
Board of Early Care and Learning

Board of Early Care and Learning Meeting
Thursday, February 17, 2022 — 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

Board Members

Phil Davis (Chair), Jen Bennecke, Debra Brock (Vice Chair), Susan Harper, Joanna Hill, Kathy Howell (Secretary), Kristin Morrissey, Cristina Washell

Public Guests

LaNita Carey, Stephanie Curington, Alyssa Foskey, Lisa Hardt, April Jones, Blanche Lamb, Kari Lovell, Joe Perreault, Dana Rickman, Melissa Ross, Brandi Swain, Dwayne Ward, 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

Pam Stevens, Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services

Carrie Ashbee, Executive Director, DECAL Foundation

Jennifer Bridgeman, CCS Quality and Process Improvement Manager

Catherine Broussard, CCS Process and Policy Director

Jim Butler, Cyber Security Attorney

Patricia Carlson, Quality Rated Assessor

Karla Crawford, Quality Rated Assessor

Erin Darley, Quality Rated Assessor

Glenda Davis-Canteen, Early Education Community Partnerships Coordinator NW

Jennifer Delorme, Quality Rated ERS Assessor Manager

Faith Duncan, Pre-K Field Operations Director

Bart Ellington, Accounts Receivable Supervisor

Rebecca Ellis, Practice and Support Services Director, Instructional Supports

Megan Fickes, Director, Early Head Start Partnership

Michelle Flynn, Accounts Payable Accountant

Carol Fordham, Quality Rated Assessor

Mary Frederiksen, Quality Rated Standardization and Evaluation Anchor

Shayna Funke, Lead Research and Policy Analyst

David Ginsburg, Contract and Procurement Attorney

Kristin Goetz, Professional Learning Specialist

Aneshia Harris, Accounts Receivable and Nutrition Accountant

Moriam Hassan, Budget Analyst
Randy Hudgins, Director of Research and Policy Analysis
Matthew Jang, Accountant
Denise, Jenson, Director, Quality Rated
Donna Johnson, CAPS Family Support Director
Lashanda Kirkland, Budget Analyst III
Laura Lucas, Infant Early Childhood Mental Health Director
Nakilia Mcray, CCS Technical Assistance Unit Manager
Meghan McNail, Summer Transition Program and Outreach Manager
Christi Moore, Professional Learning Director
Sara Myers, Quality Rated Assessor
Amir Nilforooshan, IT Support Specialist
Jill O'Meara, Community Partnerships and Projects Manager
Quandra Obi, Special Assistant to the Commissioner
Martine Powe, Quality Rated Assessor
Anne Rein, Department Writer/Editor
Mike Rodgers, Director, Finance
April Rogers, Director, CCS Enforcement Operations
Edward Rowell, Early Education Community Partnerships Coordinator SW
Brenna Rutherford, Quality Rated Assessor
Barbara Sanders, IT Business Analyst
Angela Shelton, Professional Learning Specialist
Jackie Shivers, Director, Pre-K Quality Support
Hannah Smith, Early Education Community Partnerships Coordinator CE
Sonja Steptoe, QIP Communications and Outreach Manager
Robin Stevens, Director of Human Resources
Diane Swift, Quality Rated Regional Coordinator, Central Georgia
Alysse Swiney, Grant Accountant
Michelle Talley, Quality Rated Assessor
Megan Torello, Quality Rated Special Projects Manager
Keturah Wafer, Procurement and Facilities Specialist
Laura Wagner, Director, QIP Policy and Partnerships
Bridgette Washington, Early Education Community Partnerships Coordinator CW
Jennifer Waters, Quality Rated Standardization and Evaluation Manager
Liz Young, Government Relations Director

The February 17, 2022 meeting of the Board of Early Care and Learning was held in the Oak Conference room and livestreamed via GoToWebinar.

1. Call to Order

At 9:06 a.m. Board Chair Phil Davis called the meeting to order.

2. Welcome

Mr. Davis welcomed Board members, DECAL staff, and guests. He announced that Kimberly Neville has been appointed to the Board representing the 12th congressional district.

3. Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Mr. Davis asked for a motion to accept the meeting agenda. Ms. Harper moved to accept, and Ms. Howell seconded. The Board accepted the agenda unanimously. Mr. Davis asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the November 18, 2021 meeting. Ms. Morrissey moved to approve, and Ms. Bennecke seconded. The Board approved the minutes unanimously.

4. Inspiration

Ms. Harper provided inspiration, reading a poem on the theme of inclusivity.

5. Board Member Updates

Mr. Davis invited Board members to provide updates of their recent activities. He mentioned that he has been getting to know his new community and noticing Quality Rated signs around the neighborhood, saying it makes him happy to see the signs so far from the big city. Ms. Harper said she has been in telephone contact with the Pre-K programs in her district, particularly the public-school programs, to ask how they're doing and whether they are full. She acted out of concern that enrollment is down because of the pandemic, but she found that some programs have waiting lists. Ms. Morrissey told a story about a fourth-grade student who was reading below grade level and exhibited challenging behavior. He received help at school with social and emotional issues and is now reading at grade level and enjoying school. She also said that her school district issues library cards to children as soon as they begin school. Ms. Bennecke said that she has been impressed by how DECAL has continued to create opportunities to connect with schools and providers virtually throughout the pandemic. Ms. Washell praised pre-service teachers and new teachers who have gone through educator preparation programs during the pandemic. She was inspired by their resiliency and what they went through to join the profession during this time. She also gave a shoutout to the institutions of Georgia who are supporting students and the teachers who will be teaching them. Mr. Davis informed Board members that he has a sign-up sheet for those who want to provide inspiration at future meetings.

6. DECAL Staff Reports

DECAL leaders provided updates about the agency's work.

a. Commissioner's Update

Commissioner Amy Jacobs thanked IT Specialist Amir Nilforooshan for his support of the meeting and his support of the agency throughout the pandemic. The Commissioner announced that Moonlight Through the Pines, the primary fundraiser for the DECAL Foundation, will be held this year for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic. She introduced Carrie Ashbee, the Executive Director of the Foundation, who spoke about the history and purpose of the Foundation. It was authorized by the Georgia Assembly in 2017 and became a 501(c)(3) organization in 2018. All Foundation revenue goes to programming with no philanthropic funds committed to overhead. Ms. Ashbee invited Board members to support the fundraiser, a concert at Bobby Jones Golf Course, on Wednesday, March 22, at 6:00 p.m. Commissioner Jacobs presented nine recommendations made by the Urban Institute as a result of the stakeholder engagement process they conducted with providers, teachers, families, other partners, and DECAL employees in October and November of 2021 to help DECAL determine how to spend the federal pandemic relief funds that have not yet been obligated. DECAL received about \$2 billion, and several hundred million remain. The Commissioner will meet with the Executive team to consider the recommendations and expects to announce how the remaining funds will be spent at the next Board meeting.

Ms. Harper recalled that Georgia's Pre-K class sizes had been increased in 2011, and she said she is hearing from her constituents that class sizes need to be reduced to pre-2011 numbers. The Commissioner agreed that smaller class sizes are preferable but said that the issue is funding.

The Commissioner introduced the Georgia's Pre-K Teachers of the Year (TOTY), Stephanie Curington from Kings Chapel Elementary in Perry and LaNita Carey from Jackson Creek Academy in Lilburn. Both teachers made brief remarks about their experiences in the classroom and what inspired them to become Pre-K teachers. Mr. Davis presented Ms. Curington and Ms. Carey with Board resolutions recognizing their achievements.

b. Finance and Administration Update

Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud reported that DECAL's expenses for the first half of SFY 2022 are running 7% under budget. The reason for the small discrepancy, he said, is that spending for initiatives funded by federal pandemic relief did not start until last fall. He announced that DECAL received another clean audit for SFY 2021. Mr. Ringsrud also reviewed the Governor's recommendation for Amended SFY 2022, which exceeds the funding request approved by the Board in August 2021 by \$416,000. The amount will fund \$5,000 pay increases for full-time, benefit-eligible employees in Child Care Services and Georgia's Pre-K. The Governor's recommendation for SFY 2023 calls for a \$21 million increase to DECAL's budget. This amount includes \$3.14 million for an increase in the required state match of federal funding to the CAPS program; an \$18 million increase in the Pre-K budget to fund \$2,000 pay increases for lead teachers and assistant teachers; and a \$2 million reduction to the Pre-K budget resulting from a change to the Pre-K formula. The \$2,000 pay increase for lead teachers brings their total pay increase since Governor Kemp took office to \$5,000. The Governor's recommendations require legislative approval, and there likely will be changes to the numbers.

Mr. Davis asked whether the Pre-K teacher pay increases apply to public and private school teachers, and Mr. Ringsrud said that they do.

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

Deputy Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports Susan Adams thanked the Pre-K Teachers of the Year for their great work. She highlighted some activities from Inclusive Learning Week, emphasizing the importance of including all children in high-quality early learning programs. She invited Board members to sign the Inclusion Pledge committing to support inclusion in early care. As part of the Preschool Development grant activities, DECAL is offering a new, three-part, paid virtual training for providers on the foundations of inclusion. Ms. Adams reviewed the Sage Pyramid Model of behavioral supports and explained how DECAL delivers supports at each of the three tiers. She also announced that a newly reconstituted cross-sector state leadership team is collaborating to resolve barriers and implement Pyramid Model practices into statewide systems. In December 2021 31 Family Child Care Learning Homes (FCCLH) completed a six-month grant program focused on helping FCCLH providers develop strategies to support strong social emotional development. Feedback from providers was overwhelmingly positive, Ms. Adams reported. The grants will be ramped up again for Child Care Learning Centers (CCLC) this spring. Ms. Adams also reviewed enrollment data for Georgia's Pre-K program. The second roster for the year shows enrollment rebounding, and Ms. Adams expects continued improvement. Applications are being accepted now for a second round of \$1,000 POWER payments to the early learning workforce. A third round will go out in the spring. In the first round of POWER payments, \$33,405,000 went to 33,405 individuals.

Ms. Harper commented that she had heard from teachers who participated in a recent training about inclusion that they loved the experience. Ms. Adams explained that her team provides annual training for lead teachers, assistant teachers, and program directors as part of the Pre-K contract. Ms. Adams thanked Ms. Harper for her comment.

d. Child Care Services (CCS) Update

Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services Pam Stevens gave an overview of the annual licensing rules change process. There are several reasons that licensing rules need to be updated, she said. Rules are updated to improve health and safety, to reflect advances in our knowledge of early childhood, to align all providers more closely with Quality Rated, and because CCDF funding occasionally requires rule changes. She reviewed the timeline for implementing licensing rule changes. At the February Board meeting CCS announces the general areas in which rule changes will be proposed. At the May meeting specific rule changes are presented. In July CCS holds public webinars about the rule changes. At the August Board meeting a public hearing is held, and the Board is asked to approve the rule changes. The rule changes go into effect on October 1. The rule changes to be proposed this year include a change in language that references the Division of Family and Child Services; a requirement that providers notify families of any communicable disease that is identified as part of a public health emergency; and a new rule specifying types of evidence that providers must preserve and make available to DECAL in the event of an investigation into a complaint. Ms. Stevens introduced CCS Director of Policy and Process Initiatives Catherine Broussard who told the Board about the Bridge to Quality (BTQ) project for newly licensed providers that her team of eight consultants designed and implemented because they noticed that 14% of new providers fall out of compliance with licensing rules and regulations within one year. BTQ includes a needs assessment, individualized coaching, core rules training, management training, and information about how rules are enforced. The primary goal of the BTQ is to provide positive, proactive support for providers and help them develop strategies to stay in compliance. The program includes coaching because training by itself does not change behavior. The TA team planned to pilot BTQ in 2020 and then expand it to other providers. Because of the pandemic the team focused on virtual coaching and training. As of July 1, 2021, 12 providers completed the pilot, and all have maintained compliance with CCS.

Ms. Bennecke thanked Ms. Broussard for her presentation, saying she was excited by the results. She asked whether Ms. Broussard's team had observed any common needs among the new providers they work with that correspond to areas where established providers later fall out of compliance, so that these might be addressed with preventative strategies. Ms. Broussard responded that when providers are given permission to operate, they typically don't have full enrollment. As their enrollment increases, they add staff; but sometimes they enroll children faster than they can add staff and make small sacrifices such as moving children around. The team included management training in BTQ to help providers with hiring and training staff. The next phase will be looking at how to package training for newly hired staff to get them functioning quickly. Ms. Morrissey said she was impressed that BTQ includes training on business management, and she asked whether CCS has data showing that providers who receive training and stay in compliance are better able to retain employees. Ms. Broussard responded that CCS does not have such data. She added that some of DECAL's CCDF funding is directed toward strengthening providers' business practices. A couple of years ago all of the CCS TA Consultants went through a training and now teach providers how to strengthen business practices. She added that stable relationships have a beneficial impact on child development. Ms. Stevens announced that Ms. Broussard is retiring and asked the Board to thank her for 23 years of service. Mr. Davis congratulated her, and she received a hearty

round of applause. Ms. Harper commented that she has friends in education who comment that CCS is always very responsive to provider calls. One friend, who has four after-school programs in the city of Atlanta, said that during the pandemic, CCS has gone over and beyond to help her, and she asked Ms. Harper to pass on her thanks. Ms. Stevens thanked Ms. Harper for her compliments.

e. Federal Programs Update

Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs Elisabetta Kasfir reviewed the parameters of the CAPS expansion program which will add 10,000 scholarships. The program began in November 2021 and will continue until October 2024, after which the program will gradually return to 50,000 scholarships. CAPS created additional slots by raising the income limit for initial entry from 50% of the State Median Income (SMI) to 85%, a 70% increase. For a family of four the income limit increased from \$42,426 to \$72,124. To receive a scholarship, a family must meet the income limit and be in at least one of 12 priority groups. The income limit for the very low income priority group was also raised, from 50% of the Federal Poverty Level to 150%. For a family of four this limit increased from \$13,250 to \$39,750. As of January 31, 4,800 additional children are using CAPS scholarships. Historically, about half of CAPS scholarships have gone to school-aged children, but the distribution of the new scholarships has been about 30% school-aged and 70% younger children. The new scholarships are going to almost every county, both urban and rural. Ms. Kasfir also noted the final CAPS/Quality Rated milestone has passed. With very few exceptions, as of December 31, all families with CAPS scholarships are required to select a star-rated, provisional, or probationary provider. She noted that the agency has worked for a long time to implement this policy change which ensures that all children receiving subsidies have access to the highest quality early learning environments.

Mr. Davis asked whether exceptions can be made for families who are a long way from a Quality Rated provider. Ms. Kasfir said that CAPS will make exceptions on a case by case basis, based on a family's need, not a provider's need because providers have had ample opportunities to join Quality Rated. She said such a situation has not arisen yet, but she anticipates creating a waiver process for families. The agency will not deny a child a scholarship because of the issue. Quality Rated is widespread, she said.

f. Quality Innovation and Partnerships (QIP) Update

Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships Bentley Ponder reviewed the basic structure of the Quality Rated program and explained how ratings are determined in the typical method and via the Temporary Alternate Rating Options (TARO). He said that 63% (2,796) of all providers eligible to participate in Quality Rated (4,447) have earned a 1-, 2-, or 3-star rating. Of the 37% whose quality is unknown, about half are somewhere in the process of becoming rated. Mr. Ponder announced that 1,087 providers received ratings of 1, 2, or 3 stars during 2021, the largest number ever rated in a single year. He also reviewed a breakdown of ratings awarded by cohort and by TARO option. Most providers succeeded at the TARO option they attempted. As of December 31, 2021, 93% of children with CAPS scholarships are cared for by a Quality Rated provider, and 86% of CAPS providers have achieved at least a 1-star rating. An additional 155 providers have either a provisional Quality Rated status (because they are newly licensed or new to CAPS) or a probationary status (because they went through the rating process and did not earn enough points to earn a star rating, or they allowed their ratings to expire). The Quality Rated team is on track to resume live observations in 2022 cohort 3, Mr. Ponder said. There are providers working with the team to allow Quality Rated assessors to become reliable again. DECAL is accepting applications now from 2- and 3-star rated child care learning centers

