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

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**Board of Early Care and Learning Meeting**  
Thursday, February 18, 2021 — 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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<u>Board Members</u>	
Susan Harper (Chair)	Kathy Howell
Phil Davis (Vice Chair)	Theresa Magpuri-Lavell
Kristy Beam	Kristin Morrissey
Jen Bennecke	Luann Purcell
Melissa Boekhaus	Cristina Washell
Debra Brock	

### Public Guests

Patricia Andrews, Uzma Azhar, Ivan Bennette, Jessica Chee, Gina Cook, Yasmeen Diggs, Dana Driggers, Hanah Goldberg, Ashlee Harris, Merrill Kemp-Wilcox, Blanche Lamb, Katie Landes, Shelly Lawson, Mary Lyons, Ellaine Miller, Maggie Reeves, Bernard Reynolds, Ellen Reynolds, Kelcie Silvio, Brandi Swain, Comer Yates

### 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  
Pam Stevens, Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services  
Ira Sudman, Chief Legal Officer  
Larilyn Beyer, Quality Rated Assessor Manager North Metro  
Laura Boham, Quality Rated Assessor  
Tamika Boone, Nutrition Services Director  
Kimberly Brickey, Quality Rated Assessor  
Kati Cosby, Community Coordinator  
Quandra Collins, Special Assistant to the Commissioner  
Jennie Couture, Instructional Supports Director  
Karla Crawford, Quality Rated Assessor  
Erin Darley, Quality Rated Assessor  
Kimberly Davis, Quality Rated Assessor Manager South Central  
Glenda Davis-Canteen, NW Early Education Community Partnership Coordinator Lead  
Jennifer Delorme, Quality Rated Assessor Manager Central  
Woody Dover, Enterprise Projects Director

Faith Duncan, Pre-K Field Operations Director  
Carol Fordham, Quality Rated Assessor  
Mary Frederiksen, Quality Rated Assessor  
Shayna Funke, Lead Research and Policy Analyst  
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  
Randy Hudgins, Director of Research and Policy Analysis  
Michelle Hughes, Quality Rated Assessor  
Denise Jenson, Quality Rated Director  
Donna Johnson, CAPS Family Support Director  
Shawnell Johnson, CAPS Program Administration Director, Operations  
Melinda Knowles, Quality Rated Assessor  
Rita Lang, CAPS Director Scholarships Administration  
Chris Linn, CAPS Program Administration Director Systems and Data  
Laura Lucas, Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Director  
Susan Maude, Credentialing Specialist  
Kay Mayfield, CAPS Scholarship Administration Director  
Barbara McWethy, Workforce Support Manager  
Angela Melton, CCR&R Contract Manager  
Lindsay Miller, Quality Rated Manager  
Anita Mohammad, Research and Policy Analyst  
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  
Bridget Ratajczak, Child and Family Development Supervisor  
Laura Reid, Manager Relationship Based Professional Learning  
Anne Rein, Departmental Writer/Editor  
April Rogers, Director of Child Care Services Enforcement Operations  
Edward Rowell, Early Education Community Partnership Coordinator SW  
Barbara Sanders, IT Analyst  
Brittany Seltrecht, Quality Rated Assessor  
Allison Setterlind, Director of Head Start Collaboration  
Angela Shelton, Professional Learning Specialist  
Jackie Shivers, Director Pre-K Quality Support  
Marcie Singletary, Standards and Assessment Specialist  
Carrie Spangler, CCS Regional Field Operations Manager  
Margrett Stephens, Professional Learning Specialist  
Robin Stevens, Director of Human Resources  
Diane Swift, Quality Rated Regional Coordinator Central Georgia

Michelle Talley, Quality Rated Assessor  
Amanda Vanmeter, CAPS Family Support Manager  
Keturah Wafer, Training Coordinator  
Laura Wagner, QIP Director of Policy and Partnerships  
Mark Waits, Senior Writer  
Jennifer Waters, Quality Rated Standardization and Evaluation Supervisor  
Vicki Watts, Professional Learning Specialist  
Jill West, Quality Rated Regional Coordinator North Georgia/Metro Atlanta  
Sheryl Wilhite, HR Senior Manager  
Liz Young, Government Relations Director

The November 19, 2020, meeting of the Board of Early Care and Learning was held online via GoToWebinar.

### **1. Call to Order**

At 9:06 a.m., with Board Chair Susan Harper having audio problems, Vice Chair Phil Davis called the meeting to order.

### **2. Approval of Agenda and Minutes**

Mr. Davis asked for a motion to accept the day's agenda. Dr. Boekhaus moved to accept, and Ms. Morrissey seconded. The Board accepted the agenda unanimously. Mr. Davis asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the November 19, 2020, Board meeting. Ms. Howell moved to approve, and Ms. Washell 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 gave an update about the STABLE grants funded by the CARES Act. The grants are intended to stabilize the child care industry because child care is crucial to economic recovery. After the first round of STABLE payments in May 2020 (about \$38 million), DECAL surveyed providers who indicated that they were continuing to struggle because of low attendance. Round 2 of STABLE grants, about \$54 million, went out in December 2020. Based on attendance, Round 2 grants went to 2,578 child care centers, which received an average of \$19,621, and 1,063 family learning homes, which received an average payment of \$2,500. All open providers were eligible to apply, and 82% of licensed providers received them. Data collected by DECAL shows that attendance at child care was down about 25% on average from the beginning of 2020 until the end, thus providers continue to struggle. CARES Act funds will also be used to make Early Learning Workforce Supplemental Payments. To receive the one-time \$1,000 payment, teachers must have worked for an eligible provider for at least six weeks at the time of application, and they must work on-site for at least 20 hours per week. Providers licensed by DECAL or the Department of Defense, exempt Head Start or Early Head Start providers, and all Georgia's Pre-K providers are eligible.

In December 2020 Congress passed the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA), providing \$10 billion to the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). DECAL received \$403 million to build on the initiatives begun with the CARES Act funding. Commissioner Jacobs characterized this funding as a historic investment in child care nationally and in Georgia. DECAL has developed a strategic plan for disbursing the funds. In Phase 1 DECAL will send out a little more than \$200 million. A third round of STABLE payments will be made available to providers to help

them remain open; all fees for families who have CAPS scholarships will be waived for 12 months; and \$5 million will be allocated for grants to providers who serve school-age children.

**b. Finance and Administration Update**

Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud gave an update on DECAL's expenditures for the second quarter of state fiscal year 2021, which ended December 31, 2020. Expenses are on track with the budget. With 50% of the year remaining, DECAL has 49% of our funds available. Mr. Ringsrud pointed out two minor variations that will not affect the results for the year. Nutrition services has 59% of its funds remaining because it had some CARES Act funds at the beginning of the fiscal year that were spent first. Quality Initiatives has only 41% of its funds remaining, but this includes encumbrances, money set aside to be spent later. The Department of Audits and Accounts is still working on the regular annual audit of DECAL for state fiscal year 2020, having been delayed by issues unrelated to DECAL. Mr. Ringsrud has heard informally that the audit is going well and expects another clean audit. The Governor's recommendation for DECAL's FY2022 budget includes \$2,078,554 more than DECAL requested. The additional funds will come from the state lottery funds and go to Georgia's Pre-K program. There will be an increase to the employer's share of the Teachers Retirement system accounts of \$602,706. The remaining \$1,475,848 will fund a supplement for Pre-K teachers based on their training and experience.

Mr. Ringsrud also gave a brief update on the General Assembly bills DECAL is tracking. HB 71 and HB 262 both include provisions for mandatory Pre-K and Kindergarten. So far neither of these bills appear to be moving. HB 86 authorizes sports betting as a lottery game with proceeds benefitting the HOPE Scholarship and Georgia's Pre-K Program. HB 32 establishes a tax credit for the purpose of recruiting and retaining teachers in participating school districts.

Mr. Davis asked whether we are under any time constraints to spend the CARES Act funds.

Mr. Ringsrud replied that these funds must be allocated by September 30, 2022 and spent by September 30, 2023, but DECAL will disburse the funds well in advance of the deadline.

**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 Inclusive Early Learning Week (February 7–13), the annual event during which DECAL and providers celebrate serving lots of different children and the differences among children and their families. The celebrations included many creative and collaborative activities. The Inclusion and Behavioral Support staff made two contributions, a video called "Dear Teacher, We See You" and an original book called *Different Like Me*. The book was illustrated by Inclusion and Behavioral Support Specialist Emily Graham and recorded by Commissioner Jacobs. Ms. Adams also highlighted upcoming application deadlines. Applications for the summer transition program are due March 12. Nominations for Pre-K Teacher of the Year are due March 17. Pre-K applications for the 2021–2022 school year are due March 19. The six-week Summer Transition program will be on-site as usual but with smaller class sizes. Some eligibility requirements have been relaxed to accommodate as many children as possible, and children who attended a hybrid or full-distance classroom during the school year will be given priority.

Ms. Morrissey applauded the expansion of the Summer Transition program and asked whether providers and the public have been made aware of it.

Ms. Adams responded that her team has talked with Georgia's Pre-K grantees about the changes and encouraged providers to apply. Current Pre-K providers in good standing are eligible to apply across the state. A press release is ready and will help publicize changes to the eligibility requirements. The Pre-K team has also created a podcast as well as promotional materials for providers to distribute to families. There will be social media posts to spread the word, and coordination with Department of Education to let families know about the opportunity.

**d. Georgia's Pre-K Program Longitudinal Study: Third Grade Report**

Ms. Adams and Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships Bentley Ponder presented findings from the ongoing longitudinal study of a representative sample of children who attended Georgia's Pre-K in 2013–2014. It includes a subsample of dual language learners. The longitudinal study is one of three funded by the General Assembly in 2011 to answer questions about how well Georgia's Pre-K program prepares children for kindergarten and how the children perform across the elementary school grades. The research is conducted for DECAL by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina. The longitudinal study uses norm-referenced assessments, meaning that the scores are standardized and therefore adjusted for age and what would be expected for children's growth and development. Dr. Ponder commented that Georgia can be proud of this research, which may be unique among states for the amount of data, the classroom quality observation scores, and the resulting understanding of the alignment between Pre-K and later grades. Overall, the studies show that Georgia's Pre-K prepares students for Kindergarten across all learning domains, and Kindergarten readiness is consistent across all types of Pre-K programs. One great strength of Georgia's Pre-K program is building the foundational language and literacy skills that allow children to become strong readers. This is especially significant because Georgia's Pre-K has a strong emphasis on supporting teachers in building foundational skills for all children, skills such as being able to write, hearing letter sounds, and understanding the difference between a letter, a word, and a sentence. These are skills that aren't often taught after Pre-K and Kindergarten, but children who don't have them will struggle with reading in later years. Similar to the first and second grade reports, the report from the children's third grade year shows a slight decline in the rate at which children gain new language and literacy and math skills compared to their Pre-K and Kindergarten years. Results are similar for the dual language learners, but their standard scores are lower. DECAL works with the Georgia Department of Education to improve the alignment between Pre-K programs and K–12 education. The factors that have proved to be predictive of children's growth and development are the child's English language proficiency at Pre-K, whether or not they had an IEP at Pre-K, gender, and classroom quality. In addition to the longitudinal analysis, researchers examined the gains children made each year in each learning domain. They also assessed classroom quality across the grades, finding that although classroom quality is highest in Pre-K, it is relatively consistent throughout the grades studied. The lead investigator sees this as a strength for Georgia and a reflection of our focus on Pre-K to third grade alignment. Finally, the researchers compared the children in the longitudinal study to a non-representative group of children who did not attend any Pre-K program. Children who attended Pre-K had significantly better scores on all language and literacy outcomes in third grade compared to children who did not attend Pre-K. The greatest difference between the two groups is in the auditory processing skills referred to above that are foundational for language and literacy development. The final report from the longitudinal study, on the children's fourth grade experience, will be completed later in the spring. Vocabulary development is an area of growth that DECAL is paying close attention to. Georgia's children are significantly below average when they enter Pre-K, and their skills don't increase as much as in other domains .

Mr. Davis asked for clarification about whether the longitudinal study included only children who had attended Georgia's Pre-K. Ms. Adams confirmed that the only children in the longitudinal study were those who were part of the original sample. Mr. Davis also asked whether DECAL would continue adding a grade a year as the children advance through school. Ms. Adams said "no," explaining that, because of the pandemic, the researchers have been unable to collect data from children after their fourth-grade year. The study is also very expensive, and DECAL has answered the research questions assigned by the General Assembly. The original plan was to end the longitudinal study with the third grade. The fourth grade was added, she said, because the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is conducted in fourth grade, and DECAL leadership wanted to be able to compare our data with NAEP data.

Ms. Beam offered congratulations on the data and noted that the research demonstrates the importance of Pre-K. The gap in vocabulary development continues, especially among low socioeconomic students, she noted, and asked whether DECAL has an action plan to address it. Ms. Adams responded that the agency has several initiatives underway that address vocabulary development before, during, and after Pre-K. DECAL's Quality Rated program supports teachers in responsive caregiving and understanding their role in developing vocabulary. The agency is also piloting a Language and Literacy endorsement. As part of that endorsement child care providers get support for professional development for teachers focused on language and literacy, funding for additional language and literacy materials, and instruction about how to assess children's literacy development. Georgia uses federal funds to offer the Little grants (Lifting Infants and Toddlers Through Language-rich Environments), and this program continues to expand. Ms. Adams' team is setting up a coaching program for Pre-K teachers to become mentors around language and literacy and vocabulary development. DECAL also consults with the Georgia Department of Education. Georgia has one of the largest Striving Readers grants in the country, a grant that goes to local school systems. Grantees are required to have a birth-to-5 component, and Ms. Adams' team has helped them focus on vocabulary development as they develop their community plans.

Dr. Magpuri-Lavell praised the rigor of the study and compared it to the Perry School study. She also asked Ms. Adams to elaborate on the importance of cultivating a perspective about the birth-to-8 developmental continuum and bringing the Georgia Department of Education into partnership about building on the foundational skills children acquire in Pre-K. Ms. Adams acknowledged the role of the Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy, led by Dr. Magpuri-Lavell, in this work and said research shows that if educators do the right things between birth and age 8, this has lasting benefits, not just across a child's school years but into adulthood. Pre-K is focused, she said, on making sure children receive instruction in a developmentally appropriate way, that it's sequenced and scaffolded from where they are in order to maximize brain development. Teachers and families must understand the developmental continuum and be able to monitor where students are; and teachers need to receive support about bridging the gaps when students are missing key skills. To pair developmentally appropriate practice with rigorous instruction, the best practices from early care and learning need to be pushed up to K-3 and the best practices from K-3 pushed down to birth-to-5 education.

Ms. Bennecke thanked Ms. Adams and Dr. Ponder for diligence in rigorous research and intentionally aligning the research between early education and K-3. She mentioned Governor Kemp's initiative on teacher preparedness as it relates to early education, early literacy and language, and asked whether DECAL is involved in specific initiatives related to teacher preparedness to help improve literacy outcomes, especially in the early years. Ms. Adams responded that there is an initiative to redesign teacher preparation programs in the university system to include an early childhood perspective, and DECAL is participating. Ms. Adams' team is also working with the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, looking at literacy plans for the state and making sure that Pre-K is included in plans for literacy development. Some birth-to-5 teachers are prepared by the university system, but a large

majority of them are prepared by the technical college system, and DECAL is also working with that system.

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

Dr. Ponder also shared updates about the Quality Rated (QR) program and the Community Outreach team. In January 2020 QR expected to rate 973 providers to reach the QR/CAPS 2020 goal. In spite of the pandemic the team rated 409 providers, 65% of which were rated by new methods that QR Director Denise Jenson and her team created during the public health emergency. There are now three Temporary Alternate Rating Options (TARO). Option A allows providers to receive a temporary (one-year) 1-star rating based on the strength of their portfolios. Option B, piloted successfully with 36 participants in the fall of 2020, allows providers to earn a temporary (one-year) 2-star rating on the basis of their portfolios and participation in the Quality Rated Virtual Process (QRVP). A report based on provider evaluations of the QRVP pilot is forthcoming. Option C, available only to providers seeking a re-rating and being piloted now, includes a virtual observation of selected classrooms in addition to the provider's portfolio and participation in the QRVP. Eight providers are participating in Option C now, and more than 60 are expected to participate in Cohort 2 which begins in April. Option C allows providers to achieve a 3-star rating valid for two years. Dr. Ponder also announced three Community Impact Grants that DECAL will award with funds from the Preschool Development Grant: 2Gen Innovation Grants, Trauma-Responsive Care Grants, and Community Transformation Grants. The latter are being offered for the first time. All grantees will be required to form collaborative teams that are expected to facilitate local community innovation and provide blueprints that can later be expanded or taken to scale. DECAL expects to fund nine 2Gen Innovation grants (five \$10,000 Capacity Building grants and four \$25,000 Implementation grants); nine \$10,000 Trauma Responsive Care grants; and six \$75,000 Community Transformation grants.

Mr. Davis asked what will happen to TARO when we resume normal operations. Dr. Ponder responded that the agency is learning a tremendous amount from TARO, and what is learned will be incorporated into revisions to the Quality Rated program that are already planned.

**f. Federal Programs Update**

Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs Elisabetta Kasfir gave an update on the SOLVE scholarship program funded by the CARES Act. In December 2020 DECAL expanded the program to include students with disabilities. For students without disabilities all the previously published eligibility requirements apply. Parents of students with disabilities must be working or attending school, and students with disabilities must attend a school system offering a primarily virtual learning model. But income restrictions have been waived for families with disabled students; the upper age limit has been increased to 21; and a disabled student may be cared for by an individual who meets CAPS policy. As of February 12, CAPS had received 7,486 SOLVE applications and awarded 4,876 scholarships to children or young adults in 46 counties. Students with disabilities have received 79 of those scholarships. Child care providers experience the challenges of virtual learning just as families do, and Ms. Kasfir expressed gratitude for the 946 providers who have stepped up to serve families with SOLVE scholarships.

Ms. Kasfir also reported on organizational changes in CAPS. In the fall of 2020 her division engaged in a workload analysis to assess its operations and determine the best way to support families and partner with providers. The analysis produced a plan to reallocate CAPS staff to improve their effectiveness. A new Provider and Family Relations unit is responsible for handling case changes for families and serving as the main point of contact for providers. The unit will process changes of ownership and rate changes and also provide training and technical assistance to providers on CAPS policies. The new Customer Response unit is the first tier of the CAPS virtual lobby. Staff respond to callers' questions,

resolve issues if they can, and route constituents to the appropriate person to resolve issues they cannot resolve. The existing Program Administration area has been divided between two directors. Chris Lin is Program Administration Director for Systems and Data, and Shawnell Johnson is Program Administration Director for Operations. Several new positions have been added to address program integrity and system integration.

**g. Child Care Services Update**

Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services Pam Stevens announced that no revisions to licensing rules are planned for FY 2022. Rule changes could be necessary, however, if unexpected issues arise. As of November 1, 2020, providers are required to report temporary closures to DECAL. Since that date only 185 providers (1.7%) have temporarily closed for any reason. Of those, 141 closed for reasons related to COVID-19.

Ms. Stevens also reported on the current landscape of child care in Georgia. CCS Consultants collect data every time they visit a provider (virtually or in person) about how many children and staff are present. With the help of the Research team, CCS analyzed that data and found that Child Care Learning Centers had an average of 28% fewer children in attendance during the first quarter of FY 2021 compared to the first quarter of FY 2020. For Family Child Care Learning Homes, the average was 10% fewer children. These reductions represent a significant loss of revenue. The biggest expense for child care providers is staff, and staff reductions during the same period averaged only 17%. Licensing regulations, which dictate teacher/student ratios, help explain this differential. Ms. Stevens gave the example of a classroom for 1 year-olds, which requires one teacher for eight students. Before the pandemic, the class may have had 12 children and two teachers. If the pandemic reduced attendance by 25%, there would be nine students, still requiring two teachers. Ms. Stevens emphasized that staff reductions are undesirable, but the fact that child care providers cannot reduce their expenses in response to lower revenue points to the continuing need for financial support to providers. Informal numbers for the current quarter suggest that attendance is not increasing. CCS also looked at the age distribution of children who are attending child care and found that the younger the child, the more likely they are to be in attendance.

**4. Public Comment Period**

Following the division reports, Mr. Davis asked Board Liaison Quandra Collins whether anyone was physically present in the Oak Conference Room wanting to make comments to the Board. Ms. Collins replied that there was no one physically present who wished to speak. Mr. Davis then asked Ms. Collins if any comments had been received through the GoToWebinar chat function. Ms. Collins replied that no comments had been received.

**5. Adjournment**

At 10:43 a.m. Mr. Davis asked Ms. Harper wanted to say anything. Ms. Harper thanked Mr. Davis for stepping in and the presenters for their presentations. Mr. Davis asked if there was any other business for the Board; there being none, he adjourned the meeting at 10:44 a.m. The next Board meeting is May 20, 2021.

*Susan H. Harper* 5/20/21

Board Chair, Signature

Date

*Kathy B. Howell* 5/20/21

Board Secretary, Signature

Date