

**Board of  
Early Care and Learning**

**Board of Early Care and Learning Meeting**  
Thursday, May 18, 2023 — 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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Board Members

Kristy Beam, Jen Bennecke, Melissa Boekhaus, Phil Davis (Chair), Susan Harper, Kathy Howell, Kristin Morrissey, Kimberly Neville, Luann Purcell, Cristina Washell

Public Guests

Dana Driggers, Ife Finch Floyd, Hanah Goldberg, Lisa Hardt, Emily Hatchett, David Howell, George Jones, Beverly Johnson, Terri Johnson, Isabelle Keenum, Emily McCullough, Amber Sansbury, Samantha Williams, Jessica Woltjen

DECAL Staff

Amy Jacobs, Commissioner  
Susan Adams, Deputy Commissioner for Pre-K and Instructional Supports  
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  
Andres Bernal, IT Help Desk Manager  
Chondra Bolton, CACDS Project Manager  
Jennifer Bridgeman, Director of Process and Policy-CCS  
Vanessa Brown, EHS Program Manager for Mental Health and Disabilities  
Michelle Davis, Human Resources Assistant  
Hayat Dergaga, Research Analyst  
Rebecca Ellis, Director of Practice and Support Services  
Megan Fickes, Director, Early Head Start Partnership  
Shayna Funke, Lead Policy and Business Operations Analyst  
Rhonda Gunn, Senior Human Resources Manager  
Denise Jenson, Director of Quality Rated  
Melinda Knowles, Quality Assurance Specialist, QR Operations  
Laura Lucas, Director of Infant Early Childhood Mental Health  
Christi Moore, Professional Learning Director  
Diana Myers, Nutrition and Physical Activity Supervisor  
Kamilah Natson-Melvin, EHS Education Disability Mental Health Specialist  
Amir Nilforooshan, IT Assets and Purchase Supervisor  
Rob O'Callaghan, Senior Research Analyst  
Quandra Obi, Special Assistant to the Commissioner  
Jill O'Meara, Community Partnerships and Projects Manager

Valerie Perez, Research Analyst  
Harika Polisetty, DocuWare System Administrator  
Anne Rein, Department Writer/Editor  
Michael Rodgers, Director, Finance  
April Rogers, Director, CCS Enforcement Operations  
Amy Roys, CAPS Development and Partnerships Director  
Barbara Sanders, Business Analyst  
Hannah Smith, Early Education Community Partnership Coordinator, CE  
Sonja Steptoe, QIP Communications and Outreach Manager  
Amanda Tarpley, CAPS Family Support Director  
Audreana Todd, QIP Special Projects Coordinator  
Keva Tuck, CAPS Scholarship Administration Specialist  
Amanda Vanmeter, CAPS Family Support Director  
Mark Waits, Senior Writer  
Sheryl Wilhite, Director of Human Resources  
Liz Young, Government Relations Director

The May 18, 2023 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 8:59 a.m. Board Chair Phil Davis called the meeting to order.

**2. Welcome**

Mr. Davis welcomed Board members, DECAL staff, and guests.

**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 February meeting. Ms. Zisook moved to approve, and Dr. Washell seconded. The Board approved the minutes unanimously.

**4. Inspiration**

In light of her retirement from the Board, Mr. Davis invited Ms. Howell to share reflections. She reflected on her 30-year career in education, which included teaching 8th grade, first grade, kindergarten, and a pre-k program that preceded Georgia's Pre-K, and serving as an elementary school principal at a school with 1,700 students. She retired from teaching in 2000 and joined the DECAL Board in 2012. Ms. Howell praised Commissioner Jacobs' leadership and expressed appreciation for the work of DECAL employees. Mr. Davis presented Ms. Howell with a Board resolution honoring her service and a commemorative plaque.

**5. Board Member Updates**

Mr. Davis invited Board members to share updates on their recent activities. He noted that on his drive through a rural area from Savannah, he spotted a Quality Rated provider, an encouraging sign that rural areas are being served by the program. Ms. Beam reported reading *Grumpy Pants* to a class for Children's Mental Health Week and receiving lots of information and advice from children about managing stress. Dr. Purcell said she enjoyed being on the DECAL Download podcast and thanked Ms. Howell for her service on the Board. Dr. Washell reported that she also read *Grumpy Pants* to a class in Gainesville and learned a

lot from the students. Ms. Bennecke thanked Ms. Howell for her many years of service to the Board. Dr. Boekhaus reported that many parents are asking her about child care for the fall, and she refers them to [qualityrated.org](http://qualityrated.org). Ms. Brock thanked Ms. Howell for her service and praised the work of all Georgia's Pre-K teachers. Ms. Morrissey thanked Ms. Howell and reported on a weekly summer program that she supports at her local library. The program is focused on child literacy and includes support for the whole family.

## 6. DECAL Staff Reports

DECAL leaders provided updates about the agency's work.

### a. Commissioner's Update

Commissioner Amy Jacobs wished Ms. Howell happiness in her retirement. She announced that the CAPS ACCESS program has been extended through September 2024. DECAL will continue paying the full cost of tuition through that date. Because of a federal regulation, families will resume paying their family fees in October of this year.

Ms. Morrissey asked how the family fees are collected. Commissioner Jacobs replied that providers are responsible for collecting the fees which are usually about \$20 per week per child.

The Commissioner announced that Look Again Week, to stress the importance of never leaving a child alone in a vehicle, will be observed for the 10th year during the week of May 22–26. The Commissioner invited Board members to help spread the word by changing their social media profile pictures to the "Look Again" icon for the week. She also reported on some recent speaking engagements to which she was invited. In March she spoke, along with Mindy Binderman from GEEARS and Kelli Henderson from AFLAC, at the Future of Georgia Summit, hosted by the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, about the importance of quality child care to workforce development. In April she spoke at the Aspen Forum on Children and Families in D.C. on a panel with leaders from other states about how states use family voice in their decision making, especially as it relates to 2Gen policy and programming. She had the opportunity to highlight DECAL's work about student parents, including the CAPS priority group and the upcoming pilot in which CAPS staff will work on site at several Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) with student parents to make sure they have access to the services they need as they work to complete their education. The Commissioner also led the Georgia Children's Cabinet to found a 2Gen Leadership Academy for the purpose of embedding a 2Gen perspective in all state agency leadership. On Children's Mental Health Awareness Day, sponsored by Voices for Georgia's Children and other partners, Commissioner Jacobs spoke about the work DECAL does to support children's mental health. She also read *Grumpy Pants* during Children's Mental Health Week. The Commissioner gave the commencement address to 500 graduating undergraduate and graduate students at the Georgia College and State University College of Education.

Mr. Davis thanked the Commissioner for her presentation.

### b. Finance and Administration Update

Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud gave a quarterly update on DECAL's budget and spending. As of March 31, 2023, the end of the third quarter, DECAL's spending is on track with 26% of budgeted funds remaining. He noted that the amended budget for 2023 (AFY2023) includes an \$8 million increase for Georgia's Pre-K from state lottery funds to cover an increase in the employer contribution to the State Health Benefit Plan (SHBP) for lead teachers at public Pre-K providers. DECAL's FY2024 budget includes a \$43.9 million increase, \$1 million of which goes to Child Care Services (CCS) to fund the \$2,000 cost of living increase for state employees, an increase in state matching funds for the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) to allow DECAL to

continue receiving the same amount of federal funding for CAPS, and other rising costs. The remaining \$42.9 million increase goes to the Pre-K program to fund the \$2,000 cost of living increase for DECAL employees, a \$14 million increase to classroom operations, a \$20.6 million increase for the \$2,000 cost of living increase for Pre-K teachers, and the increase in the employer contribution to the SHBP mentioned above. Mr. Ringsrud also reported that DECAL received another clean audit. He gave an update about bills passed by the Georgia General Assembly in its recent session. House Speaker John Burns announced the formation of a House Working Group on Early Education that will focus on expanding access to Georgia's Pre-K. DECAL will work closely with the group. House Bill 538, the Georgia Early Literacy Act, requires early learning teachers to have training on literacy and goes into effect in 2025. Senate Bill 211 creates the Georgia Council on Literacy which will conduct a comprehensive review of literacy programs from birth through post-secondary education.

Ms. Morrissey asked whether there is funding attached to any of the bills. Mr. Ringsrud replied that there is not. Ms. Harper asked whether DECAL will be providing the literacy training to child care providers. Mr. Ringsrud replied that DECAL will more likely approve training provided by others but that details are still being worked out.

Mr. Ringsrud also reported that DECAL received approval to spend the \$105,000 remaining from last year's budget for start-up grants of up to \$10,000 each to incent experienced sponsors to expand operations into unserved and underserved counties. Applications from sponsors were due on May 15, and grants will be announced on June 1.

Mr. Davis thanked Mr. Ringsrud for his presentation.

**c. Federal Programs Update**

Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs Elisabetta Kasfir reviewed DECAL's strategic goals and highlighted the goal of expanding 2Gen approaches to better support children and families. She summarized the ongoing work in CAPS to support that goal and introduced CAPS Directors, Amy Roys, the new CAPS Development and Partnerships Director, and Amanda Vanmeter and Amanda Tarpley, both CAPS Family Support Directors. Ms. Tarpley gave a presentation about Find Help Georgia, a resource and referral portal for families, designed to be a "one-stop shop" with a 2Gen approach. The portal is a collaboration among DECAL, Prevent Child Abuse Georgia, and the Technical College System of Georgia. Backend staff sites allow the partners to track referrals and other data. All CAPS employees receive fundamentals training about the portal, and those who work directly with families receive more extensive training so they can promote the service to families. CAPS staff are also making outbound calls to community-based organizations (CBOs) to encourage them to claim their sites and keep them updated. The portal has been in operation just over a year and has had almost 17,000 unique visitors with a 40% increase per month since January. "Help paying for child care" is the third most frequent search term after "help paying for housing" and "finding housing." CAPS has just begun an engagement campaign to increase the number of connections made on the site each month.

Mr. Davis asked for clarification about whether DECAL is tracking engagement between DECAL and local organizations or between families and local organizations. Ms. Tarpley clarified that DECAL is working to drive up the number of connections between families and local organizations and is reaching out to local organizations to encourage them to promote their services on Find Help Georgia.

Ms. Tarpley said that CAPS hopes to recruit additional partners for the portal and has developed a governance structure in anticipation of bringing new partners on board.

Dr. Washell asked whether Find Help Georgia is available in languages other than English. Ms. Vanmeter responded that it is available in more than 20 languages.

Ms. Morrissey said that she understood the value of Find Help Georgia from having been involved in strategic planning for the library system in her county that included 100 stakeholders, many of which were nonprofits. A lot of their conversation, she said, was about how to reach underserved members of the community and communicate services that are available. The process revealed that many of the service providers operated in silos, and some duplicated the efforts of other organizations. She asked Ms. Tarpley to share the top five things that employees are trained on so that she could share that information with service providers in her area. Ms. Tarpley replied that her top recommendation would be the fundamentals training that all CAPS employees receive. It is a high-level overview about how to navigate the site put together by the national Find Help organization. Ms. Tarpley said she would share that and other training materials with Board members.

Ms. Zisook asked whether during the awareness campaign connections were made to school districts. Ms. Tarpley said yes. She explained that Prevent Child Abuse (PCA) has been training community-based organizations, including school systems, while CAPS has focused on training families. DECAL's Community Partnership Coordinators are also supporting PCA in their outreach efforts.

Ms. Brock asked for more promotional materials so that she could make them available at her school.

Mr. Davis thanked Ms. Tarpley for her presentation.

**d. Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports Update**

Deputy Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports Susan Adams shared highlights from Children's Mental Health Week, celebrated May 1–5, including puppet shows, the Friday Free Your Feels dance party, and the square breathing cards that children were given to take home. Ms. Adams thanked Board members Beam, Neville, and Washell for taking time to read to children during the week. State Representative Katie Dempsey and other legislators as well as DECAL staff also read to children during the week, and Ms. Adams reported that she also enjoyed reading *Grumpy Pants* in the classroom. GEEARS donated \$750 for self-care gift cards for teachers. Ms. Adams also reported on the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation pilot. The program is based on a model developed by Georgetown University that trains and certifies mental health professionals to provide consultation at early learning sites. Consultants can work directly with children and families to help them get the services they need and educate teachers about when mental health services would be beneficial. The consultants will also support DECAL's Inclusion and Behavior Support specialists in identifying next steps in classroom situations where mental health expertise is needed. This month 10 mental health professionals will be certified as IECMH consultants, and they will work at three pilot sites in Atlanta, Macon, and Savannah. Ms. Adams also announced that DECAL is represented by IECMH Director Laura Lucas on the Multi-Agency Treatment for Children (MATCH) committee created by House Bill 1013 to support the Mental Health Parity Act, led by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities.

Ms. Harper suggested that the square breathing technique might be beneficial to introduce at the beginning of the school year so that children can practice regulating themselves throughout the year. Ms. Adams responded that breathing techniques are a key part of teacher training on social and emotional development, and several techniques are taught to children throughout the year. The square breathing cards were designed for children to take home and teach their families the technique, Ms. Adams said.

Mr. Davis thanked Ms. Adams for her presentation.



## 7. Break

Mr. Davis recessed the meeting for a short break at 10:28 a.m. The meeting resumed and staff reports continued at 10:41 a.m.

### e. Update on Longitudinal Study of Georgia's Pre-K Program

Deputy Commissioner Adams and Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships Bentley Ponder presented results of the longitudinal study that followed a representative sample of 1,169 children who participated in Georgia's Pre-K during 2013–2014. The study, conducted by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (FPG), followed the children through 4th grade and is now complete. It included standardized child assessments twice a year on a variety of language and literacy, math, executive function, and social skills; classroom observations that measure the quality of teacher-child interactions; and a subsample of dual language learners. The inclusion of classroom quality observations is unique to this study the Deputy Commissioners said. In the children's third grade year, researchers picked up a comparison group of children who had not attended any pre-k program. The study had a high retention rate, which lends confidence to the results, Ms. Adams said. Dr. Ponder gave an overview of the study findings. Within grade achievements were strongest in Pre-K and fourth grade, he said.

Ms. Zisook asked whether all the assessments started in Pre-K and whether any of the assessments included listening comprehension. Dr. Ponder responded that assessments of passage comprehension and calculations began in first grade. Ms. Adams responded that all the skill assessments are from Woodcock-Johnson, and passage comprehension has some listening comprehension in it, and applied problems also reflects listening comprehension. Ms. Adams briefly explained each of the assessments. Ms. Harper expressed concern that children develop at different rates in different skills and the ages of children in the same grade level may vary by as much as 18 months. Dr. Ponder responded that one of the strengths of the study is that the assessments are age normed. Ms. Adams added that we have researchers do the assessments because they are complex. Researchers look at each child's age by month, and compare their skills to children of exactly the same age. Mr. Davis asked whether the assessments are given specifically for the study. Dr. Ponder said they are, and that the assessments feel more like games than tests to the children.

The longitudinal findings for language and literacy show a general pattern of strong gains in Pre-K and kindergarten with scores leveling off, or regressing to the mean, in the early grades, Dr. Ponder said. Some skills show another uptick in fourth grade. One finding of the study is that the children did not make substantial gains in vocabulary over the course of the study. There are a lot of efforts in the state to improve children's vocabulary skills, Dr. Ponder said, and it has been difficult to get results in this area. Longitudinal findings for math skills show a pattern of gains in Pre-K and kindergarten followed by a leveling off. Calculations skills show a strong uptick in fourth grade. Executive function skills show a steady increase across the study. Social skills, which are rated by teachers, show mixed results. Classroom quality was very high in Pre-K and is relatively consistent throughout the study. Children in the study performed better on all measures than the comparison group that did not attend any pre-k program.

Ms. Harper asked whether the same children were tracked throughout the study. Dr. Ponder responded that the same children were tracked throughout. They were chosen randomly, and their identities are unknown to DECAL.

By fourth grade, Dr. Ponder said, children scored at or above the national average on six of the nine

standardized assessments. Dual language learners were slightly below the national norm for language and literacy skills measured in English, and well below the national norm for skills measured in Spanish.

Ms. Adams drew general conclusions about the study. One key finding, she said, is that Georgia's Pre-K builds foundational language and literacy skills for reading, and this outcome is the result of a 20-year by DECAL, Pre-K providers, and classroom teachers to improve the quality of interactions between teachers and children. Vocabulary is an area that the state needs to continue to improve on, Ms. Adams said, not just in Pre-K but also before Pre-K and between kindergarten and third grade. Work is also needed, she said, to make sure classroom quality is consistent across children's educational careers because children sustain the gains they make in early learning settings when they continue in high-quality classrooms.

DECAL is working with FPG on a new study that will help the agency better understand the factors that help children develop language skills. Research questions will focus on identifying the best classroom practices, understanding variations in children's experience within classrooms, and discovering whether student characteristics predict differences.

Dr. Washell asked whether the current study is focused just on children's classroom experience or includes factors outside the classroom such as families. Ms. Adams responded that one of the findings from the longitudinal study is that in classrooms that have a lot of dual language learners, there is a lot more growth in language and literacy skills. The second research question is designed to unpack that finding. The third research question includes surveys to collect more information, but it is more focused on classroom than families at this point.

The current study samples 146 classrooms and 663 children in all six regions of the state, with 53% of participants in rural classrooms. Findings will be available next fall.

Mr. Davis thanked Ms. Adams and Dr. Ponder for their presentation.

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

Deputy Commissioner Ponder informed the Board that 64% (2,888) of all eligible providers are now Quality Rated. A total of 375 providers received ratings in the first quarter of 2023. Of these, about 60% were 2-star ratings, a slightly higher percentage than expected. Quality Rated 10-year anniversary celebrations wrapped up with Quality Rated Week, April 24–28 sponsored by GEEARS. A cohort of 15 child care learning centers (CCLC) recently completed the Quality Rated Language and Literacy Endorsement program and received their endorsements. Participating family child care learning homes (FCCLH) will receive their endorsements soon. Dr. Ponder announced that a yearlong comprehensive review of the Quality Rated program is underway. The review is a key part of DECAL's continuous improvement strategy for Quality Rated and will lead to revisions that will strengthen the program. The process includes a lot of stakeholder engagement. The review will examine the structure and components of a rating, the process providers go through to become rated, the technical assistance given to providers, supports for providers and families, communication with providers and families, new research, and look at the whether the program is meeting the needs of the population it serves.

Mr. Davis asked whether the Board would revisit the topic at its August meeting. Dr. Ponder said that it probably would.

Dr. Ponder presented the timeline for the review and described the progress made so far. The Urban Institute has conducted 10 family focus groups with 63 participants and fielded a survey of Quality Rated providers and those who are eligible to become rated. Child Trends conducted four listening

sessions with 27 participants for Quality Rated assessors and CCR&R staff. During the third quarter there will be stakeholder data dives where different stakeholder groups are invited to hear the findings from the surveys and focus groups. In the fourth quarter there will be two large community forums in which the review team will share its findings and solicit more feedback.

Mr. Davis asked whether the quarters are based on the calendar year rather than the fiscal year, and Dr. Ponder responded that they are. Mr. Davis thanked Dr. Ponder for his presentation.

**g. Child Care Services (CCS) Update**

Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services Pam Stevens shared attendance data for CCLCs. Attendance data is based on the observations of CCS Consultants and is not the same as enrollment or capacity. The number of children is rising but is still 13% below the pre-pandemic average. Infant and toddler classrooms are recovering faster than classrooms for older children. The number of classroom staff observed at CCLCs is just 4% below the pre-pandemic average, meaning that income has been reduced by 13%, but labor expenses are almost equal to pre-pandemic levels. The child care industry is still recovering, Ms. Stevens said, and the STABLE grants have been very important. Ms. Stevens presented the specific language for the proposed rule changes that will be voted on by the Board at its August meeting and take effect October 1. The first change requires CCCLCs and FCCLHs to notify parents of any incident that puts the health and/or safety of their children at risk. The current rule requires that parents be notified in the case of illness or injury. The second change is an additional instance of a rule approved by the Board last year that allows DECAL to revoke a license for false or misleading information. The third change requires that all transportation logs must include dates and times.

Ms. Morrissey asked whether CCS ever suspends a license rather than revoking it when an infraction is less severe. Ms. Stevens said yes, that CCS suspends licenses when providers need time to correct an issue or if they need training. CCS can also suspend parts of licenses, such as transportation.

**8. Lunch and Committee Meetings**

Mr. Davis adjourned the meeting for lunch at 11:30 a.m.

**9. Public Comment Period**

At 12:56 p.m. Mr. Davis called the meeting back to order and opened the floor for public comments. He asked Board Liaison Quandra Obi whether anyone had signed up to make a public comment. Ms. Obi replied that no one had signed up. He asked whether any comments had been received via the GoToMeeting chat function. Ms. Obi responded that no comments had been received via chat. Mr. Davis noted that a letter about licensing rules addressed to the Commissioner and the Board had been received in advance and would become part of the meeting record. (See below.)

**10. Committee Reports**

Mr. Davis called for Committee reports.

- a. Ms. Howell reported from the Programs and Rules Committee. CAPS is conducting a student parent 2Gen pilot at three Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) campuses, Chattahoochee Technical College in Cobb County, Central Georgia Technical College in Bibb County and Wiregrass Georgia Technical College in Lowndes County. Student parents who are enrolled in credit and degree programs, workforce development programs, and adult education programs at those sites may participate. Onsite staff will provide coaching to make CAPS more accessible, improve service delivery, and help student parents identify and remove barriers to their academic success. School age grants are still available from



CCS. School age programs can use the funds for age-appropriate equipment and supplies. These are especially helpful for school age programs that occupy space in early learning programs. Health and safety grants of up to \$40,000 are also available from CCS. Many compliance issues involve playground safety, and the grants may be used to improve playgrounds, transportation, and other health and safety issues. The five-week Summer Transition Program will begin almost as soon as school lets out. There will be 322 rising kindergarten classes and 71 rising pre-k classes. Each classroom will have a transition coach to help families navigate the transition. The Alliance Theater will offer an arts integration program to show teachers how to incorporate arts into their lesson plans. This summer there will be classrooms to target underserved populations, nine inclusion classrooms (five for rising pre-k students and four for rising kindergarteners) and six multi-language classes (four for rising pre-k students and two for rising kindergarteners). Nutrition Services will host a train-the-trainer Physical Activity Learning Session in June. Statewide training for early care and learning providers will begin in September. Nutrition Services applied for a \$200,000 USDA farm-to-school grant. If awarded, funds will be used to provide web-based training to Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) sponsors and offer grants to two CACFP child care centers. Nutrition Services is also planning events around the state to kick off Happy Helpings, the summer food service program. These include hydration stations, physical activity games, taste testing, and other activities.

- b. Ms. Morrissey reported from the Finance Committee, praising Mr. Ringsrud for the latest clean audit and noting that DECAL has had consistently clean audits throughout its history, which is phenomenal. The finance committee received updated financials as of April 30. As of that date, with 17% percent of the year remaining, DECAL has 18% of funds remaining. Some additional funds remain for Nutrition to fund the start-up grants. Ms. Morrissey also reported that DECAL continues to distribute 93% of all funds received and retain only 7% for operations. The percentage for operations will likely increase to about 11% when all the federal COVID relief funds have been spent.
- c. Ms. Brock reported from the QIP Committee, saying that she is thankful for and inspired by all the work DECAL does. She reported on the Quality Rated restoration grants of \$5,000 for each eligible classroom and \$500 bonuses for eligible teachers. There are still 408 eligible providers that have not yet applied for their grants, she said, and it's important to get the word out about that. Ms. Brock reported that 24 children in the Early Head Start Partnership Program who were enrolled at a provider that DECAL terminated have been placed at other providers, and DECAL is recruiting new providers for the 2023–2024 school year. In 2021 DECAL commissioned an economic impact study of the early care and learning industry in Georgia, and the Research team is expecting the first report this fall. The Research team also asked the Urban Institute to study the needs of families who need child care during nontraditional hours. Ms. Brock reported that Community Outreach and Partnerships contracts with Quality Care for Children to operate the 1-877-ALL-GA-KIDS call center to help families find high-quality child care and summer camp options. QCC, GEEARS, and Voices for Georgia's Children are helping DECAL to spread the word about this resource. This resource was especially valuable during the pandemic when families and members of the emergency services workforce needed help finding child care. Community Partnerships and Projects Manager, Jill O'Meara, reported on a symposium she attended about student parents' support needs. Georgia was highlighted as one of six states working on such initiatives, Ms. Brock said.

## 11. Adjournment

Mr. Davis asked if there was any other business for the Board. There being none, he thanked all the Board members for their service, announced the date for the next meeting, August 24, 2023, and adjourned at 1:24 p.m.

As noted above, a letter addressed to the Commissioner and the Board from Katie Davidson and dated May 12, 2023 follows. Ms. Davidson wrote,

*Commissioner Jacobs and DECAL Board,*

*I write to you today to request your consideration in revising Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning policy, specifically The Childcare Learning Center Rules.*

*My child is currently enrolled at a childcare facility, in Bibb County. She is a healthy and thriving three-year old and has been in this facility since June 2021. Our family, residents of Knoxville (Crawford County), has been happy with the care given to her until this point in time. This is a relatively new childcare facility with policies and processes just being hammered out in the last year or so. I would like to bring one of their policies to your attention. I understand that any change in policy is a slow and tedious process, and that any change that may come from this will not help my family as we will have aged out of this childcare facility by the time any policy change might be enforced. However, having spoken with leadership at every level within my child's daycare and receiving no help, I have no choice but to raise this issue to you all with the hope that this can save some other family potential angst.*

*The facility's policy I want to bring to your attention is below (facility name omitted intentionally, and emphasis added)*

**XXXXXXXX Parent Handbook 2022-2023, Potty Training Policy Amendment August 5, 2022** reads in part—

*“Children in the Two and Three-year-old classrooms will adhere to the new potty training policy, effective immediately.*

*Children that remain accident free for a 2 week period may wear underwear at school. Pull-ups will be worn during nap time until the child remains dry for a consecutive 30 days. Parents are responsible to provide a weekly supply of pull-ups, at a minimum two sets of clothes, and underwear for their child. **If a child has five accidents in class, they will be asked to remain at home for 1 week to work on using the restroom independently.** Parents are encouraged to help their child transition out of diapers/pull-ups at this time.”*

*The DECAL policy which I request be amended is below—*

*The Childcare Learning Center Rules **Page 21 of the Childcare Learning Center Rules 10-1- 22, 591-1-1-.11**, paragraph (2) states that “personnel shall not... punish toileting accidents”.*

*Cite as Ga. Comp. R. & Regs. R. 591-1-1-.11 Authority: O.C.G.A. § 20-1A-1 et seq. History. Original Rule entitled "Discipline" adopted. F. Dec. 23, 1997; eff. Mar. 1, 1998, as specified by the Agency. Amended: F. Dec. 4, 2015; eff. Dec. 24, 2015. Amended: F. May 26, 2017; eff. June 15, 2017.*

*Having spoken with the Deputy Commissioner for Childcare, Ms. Pam Stevens, I understand that the policy in question is permissible according Bright from the Start policies, and that a suspension for toileting accidents is not considered punishment. However, as I cannot imagine this policy is within the intent of the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, I would like to request that a revision be made to the Childcare Learning Center Rules so that this policy, or one like it, can no longer be levied against children and their families.*

*Below is some background information about my family's specific experience with this policy and how it has affected our children and our family, for your consideration.*

*The childcare environment that we are in, specifically in Crawford County, is difficult. There are few Quality Rated providers, which leaves us having to drive 30 minutes away from home, and to Bibb County for childcare. Bibb County does not have many options for us either, and when first moving back from Overseas in 2021, there was one facility with an opening for my then one (1) and two (2) year old. So, this is where we went—and where we stayed. Along the way, we have looked at other facilities and options, but there are always waitlists—lots of waitlists. For example, for this Summer I was able to get my now four (4) year old in to childcare at one facility, but that facility does not have a space for my three (3) year old. So, we will have our children at two different childcare facilities in Bibb County this Summer, which is less than ideal.*

*The daycare policy that is in place does not benefit the child or the parents of said child, and in our experience has had the opposite of the intended impact. During a particularly difficult week in daycare, after a period in which she was out of school due to illness, our child had multiple accidents. During pickup, my usually energetic, happy child was pitiful and appeared stressed. She told me that her teachers were mad and sad with her and asked me not to be mad at her. She was dejected. I explained to her that accidents happen, and that we loved her and knew she was capable and that we would all keep trying. The next several days, she cried all the way to daycare—she didn't want to go, and she was feeling that her teachers were upset with her. All this to say—the policy may have had great intentions, but the reality of it was that its implementation served to shame and stress our entire family, most notably our three (3) year old.*

*So, while it seems as though we are stuck in a bad situation as there are really no other good options for two full-time working parents, ultimately, we do not want our child to have to leave the facility. She is thriving, loves her friends and teachers, and is learning so much. We just want the peace of mind that comes with knowing that regardless of how many toilet accidents our three (3) year old has, she and we will be offered reliable daycare in a safe environment.*

*Thank you for your attention and for your continued support of the children of the State of Georgia.  
Respectfully, Katie Davidson.*

 8/24/23

Board Chair, Signature

Date

 8/24/23

Board Secretary, Signature

Date