

**Board of Early Care and Learning**  
**Meeting Summary**  
**May 19, 2022**

**Attendees**

**Board Members:**

Kristy Beam, Jen Bennecke, Debra Brock (Vice Chair), Phil Davis (Chair), Susan Harper, Joanna Hill, Kristin Morrissey, Luann Purcell, Cristina Washell, Karla Zisook

**Guests:**

Rachel Combs, Finch Floyd, Hannah Goldberg, Lisa Hardt, Beverly Johnson, Ed Juline, Michelle Lank, Shelly Lawson, Blake Miller, Ellaine Miller, Joe Perreault, Maggie Reeves, Kristie Terry, Austin Trott, Brigitte Willis, Jessica Woltjen

**DECAL Staff:**

Commissioner Amy Jacobs, Rian Ringsrud, Pam Stevens, Susan Adams, Elisabetta Kasfir, Bentley Ponder, Allison Setterlind, Dennis Brice, Reg Griffin, Ira Sudman, Quandra Obi, Carrie Ashbee, Farouk Baksh, Lari Lyn Beyer, Chondra Bolton, Tamika Boone, Kimberly Brickey, Jennifer Bridgeman, Vanessa Brown, Rachel Combs, Glenda Davis-Canteen, Erin Darley, Faith Duncan, Rebecca Ellis, Megan Fickes, Mary Frederiksen, David Ginsburg, Kristin Goetz, Jessica Guarneros, Iris Herrera, Randy Hudgins, Denise Jenson, Melinda Knowles, Jarita Lawrence-Burdette, Laura Lucas, Barb McWethy, Lindsay Miller, Christi Moore, Sara Myers, Jill O'Meara, Amir Nilforooshan, Rob O'Callaghan, Rhonda Parker, Martine Powe, Valerie Perez, Laura Reid, Anne Rein, Mike Rodgers, April Rogers, Brenna Rutherford, Jackie Shivers, Richa Singhania, Hannah Smith, Nate Smith, Sonja Steptoe, Robin Stevens, Megan Torello, Keturah Wafer, Laura Wagner, Bridgette Washington, Kori Woodward-Dickens, Alexandra Young, Liz Young

Mr. Davis called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

The Board unanimously approved the proposed agenda and the minutes from the February 17 meeting.

Ms. Brock provided inspiration, reading passages from the book *Together is Better* about the role of leaders in helping children become as successful as they can be as students and, eventually, adults.

Board members provided updates on their recent activities.

DECAL leaders provided updates about their areas of responsibility.

- Commissioner Amy Jacobs passed around a copy of *Hey, Georgia*, a children's book inspired by Georgia First Lady Marty Kemp and written by Malcolm Mitchell. Copies will be sent to every child enrolled in Pre-K in the coming school year to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Georgia's Pre-K. The Commissioner announced the 2022–2023 finalists for Pre-K Teachers of the Year. From public schools, the finalists are Debbie Carraway from Thomas County, Melissa Boswell from Houston County, and Shannon Gibson from Habersham County. From private centers, the finalists are Shazia Ali from Gwinnett County, Alaina Jones from Forsyth County, and Silina Hodges from Coweta County. Finalists receive \$500 for their own use which is funded by the DECAL Foundation. Celebrations for the 10-year anniversary of the Quality Rated program will kick off with a Braves game on Labor Day weekend and continue throughout the school year.
- Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud provided his standard quarterly update on DECAL's expenses vs. the budget. With 25% of the year remaining, DECAL has 32% of funds still available because some of the federal COVID-19 relief funds were received after the start of the fiscal year. The Amended budget for SFY 2022 passed by the Georgia Legislature includes an additional \$300,000 for Nutrition Services. This is the first time that state funds have been contributed to the program. Nutrition Services will use the additional funds to provide \$25,000 start-up grants to experienced sponsors for the purpose of expanding Happy Helpings into counties which have not previously been served. The final appropriation for SFY 2023 includes an increase of \$22 million, most of which goes to fund the \$2,000 pay increases for lead and assistant Pre-K teachers.
- Deputy Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports Susan Adams shared highlights from Children's Mental Health Week and showed a short video about social emotional health written and directed by Laura Lucas. Ms. Adams reviewed some recent achievements related to infant and early childhood mental health.

These include establishing the Georgia Alliance for Infant Mental Health (GA-AIMH), the passage of the Mental Health Parity Act, the publication of a chart for mental health clinicians showing how they can bill Medicaid for their services, and securing funding for Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP) training. Ms. Adams gave an overview of the Summer Transition Program. The program for rising Pre-K students is for children whose first language is Spanish, and the instruction is bilingual. Like last year the class sizes are lower for both programs, and there is no family income limit. There are 720 slots in 20 counties for rising Pre-K students and 3,816 slots in 61 for rising Kindergarteners. A total of 3,792 grants were awarded for Pre-K providers for the coming school year. Ms. Adams introduced Director of Professional Learning Christi Moore who gave an update about the \$1,000 supplemental POWER payments. Her team fielded a survey of past POWER payment recipients, collecting demographic data in order to learn about the early care and education workforce. The survey also asked whether respondents had experienced a reduction in work hours or loss of income during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Most child care workers did not experience loss of income; but, of those affected, family child care learning homes saw more reductions. Instructional staff who were eligible for Round 2 POWER payments are also receiving \$125 grants that they can use to buy instructional materials for their classrooms. Applications for Round 3 POWER payments will be accepted from June 1 to July 1.

Mr. Davis recessed the meeting for a short break at 10:07 a.m. and resumed at 10:22 a.m.

- Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services Pam Stevens reviewed the proposed licensing rule changes in more detail. The Board will vote on the rule changes at its August meeting. Most of the proposed changes are wording changes that update the rules to reflect current best practices. For example, the word “paper” will be removed from all references to criminal background checks because these are all submitted electronically as a safeguard against fraud. Providers will be required to notify parents of any suspected cases of illnesses during a public health emergency. Proposed rule changes also broaden the definition of records to include electronic media and require that records be retained for 12 months. Ms. Stevens reviewed data showing that attendance is slowly making its way back to pre-pandemic levels. Stabilization efforts continue to be very important, she said. She also presented graphs showing trends in the number of child care facilities in operation. Since 2018 the number of Family Child Care Learning Homes (FCCLH) has been declining. The number of Child Care Learning Centers (CCLC) has stayed about the same, but the capacity of CCLCs has expanded.
- Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs Elisabetta Kasfir announced that some funds from the Aspen Policy Acceleration Partnership grant are being used to develop a comprehensive resource and referral portal called FindHelp, the goals of which are to make it easier for families to access services and expand the state’s 2Gen network. The site will have links to state agencies and also nonprofits that offer services and will be updated at least every six months. Participating organizations may claim their pages and update them as often as they choose. Ms. Kasfir also announced that CAPS has created a new priority group for student parents. Several of the other priority groups are based on negative circumstances that families and children might experience such as homelessness or children in foster care. The student parent priority group is based on the positive circumstance of a parent deciding to further their education. Eligible education programs include ESL and GED classes as well as coursework at technical colleges and associate’s and bachelor’s degree curricula.
- Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships Bentley Ponder announced that live observations will resume in Cohort 3 as planned, and staff reliability recertification is well underway. As of February 28, 96% of children with CAPS scholarships are cared for by a Quality Rated provider, and 90% of CAPS providers have achieved at least a 1-star rating. Cohort 2 of the yearlong Quality Rated Language and Literacy Endorsement program began in May with 24 CCLCs participating. A pilot with 15 FCCLHs will begin soon. 2Gen grants were awarded to 12 local communities. The Early Head Start Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP) has hired five specialists who work on-site at the partnership’s CCLCs. Staff recruitment and full enrollment are priorities for the remainder of the year.
- Georgia Head Start Collaboration Director Allison Setterlind told the Board that Head Start celebrated its 57th birthday on May 18. The key to sustaining the program over that time she said, is that the states do not administer the program. Head Start is a federal-to-local community grant in which grantees, (32 in Georgia including DECAL) design their programs around local community needs. Statewide, Head Start and Early Head Start programs serve about 24,000 children and pregnant women. For the first time in several years the Federal Office

of Head Start has established several inter-related national priorities: advancing equity, promoting pandemic recovery, investing in the workforce, and reaching more children and families. The Georgia Head Start Collaboration Office received a new five-year grant this year. A priority for the Head Start Collaboration Office is making sure that every Head Start program that should be licensed is licensed. A recent decision expands eligibility for Head Start to include families receiving public assistance, either Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), social security, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Currently, there are more 200,000 children under the age of 5 who are on SNAP, and Head Start programs will not be able to serve all those children. Every grantee will need a rating scale that assigns points based on families' specific needs.

Mr. Davis asked the Board committees to appoint chairpersons to report on committee meetings. He adjourned the meeting for lunch and committee meetings at 11:33 a.m. and called the meeting back to order at 12:50 p.m. for committee reports.

- Ms. Morrissey reported that the Finance Committee received an update on the FY2022 budget as of April 30, as of which 17% of the fiscal year remains. DECAL's expenses remain on track with the budget she said. She reported that Mr. Ringsrud explained that encumbrances that make expenses Quality Initiatives appear to be running ahead of the budget include things like contracts. She also reported that this year 92% of funds coming into DECAL go out to operations, an improvement over last year's rate of 91%.

Mr. Davis paused the committee reports for the public comment period, reminding Board members that their role during the public comment period is to listen and understand rather than respond. He opened the public comment period. Mr. Ed Juline, Owner and CEO of Club SciKidz Atlanta, commented that he wanted the Board's help to avert a crisis. He said he had been in business for 20 years and described his business cycle, saying that parents register their children for summer camp as early as October or November for the following summer. He continued, "We have applied for nine exemptions for our programs, of which we have received four. We have spent thousands of dollars and countless hours on this, trying to get these exemptions in place. I don't know if we're going to get the last five. I've talked to dozens of other camp operators, and they tell me one of two things: 'Don't get involved with DECAL; avoid them like the plague,' or 'It's limited my business, and I can't grow anymore.' So in April 2021, this Board decided to put a process in place to comply with zoning, building, fire, and health requirements, and the method by which they wanted to do that was requiring these documents from the locations that we are renting, locations that we are begging to rent. This is not something where they're coming to us and saying, 'Bring your summer camps here.' There is fierce competition for these locations. These locations are often grandfathered in; they're CCLCs or churches and their exemption was grandfathered in before April, and so they never had to present these documents, and they often ask us, 'Why?' And we say, 'It's a new thing with DECAL,' and they say, 'Well, maybe you should find another church.' It's frustrating. So these are churches and private schools, churches that have schools, churches that have schools with kids going every day."

Ms. Obi informed Mr. Juline that his time was up. He asked for and was given an extension. He continued, "So I don't know if we'll make it, but if I lose one site, I lose it all. The company will be bankrupt. I have to refund hundreds of parents. I'm going to have 350 East Cobb moms devastated. So, here's our ideas. None of these are good for you, but we're trying everything to make this work. One is if the facility has a grandfathered exemption, let us ride on that grandfathering until the facility has to then present these documents. Don't make us the bad guys that have to go out and force these facilities to do something that they don't want to do anyway. Number two, if the fire inspection is the problem, let the fire marshal do his job and go get the fire inspection. Don't make us beg the fire marshal and the facility and everybody else to try to get this all done in such a short period of time. It was suggested by DECAL that we shouldn't open registrations until we have the exemption. That puts us out of business. We have to get the facility in October, and it takes four months, six months to get an exemption. That won't work. The last possibility is if we don't make it in time to start summer camps with an exemption, give us a six-month waiver to get through the summer so we don't go bankrupt. Then the next year there is no leeway. So, this is a crisis. I'm not sleeping; my team's not sleeping; the other people in the city here are panicking that they're going to have to get exemptions. The process is broken. Please help us fix it so we don't end up with thousands of kids without summer camps to go to. Thank you."

Mr. Davis asked Ms. Obi if there were any other comments, and she said there were none. Mr. Davis closed the public comment period and resumed the committee reports.

- Joanna Hill reported that the Quality Innovations and Partnerships Committee first talked about the EHS-CCP. Ms. Fickes gave more detail on the challenges of finding qualified staff and achieving full enrollment. The team is

developing creative ways to attract staff, and some of the federal COVID funds have been set aside for recruitment and retention. The Early Head Start requirement that all programs maintain full enrollment was suspended during the pandemic but goes back into effect September 1. The team is focused on engaging new family child care providers and rebuilding relationships with existing programs. Laura Wagner and Jill O'Meara also presented to the Committee about the Community Transformation grants, which are intended to support local communities as they address the critical needs of children birth to 5 and their families. Currently there are eight grantees around the state. The needs that the grants address include food insecurity, dual language learners, reducing suspensions and expulsions in early care and learning programs, mental health services, and improving access to high-quality early learning programs, The grants are funded up to \$75,000 and run for 18 months.

- Kristy Beam reported that the Program and Rules Committee received more information about the Find Help/Gateway Community Partners to help families more easily access services. The Committee also learned more about the Class Wallet classroom grants and a PPE grant through the DOE for testing for lead in schools and preschools and providing low-cost remediation if lead is found. The Committee heard a more detailed presentation about DECAL's activities related to social emotional learning and the fact that DECAL provides state-level leadership in this area. Nutrition Services is expanding to include a physical activity component.

Mr. Davis thanked the Committees for their reports. At 1:08 p.m. he asked if there was any other business for the Board. There being none, he announced the date for the next Board meeting, May 25, 2022, and adjourned.