



**Georgia Dept
of Early Care
and Learning**

BRIGHT FROM THE START



**FY 2025
Annual
Report**



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A Message from Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs

Dear Friends of DECAL,

As I reviewed the goals, accomplishments, and financials compiled for this report, I felt both humbled...and proud: humbled by the trust Georgia's families, child care providers, the public, and state policy makers place in DECAL and proud of all the ways we've been able to serve children, families, and the early care and education industry in our state this past fiscal year.

This annual report for State Fiscal Year 2025 (July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025) highlights the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning's (DECAL) continuing efforts toward accomplishing the following goals:

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



I encourage you to read this report to learn specifically how DECAL has worked to fulfill our mission and vision and accomplish our goals, but I'll mention a few things in which I'm most proud. I'm proud:

- of the ways we helped prepare children from birth to age 5 for success in school.
- of the strategies we implemented...in collaboration with other state agencies...to serve not just the needs of children, but also their families.
- of the efforts we made in supporting the quality of care provided to children in licensed child care.
- of how we expended state, federal, and private funds fairly, transparently, and with integrity.
- of the updates we made to technology so families and child care providers can access services and resources more easily.

But DECAL doesn't function in a vacuum. Everything we were able to do in SFY25 has been in partnership with 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 2025 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, contact me at amy.jacobs@decal.ga.gov.

Sincerely,

Amy M. Jacobs
Commissioner

As of June 30, 2025

Georgia's Child Care Providers



3,211

Child Care Learning Centers



1,077

Family Child Care Learning Homes



Total Licensed Capacity

387,133
Children

The State of Child Care in Georgia

As of June 30, 2025, Georgia had 3,211 Child Care Learning Centers and 1,077 Family Child Care Learning Homes, with a total licensed capacity of 387,133 children.

From July 2024 to June 2025:

- The number of Child Care Learning Centers decreased by 20 centers, a change of -0.6%.
- The number of Family Child Care Learning Homes decreased by 64, a change of -6%.
- Total licensed capacity decreased by 542, a change of -0.1%.

Over the previous five years, from July 2020 to June 2025, the following trends occurred:

- Child Care Learning Centers increased by 113 centers, a change of +4%.
- Family Child Care Learning Homes decreased by 297, a change of -22%.
- Total licensed capacity increased by 21,383, a change of +6%.

Statewide trends indicate a modest increase in the number of licensed centers. Meanwhile, in the past decade, family child care in Georgia and nationally has steadily declined. In previous years, licensed capacity increased at a higher rate than the increase in the number of facilities, indicating that centers are growing larger to serve more children than previously. However, the growth in centers and in capacity leveled off in FY2025.

NOTE: These are state-level trends. Some parts of the state may not reflect the same trends.

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

Preliminary findings from a study of the economic impact of the child care industry in Georgia commissioned by DECAL indicate that the industry provided care for 336,000 children in 2024, serving 14% of infants, 23% of 1-year-olds, 33% of 2-year-olds, 48% of 3-year-olds, 85% of 4-year-olds, and 6% of school-age children (ages 5-13). In addition, the industry contributed \$6.52 billion to Georgia's economy in 2024. 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.
- **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



By the Numbers



**Received 14,087 student parent
CAPS applications**



**Conducted 1,600 Quality Rated, on-site
observations resulting in 747 ratings**

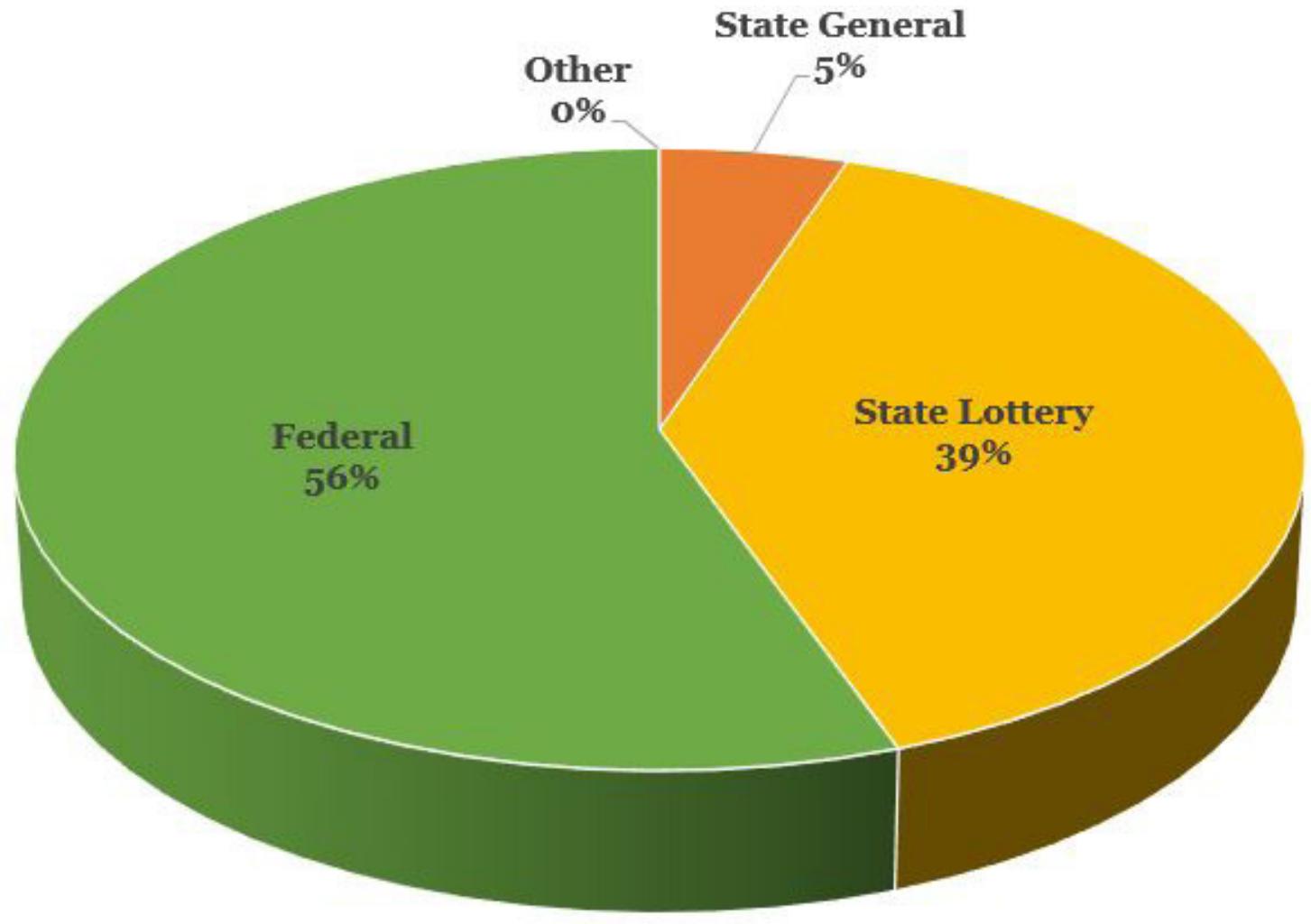


Financial Highlights

FISCAL YEAR 2025 BUDGET BY FUNDING SOURCE

State General	\$71,982,694
State Lottery	\$548,846,095
Federal	\$773,480,303
Other	\$283,603
Total Budget	\$1,394,592,695

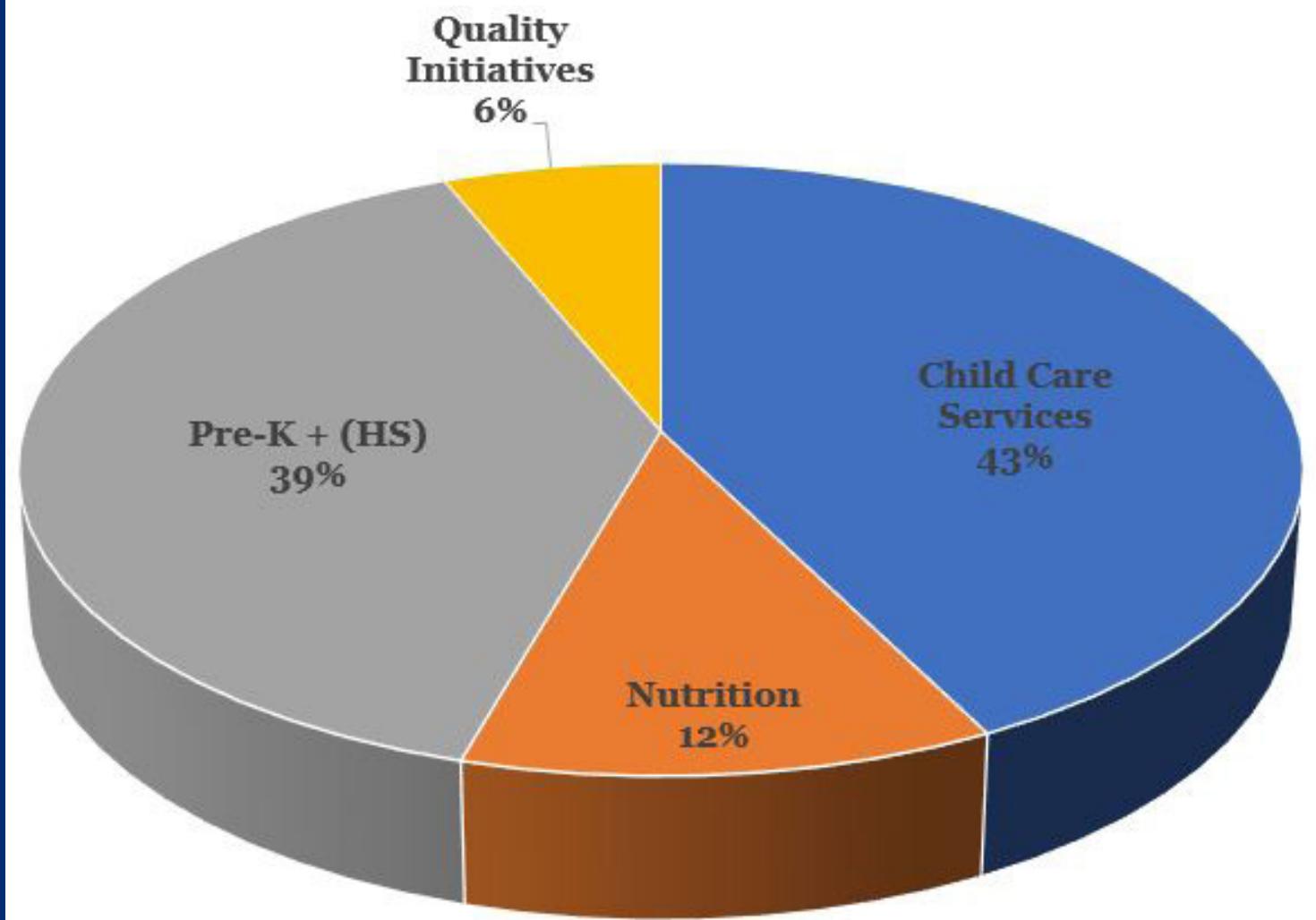
BUDGET BY FUNDING SOURCE



FISCAL YEAR 2025 BUDGET BY PROGRAMS

Child Care Services	\$592,421,344
Nutrition	\$166,923,522
Pre-K + (HS)	\$549,016,276
Quality Initiatives	\$86,231,553
Total Budget	\$1,394,592,695

BUDGET BY PROGRAMS



Enhancing School Readiness

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

Georgia's Pre-K Program served approximately 71,000 children across all 159 Georgia counties in public schools and child care programs providing a high-quality preschool experience that prepares children for kindergarten.

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

The Rising Pre-K program enrolled 763 children who were dual language learners in 69 classrooms around the state. Rising Pre-K classrooms offered a full day of instruction to students who would be attending Georgia's Pre-K Program in the upcoming school year. Instruction focused on classroom routines, social emotional development, and language and literacy.

The Rising Kindergarten program enrolled 4,042 children in 325 classrooms throughout Georgia. Rising Kindergarten was also a full day of instruction that focused on the Georgia Early Learning Development Standards to help prepare children for kindergarten.





Child Care Services (CCS) added 100+ national best practices to the Licensing Rules and Regulations Indicator Manuals for child care learning centers and family child care learning homes. These best practices were made accessible on DECAL's website and were covered in all technical assistance offered by CCS's TA staff.

Nutrition Services supported 65,677,667 meals served through the Child and



Adult Care Food Program and 3,123,707 meals through Happy Helpings, Georgia's Summer Food Service Program. These nutrition programs played a vital role in ensuring children returned to school healthy and ready to learn by reducing food

insecurity, promoting healthy development, and supporting routines that eased children's transition back to school.

DECAL's Community Partnership Team conducted more than 60 in-person presentations to technical colleges, Family Connection Collaboratives, and civic groups. These sessions provided valuable information about DECAL's programs and services, helped strengthen local connections, and helped ensure that families and organizations were aware of the resources available to support early childhood development across Georgia. The Community Partnership team facilitated 58 Birth to Eight Leadership Team and Child Care Engagement Network meetings.

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

Quality Rated conducted 1,600 on-site observations resulting in 747 ratings.



On June 30, 2025, 63,460 children with a CAPS scholarship (94%) were enrolled in Quality Rated care.* (2,400 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

DECAL began planning for and officially kicked off Georgia's Child Care Quality Study. The study, conducted by Child Trends, Inc., included classroom observations and surveys of providers and teachers in licensed child care programs across the state. Results are expected by FY27 and will inform revisions to Quality Rated.

With the launch of the \$500 annual Quality Rated Workforce Bonus (QRWB) in April 2025, DECAL awarded 11,798 eligible staff members (not just educational staff) a total of \$5.9 million. Both bonuses were developed to recognize staff working in programs that completed the Quality Rated process.



DECAL awarded 2,019 2- and 3-star CAPS providers \$14.1 million through the new Commitment to Quality (C2Q) quarterly bonuses to support their continuing efforts and commitment to providing high-quality care and education services.

The Expanding Parents' Access to Nontraditional Delivery (EXPAND) Grants program concluded in June 2025 after 21 months of impactful work to increase access to child care during nontraditional hours (evenings, overnight, and weekends). These 13 grants were awarded to child care providers, nonprofits, and government entities. Evaluation results are expected by the end of 2025.

The Child Care Services Technical Assistance unit created the CCS Resource Suite with more than 60+ resources available in English and Spanish to support increased understanding of licensing rules and their associated best practices for all programs and partners.

The Nutrition Services division conducted over 30 trainings on offering healthy, nutritious meals and snacks and incorporating physical activity into child care settings.



Increasing Quality and Access

(Continued)

Healthy Kids, Healthy Future

PALS

Physical Activity Learning Session



DECAL implemented a Nutrition and Physical Activity Endorsement Pilot with 14 child care centers that included an in-person Physical Activity Learning Session (PALS) training, online Go Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (Go NAPSACC) training modules, a DECAL-hosted virtual training series, and one-on-one technical assistance.

Georgia's Pre-K Program implemented strategies to maintain classroom quality and improve program access.

- Reduced class sizes from 22 to 20 students, with a 1:10 ratio, to support child development, decrease disruptions, and enhance teacher interactions
- Added 100 classrooms across Georgia, creating 2,000 new student slots to meet demand for high-quality Pre-K

Georgia's Pre-K Program transitioned to the State Salary Schedule for Teachers used by the Georgia Department of Education. This change ensured salary parity between lead teachers in Georgia's Pre-K Program and teachers in K-12 public schools. 77% of Pre-K lead teachers received a salary increase due to the change.



DECAL's SEEDS (Supporting Early Education and Development for Success) program responded to 1,179 calls from families and providers on the SEEDS for Success Helpline resulting in 535 child care programs receiving coaching and training.

The SEEDS Program awarded Adaptive Learning grants to help early learning programs support children with disabilities in inclusive settings. Programs received training and coaching on classroom adaptations, differentiated instruction, and collaboration with early intervention providers. 147 educators in 75 programs participated.

The LITTLE (Lifting Infants and Toddlers Through Language-rich Environments) grant, administered by the DECAL Infant Toddler Team, supported 147 educators across 93 classrooms in early learning programs. Funding from the Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy helped support this initiative.

DECAL piloted Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) to provide child care centers with access to mental health professionals 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



DECAL
Thriving Child Care
Business Academy

Since its launch on September 26, 2023, the DECAL Thriving Child Care Business Academy's free trainings and resources have helped hundreds of Georgia child care program owners and administrators acquire the knowledge, skills, and tools to make their centers and homes more financially stable and resilient child care businesses. During FY25, provider enrollment in the Academy's 46 live webinars totaled 499, participation in small study groups reached 736, and Academy business coaches conducted 54 individual TA sessions.

Nutrition Services delivered Physical Activity Learning Sessions (PALS) training to promote physical activity best practices for children from birth to age five across ECE settings. Led by the Nutrition Education and Physical Activity Specialist Team, five full sessions and three virtual micro sessions reached up to 82 participants. The new virtual format increased engagement and focused on evidence-based strategies, standards, and tools to support healthier environments and lasting practice change.



SEEDS specialists and Infant and Toddler specialists conducted training for 4,519 educators on topics including social and emotional development, infant and toddler language and literacy development, and support for children with disabilities. Coaching was also provided to 1,834 early childhood professionals.

Infant and Toddler specialists, SEEDS specialists, and Pre-K specialists provided training and professional learning communities focusing on the Pyramid Model and social emotional learning to more than 700 educators, including child care teachers, administrators, and family child care providers.

DECAL's Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Task Force collaborated with the Georgia Association for Infant Mental Health (GA-AIMH) at Georgia State University to train clinicians in evidence-based trauma treatments for preschool-age children and their families. GA-AIMH hosted free online IECMH sessions for early learning professionals, and DECAL launched an online IECMH course completed by 1,000 participants in FY25.

The DECAL Scholars program awarded approximately \$8.5 million in financial support to 6,385 participants pursuing a degree or credential in early childhood education.

The number of users in the Georgia Professional Development System increased 9.5% to a total of 213,887 users.

Supporting Workforce Development

(Continued)



The Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) website grew to more than 5,500 users who created more than 7,600 lesson plans throughout the year.



The Georgia Training Approval unit approved more than 1,700 trainings and conferences.



More than 100 language and literacy courses were approved to support the Science of Reading training requirement for child care teachers. Beginning in FY26, all teachers in licensed child care programs will be required to complete two hours of language and literacy training.



The Professional Learning Community (PLC) training initiative certified 24 PLC Facilitators and supported 54 participants to complete Year 1 Facilitator training.



The Workforce Supports team led a statewide advisory group of subject matter experts to update the Workforce Knowledge and Competencies, which outline what early childhood and school age professionals should know and do to create high-quality learning environments.



Expanding Two Generation

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

DECAL awarded 15 Community Impact Grants totaling \$1.4 million to community organizations across the state to address critical needs, including access to child care, literacy, and food insecurity. Grants were awarded in three categories: 2Gen Innovation Grants for Student Parent Success, 2Gen Community Literacy Grants, and Community Transformation Grants.

The Urban Institute continued to conduct the DECAL-funded CAPS Family Experiences Study, including surveys, interviews, and focus groups with families about their experiences with the CAPS program. Results of the study are expected in FY27 and will inform improvements to CAPS.

DECAL began planning to launch the Quality Rated Family Support Call Center, a child care search and referral help line staffed by DECAL specialists. The call center will provide families with information on the benefits of high-quality child care, referrals to Quality Rated providers matching their preferences, help with the enrollment process at the programs they choose, and connections to colleagues across the department who can help them access other beneficial early care and education information and supports from DECAL.

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 used 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. In SFY 25, there were 213,546 searches on the Find Help Georgia site.



The CAPS 2Gen Student Parent Pilot, a DECAL initiative with the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) and WorkSource Georgia, supported student parents by addressing barriers to education. Consultants provided in-person CAPS assistance, resource referrals, and Family Centered Coaching, fostering success through a holistic 2Gen approach that benefits families across Georgia. The pilot launched in spring 2024 at three TCSG campuses and then expanded to a fourth campus in spring 2025. Additionally, pilot staff supported many other TCSG campuses by offering information sessions about the CAPS program and eligibility.

CAPS implemented a statewide Family Advisory Council to provide guidance on policy, procedures, program direction, and planned changes. The Family Advisory Council met quarterly to review CAPS initiatives, discuss current concerns, and offer feedback to the CAPS leadership team. CAPS began implementing their recommendations to improve and streamline the CAPS family experience.

DECAL's network of 55 Family Peer Ambassadors attended 215 events and shared information about child development, developmental milestones, Quality Rated, CAPS, and other critical early childhood services with 5,313 Georgia families.

During Happy Helpings events and other DECAL-hosted outreach activities, Nutrition Services staff engaged directly with families to provide practical nutrition education. This support included tips for preparing healthy, affordable meals at home, understanding food labels, and building balanced lunches for children. These events often featured hands-on activities, informational materials, and interactive demonstrations to promote long-term healthy habits for the whole family.

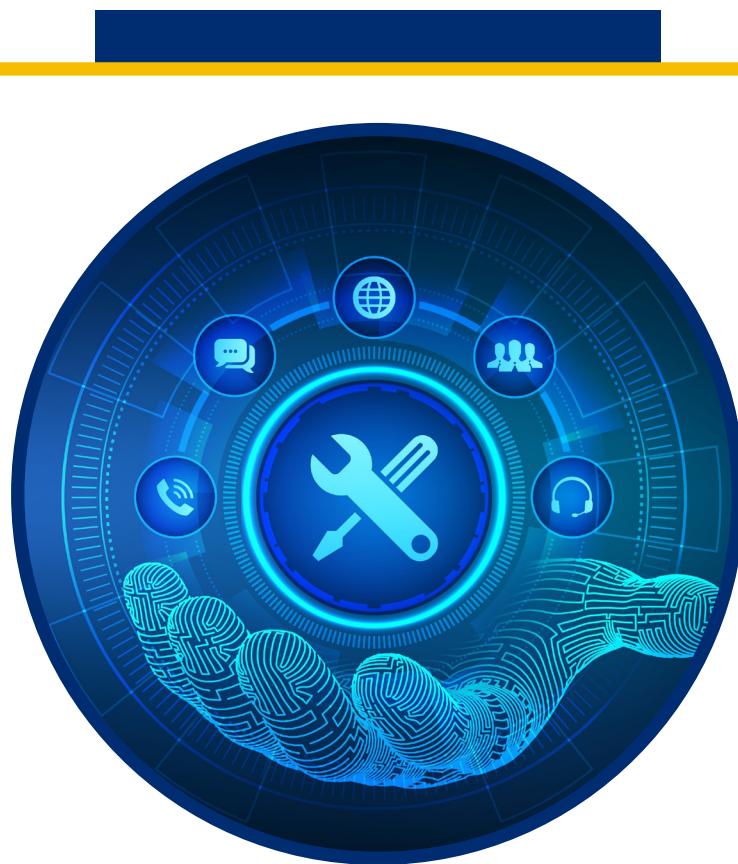
Advancing Technology

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

Applications were migrated to Salesforce on a digitally secured modernized platform for DECAL staff and providers. The Provider Portal enabled a unified user experience including payment advice, easy login, and functionalities in one place in an easy-to-navigate, user friendly design. A dedicated webpage offers FAQs, communication materials, and other resources to support the transition.

In FY25, DECAL released several research and evaluation reports. These include a report that examined providers' experiences with the DECAL Scholars program (Child Trends) and a report about the economic impact of the early care and education industry in Georgia in 2021 (Georgia State University and University of Georgia).





The Enterprise Contact Center initiative enhanced 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 improved service efficiency and quality. Six DECAL programs have begun using the system to enhance user interactions: CAPS, Pre-K, GA PDS, CRC, Quality Rated help desk, and CCS. The project also included agent training, policy updates, performance tracking, and ongoing support as the platform continues to roll out to other DECAL programs.

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