

## **Board of Early Care and Learning**

### **Meeting Summary**

**November 21, 2024**

#### **Board Members:**

Kristy Beam (Vice Chair), Jen Bennecke, Phil Davis (Chair), Maria Franklin, Joyce Freeman, Susan Harper, Karen Jones, Kristin Morrissey, Cristina Washell, Sylvia Washington, Karla Zisook

**DECAL Staff:** Commissioner Amy Jacobs, Rian Ringsrud, Susan Adams, Elisabetta Kasfir, Bentley Ponder, Pam Stevens, Dennis Brice, Reg Griffin, Ira Sudman, Quandra Obi, Farouk Baksh, Karla Berlioz, Chondra Bolton, Stephanie Clark, Katie Davis, Kimberly Davis, Tyler Duggins, Shayna Funke, Moriam Hassan, Leigh Ann Hendrix, Melissa Herndon, Amy Hill, Abraham Hussain, Denise Jenson, Christine Lampkin, Laura Lucas, Andrea Marable, Akaiyah Moore, Christi Moore, Carolyn Morkeh, Miranda Murphy, Amir Nilforooshan, Rob O'Callaghan, Mia Parks, Valerie Perez, Laura Reid, Anne Rein, Ashley Rich, Michael Rodgers, April Rogers, Amy Roys, Barbara Sanders, Angela Shelton, Hannah Smith, Sonja Steptoe, Jill Taylor, Laura Wagner, Bridgette Washington-Collier, Jennifer Waters, Liz Young

**Guests:** Olivia Amato, Tracy Baynes, Ideishe Bellamy, Sescily Bell, Sandi Bennett, Bianca Brown, Bobby Creech, Charlotte Davis, Morgan Dumenil, Darrell Hampton, Chantelle Hester, Linton Hester, Ladesha Jenkins, Isabelle Keenum, Garrett Knight, Katie Landes, Michelle Smith Lank, Ciara Lowe, Mackenzie Luke, Lindsay McVicar, Chanda Mullican, Jenaya Parris, Charlotte Pelz, Lauren Pollow, Marion Powell, Renee Ryberg, Heather Steed, Noel Weimer, Jennifer Williams

Mr. Davis called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.

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

For inspiration Dr. Washell told a personal story to illustrate the impact early childhood educators have on children. She told of coming to the United States from Cuba with her family when she was 3. She was placed in a Head Start program and arrived the first day fearful and with a very limited ability to communicate. She recalled seeing a large poster of an oak tree with acorns on it, one acorn for each child in the program. Her teachers were warm and welcoming, and she told her older sister who picked her up in the afternoon that she wanted to be a teacher so that she could make children feel welcome.

Mr. Davis invited Board members to share updates about their recent activities. Dr. Zisook read stories at Sunshine House on Winn Way in Decatur during Pre-K week. She had a chance to talk to the teachers about their STEM curriculum and was impressed by it. Dr. Beam read and danced with children at KinderCare on Chamblee Tucker Road in Dekalb County during Pre-K week and attended DECAL's all-staff meeting in October. She encouraged other Board members to try to attend the all-staff meetings. Ms. Bennecke read to the Pre-K class at Lake Forest Elementary and was impressed by the program's support of many dual language learners.

DECAL leaders provided updates about their areas of responsibility.

- Commissioner Jacobs announced the 2024-2025 Pre-K Teachers of the Year, Elizabeth Arthur from Lincoln County Elementary, the public school winner, and Rachel Robertson from Oconee

Preschool Academy, the private child care center winner. Both teach inclusion classrooms. The Commissioner introduced the 2023 Early Educators of the Year, Noel Weimer, the Infant Teacher of the Year from Water Oak Family Child Care in Roswell, Bianca Brown, the Toddler Teacher of the Year from The Greenbrier School in Evans, and Chantelle Hester, the Preschool Teacher of the Year from Smart Starters Academy in Savannah. Each of the Early Educators of the Year made a brief presentation and was recognized with a Resolution from the Board presented by Mr. Davis. The Commissioner reminded Board members that funds for these awards are raised privately. She introduced Olivia Amato and Katie Landes from Voices for Georgia's Children. They shared highlights Georgia's Pre-K Week, held for the 14th year in October. During the week 105 state leaders visited 150 Pre-K program sites.

- Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud reported that DECAL's expenses are on track with the budget as of September 30, the end of the first quarter of SFY2025. Although it appears that CCS has only 60% of its funds remaining after the first quarter, the last federal funds from the American Rescue Plan act (ARP) will be amended into the budget to offset expenses, he explained. Mr. Ringsrud also shared data about Georgia's summer food service program Happy Helpings, through which 73 sponsors served 3,299,498 meals at 1,026 sites in 103 counties, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), through which 556 sponsors and institutions served 65,886,120 meals at 3,336 centers and sites in 157 counties. Both the number of meals and the number of counties served increased as a result of the start-up grants to food sponsors funded by the Georgia Legislature, according to Mr. Ringsrud. He also shared photos of visits to child care learning centers made by the Nutrition Services team during Farm to School/Farm to Early Learning month in October.
- Deputy Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports Susan Adams gave the Board an update about Georgia's Pre-K in the current school year. She reminded Board members that her department received an additional approximate \$100 million in lottery funds this year to maintain high quality and expand access. Six new management positions have been added to her staff to support the growth of Georgia's Pre-K program. A net total of 110 additional classrooms have been added, and the program transitioned to the K-12 lead teacher pay scale in September. Replenishment grants of \$15,000 will be paid to 760 classrooms in November. These grants are paid on a five-year cycle. Ms. Adams introduced Director of Workforce Supports and Learning Dr. Christi Moore. Dr. Moore introduced Bobby Creech, the Executive Director of the Technical College System of Georgia's (TCSG) Office of Adult Education. Mr. Creech made a presentation about the impact of the grant awarded to TCSG to build a pipeline of adult education students in technical colleges headed into the early care and education workforce. The grant supported 191 students, 101 of whom were English language learners. Of the 60 who have graduated, 43 entered the child care workforce; and 105 are currently in the pipeline completing their coursework and/or practicums. Mr. Creech recognized Sescily Bell who entered Georgia Piedmont Technical College seeking a high school diploma. Ms. Bell made brief remarks about her career journey. The mother of seven children, she finished her high school and college coursework in a single year and went on to enter the ECE workforce.

Mr. Davis recessed the meeting for a short break at 10:38 a.m. and resumed it at 10:57 a.m.

- Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services (CCS) Pam Stevens gave Board members an overview of the licensing rule changes to be introduced in 2025. Rules changes are necessary to comply with the Georgia Early Literacy Act, HB538 and CCDF rules, and the Board will vote on these in May 2025 so that new rules can be implemented July 1, 2025. Ms. Stevens also informed the Board that rules changes are needed to align with current National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) Guidelines and promote playground best practices as aligned with the CPSC Public Playground Safety Handbook. CCS will engage with providers to determine the timeline for implementation of new playground rules. Ms. Stevens introduced CCS Technical Assistance Unit Manager Jennifer Waters who made a presentation about the CCS Resource Suite that her team developed. The resources are succinct visual aids about licensing rules and corresponding best practices. More than 40 resources have been created so far, and 20 have been translated into Spanish. Ms. Waters also reported on Child Passenger Safety Week held September 15-21. It was a collaboration among CCS, the Department of Public Health (DPH), and the Governor's Office of Highway Safety. Staff from CCS and DPH made joint visits to 10 licensed child care programs in Dublin, Covington, and Moultrie, conducting free safety inspections of child passenger vehicles and providing free resources and booster seats as needed. They found that many parents and program administrators were unaware that child passenger seats had expiration dates. The *DECAL Download* podcast for the week also promoted awareness of child passenger safety.
- Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs Elisabetta Kasfir gave a brief update on CAPS policy changes that have been implemented to facilitate the transition back to serving 50,000 children, the number that can be supported with typical CCDF funding. Requirements for several priority groups were changed on July 1, and on September 1 the income threshold for initial eligibility was reduced to 30% of state median income (SMI). Ms. Kasfir expressed her hope that this change will be temporary. She introduced CAPS Director for Development and Partnerships, Amy Roys, who made a presentation about the CAPS 2Gen pilot program and recognized the pilot team. The pilot program operates onsite at three TCSG colleges, Chattahoochee Tech, Central Georgia Tech, and Wiregrass. DECAL staff collaborate closely with staff from TCSG and WorkSource Georgia. DECAL staff provide same-day service for CAPS case assistance, including new applications, renewals, and changes and offer parent-driven goal setting through family-centered coaching. They also provide individual resource referrals via Find Help Georgia and other community agencies. So far, 100 families have received help with their CAPS applications, and the approval rate for applications processed on campus is 56%, compared to 16% for CAPS applications overall. Requirements are all the same, but the additional in-person support may contribute to this higher approval rate.
- Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships Bentley Ponder gave a brief update about Quality Rated participation: 65% of eligible providers have received a 1-, 2-, or 3-star rating. Of these, 82% are 2- or 3-star. Another 18% of eligible providers are in the process of becoming Quality Rated. Dr. Ponder reminded Board members about the new quarterly "Commitment to Quality" payments for 2- and 3-star providers that replace the former weekly tiered reimbursements and the new \$500 annual workforce support payments. Dr. Ponder also presented key findings from the economic impact study about the child care industry in Georgia for the year 2021. In total, the industry generated \$6.01 billion in economic activity in

Georgia that year. Industry revenue was \$2.95 billion, ranking it among Georgia's largest industries. The industry employed 64,631 individuals in 2021 and supported an additional 16,559 jobs in other industries. The average annual pay for child care workers in 2022, \$27,166, makes them the lowest paid professionals compared to workers in similar industries such as education and healthcare.

Mr. Davis adjourned the meeting for lunch and committee meetings at 12:00 p.m. and called the meeting back to order at 1:02 p.m.

Mr. Davis asked Ms. Obi if anyone had signed up to make a public comment or submitted comments via the GoToWebinar chat function. She replied that no one was present to make a comment and that no comments had been received through the chat function.

Mr. Davis called for committee reports. Dr. Beam reported from the Programs committee about the CAPS Family and Provider Advisory Councils launching in 2025 to promote stakeholder engagement, the CCS Lights on After School event and Health and Safety Grants to improve afterschool programming, the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health program providing training and resources for families and caregivers to help recognize the signs of trauma, and Nutrition Services' activities to recruit Happy Helpings sponsors, pilot the Quality Rated Nutrition and Physical Activity Endorsement, and support organizations offering meals during emergencies. On behalf of the Finance committee Ms. Morrissey noted that the COVID-related dollars are almost gone and that 89% of the funding DECAL receives goes toward service delivery. Dr. Washell reported from the QIP committee about the three community impact grant funding opportunities underway as well as the Thriving Child Care Business Academy helping providers operate successful child care businesses.

Mr. Davis reminded Board members of the next meeting on February 20, 2025 and adjourned.