

**Board of Early Care and Learning
Meeting Summary
August 28, 2025**

Board Members:

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

DECAL Staff:

Commissioner Amy Jacobs, Susan Adams, Elisabetta Kasfir, Bentley Ponder, Pam Stevens, Dennis Brice, Reg Griffin, Rian Ringsrud, Ira Sudman, Quandra Obi, Clayton Adams, Farouk Baksh, Katrina Bernard, Mary Berry, Lari Lyn Beyer, Kristin Blevins, Nieves Blocker, Chondra Bolton, Tamika Boone, Karen Brown, Tomisher Campbell, Pat Carlson, Malissa Champion, Stephanie Clark, Gemma Clopton, Katie Davis, Kim Davis, Glenda Davis-Canteen, Jennifer Delorme, Hayat Dergaga, Tammy Dill, Woody Dover, Tyler Duggins, Carol Fordham, Shayna Funke, Janet Herrera, Beth Houtz, Michelle Hughes, Abraham Hussain, Alaina Jones, Melissa Johns, Lashaunda Kirkland, Melinda Knowles, Andrea Marable, Brittany Marks, Stephen McGarity, Sara McKellar, Elizabeth Milling, Tiffany Mitchell, Sara Myers, Elizabeth Milling, Christi Moore, Miranda Murphy, Amir Nilforooshan, Mia Obiwo, Rob O'Callaghan, Valerie Perez, Jessica Perschka, Lisa Pitts, Bridget Ratajczak, Laura Reid, Anne Rein, Ashley Rich, Dajuana Robinson, Michael Rodgers, Brenna Rutherford, Barbara Sanders, Devanie Schay, Angela Shelton, Sandra Shepherd, Hannah Smith, Nate Smith, Sonja Steptoe, Michelle Talley, Amanda Tarpley, Jill Taylor, Lauren Thompson, Balaram Tidhi, Adi Valdez-Rodriguez, Laura Wagner, Bridgette Washington-Collier, Martine Watts, Vicki Watts, Liz Young

Guests: Ideisha Bellamy, Maria Barkley, Mary-Anne Carter, Angela Church, Erin Clark, Ellyn Cochran, Charlotte Davis, Lauren Davis, Maitri Desai, Michelle Dozier, Diane Early, Akira Eiland-Sharp, Brandy Ellison, Falona Flood, Frances Gillison, Hanah Goldberg, Julie Heap, Jamila Higgins, Ladesha Jenkins, Bruce Johnson, Shawnell Johnson, Tamarra Johnson, Isabelle Keenum, Christina Lindsey, Wes Lindsey, Kelly Maxwell, April McBride, Kendall McGrew, Kathlyn McHenry, Lindsay McVicar, Angela Melton, Danielle Millman, Charlotte Pelz, Lauren Pollow, Tranae Powell, Cindaria Redmond, Bernard Reynolds, Ellen Reynolds, Anaya Richardson, Shukriyyah Shannon, Samantha Shepherd, Michelle Smith-Lank, Shannon Smith, Nicole Sowell, Noni Walton, Tammye Woods

Dr. Beam called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m.

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

Dr. Beam thanked Mr. Davis for his service as Board Chair. She shared the excitement that her grandson showed at the start of the new school year. He participates in a Quality Rated child care program in Dekalb county. Educators celebrate two new years, she said, and the start of the new school year is an opportunity to reflect on the shared commitment to make sure that every child has the foundation they need to thrive and succeed. She called for growth, renewal, and joy in support of Georgia's youngest learners.

Dr. Beam invited Board members to share updates about their recent activities. Mr. Davis reported on a visit to Jessup for one the Happy Helpings events. Ms. Freeman shared that she participated in an early bird breakfast in La Grange focused on language and literacy skills for Pre-K students. Dr. Zisook reported that 83% of graduating Pre-K students in Decatur were assessed as ready for kindergarten. Ms. Morrissey said she enjoyed recording the DECAL Download podcast with the other Board officers. Dr. Jones shared that she had spoken with a prospective child care center owner who is very excited about opening her center. Dr. Washell reported that she attended a Happy Helpings event in Fanning County and she too enjoyed recording the podcast.

DECAL leaders provided updates about their areas of responsibility.

- Commissioner Amy Jacobs reported on a meeting with Dr. Laurie Todd-Smith, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Early Childhood Development in the federal Office of Early Childhood Development, a part of the Office of Child Care (OCC) that administers the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), which provides most of DECAL's funding. Some priorities of the OCC are changing with the new administration, the Commissioner said. Dr. Todd-Smith has advised states to stop implementing system changes that had been mandated by the CCDF 2024 final rule to pay CAPS providers prospectively and based on enrollment rather than attendance because the CCDF 2025 proposed rules may differ. The Commissioner announced that the OCC has opened a grant opportunity for supplemental CCDF funding for expenses arising from major disasters and emergencies in 2023 and 2024. DECAL is applying for funds to distribute to providers who sustained losses during Hurricane Helene. Applications are due September 15, 2025, and funds will be awarded by September 30, 2026. She mentioned that the Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning stepped up and raised a total of \$50,000 for grants to 33 providers that experienced losses as a result of the storm. The Commissioner also informed the Board that she expects that DECAL will receive a smaller CCDF grant for FFY 2026, which begins October 1, and the agency is proactively reducing contracts in anticipation.
- Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration Rian Ringsrud reported on the budget for SFY 2025, which ended on July 31. Most programs spent all of their allocated funds. Georgia's Pre-K had a \$12.8 million surplus, and those funds will be returned to the state treasury. Happy Helpings had a surplus of \$15,000 from funds earmarked for startup grants to sponsors. Mr. Ringsrud has requested that DECAL be allowed to keep those funds and distribute them next year. Per instruction from the Governor's Office of Planning and the Budget, DECAL is submitting a flat budget request for amended SFY 2026. DECAL's budget request for SFY 2027 is flat except for a \$15.7 million increase from state lottery funds for year three of the four-year phase in to reduce Georgia's Pre-K classrooms from 22 to 20 students. Increased spending linked to enrollment is allowed, he explained. The Board will be asked to approve the 2027 budget request later in the meeting. Mr. Ringsrud also reported that 65 Happy Helpings sponsors served 1,977,956 meals at 933 sites in 109 counties as of August 11. The number of meals served is expected to rise as sponsor complete their paperwork.
- Deputy Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports Susan Adams reported on the Summer Transition Program (STP). The STP maintained the class count and enrollment from last year with 69 classes for rising Pre-K students and 326 classes for rising kindergarteners. Ms. Adams showed pictures of DECAL employees' children attending the first day of school, reminded Board members that Georgia Pre-K week is October 6-10, and passed around a copy of this year's Pre-K book, *Every Amazing Story* by Coy Boyles and Malcolm Mitchell. Ms. Adams also reported on the adaptive learning mini-grants, which include training, coaching, and up to \$2,500 to purchase adaptive materials to support children with disabilities. In SFY 2025, 75 mini grants were awarded; \$134,000 was disbursed; and 147 coaching visits were completed.
- Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services (CCS) Pam Stevens reported on the cross-division collaboration initiative that seeks to break down silos between DECAL divisions and support the goal of "One DECAL." The anti-choking public awareness campaign originated from the team in February and will launch this fall with Super Saturday trainings, public events, and resources with the theme, "Chop, Look, Listen," to educate providers and families about how to prepare food for small children and observe and engage with them while they eat. Ms. Stevens applauded the achievements of the CCS Technical Assistance unit over the past year. Because of the team's outreach efforts, the number of programs actively receiving TA has increased by 55%, and the number of programs in good standing with DECAL has increased by 18%. Ms. Stevens also reported characteristics on the child care business

as a whole as of the end of SFY 2025. The number of Child Care Learning Centers (CCLC) declined slightly over the course of the year, and the number of Family Child Care Learning Homes (FCCLH) continued a steady decline. Licensed capacity in Georgia has nevertheless increased by 7% since 2018. The average number of children present at CCLCs declined by 8% during the year, indicating the pace of recovery from the pandemic has slowed.

Dr. Beam recessed the meeting for a short break at 10:08 a.m. and resumed it at 10:32 a.m.

- Deputy Commissioner for Federal Programs Elisabetta Kasfir presented a comprehensive overview of the CAPS program which subsidizes child care costs for families who meet eligibility requirements. Annual subsidies, funded by the CCDF and state matching funds, total \$385,000,000, an average of \$7549 per child each year. An additional \$17 million goes to 2- and 3-star Quality Rated providers as Commitment to Quality (C2Q) payments. Most families are charged a weekly fee based on the number of children enrolled and the family's income. The average fee is \$22 per week. Families who choose providers that charge more than the CAPS subsidy rate also pay the difference between the CAPS rate and the provider's actual charge. To be eligible for CAPS scholarships, families must belong to one of 13 established priority groups, have income of less than 30% of the State Median Income (SMI) at initial eligibility, and, for most, work or attend school at least 24 hours per week. Currently 53,000 children are using CAPS scholarships; almost 96% attend CCLCs, and 99% are enrolled with Quality Rated providers. Almost half of children with scholarships are of school age. More than 60% of families with current scholarships have income at or below 30% of SMI. After a family meets CAPS initial eligibility requirements, they may remain in the program until their income exceeds 85% of SMI. A little more than 35% of families have income between 30% and 85% of SMI. More than 60% of children with scholarships live below the federal poverty line or have no income.
- Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships Bentley Ponder reported on the Quality Rated family support call center that launched July 1, 2025. The call center team of four served 1,232 families during their first month of operation. He announced that 13 Quality Rated providers completed a pilot program and earned the inaugural Quality Rated Nutrition and Physical Activity Endorsement. Child Trends is currently reaching out to randomly-selected child care programs to participate in the comprehensive child care quality study, he said. Dr. Ponder elaborated on data from the Quality Rated program, giving historical context for some recent trends. Since Quality Rated began in 2012, 4,197 unique providers have received a rating. If ratings and re-ratings are counted, the QR team has conducted almost 10,000 assessments. Different rating options, called TARO, were offered during the pandemic when live observations were not possible. Providers who were rated during the pandemic have now received reassessments. At re-rating, 70% of 2-star providers retained their 2 stars, but only 34% of 3-star providers retained theirs, an effect Dr. Ponder called, "TARO settling." In contrast, 57% of providers who had previously been rated with the traditional method (live observation) retained their 3 stars at reassessment. Of providers who received 1-star ratings using TARO, 76% who were rerated in 2025 increased to 2- or 3-stars. The percentage of eligible providers who have achieved a rating remained steady at 67% with an additional 5% somewhere in the rating process.

Dr. Beam adjourned the meeting for lunch and committee meetings at 11:28 a.m. She called the meeting back to order at 1:00 p.m. for the public comment period. She asked Ms. Obi whether anyone had signed up to make public comments. Ms. Obi replied that three people had signed up to speak, and she called on Lauren Davis, the owner of ICare, who said:

Good morning. My name is Lauren Davis and I stand here today as the owner of ICARE Child Development Center. And as someone who has been directly harmed by DECAL's abuse of its own rules, I am here today to again put DECAL's behavior on the record. I understand that these quarterly meetings are mostly symbolic.

DECAL presents what it chooses, avoids answering direct questions and shields itself from accountability. But that is exactly why I'm speaking. So, there is a record of how this agency has treated me and others like me when we challenge DECAL's misapplication of the law and its own regulations. In February 2025, I submitted a complete change of ownership application. By DECAL's own rules, a permit should have been issued within 10 business days of a complete application. Instead, DECAL held my application for 45 days, then denied it. After that denial, DECAL reached out to the owner of the program and pressured her to surrender her license, even threatening that she could face adverse actions if she did not. That was not about protecting children. That was not about compliance. That was about forcing the shutdown of a successful program that was in good standing simply because I was to be the owner. When I appealed, an independent administrative law judge of OSA ruled in my favor, ruled in my favor, but DECAL ignored that ruling, overturned it, and reinstated the denial. That is not regulation, that is retaliation. And what makes it worse is who made the decision. Commissioner Amy Jacobs and General Counsel Ira Sudman. Both are personally named defendants in my pending federal lawsuit. Georgia's Executive Branch Code of Ethics requires officials to avoid even the appearance of conflict of interest and to recuse themselves when impartiality can reasonably be questioned. They did not recuse. They were ruled anyway. That is a blatant abuse of power. So let me be clear. I know DECAL will not answer me today, but the public record will show that I stood here, called out this conflict of interest, and named this behavior for what it is, retaliation and abuse of authority. If DECAL leadership can ignore ethics, rules and neutral judges when it suits them, then no provider in Georgia can trust this process or this agency. Commissioner Jacobs and Ira Sudman should resign. Commissioner Amy Jacobs and General Counsel Ira Sudman have demonstrated a personal vendetta against me for refusing to stay silent about DECAL's mismanagement of the CAPS program. I put on blast the issues that leadership wanted to sweep under the rug, which led to the discovery that a DECAL employee was selling CAPS scholarship. And instead of addressing that corruption, DECAL turned its focus on me. Their decisions in my licensing case cannot be separated from their role as defendants in my federal lawsuit. Instead of recusing themselves as required by Georgia's code of ethics, they actively participated in the final agency decision. This dual role as both adversaries and adjudicators destroyed the appearance of fairness and made impartiality impossible. Their actions show not regulation, but again, retaliation. Georgia families, Georgia providers and Georgia children deserve better. This board deserves better. We deserve fairness. We deserve transparency. We deserve accountability."

Ms. Obi called on Christina Lindsay who said:

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Christina Lindsay. This is my husband, Wes Lindsay. We are here today to advocate on behalf of our daughter Alexandra Lindsay, who was a student or child at Tomorrow's Hope Montessori School in Suwanee, GA. Our relationship with Bright From the Start began. We didn't even know it began until April 17, when the head of the school said I just heard back from the state. They want me to interview Alexandra and file her statement with the state. Now, what brought that to her attention was we heard some concerning things from our daughter, and we believe that another child was inappropriately touching our daughter. And so we brought it to the school's attention, and the school brought this to Bright to the Start's attention. And then Shereen started pressuring us for her to speak with our daughter directly without being spoken by a trauma informed professional first. She wanted to speak with our daughter first. So I just want to start with saying that without our presence, correct. This is the head of the school, Shereen Ali, who is new to being the head of the school within the last year. But I've had several communications with different people in Bright From the Start. I originally spoke with Maria Margarita Collier on 4/21 who got a statement from me and informed me that I could make an official statement by calling the board I guess without her coming to me first, so I spoke with Tiffany Hill and I told her I just want our children to be safe and as a parent to feel heard when we speak up for them. I think the agency that licenses Tomorrow's Hope should be made aware of these concerns for an early learning child care center. If your agency is not the one to address this, I would

appreciate any guidance you can give me to channel my concerns to the appropriate agency. When I see something concerning, I say something. The children are the ones that suffer when these types of issues are not addressed in a timely manner. So that was back on April 24. The last contact that I had was with Rhonda Parker, who I escalated my concerns to. I had spoken with the lead investigator on our case, and then I had spoken with Jennifer Taylor, regional manager, and then Rhonda Parker, who I believe is the Director of Field Operations and I will say she was the least empathetic and dismissed, and she was the most dismissive of my concerns for my daughter. This case was brought to the Swannee Police Department. We were not expecting that our child or the other child would be charged as a 5 year old, but we do believe that there was a lack of supervision with the school, which is what initially Diane Clark said that was going to be addressed to this date. There's still no report on Tomorrow's Hope on Bright from the Start. And their license number changed. They went from being license number—hold on one moment. Their old license number went from 37849 to new license 66530, and it was because Shereen became the new owner, but she had been the owner for over a year and a half, and it was interesting that no parents could access these records at the time. The other thing that was a big concern to me was that Shereen was sending out communications to parents saying that our case was closed as of May 7, and our report just opened on April 17, and I had just spoken with Diane Clark on May 5, and she. . . that was the first time I ever spoke with her and she said, 'This is ongoing.' And then I spoke again with Diane Clark on May 13th and she said no, this is still ongoing. And it wasn't until July 18 that I heard that it is closed. Thank you. And but there's still no report, no nothing. And the license numbers changed, you know. And so when I asked for clarification on that, no one could give me an answer. There was another case that was involved that transparency, accountability, as Miss Lauren Davis had spoken to, there's a lack of transparency and accountability. DECAL, I feel like, is not doing the job and the service to the children which they serve, and we immediately pulled our daughter out after we saw that the school was then trying to shirk responsibility, and we have tried to bring our concerns to DECAL as a licensing agency, and we don't know who to bring our concerns to? Because we do feel that the school should ultimately be dealing with some sort of reprimand, and they have not so far. There's no accountability on another case. It was not met. Oh, she called time. OK, thank you. I will probably be back in November when you have another public hearing November 20.

Ms. Obi called on Shannon Smith from SoulShine who said:

Hello, thank you for having capacity and time to allow us to public comment. I understand that this is not a Q and A. I am going to be posing questions and hopefully I can get a follow up with maybe a licensing consultant or something to get some of this answered. So I came here a year ago. I was here on August 24 of 2024 and I brought to the attention of the board and the audience that there's massive low enrollments that were happening due to job losses and people relocating themselves. Sorry, I want to make sure I'm politically correct. That crisis was very hard for a lot of schools to survive. SoulShine was able to get through that time and then we got back to a good high capacity number that made the business more viable and then this year we bought again and through a lot of research. I don't know exactly what the Pre-K guidelines are and how you all are deciding where you're putting the Pre-K programs, but College Heights got 8 classrooms. SoulShine got one. College Height is a feeder school for the City of Decatur school system. So that right there is understandable that parents would want to go there and obviously they're going to take their siblings and but the feeder schools getting East Lake Learning Center got quite a few classrooms. It just seems to me that a lot of the feeders did, and that just puts the mom and pop shops who have been holding the economy together for 20-30 years, depending upon how long they've been a provider in a really difficult place because as CAPS, money starts to lower. They're not going to be able to get that funding. And now that it has come to light that DeKalb County is \$350 million in the hole for taxes due to 20,000 seats being open and now they're going to do Pre-K clusters. I know there's been talk of doing 2-3 and fours in Pre-K. I don't know where you guys are at. I just don't know how mom and pops are going to survive. I don't know how parents will have choice for private schools or publicly funded schools. I don't know if Whitefoord may expand and move into Toomer, and then you know

they've got the ability to get more funding. And I'm just concerned, not just for SoulShine. I'm concerned for the industry that has loved and cared for so many children and is doing that and showing up for the passion that they have. I think that if we could find out and understand the Pre-K approval process, I would wonder if you guys would still grant funds for we have one in Decatur, but our Kirkwood or East Atlanta location or if those funds will be distributed to help stabilize staffing low enrollment. And what kind of support we can seek out and then how that will be communicated because owner operators right now are changing diapers, covering breaks and it's very hard to get here. Yes, the meeting summary notes are very helpful, but a lot of people, they need an opportunity to have a dialogue. So if an FAQ could be done or some type of communication before they just get hit with not all the research I've done. So for the loving care of all of our children and for all of the people that have loved them, I would just like to bring to your attention that it's with these feeder schools getting. And I understand why it's just going to close a lot of us down. Thank you for your time.

Dr. Beam asked Ms. Obi if any comments had been submitted online via the chat function. Ms. Obi replied that three comments had been received, and she read the following:

Thank you for the opportunity to address our concerns. We are very concerned with the lack of CAPS funding for low income families. You are seeing a drop in the number of children attending the centers because the funding for low income families are not receiving the funds. Most centers in Lower income areas enrollment are at record lows because the CAPS cases are being denied. Why is Ga Lottery Pre-K after care program a priority when there are homeless children and special needs children who are not funded for childcare. Why would DECAL send out CAPS pilot program letter to needy families to apply for funding, but do not have the staffing to effectively respond and process the request then issue an automatic denial to the applicants. Why are there no contact or email addresses for CAPS supervisors? Do DECAL and its board understand that by withholding CAPS funding from low income families this detrimental to families, children and the centers that provide services to them. Enrollment across the board for centers that service low income families because the funding is being withheld. Special needs children should not be denied services because CAPS will not pay the adjusted rate to the centers to provide proper care for these children. This process should not take over a month and a requirement for a special hearing to determine the rate they want to pay. Why are these rates not published and easily accessible to the families that need the care in a timely manner. With all is being said, is DECALs focus on GA-Lottery PRE-K and growing the program for children of Ga that is 4 years old or providing the Help to the families that depend on the State of Georgia for much needed assistance that is inclusive of all children beginning at birth? Thank you for your time.

In regards to the Quality Rated Process, Can they implement video observation as proof of the scores. The centers should be able to receive the actual notes from the assessors to truly understand how the program was scored with evidence upon receiving the rating score. The Quality Rating score decides whether or not childcare center can accept CAPS funding so scoring should not be subjective and there should be no ambiguity. The company contracted by DECAL should be capable with the knowledge base to help the program score the highest score possible by the program. Without that knowledge the program cannot be successful at scoring high on the scale. In the near future, transparency should be required with all program scoring across the board instead of the need to pay for open records request for clarification of scores or the lack thereof. Also, all childcare centers should be able to receive surveys, study questions etc. instead certain centers chosen at "random." Raise the bar on quality in childcare licensing standards and do away with the rating scale because licensing and quality rating scale do not align. Thank you for your time.

Akira Eiland-Sharp
Safe Haven Learning Academy
akirasharp1104@gmail.com
4044270560

Here are the concerns of many ECE Providers. Please address the following concerns

*DECAL's current focus on the **Georgia Pre-K Lottery** is leaving behind the very children and families it was created to serve. The agency's mission is *family and children*, yet its neglect of **birth-to-four programs** has left providers underfunded and families unsupported.*

*The **Georgia Lottery was designed to fund Pre-K and scholarships**—but it was never meant to replace the broader responsibility of supporting early childhood care. By prioritizing only four-year-olds, DECAL is effectively pushing providers—especially those serving infants and toddlers—out of business.*

*If providers can't stay open, families lose access, and children lose the foundation they need before Pre-K even begins. This crisis demands immediate attention: **raise income qualifications for low-income families, reinvest in birth-to-four care, and ensure that CAPS is staffed and structured to serve families effectively.***

*Tammye Woods
Arrow Christian Academy at College Park, Inc.
INFO@ARROWCHRIST.COM
(770) 997-0711*

One of my questions is that is there an audit process to determine if the CAPS application determination is performed properly? Also, DECAL promotes inclusion for special needs children in licensed childcare programs but are not paying for the individualized care for the autistic child's needs? How can this be a realistic goal when the CAPS rate does not cover the cost associated with individualized care needs for special needs children and children on the autism spectrum. Furthermore, why have the very low-income eligibility income has not increased due to inflation and household cost; why is the initial requirement to receive CAPS so hard to meet for needy families? Some families have been cut off of CAPS for as little as \$3 over the income limit just for that particular pay period. Also, if the parent wants to appeal the decision in their case not qualify then the parent's rights are violated because DECAL for summary judgement in the hearing which automatically removes the families right to appeal because they are not represented by a lawyer. As most families cannot afford food and childcare they cannot afford to consult with an attorney on a summary judgement filing. To the board, are you aware this is happening and that this is a practice of DECAL which strips the families rights of appealing their rights for benefits. Why are CAPS providers required to participate in the program and require higher quality, but DECAL pays significantly less to providers that heavily rely on CAPS enrollment, but centers in higher income areas are charging almost double tuition? We have seen a vast drop in CAPS children attending centers. Is there a funding freeze that we are not aware of because enrollment is at an all-time low for CAPS subsidized centers across the board. CAPS childcare renewals are taking excessive amounts of time and providers are unable to caseworkers also it is a huge issue for enrollment for parents that they do not have to give notice before moving the children to another center. Per our centers policies and procedures we upload every year letting you all know our policies which heavily impact the center financially. The provider needs to have a relationship with the caseworkers in case of issues with certificates but we are unable to do so.

Thank you for time and consideration in addressing these issues.

*April McBride
aprilmcbride30@gmail.com
404-956-5867*

Following the public comments, Dr. Ponder resumed his presentation at 1:24 p.m.

- He reviewed the findings of the most recent Economic Impact study for 2024. He noted that Georgia's birth-through-5 population has declined by 1.6% since 2020, and young children are the biggest source of demand in the child care industry. The total economic impact of the industry grew from \$4.7 billion

in 2014 to a peak of \$7.03 before falling slightly to \$6.36 billion in 2024. The total economic impact includes direct effects, the gross receipts of child care providers; indirect effects, spending within the child care supply chain; and induced effects, consumer spending that results from employment in the industry. Dr. Ponder presented charts showing the breakdown of providers' gross receipts by state and federal funding vs. parent fees. Parent fees declined during the pandemic because of federal relief funds, and have increased as federal funding ran out. Dr. Ponder closed his presentation with an update on the Quality Rated workforce bonus. Over 16,074 applications have been received, and 13,022 child care employees have received their bonuses. About 82% of providers have employees who have applied.

At 1:35 p.m. Dr. Beam called for committee reports.

Dr. Washinton reported from the Programs and Rules committee and provided four programmatic updates. CAPS has formed two advisory councils: one serving parents and the other serving providers. The first CCS virtual provider engagement lunch and learn launched in February, and subsequent meetings will explore classroom observations and investigations. CCS is raising awareness about child passenger safety through the Look Again campaign. Dr. Washington reported that Pre-K week is October 6-10 and invited Board members to go and read to Pre-K children during that week. The Pre-K Teachers Of The Year will be announced soon, she said. She also reported on the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) and Workforce Knowledge and Competencies (WKC) revisions projects. Lastly, Dr. Washington discussed the Happy Helpings program that served two million meals over the summer.

Ms. Morrissey reported from the Budget and Finance Committee that FY2025 is complete and that 88% of funding supported grants and benefits while the remaining 12% supported operations. Ms. Morrissey provided updates on the DECAL AFY 2026 and FY 2027 budget including the Governor's guidance to submit flat budget requests. She recommended the Board approve the amended FY2026 budget and the proposed FY2027 budget.

Ms. Franklin reported from the Quality Innovations and Partnerships Committee about the EXPAND grantee site visit to the Alliance Theatre. Ms. Franklin discussed the 15 Community Impact Grants DECAL recently awarded to support young children and families across Georgia as well as the Quality Rated Nutrition and Physical Activity Endorsements awarded to 13 providers. In closing, Ms. Franklin highlighted the 1-star support initiative Quality Rated launched to help programs achieve a higher star rating.

Following the committee reports Dr. Beam asked whether there was any further discussion about the proposed budget requests for amended SFY 2026 and SFY 2027. Hearing none, she called for a motion to approve the budget request for amended SFY 2026. Ms. Harper made a motion, and Mr. Davis seconded. The Board approved the budget request unanimously. Dr. Beam called for a motion to approve the proposed budget request for SFY 2027. Ms. Morrissey made a motion, and Ms. Freeman seconded. The Board approved the budget request unanimously.

Dr. Beam announced the 2026 meeting dates, reminded Board members of the next meeting on November 29, 2025, and adjourned at 1:49 p.m.