

**Board of Early Care and Learning**  
**Meeting Summary**  
**May 20, 2021**

**Attendees**

**Board Members:**

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

**DECAL Staff:**

Commissioner Amy Jacobs, Rian Ringsrud, Susan Adams, Bentley Ponder, Elisabetta Kasfir, Donna Johnson, Shawnell Johnson, Jennifer Bridgeman, Ira Sudman, Dennis Brice, Reg Griffin, Quandra Collins, Carrie Ashbee, Larilyn Beyer, Alethea Cicero-Brown, Jennie Couture, Kimberly Davis, Kori Dickens, Faith Duncan, Kristin Goetz, Jessica Guarneros, Michelle Hughes, Denise Jenson, Tammy Jeune, Melinda Knowles, Laura Lucas, Susan Maude, Lindsay Miller, Anita Mohammad, Christi Moore, Sara Myers, Jill O'Meara, Martine Powe, Anne Rein, Edward Rowell, Barbara Sanders, Brittany Seltrecht, Jackie Shivers, Marcie Singletary, Margrett Stephens, Robin Stevens, Diane Swift, Megan Torello, Amanda Vanmeter, Laura Wagner, Mark Waits, Perri Walden, Bridgette Washington, Liz Young

**Other Guests:**

Tracy Baynes, Angela Church, Yasmeen Diggs, Dana Driggers, Crystal Gebhart, Hanah Goldberg, Michelle Grant, Erin Greenberg, Emily Jones, Michelle Lank, Whitney Long, Mary Lyons, Marcia McCall, Chee-Christine Merritt, Ellaine Miller, Maggie Reeves, Brandi Swain, Jill Tarpey, Caroline White, Ben Worries, Comer Yates

The May 20, 2021, meeting of the Board of Early Care and Learning was held online via GoToWebinar.

At 9:06 a.m. Ms. Harper called the meeting to order.

Ms. Harper asked for a motion to accept the meeting agenda. Dr. Boekhaus moved to accept, and Ms. Purcell seconded. The Board accepted the agenda unanimously. Ms. Harper asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the February 18, 2020 meeting. Dr. Boekhaus moved to approve, and Ms. Bennecke seconded. The Board approved the minutes unanimously.

DECAL leaders provided updates about their areas of responsibility.

- Commissioner Amy Jacobs gave an update on how DECAL has spent/plans to spend federal stimulus funding. The \$144 million from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act has been spent as follows. Three rounds of STABLE payments to child care providers totaled \$144 million. Another \$19 million funded CAPS emergency payment policies intended to provide a consistent funding stream for childcare. The remaining \$3 million provided CAPS scholarships to an essential workforce priority group. Early this year DECAL received \$403 million from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act. Phase 1 spending, about \$200 million will go to child care supplements for CAPS families (ACCESS); \$1,000 POWER payments to child care professionals; a fourth round of STABLE payments to child care providers; and competitive grants for school age programs (\$5 million). Most recently DECAL received \$1.57 billion in two funding streams to continue to support Georgia's early childhood and education system. Planning is underway now for spending \$604 million from the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF). CCDF funds can be used to support DECAL's current work, and some of these funds will be allocated to support families' access to child care, especially low-income families. The remaining \$968 million is for a child care stabilization program and will include STABLE payments to providers to help them continue operating. The

Commissioner also announced the six finalists for Pre-K Teacher of the Year (TOTY). Two winners will be chosen in the fall, one from a public school and one from a child care program. The TOTY awards are privately funded as are two new awards. Three recipients will be selected for the Early Educator of the Year award, one each from infant, toddler, and preschool classrooms. DECAL will also select two Scholars of the Year from the DECAL Scholars program, one attending a four-year college or university and the other attending a technical college.

- Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud reported that 34% of DECAL's funds for fiscal year 2021 remained unspent as of March 31, 2021, the end of the third quarter. As of that date, federal stimulus funds had been received but not spent. In April DECAL made the third round of STABLE payments to providers, and in May the ACCESS payments to providers for the benefit of families with CAPS scholarships are beginning. DECAL will finish the fiscal year on track with the budget, Mr. Ringsrud said. Final appropriations for fiscal year 2022 exceed the Governor's recommendation, which was shared with the Board at the February meeting, by \$5.3 million. CAPS will receive an additional \$3.5 million from state general funds, and Georgia's Pre-K program will receive an additional \$1.8 million in lottery funds. Mr. Ringsrud also reported that DECAL received another clean audit.
- Deputy Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports Susan Adams shared details about the eligibility requirements and application process for the one-time \$1,000 payments to child care employees called Providing Our Workforce Essential Recognition (POWER). Applications are being accepted now via KOALA, and payments will begin in June. Ms. Adams highlighted some of the activities and giveaways offered during Children's Mental Health Week earlier this month. She also reported that Pre-K teachers and teacher-coaches will receive a \$500 bonus for their work during the Summer Transition program, which will be held face-to-face. The number of Summer Transition program classes for rising Kindergarten students has been doubled this year, with children who attended a virtual or hybrid Pre-K program being given priority. Face-to-face instruction will also resume for Pre-K classrooms for the upcoming school year. Ms. Adams' team has reviewed all the applications from programs and made a first round of funding decisions. In considering applications for new and expansion classrooms the team considers need in the area; program enrollment; and program compliance and quality. DECAL has decided to fund 70 new or expansion classrooms for the upcoming school year, and Ms. Adams expects to fund more, ensuring that there are 84,000 Pre-K slots. Ms. Adams briefed the Board on a project the Inclusion and Behavioral Support Specialists and the Infant and Toddler Specialists (both from the Instructional Supports division) are working on to improve quality in Family Child Care Learning Homes (FCCLH). DECAL is making grants through the Social-Emotional Early Development Strategies (SEEDS) to family child care providers. The grants will include weekly coaching sessions from the Inclusion and Behavioral Support Specialists; four institutes (trainings) for which providers receive credit and stipends for attendance; and grant materials that include a technology package and materials about social-emotional development. Family providers are also eligible to apply this year for Lifting Infants and Toddlers Through Language-Rich Environments (LITTLE) grants that have been available to centers for several years. Grant components are similar to the SEEDS grants and include a 12-week LENA Grow Cycle in which providers receive feedback on their interactions with infants and toddlers based on the LENA talk chronometer.
- Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships Bentley Ponder began his presentation with an update about DECAL's Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership which will begin its seventh year on July 1. Director Maria Goss left recently to accept a position as Head Start's Regional Program Manager, a significant promotion. In the fall of 2020 DECAL conducted interviews with a representative sample of the families of 184 children who are served by the Partnership. Families expressed that they felt supported by the partnership in general and through the pandemic. DECAL

awarded 13 Community Impact grants in April: five 2Gen Capacity Building grants (\$10,000 each), four 2Gen Implementation grants (\$25,000 each), and four Trauma-Responsive Care grants (\$10,000 each). DECAL received 18 applications for the \$75,000 Community Transformation grants and expects to award six. Dr. Ponder announced that all 2021 quality ratings will be awarded through the Temporary Alternate Rating Options (TARO), and he reviewed the three TARO options. The evaluation of the Quality Rated Virtual Process (QRVP) pilot, which ran in the fall of 2020 with 36 participants, showed that providers had high scores on all five topic areas, which are based on the areas observed during live observations. Providers, DECAL staff, and TAs rated their experience as positive or very positive. The deadline for all CAPS providers to become Quality Rated is December 31, 2021, and Dr. Ponder noted that he is confident DECAL will meet this longstanding goal. Currently 84% of children with CAPS scholarships are at a Quality Rated provider. Providers who achieve star ratings this year will receive rating incentive packages based on the TARO option they complete. Incentive amounts are larger than last year.

- Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs Elisabetta Kasfir gave the Board an overview of the program for Awarding Child Care Education Scholarship Supplements (ACCESS). Funded by the CRRSA, the goal of the program is to expand access to high-quality child care by temporarily eliminating the financial burden of child care for CAPS families. Families with CAPS scholarships normally share in the cost of child care by paying a family fee plus the difference (if any) between the provider's published rate and the CAPS reimbursement rate. For the period from May 17, 2021 until October 2022, DECAL will pay providers their full published rates. To implement ACCESS the CAPS team collected current rates from all CAPS-eligible providers, updated CAPS scholarships to reflect current rates, established a method for paying providers without requiring them to change their billing practices, and informed providers as well as the 30,000 families with CAPS scholarships about the ACCESS initiative. Ms. Kasfir then introduced Donna Johnson, CAPS Family Support Director for Development and Partnerships. Ms. Johnson gave a presentation about the 2Gen Policy Acceleration Partnership Grant that DECAL recently received from Ascend at the Aspen Institute and the Liz Blake Giving Fund of the Blake Family Foundation. The overall goal for the \$150,000 grant is to strengthen coordination across child care, post-secondary education, and state benefit services and align funding streams with program initiatives. The project has five specific goals: defining shared goals and opportunities among state agencies, increasing the access single mothers and student parents have to state and community-level supports, building coaching and case management skills for state employees, making sure parents are included in the process, and expanding the state's 2Gen Community.
- CCS Process and Quality Improvement Manager Jennifer Bridgeman walked Board members through the process DECAL followed when deciding on and implementing the 2020 rule changes about supervision, food service, and mealtime requirements. Proposed rule changes are based on DECAL's areas of focus and grounded in industry best practices as reflected in *Caring for Our Children*. For the 2020 rule changes, CCS also referenced Quality Rated expectations based on the ITERS and ECERS rating scale as well as other states' licensing requirements. DECAL communicated with providers and CCS staff and provided training before and after the rule changes were implemented. Numerous communications went to providers after the rule changes were approved, and CCS staff received guidance about offering technical assistance in lieu of citations on the first regulatory visit after October 1, 2020, when the new rules went into effect. Children's Healthcare of Atlanta (CHOA) developed a one-hour webinar for providers that was offered eight times and attended by 306 early childhood professionals and at least 143 programs. Feedback from providers after the training was positive and showed they were reflecting on best practices.

Following the division reports, Ms. Harper asked whether anyone was physically present in the Oak Conference Room wanting to make comments or if any comments had been received through the GoToWebinar chat

function. Board Liaison Quandra Collins responded that no one was physically present nor had any written comments been received.

Ms. Harper turned the Board's attention to election of Board officers. As required by the by-laws, officers are elected at the May meeting and officially take their positions at the August meeting. Officers serve a two-year term with the possibility of serving a second two-year term. Ms. Harper has completed her second term as Chair. Ms. Harper asked for a motion to nominate Vice Chair Phil Davis to become Chair, as is customary. Ms. Purcell moved to nominate Mr. Davis, and Dr. Boekhaus seconded. Ms. Harper called for other nominations for Chair. There being none, she asked for a motion to close nominations. Ms. Howell moved to close nominations, and Ms. Washell seconded. The Board elected Phil Davis as Chair unanimously. Ms. Harper called for nominations for Vice Chair. Ms. Howell nominated Ms. Brock, and Ms. Washell seconded the nomination. Ms. Harper called for a motion to close the nominations for Vice Chair. Ms. Purcell moved to close nominations, and Dr. Boekhaus seconded. The Board elected Ms. Brock unanimously. Ms. Harper called for a motion to re-elect Ms. Howell as Board Secretary. Mr. Davis moved to re-elect Ms. Howell, and Ms. Bennecke seconded. The Board re-elected Ms. Howell unanimously. Ms. Harper thanked all the Board members for their commitment, and Commissioner Jacobs congratulated Mr. Davis and Ms. Brock and thanked Ms. Howell for her continued service. The Commissioner also thanked Ms. Harper for her four years of service as Chair. Ms. Harper remains on the Board.

At 11:08 a.m. Ms. Harper asked if there was any other business for the Board; there being none, she announced the date for the next Board meeting, August 26, and adjourned.