



Georgia Dept
of Early Care
and Learning
BRIGHT FROM THE START

FY 2024 Annual Report





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A Message from Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs

Dear Friends of DECAL,

An African proverb says, *If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.* At the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), our goal every year is to *GO FAR* in meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia's families.

This annual report highlights how FAR DECAL went in State Fiscal Year 2024 (July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024) toward accomplishing the following goals:

- Enhancing School Readiness
- Increasing Quality and Access
- Supporting Workforce Development
- Expanding Two Generation
- Advancing Technology

This report discloses how DECAL administered the funds we received from federal, state, and private sources to benefit children, families, and the early care and education industry in our state.

This report also includes a section on how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the child care industry in Georgia and shares the STATE of CHILD CARE in Georgia after the pandemic. Despite what many feared might happen to child care during and after the unprecedented medical emergency experienced in our state and worldwide, data supports that the child care industry in Georgia is strong and continued to grow during State Fiscal Year 2024.

As the proverb says, the reason we were able to GO FAR this fiscal year is because we went TOGETHER with so many of you: the dedicated child care providers who care for Georgia's children every day; the valuable stakeholders who partner with us to enhance the well-being of Georgia's children; DECAL's passionate and professional staff; the Board of Early Care and Learning, DECAL's board that advises and supports our work; and Governor Kemp and other state policy makers.

Thank you for your part in making State Fiscal Year 2024 a success for Georgia's children, families, and the early care and education community. If you have any questions or comments about items contained in this report or ideas of how DECAL can continue to GO FAR, contact me at Amy.Jacobs@decals.ga.gov.

Sincerely,

Amy M. Jacobs
Commissioner





The State of Child Care in Georgia

While there were fears that the pandemic and the end of federal relief funds would lead to a significant decline in child care capacity, these fears have not materialized in Georgia.

As of June 30, 2024, Georgia had 3,234 Child Care Learning Centers and 1,141 Family Child Care Learning Homes, with a total licensed capacity of 388,243.

From July 2023 to June 2024:

- The number of Child Care Learning Centers increased by 8 centers, a change of +0.2%.
- The number of Family Child Care Learning Homes decreased by 57, a change of -4.8%.
- Total licensed capacity increased by 4,428, a change of +1.2%.

Over the previous five years, from July 2019 to June 2024, similar trends were seen:

- Child Care Learning Centers increased by 169 centers, a change of +6%.
- Family Child Care Learning Homes decreased by 330, a change of -22%.
- Total licensed capacity increased by 28,693, a change of +8%.

Thus, overall statewide trends indicate a modest increase in the number of licensed centers. Meanwhile, family child care going back more than a decade in Georgia and nationally has steadily declined. The growth in licensed capacity has outpaced the change in the number of facilities, indicating that centers are growing larger to serve more children than previously.

These trends are at the state level. In some parts of the state, the same trends may not apply.

In addition, licensing visit data suggests that, by 2024, the average number of children from birth through age four observed at licensed programs and the average number of classroom staff are on par with pre-pandemic averages.

Preliminary findings from DECAL's study of the economic impact of the child care industry in 2020 and 2021 suggest that federal pandemic relief dollars and their rapid distribution by DECAL were successful in stabilizing the industry. This study is being conducted by the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University and the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia.

About Us

Vision

Every child in Georgia will have equal access to high quality early care and education.

Mission

The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning improves outcomes for children and families by strengthening early learning experiences in partnership with early education programs, professionals, stakeholders, families, and communities.

Services

DECAL is the department of state government that supports child care providers in preparing Georgia's children and their families for school. Our services focus on quality child care, early education, brain development, nutritional programs, and tools and resources for families. We support eligible families by providing scholarships to help with the cost of child care so they can work or attend school. We work to equip early care and education professionals with enhanced credentials, appropriate teaching strategies, and best practices in working with children. We also collaborate with state policymakers and stakeholders to develop and implement policies that ensure access to quality care for all Georgia children.



Values and Principles

DECAL has embraced values that define its culture, guide the actions of staff as they work each day, and set the tone for interaction as an effective, cohesive team. In addition, DECAL's work embodies principles that characterize effective early childhood system building. Early childhood system building involves the ongoing process of adapting and developing the structures, behaviors, and connections that make the components of an early childhood system operate holistically to benefit children and families.

Values

- **Customer Service:** We strive to always respond professionally, courteously, respectfully, and in a timely manner to all our customers: families, child care providers, teachers, stakeholders, and policy makers.
- **Integrity:** We are honest, transparent, and accountable in our work.
- **Excellence:** We strive for quality and excellence in all we do; we use data, research, and best practices in our decision making.
- **Innovation:** We are focused on continuous improvement and are willing to try new approaches to accomplish our vision and to achieve our goals.
- **Collaboration:** We engage stakeholders and partners and value input from people and groups with diverse backgrounds and perspectives.
- **Equity:** We are committed to a culture of diversity and inclusion and recognize the complex and varying needs of families and children to access high-quality early education opportunities.
- **Respect:** We maintain a professional work environment and value the contributions of our team members and partners in helping children and families succeed.

Principles

To build a comprehensive early childhood system for all Georgia children, DECAL will partner with others to:

- Reach all children (as early in their lives as possible) and their families with high-quality services and supports
- Create policies and procedures that help Georgia children remain healthy and safe
- Include and effectively accommodate children with special and complex needs
- Reflect and respect the strengths, needs, values, languages, cultures, and communities of children and families
- Make it easier for families to access quality early care and education and for children to transition from early care and preschool to kindergarten
- Value parents as decision makers and leaders
- Promote and maximize investment and foster data driven innovation





Georgia Dept
of Early Care
and Learning
BRIGHT FROM THE START

By the Numbers

Conducted
10,106
regulatory visits

Processed
74,337
applications for
Childcare And
Parent Services
(CAPS)

71,526
students served in
3,682
Georgia's Pre-K
Classrooms

3,241
Child Care Learning
Centers
1,131
Family Child Care
Learning Homes

Supported
69,025,075
meals served
through the
Child and Adult Care
Food Program

Processed
19,316
grant payments and contract
payments to
1,371
vendors through the
Finance Division

Received **13,770** student parent
CAPS applications

Facilitated training for
5,553
educators on inclusion,
social and emotional
development, and infant
and toddler language &
literacy development

IN
STATE FISCAL
YEAR **2024**
DECAL

1,892
Funded sites for
Georgia's Pre-K
Program

Rated **1,655** programs bringing the number
of Quality Rated providers to **2,923**

Supported
107,326
unique children through
active
CAPS Scholarships

Hired and onboarded
107
full time staff and
73
temporary staff through
Human Resources Division

Child Care
Services awarded
\$80 Million in
Health and Safety
Grants

The DECAL Scholars program
provided financial support for
4,329
members of the workforce to
earn a credential or degree.

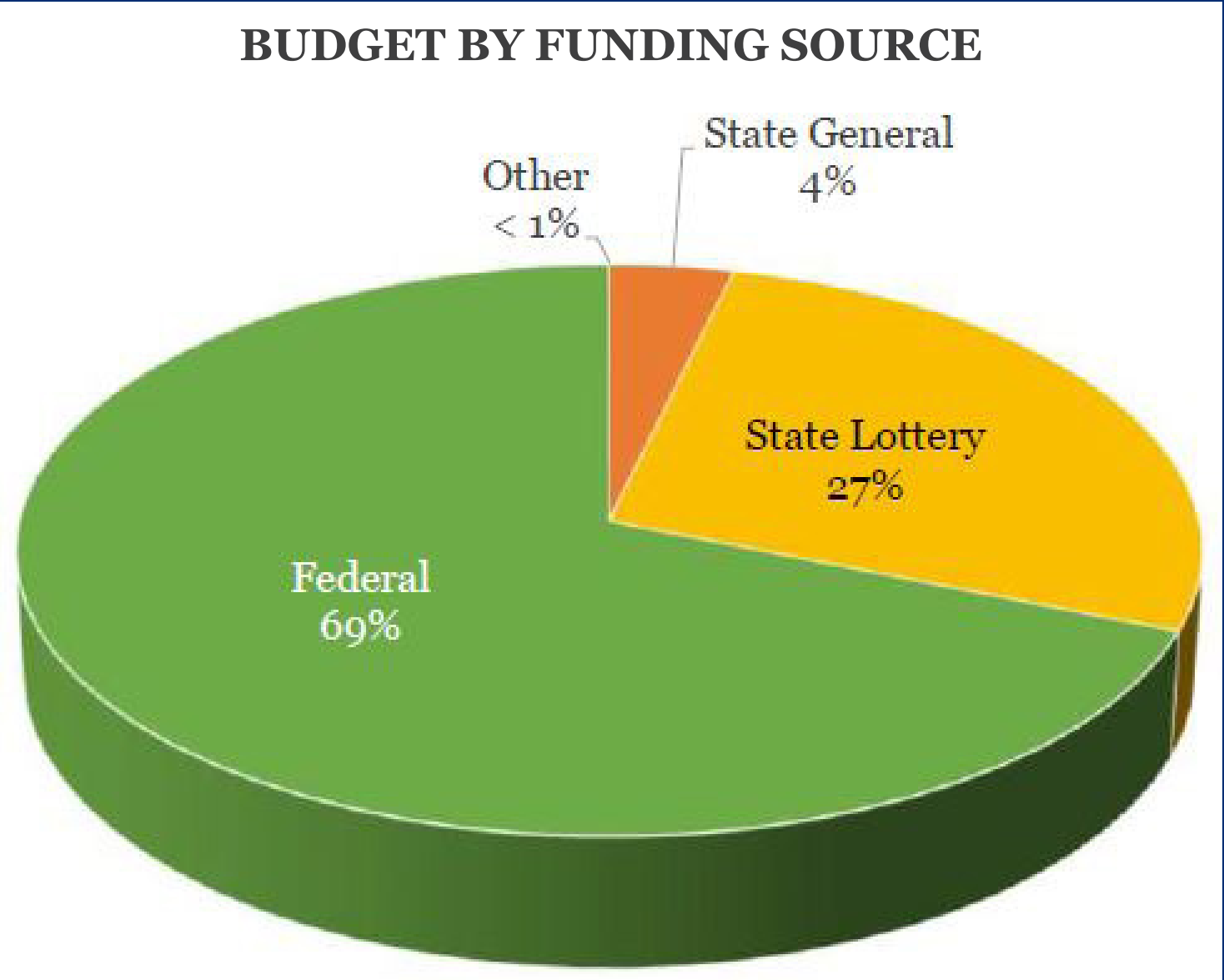
Supported
3,106,572
meals served
through the
Happy Helpings program

FAMILY PEER
AMBASSADORS
SUPPORTED
7,283
GEORGIA FAMILIES

Financial Highlights

FISCAL YEAR 2024 BUDGET BY FUNDING SOURCE

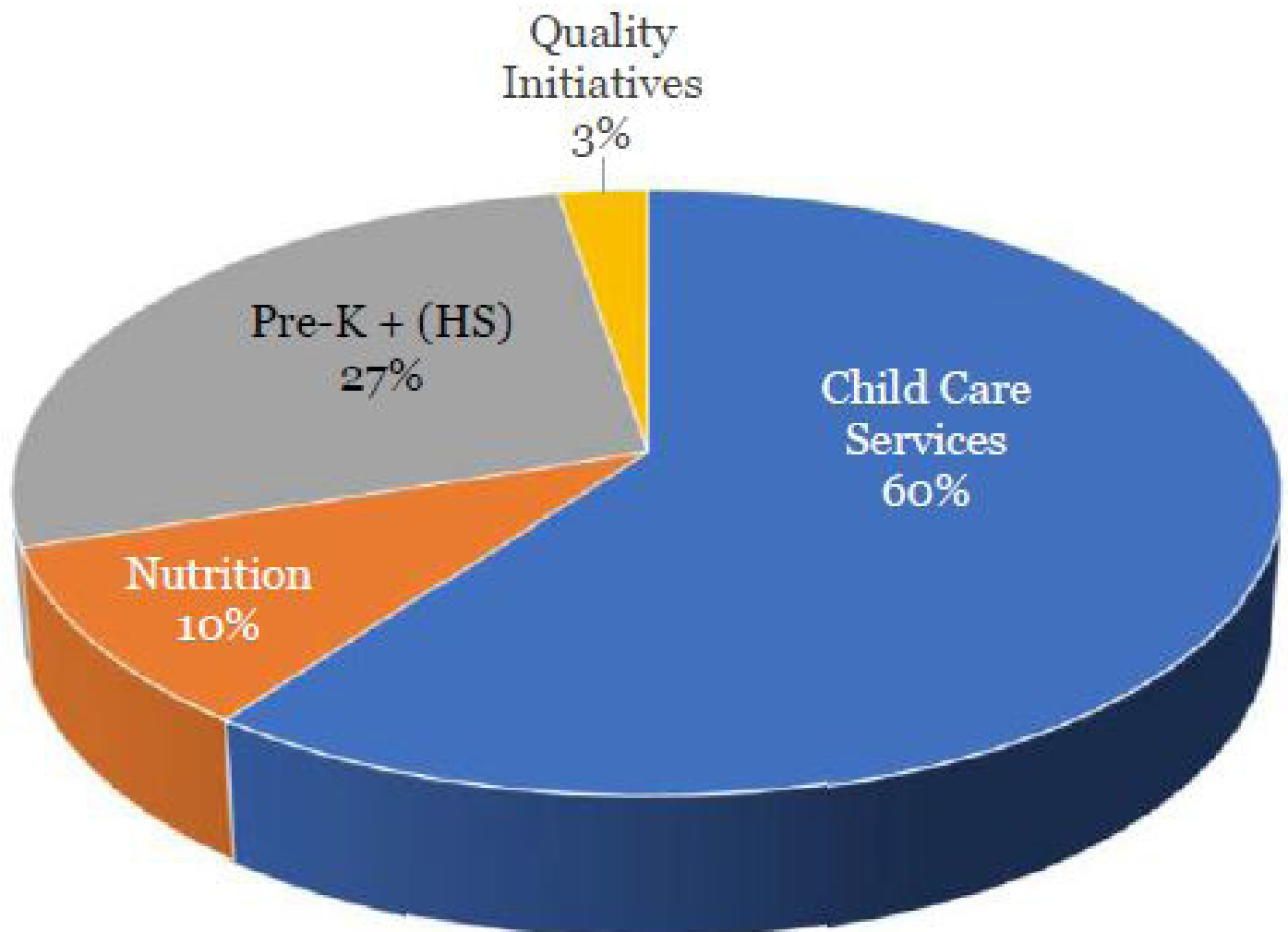
State General	\$63,285,758
State Lottery	\$462,555,096
Federal	\$1,164,741,384
Other	\$349,218
Total Budget	\$1,690,931,456



FISCAL YEAR 2024 BUDGET BY PROGRAMS

Child Care Services	\$1,017,150,920
Nutrition	\$166,950,534
Pre-K + (HS)	\$462,735,694
Quality Initiatives	\$44,094,308
Total Budget	\$1,690,931,456

BUDGET BY PROGRAMS



Enhancing School Readiness

Goal: Align, integrate, and coordinate programs to improve school readiness for children birth to five in Georgia

As an Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership grantee, DECAL delivered health, early education, nutrition, mental health, disability, and family support services to 159 infants and toddlers. After 10 successful years, this grant ended July 31, 2024.

In state fiscal year 2024 (FY24), Georgia's Pre-K Program made a significant impact by serving 71,526 children across all 159 Georgia counties. With 1,827 sites and 3,682 classrooms in public and private settings, the program ensured that children received high-quality preschool experiences. This comprehensive approach prepared Georgia's children for success as they entered kindergarten.

DECAL's Community Partnership team facilitated 72 virtual meetings across the state:

- Birth to Eight Leadership Team sessions focused on improving system coordination and early childhood outcomes for children from birth through age 8.
- Child Care Engagement Network meetings connected child care providers with DECAL and Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning resources while assessing regional and community needs.

DECAL's Nutrition Services unit supported serving:

- 69,025,075 meals through the Child and Adult Care Food Program
- 3,106,572 meals through Happy Helpings, Georgia's Summer Food Service Program.



During FY 24 DECAL continued to offer educational opportunities over the summer to children through the Summer Transition Program.

The Rising Pre-K program enrolled 787 children who were dual language learners in 70 classrooms around the state. Rising Pre-K classrooms offer a full day of instruction to students who will be attending Georgia's Pre-K program for the upcoming school year. Instruction focuses on classroom routines, social emotional development, and language and literacy.

The Rising Kindergarten program enrolled 3,989 children in 325 classrooms throughout Georgia. Rising Kindergarten is also a full day of instruction that focuses on the Georgia Early Learning Development Standards to help children be more prepared to enter kindergarten.

Increasing Quality and Access

Goal: Continue to increase the quality and accessibility of early care and education programs for children birth through school age in Georgia

In FY24, DECAL's Inclusion and Behavior Support program responded to 1,050 calls from families and providers on the SEEDS for Success Helpline resulting in 524 child care programs receiving coaching and training.

The LITTLE grant program (Lifting Infants and Toddlers Through Language-rich Environments), DECAL Infant Toddler team supported 90 educators in 42 classrooms in early learning programs with funding from the Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy.

In FY24, Child Care Services awarded \$80,000,000 in health and safety grants to licensed child care providers to support and increase compliance with child care rules and regulations.

The Child Care Services Technical Assistance unit conducted 1,156 visits to child care providers and conducted 75 training sessions.

On June 30, 2024, 82,221 children with a CAPS scholarship (91.7%) were enrolled in Quality Rated care*. 2,460 providers serving children with a CAPS scholarship were Quality Rated.

*Excludes children enrolled in programs participating in Quality Rated that are in a provisional or probationary status.



Quality Rated continued work on revising the Quality Rated program by hosting stakeholder meetings about proposed revisions and publishing research reports detailing the comprehensive review of the program.

Quality Rated conducted 2,297 on-site observations resulting in a rating.

DECAL awarded 12,471 workforce bonuses totaling \$6.2 million to recognize and acknowledge the staff working in programs that completed the Quality Rated process.

DECAL awarded 13 grants totaling \$6.5 million to providers, nonprofits, and government entities to increase access to child care during nontraditional hours (evenings, overnight, and weekends) through the Expanding Parents' Access to Nontraditional Delivery (EXPAND) program.

DECAL began an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) pilot to provide child care centers with mental health consultation to address mental health concerns for staff, children, and families.

Supporting Workforce Development

Goal: Develop, professionalize, and retain a highly skilled workforce for the early care and education industry

Inclusion and Behavior Support specialists and Infant and Toddler specialists facilitated training for 5,553 educators on inclusion, social and emotional development, and infant and toddler language and literacy development. They also provided coaching to 1,728 early childhood professionals.

The DECAL Thriving Child Care Business Academy opened its virtual doors on September 26, 2023, as an online platform of free trainings and resources to help program owners and administrators acquire the knowledge, skills, and tools to make their centers and homes thriving child care businesses.

- 710 participants completed 32 live webinars
- 698 enrolled in small study groups
- 37 individual coaching sessions with providers were conducted by Academy trainers.

In FY24, Infant and Toddler specialists, Inclusion and Behavior Support specialists, and Pre-K specialists provided Pyramid Model training and information about professional learning communities to more than 945 educators, including child care teachers, administrators, family child care providers, and technical college instructors.

DECAL's Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Task Force continued working to increase access to mental health services for young children and their families by training clinicians in evidence-based trauma treatments for preschool children

The DECAL Scholars program awarded approximately \$12 million in financial support to 7,000 participants pursuing a degree or credential in early childhood education.

The number of users in the Georgia Professional Development System increased 10% to a total of 195,053 users.

The GELDS website grew to more than 4,500 users who have created almost 15,000 lesson plans.



The Georgia Training Approval unit approved more than 1,600 trainings and conferences.

The Online Learning Library Initiative (OLLI) added 11 new courses that have reached more than 15,000 participants.

The Professional Learning Community (PLC) training initiative certified 34 PLC facilitators and added five members to the lead facilitation team.

Expanding Two Generation

Goal: Expand Two Generation (2Gen) approaches to better support children and families

Family-Centered Coaching and Find Help Georgia

CAPS staff used Family-Centered Coaching to help families enrolled in the CAPS program to set and achieve goals, offering personalized support through parent-driven coaching conversations. CAPS staff utilized the Find Help Georgia platform to connect families with local resources, provide referrals, and collaborate with organizations to ensure accurate information is available to assist families.

2Gen Student Parent Pilot

The CAPS 2Gen Student Parent Pilot, a DECAL initiative with TCSG and WorkSource Georgia, launched in the Spring of 2024 at three TCSG campuses. The pilot supports student parents by addressing barriers to education. Consultants provide in-person CAPS assistance, resource referrals, and Family Centered Coaching, fostering success through a holistic 2Gen approach that benefits families across Georgia.

Family Advisory Council

CAPS is forming a statewide Family Advisory Council to provide guidance on policy, procedures, and the development of CAPS initiatives. Parents, grandparents, and guardians of children who receive CAPS scholarships may apply.

Family Peer Ambassadors

DECAL's network of 49 Family Peer Ambassadors attended 198 events and shared information about child development, developmental milestones, Quality Rated, CAPS, and other critical early childhood services with 7,283 Georgia families.



Advancing Technology

Goal: Enhance the use of technology and data to better support our stakeholders

DECAL Application Modernization

A substantial investment has been made to modernize key applications such as GACAPS and GAPREK, migrating them to Salesforce. This modernization is a critical step in ensuring DECAL's technology remains efficient, user friendly, and future proof.

Georgia Pre-K System (GAPREK)

To enhance access and functionality for internal and external users, DECAL developed a modernized system called Georgia Pre-K System (GAPREK) to support quality Pre-K programs across the state. On July 1, 2024, Georgia's Pre-K Program officially transitioned from the legacy PANDA system to the new GAPREK. This streamlined platform improves the user experience, providing a one-stop solution for Pre-K providers to manage all their needs in a more efficient and user-friendly environment. A dedicated webpage offers FAQs, communication materials, and other resources to support the transition.

Childcare and Parent Services System (GACAPS)

On November 15, 2023, DECAL launched GACAPS, a state-of-the-art provider management and payment system that replaced the previous CAPS system. The enhanced system allows DECAL to better serve providers and process key functions, such as making payments and enrolling providers for participation in the program.

Family Experience Study

The Urban Institute is conducting a DECAL-funded study to improve the CAPS program by surveying Georgia families in early 2025. Responses will remain confidential, accessible only to the study team. Participants can also opt to join a focus group or interview to provide further insights.



Research Reports

In FY24, DECAL released research reports examining the economic impact of the early care and education industry in Georgia in 2019 and 2020 (Georgia State University and University of Georgia), changes in quality on Quality Rated observations before and after the pandemic (Child Trends), the need for nontraditional-hour care in Georgia (Urban Institute), child care prices in Georgia (Care Solutions), and evaluations of DECAL Scholars (Child Trends) and the Quality Rated Language and Literacy Endorsement (Child Trends).

Technology and Data

In FY24, DECAL released research reports examining the economic impact of the early care and education industry in Georgia in 2019 and 2020 (Georgia State University and University of Georgia), changes in quality on Quality Rated observations before and after the pandemic (Child Trends), the need for nontraditional-hour care in Georgia (Urban Institute), child care prices in Georgia (Care Solutions), and evaluations of DECAL Scholars (Child Trends) and the Quality Rated Language and Literacy Endorsement (Child Trends).

Enterprise Contact Center

The Enterprise Contact Center initiative enhances DECAL's customer service experience by implementing a comprehensive cloud-based solution for voice, chat, and email communication. Powered by artificial intelligence and analytics, this platform significantly improves service efficiency and quality. Six DECAL programs have begun using the system to enhance user interactions: the Provider Relations portion of CAPS, Pre-K, GA PDS, CRC, Quality Rated help desk, and CCS. The project also includes agent training, policy updates, performance tracking, and ongoing support as the platform continues to roll out to other DECAL programs.

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(Chair)**

**Susan Harper, Albany
Second Congressional District**

**Joyce Freeman, Bowdon
Third Congressional District**

**Kristy Beam, Ed.D., Atlanta
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(Vice Chair)**

**Karla Zisook, PhD, Decatur
Fifth Congressional District**

**Jen Bennecke, Atlanta
Sixth Congressional District**

**Kristin Morrissey, Cumming
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(Secretary)**

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Eighth Congressional District**

**Cristina Washell, Ed.D., Cleveland
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**Joanna Hill, Watkinsville
Tenth Congressional District**

**Maria Franklin, Adairsville
Eleventh Congressional District**

**VACANT
Twelfth Congressional District**

**VACANT
Thirteenth Congressional District**

**Sylvia Washington, MD, Rome
Fourteenth Congressional District**



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