Early Head Start Child Care Partnerships project, which serves 184 families in centers and family learning homes. All providers are now open. DECAL’s research team conducted in-

depth interviews with 19 families. The interviews reveal the precarious situations that many families find themselves in, and the information collected will be used to strengthen services.

Dr. Magpuri-Lavell asked how the ERS ITERS and ECERS that have been in use for on-site observations translate into the QRVP. Dr. Ponder responded the five topics selected for the QRVP cover about 90% of the indicators in the ERS, and the QR team recognizes that the virtual process is not a substitution for live observations.

Director of Research and Policy Analysis Randy Hudgins reported on the ongoing data collection and analysis his team performs. As of October 30, about 76% of licensed child care providers reported that they are open. The research team reports open vs. closed status by provider type (CCLC or FCCLH) and region; in some counties 100% of licensed providers are open. Quality Rated providers throughout the state are slightly more likely to be open than their unrated counterparts. CAPS providers are also more likely to be open than non-CAPS providers. With respect to CCLCs, 85% of those with CAPS scholarships are open compared with 56% who are not CAPS providers. Prior to November 1, providers were asked to voluntarily report any cases of COVID-19 at their facilities. As of October 31, 372 licensed providers (about 8% of all licensed providers) in 78 counties had reported at least one case. As of November 1, providers are required to report COVID-19 cases to CCS.

e. **Federal Programs Update** Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs Elisabetta Kasfir provided updates on the SOLVE program (Supporting Online Learning for Virtual Education) and the CAPS emergency payment policies. The purpose of SOLVE is to provide scholarships for families with students enrolled in Georgia Public School systems that currently offer primarily virtual learning, meaning that 50% or more of instruction is delivered online. The scholarships support working families with children ages 5 through 12, kindergarten through grade 7, by paying for tuition and support during the school day while students are engaged in virtual learning. The SOLVE program is funded by the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund, a part of the Cares Act. The program began on September 1, 2020. Scholarships are issued for three months and can be extended in three-month increments if the school system continues to offer a primarily virtual learning model. For children to qualify for SOLVE scholarships, their parents must be working or going to school with incomes not exceeding 85% of the state median income, about \$68,000 for a family of four. As of October 30, DECAL had awarded about 3,350 SOLVE scholarships. Almost 75% of these went to families earning less than \$31,199 per year. Scholarships were awarded in 42 school districts and to 800 providers, 75% of which are licensed Child Care Learning Centers (CCLC). As of October 30, CAPS had processed more than 4,500 SOLVE applications, 70% of them automatically. Manual applications are generally processed within one day. About 750 scholarships were still available at the end of October.

Ms. Kasfir reviewed two recent changes to the CAPS emergency payment policies. The emergency policies were implemented to support the child care industry at the beginning of the pandemic as attendance plummeted and many providers were forced to close. CAPS monitors attendance data; and, because the number of children being billed as present continues to trend lower than expected, DECAL continues to pay for children with active scholarships whether they are present or absent as long as they attended at least one day since March. In September CAPS stopped paying the highest rate authorized on an active scholarship and began paying for the care provided. At the end of October CAPS began paying only providers who are open or temporarily closed, that is closed for 30 days or less. A provider that needs to close temporarily for more than 30 days can apply for a waiver.

At the beginning of November CAPS amended some regular policies. Changes include requiring providers to report non-attendance and excessive unexplained absences and stipulating CAPS will reimburse providers only for before and after school care for school age children unless a child is participating in distance learning while school is in session.

**f. Child Care Services Update** Director of Enforcement Operations April Rogers gave an overview of how CCS has fulfilled its regulatory responsibilities while complying with COVID-19 restrictions. CCS leadership developed a plan in April to fulfill four primary goals: 1) complete normal regulatory visits for the remainder of fiscal year 2020; 2) process new applications and change of ownership applications; 3) investigate the most serious incidents and complaints; and 4) develop a safe way to carry out regulatory oversight.

There were 425 providers open in April, and CCS staff visited all of them by June 30. CCS staff also continued to process applications. With IT support, CCS leadership implemented a two-phase process for making virtual inspections. In the first phase providers upload documentation to their KOALA accounts for CCS staff to review. In the second phase CCS staff use the GoToMeeting platform to conduct virtual inspections. Inspectors look at core rules because these impact the immediate health and safety of children. They also evaluate compliance with executive orders related to the pandemic and follow up on any prior rule violations. The response from providers to the virtual inspection process has been positive. The administrative review of documents may be continued after the pandemic.

As of the end of October CCS had completed 2,226 virtual visits. These included initial licensing studies for new providers, regular licensing studies, inspections of exempt providers who receive CCDF funding, and investigations.

**g. Head Start Collaboration Office Update** State Head Start Collaboration Director Allison Setterlind informed Board members that Head Start funds 33 grantees in Georgia, including DECAL, that serve more than 25,000 children and their families. Head Start employs around 7,000 staff in Georgia at 365 locations across 151 counties. One of the services Head Start provides is health care, monitoring well-care visits and immunizations and making sure Head Start families have a medical home. This embedded infrastructure was helpful during the pandemic.

Ms. Setterlind reported on the Georgia ECE Health and Wellness Collaboration project that she participated in with Dr. Boekhaus, who represented the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). GEEARS and Voices for Georgia's Children (Voices) also collaborated. The goals of the project were to understand how COVID-19 has impacted Head Start families and programs and to connect Head Start programs and pediatricians with each other.

GEEARS and Voices conducted three focus groups in October with Head Start Health and Family Service Managers from metropolitan, suburban, and rural counties throughout the state and three focus groups with parents who were selected by the Family Service Managers. The AAP surveyed physicians. The focus groups revealed that Head Start families, already vulnerable because of poverty, have been significantly impacted by job losses as well as food and housing insecurity. Ms. Setterlind praised DECAL's Nutrition Services team for their work getting fresh food to Head Start families, and she gave several examples of innovative solutions devised by Head Start programs around the state. Parents who participated in focus groups identified Head Start as a very important resource for them during the crisis. One of the most startling facts to emerge from the collaboration concerns the lack of access to health

care. There are 63 counties in Georgia that do not have a pediatrician, and Head Start families often have to travel long distances for routine care and to see specialists.

Dr. Boekhaus commented that it was eye-opening for the pediatricians who participated in the project to see how much of the state is without a pediatrician or even a family doctor. She expressed the hope that pediatricians near under-served areas will be able to offer telehealth visits to families who cannot travel.

**4. 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 no comments had been received.

**5. Adjournment**

At 11:01, Ms. Harper asked if there was any other business for the Board; there being none, she announced the date of the next meeting, February 18, 2021 and adjourned the meeting.

*Susan Harper* 2/18/21

Board Chair, Signature

Date

*Kathy Howell* 2/18/21

Board Secretary, Signature

Date