

**Board of Early Care and Learning**  
**Meeting Summary**  
**February 18, 2021**

**Attendees**

**Board Members:**

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

**DECAL Staff:**

Commissioner Amy Jacobs, Rian Ringsrud, Susan Adams, Bentley Ponder, Elisabetta Kasfir, Pam Stevens, Ira Sudman, Dennis Brice, Reg Griffin, Quandra Collins, Larilyn Beyer, Laura Boham, Tamika Boone, Kimberly Brickey, Kati Cosby, Jennie Couture, Karla Crawford, Erin Darley, Kimberly Davis, Glenda Davis-Canteen, Jennifer Delorme, Woody Dover, Faith Duncan, Carol Fordham, Mary Frederiksen, Jasmin Godding, Jessica Guarneros, Rhonda Gunn, Anita Hasni, Leigh Ann Hendrix, Melissa Herndon, Michelle Hughes, Denise Jenson, Donna Johnson, Shawnell Johnson, Melinda Knowles, Rita Lang, Chris Linn, Laura Lucas, Susan Maude, Kay Mayfield, Barbara McWethy, Lindsay Miller, Anita Mohammad, Christi Moore, Dana Morrison, Miranda Murphy, Sara Myers, Jill O'Meara, Martine Powe, Bridget Ratajczak, Laura Reid, Anne Rein, April Rogers, Edward Rowell, Brenna Rutherford, Barbara Sanders, Allison Setterlind, Angela Shelton, Jackie Shivers, Marcie Singletary, Carrie Spangler, Margrett Stephens, Robin Stevens, Diane Swift, Michelle Talley, Amanda Vanmeter, Keturah Wafer, Laura Wagner, Mark Waits, Jennifer Waters, Vicki Watts, Jill West, Sheryl Wilhite, Liz Young

**Other 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

The February 18, 2021, meeting of the Board of Early Care and Learning was held online via GoToWebinar.

At 9:06 a.m., with Ms. Harper having audio problems, Mr. Davis called the meeting to order.

Mr. Davis asked for a motion to accept the meeting 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.

DECAL leaders provided updates about their areas of responsibility.

- Commissioner Amy Jacobs gave an update about the second round of STABLE payments, about \$54 million, that went out in December 2020. The payments, funded by the CARES Act and based on attendance, 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 for STABLE Round 2 payments, and 82% of licensed providers received them. 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. 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.

- 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 are on track with the budget. 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. 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. 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.
- 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. 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.
- Ms. Adams and Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships Bentley Ponder presented findings from the Longitudinal Study of Georgia's Pre-K, Third Grade report. The longitudinal study was funded by the General Assembly in 2011 and is conducted for DECAL by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina. Similar to the first and second grade reports, the third grade report 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. DECAL is working with the Georgia Department of Education to improve the alignment between Pre-K programs and K–12 education. Researchers examined the gains children in the study made each year for a variety of nationally normed assessments across all learning domains. The researchers also measured classroom quality across the grades and compared the children in the study to a comparison group of children who did not attend Georgia's Pre-K or a similar type of program. They found that classroom quality was the highest in the Pre-K year but declines only slightly from Kindergarten through second grade and increases slightly in third grade. The principal investigator of the project considers this a strength for Georgia. In comparison to children who did not attend Pre-K, children who attended Georgia's Pre-K Program had significantly better scores third grade language and literacy outcomes in third grade. The third grade report reinforces the general conclusion that Georgia's Pre-K program prepares students for Kindergarten. A key 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 important because Georgia's Pre-K has a strong emphasis on supporting teachers in building skills such as rhyme, hearing letter sounds, and understanding the difference between a letter, a word, and a

sentence for all children. 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.

- 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 classroom 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 be expanded or taken to scale.
- Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs Elisabetta Kasfir gave an update on the expansion of the SOLVE program to 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 has 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. A total of 946 child care providers are serving SOLVE scholarship families. Ms. Kasfir also reported on organizational changes that reallocate CAPS staff so that they can serve families and providers more effectively. 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.
- 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. CCS Consultants collect data every time they visit a provider 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. Staff reductions during the same period averaged only 17%.

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.

At 10:44 a.m. Mr. Davis asked if there was any other business for the Board; there being none, he adjourned the meeting. The next Board meeting is May 20, 2021.