

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



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DECAL By the Numbers

- 87,294** - Participants in GaPDS
- 4,534** - Licensed child care programs in Georgia
- 1,952** - Quality Rated programs in Georgia
- 80,433** - Students enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K Program
- 21,128** - DECAL social media audience
- 130** - Appeals to DECAL adverse actions 2018-2019
- 160** - Visits by officials during 2019 Georgia Pre-K Week
- 3,595** - Sites participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program

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Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs



Dear Co-workers,

I recently came across the first letter I wrote for "The Commissioner's Corner" of *Decidedly DECAL*; it was July 2014...I had been here less than two weeks...and I was writing to DECAL's 260 full time employees. Following are the opening paragraphs from that letter:

"As I mentioned in my introductory e-mail to you last week, I was familiar with the work of DECAL through my former position at OPB. I've watched the evolution of this department...from the Office of School Readiness

when I joined OPB to the creation of Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning in 2004 to one of the most respected state agencies serving children and families today.

But after being here for a week, I'm learning and experiencing the scope, the breadth and depth, of ALL the work we do, and I reiterate how excited I am to be a part of DECAL. I look forward to learning much more from all of you."

I'm smiling as I reflect on the thoughts expressed in those opening paragraphs because now, after more than five years here, I feel much the same way (except that today I'm writing to more than 700 DECAL employees).

DECAL is STILL "one of the most respected state agencies serving children and families."

I am STILL "learning and experiencing the scope, the breadth and depth, of all the work we do, and..." am STILL "excited to be a part of DECAL."

And I STILL "look forward to learning much more from all of you."

As 2019 gives way to 2020, we enter a new decade of opportunities to serve children, families, and the early care and education industry in Georgia...and we begin time of holidays and celebrations.

I wish each of you and your families warm, safe, fun, and happy holidays, and I hope all the best for you, personally and professionally, in 2020.

Sincerely,

Georgia's Pre-K Program 2019-2020 Teachers of the Year Announced

DECAL and the Georgia Foundation for Early Care and Learning have named two outstanding educators as Georgia's Pre-K Program Teachers of the Year for the 2019-2020 school year. The recipients are Heather Williams of the Central Georgia Technical College Child Development Center in Warner Robins/Houston

County, and Johnathon Hines of Barack H. Obama Elementary School in DeKalb County.

DECAL Download

Podcast with Commissioner
Amy M. Jacobs



Five Employees Receive 2019 Spirit of DECAL Awards

Zac Brown Band lead guitarist and children's author Coy Bowles helped Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs honor five employees as recipients of the 2019 Spirit of DECAL Awards.

The awards are presented to DECAL employees who exemplify our agency's values and inspire greatness among their fellow staff members. Any DECAL full-time, part-time, temporary, or contract employee, or intern can nominate any other DECAL staff member without regard to seniority, division, or employment status.

Recipients were: Jennifer Bridgeman, a CCS Process and Quality Improvement Manager; Colleen Covey, a CCS NW Region Consultant; Brian Griffin, a Georgia's Pre-K Program Quality Support Coordinator; Tiara Jenrette, a CAPS Family Support Consultant; and Atlantis Wright, who is in Finance working in Accounts Receivable Federal Reports and Special Projects. They are pictured below with Bowles and Commissioner Jacobs.



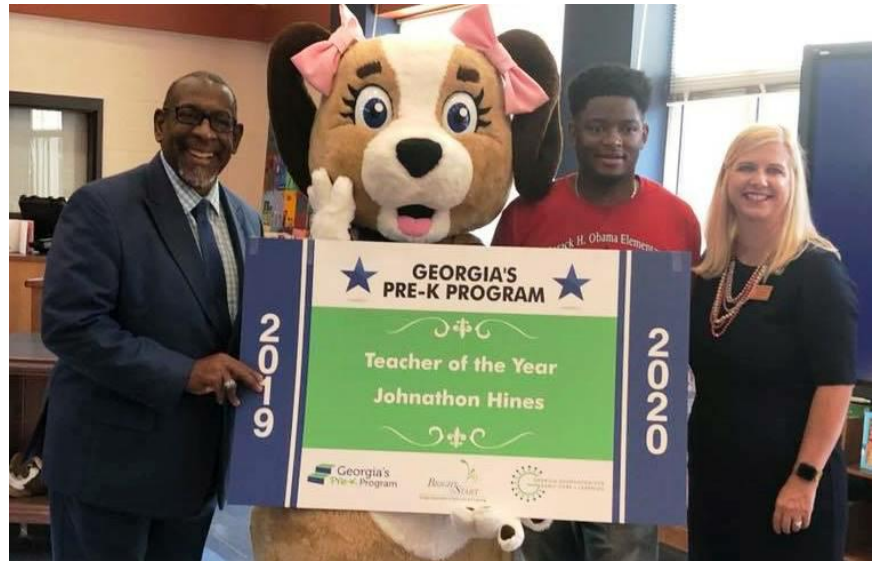
Jennifer Bridgeman

The recipients were each presented with checks for \$7,500 from Stephanie Blank's Naserian Foundation, which includes \$2,000 for their school, \$2,500 for their classroom, and \$3,000 for themselves.

Each year, DECAL names two teachers, one from a public school system and one from a private child care center, representing the public-private partnership through which Georgia's Pre-K Program is offered. Williams and Hines will serve as ambassadors for Georgia's Pre-K Program this year, making presentations, attending meetings and conferences, and modeling effective classroom practices.

"The Georgia Pre-K Program's reputation as an exemplary early childhood education program for four year olds can be attributed directly to the outstanding Pre-K teachers and assistant teachers who implement this program daily," said Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "These awards are a small way for us to say thank you and to recognize their efforts. We congratulate Heather and Johnathon and look forward to working with them throughout this school year."

Susan Adams, Deputy Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K Program and Instructional Supports, added, "We appreciate this opportunity to recognize the commitment of our Pre-K teachers who work every day all over the state to ensure that Georgia's children have a great Pre-K experience. The quality of the teacher in the classroom determines the quality of the classroom instruction."



Early Education Community Partnerships: A Unit of the Quality Innovations and Partnerships Division

By Jill O'Meara

It is hard to believe that our Community Partnership Coordinators have been working together as a team for



Colleen Covey



Brian Griffin



Tiara Jenrette



Atlantis Wright

Touring YMCA of Metro Atlanta Early Learning Center

Shown touring the YMCA of Metro Atlanta Early Learning Center recently are (L-R) Governor's Office of Student Achievement Executive Director Joy Hawkins, Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs, DECAL Director of Government Relations Liz Young, and YMCA of Metro Atlanta President and CEO Lauren Koontz. The YMCA has been in the early education arena for more than 30 years and is the largest provider of early learning in metro Atlanta, serving 3,475 early learners

over a year now! Since they are all regionally based, coordinators devote the majority of their time connecting with partners in their region and sharing state-level resources that are meaningful for their local community. With 159 counties in Georgia, we had to be very strategic in our plans to ensure that we could reach community partners in each county. In September 2018, we worked with DECAL's research team to assess quantitative data by county to determine which counties we should target first. After just over a year into this work, there are only a handful of counties left before we can say that we have made contact by personal visits, emails, and/or phone calls with at least one community partner in each county in Georgia.

Over the last quarter, our coordinators have attended Georgia Family Connection Partnership Collaborative meetings, Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students events, Two-Generation Innovation Grant events, the Home Visiting Institute, United Way meetings, Chambers of Commerce meetings with a focus on early childhood education and workforce development, as well as recently serving as table facilitators at the Get Georgia Reading: Beyond 2020 Summit. Our coordinators are also supporting DECAL's Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Early Learning Leadership Collaboratives (ELLC). Through this work, local leaders have brought together partners from across early childhood and K-12 settings to learn and implement a trauma-informed approach for supporting young children and their families.

Our team has also been working with Child Care Services to develop content for the Pre-Licensure Orientation Meeting (LOM) trainings, called "So, You Want to Open a Child Care Program?" These regional two-hour trainings are facilitated by our Community Partnership Coordinators to prepare potential child care owners for the mandatory LOM that is held monthly in Forsyth, Georgia. Our Coordinators have been trained by Instructional Supports to use GaPDS for participant registration and offer two credit hours to participants, if needed. The topic of the training is on the licensure process with an introduction to Quality Rated child care.

Over the next quarter, our team will continue to build on promising outreach strategies, which include efforts to share the critical message with community partners that child care programs must be Quality Rated by December 31, 2020, to support children receiving CAPS scholarships. This will include sharing information about policy and procedural changes that support the deadline.

Please continue to look for our community work on DECAL's social media and don't forget to like our posts. If you have suggestions about how we can best support your work in your region, please feel free to reach out to us.

Keturah Washington Is Grand Champion of 'DECAL's Got Super Talent'

From Aretha and Whitney to Puccini and John Newton, we confirmed what we already knew in a recent event called "DECAL's Got Super Talent." The Grand Champion was Keturah Washington from our Professional Learning Division; First Runner-up was Latisha Lewis from CAPS; and Second Runner-up was Ben Appling from Audits and Compliance. Also performing were Laura Wagner from Quality Innovations and Partnerships and Melyn Smith from Child Care Services. Outstanding performances from everyone.



DECAL Declares Penny Wars for State Charitable Contributions Program

by Aleah Slocum, Communications Intern

DECAL has been gearing up for another year of giving through the State Charitable Contributions Program (SCCP). Not surprisingly, DECAL desires to be a shining light among state agencies by its enthusiastic participation in this year's SCCP.

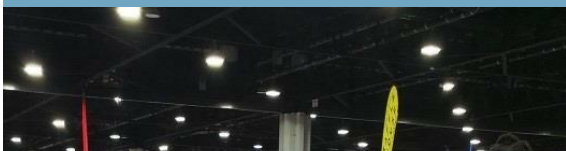
There are a many ways to donate, but the beloved Penny Wars was a DECAL fan favorite. Under the

across 32 sites.



DECAL Employees Participate in Kaiser Permanente Fitness Run/Walk

Twenty-two DECAL employees participated in this year's Kaiser Permanente Corporate Run/Walk & Roll to promote health and fitness among metro Atlanta companies and their employees. The 5K (3.1 mile) trek through downtown Atlanta is promoted internally through the DECAL Wellness Committee. Congrats to everyone who participated!



direction of DECAL's SCCP Coordinator, Carrie Ashbee, a little friendly fire went a long way. As each division fought to collect the most pennies, sabotage was inevitable with increased donation amounts geared toward winning divisions.

The competition was fierce, but our CAPS division prevailed by raising \$882.57 and securing this year's Penny Wars victory and bragging rights. CAPS was followed by Georgia's Pre-K Program and Instructional Supports, and the Finance Division. Collectively, DECALers raised \$1,739.58, boosting overall participation in this year's SCCP campaign.

You can support your favorite non-profit as part of the SCCP through November 26. For more information, [click here](#).



CAPS Scholarship Administration Director Rita Lang (L) and Penny Wars Captain and Scholarship Administration Manager Renee Lind

DECAL and Voices Host Georgia Pre-K Week

DECAL and Voices for Georgia's Children joined leaders from around the state to show support for early childhood education and to visit prekindergarten classrooms as part of this year's Georgia Pre-K Week, October 7-11, 2019. The week ended with more than 160 visits by federal, state, and local officials to early learning classrooms where they read to students and experienced first-hand the joy and enthusiasm of young learners.

Now in its ninth year, Pre-K Week is a celebration of Georgia's nationally recognized Pre-K program and other quality early learning centers.

"Quality early learning gives Georgia's youngest learners the foundational skills they build upon throughout their education," said Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "Research shows children who attend quality early learning programs are more likely to graduate from high school and enroll in college, making quality early learning essential to our children, families, and state workforce."

"The support of public and private organizations sends a powerful statement to the community about the value of quality early learning," said Dr. Erica Fener Sitkoff, Executive Director of Voices for Georgia's Children. "We are grateful to have their support in raising awareness of Georgia's Pre-K Program."

Pictured below (clockwise), U.S. Representative Rob Woodall during a visit to at Legacy Academy in Duluth; Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs and First Lady of Georgia Marty Kemp with students at Children's Development Academy in Roswell; U.S. Representative Lucy McBath at Dunwoody Springs Elementary School; and Georgia Department of Human Services Commissioner Robyn Crittenden at Idlewood Elementary School in Tucker.



Baldwin County School District Wins the Baby Golden Radish Award

Congratulations to Baldwin County School District, who won the Baby Golden Radish Award for creating an innovative and successful Farm to Early Care & Education Program that advances the learning and development of its Pre-K and Head Start students. Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs commended Baldwin County for their Farm to ECE program that educates minds, nourishes bodies, and cultivates healthy habits through engaging activities inside and outside the classroom.

Pictured below, Commissioner Jacobs and other state officials congratulate Susan Nelson (second from right), Director of School Nutrition for Baldwin County School District.



Board of Early Care and Learning

*Supporting and guiding the mission and vision of
Bright from the Start:*

Board of Early Care and Learning

Drew Hunt, Savannah
First Congressional District

Susan Harper, Albany
Second Congressional District
(Chair)

Kathy Howell, Carrollton
Third Congressional District
(Secretary)



Sign up for DECAL text messages by texting DECAL to 474747!

Employee Suggestion Program



**Visit the Virtual
Suggestion Box now!**

Phil Davis, Stone Mountain
Fourth Congressional District
(Vice Chair)

Kristy Beam, Ed.D, Atlanta
Fifth Congressional District

Vacant
Sixth Congressional District

Kristin Morrissey, Cumming
Seventh Congressional District

Luann Purcell, Ed.D., Warner Robins
Eighth Congressional District

Cristina Washell, Ed.D., Cleveland
Ninth Congressional District

Theresa Magpuri-Lavell, Ed.D., Milledgeville
Tenth Congressional District

Jen Bennecke, Atlanta
Eleventh Congressional District

VACANT
Twelfth Congressional District

Melissa Boekhaus, MD., Smyrna
Thirteenth Congressional District

Debra Brock, Calhoun
Fourteenth Congressional District

**Let Us Hear
From You!**

The Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Jim Keith, Farouk Baksh, Diane Myers, Matthew Jang, Yolanda Corbitt, Sarah Ward, and Courtney Woullard.