

# Decidedly DECAL

*Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are*



Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning



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## DECAL By the Numbers

**\$193 million** - Annual budget allocation for Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Program

## Commissioner's Corner

*by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs*

Dear DECALers:

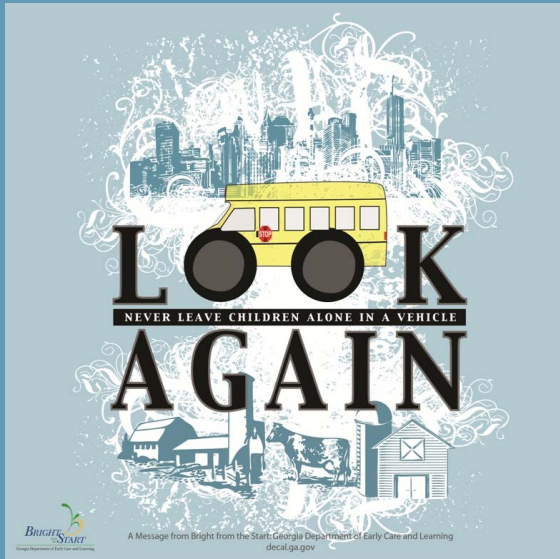
In the early 1990s Governor Zell Miller insisted that part of the Georgia Lottery for Education proceeds be dedicated to a voluntary pre-kindergarten program to ensure that Georgia's youngest students were prepared to enter Kindergarten. Since then, Georgia's Pre-K Program and DECAL have worked diligently to that end. But for some of Georgia's youngest students, the transition from Georgia's Pre-K Program to Kindergarten is challenging. That is why over the past few years DECAL has focused on making the transition as seamless and effective as possible through the following efforts.

DECAL has worked closely with the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) to align Pre-K and Kindergarten standards, curricula, and assessment. The new Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) align what is expected of four year olds with what will be expected of Kindergarten students.

DECAL is currently working with GaDOE to develop a new Kindergarten Entry Profile (KEP) assessment. The KEP will assess Kindergarten students during the first six weeks of the school year on the GELDS standards for four year olds. This formative assessment will provide a baseline for instruction in Kindergarten and will help re-frame the skills and knowledge needed at the beginning of Kindergarten.



**50,000** - Georgia children served each week by CAPS  
**80** - Summer Transition Program classes for rising Kindergarten students  
**30** - Summer Transition Program classes for rising Pre-K students  
**84,000** - Four year olds being served through Georgia's Pre-K Program  
**3,800** - Funded Georgia's Pre-K classes  
**5** - Orders for Intended Emergency Closures FY2015  
**8,931** - People completing online transportation training using the "Look Again" video



## Quick Links

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**Quality Rated Promoted by  
 Participants**

Then there are our Summer Transition Programs for rising Pre-K and rising Kindergarten students, both of which, according to an evaluation conducted in 2014, are providing positive experiences for children and their families. Both of these six-week programs target children in low-income families eligible for subsidized child care. The rising Kindergarten program is for students who were not able to attend Georgia's Pre-K Program or Head Start during the school year OR who attended Georgia's Pre-K or Head Start but need additional help. The rising Pre-K program focuses on children from families where Spanish is the home language.

Key findings and implications of the programs' evaluation included:

- In both programs, scores measuring key teacher-child interaction concepts were high.
- Both Spanish and English were used regularly in the rising Pre-K classrooms.
- Parents were generally pleased with both programs and their child's experiences.

To view highlights from the 2014 study and/or the full report, visit the DECAL website at <http://www.decal.ga.gov/BftS/SummerTransitionProgram.aspx>.

This summer, we will offer 80 summer transition classes for rising Kindergarten students and 30 classes for rising Pre-K students making the transition to their respective classes much easier for these students who need special attention. But DECAL's goal is that ALL Georgia's children receive positive preschool experiences to successfully transition them to Kindergarten and beyond. Thank you for the part you are playing in fulfilling Governor Miller's goal.

Sincerely,

**DECAL Priority:**

**Ensure Health & Safety**

## Workshop Held on Fire Safety in Child Care Settings

Safe Kids Georgia and DECAL Child Care Services hosted a workshop recently on fire safety education for Quality Rated programs and fire safety trainers. The workshop was facilitated by Dr. Robert Cole, President of Fireproof Children. Dr. Cole is a national expert in fire safety education and Associate Professor at the University of Rochester Medical Center. Participants learned practical approaches to teach young children fire safety and how to integrate the "play safe! be safe!" fire safety program. Pictured below (left to right) are Shawnell Johnson, Quality Improvement Supervisor; Dr. Robert Cole, Associate Professor, University of Rochester/



Representatives of DECAL's three-star Quality Rated programs explain why it's so important for child care programs in Georgia to be Quality Rated. [Click here](#) to watch the video.

## DECAL Selected for National Award

DECAL has been selected for the Let's Move! Child Care (LMCC) Recognition Award for its implementation of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) in Georgia. It was the only state/territorial/tribal agency chosen for the honor.

Winners will be recognized at the 2015 National CACFP Sponsor Association Conference on April 23, 2015 in Las Vegas, Nevada.

DECAL is being recognized for our work through the Caregivers Promoting Healthy Habits (CPHH) wellness grant and the Farm 2 Georgia Preschool (F2P) grant, which are funded by USDA's Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) Team Nutrition Grant program. Nutrition education training, technical assistance and resources are provided to child care centers and day care homes that develop and implement or adopt nutrition and physical fitness wellness policies in the childcare setting.

The Let's Move! Child Care campaign recognizes childcare facilities, sponsoring organizations and state agencies who are making

President, Fireproof Children Company; Beverly Losman, Director, Safe Kids Georgia; Morgan Barnett, Program Coordinator, Safe Kids Georgia; Ariel Lichtenwalner, Intern; Meagan Will, Intern; Lacey Lewis, Quality Improvement Consultant; and Rachel Fowler, Quality Improvement Consultant.



## DECAL Observes National CACFP Week

DECAL observed National Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Week on Wednesday, March 18, 2015 with a news conference and activities at the Arthur M. Blank Family Youth YMCA in Atlanta. National CACFP Week "is a national education and information campaign...to raise awareness of how the USDA's CACFP works to combat hunger and bring healthy foods to the table for adults in day care and children in child care homes, centers and in afterschool and summer feeding programs across the country."

The CACFP is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Children up to age 12, adults ages 60 or older and adults who are functionally impaired can receive nutritious meals while enrolled in qualified, non-residential child care or adult day care settings. Facilities approved by DECAL to provide meals that meet USDA meal pattern requirements can be reimbursed for those meals.



Shani Drake, Nutrition Services Outreach and Marketing Manager, and Falita Flowers, Nutrition Services Director.

outstanding efforts to improve child nutrition programs that promote young children's health and prevent childhood obesity.

## First Lady Completes Read Across Georgia Month



First Lady Sandra Deal completed Read Across Georgia Month on Tuesday in Chatham and Bulloch counties. The First Lady, shown here with Georgia's Pre-K students at Mill Creek Elementary School, visited 51 schools during the month reading the new book "TJ's Discovery." Let's keep the reading going in schools and homes all across our great state!

## April Birthdays



Best wishes go out to the following DECAL employees who celebrate birthdays this month:

- 3 - Meggan Hemans
- 3 - Shawnell Johnson

DECAL Nutrition Services Director Falita Flowers said Georgia needs more facilities to participate in the CACFP. According to Flowers, "Early healthy nutrition habits are critical to establishing a lifetime of healthy eating choices. The CACFP provides children in care environments nutritious meals that meet federal requirements for providing balanced and healthy options. Our office is continually searching for institutions to participate in the program and instill these healthy habits early." [Click here](#) to learn more about CACFP.

DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs and Dee Bolden, DECAL Assistant Commissioner for Federal Programs and Administration, are pictured below with Lanna Kirk, Regional Director, Special Nutrition Programs, USDA FNS-SERO, and Rc Pruitt, SVP Operations, YMCA of Metro Atlanta.



## DECAL Priority:

- 4 - Yolanda Crawford
- 6 - Sharelle Cross
- 7 - Elizabeth Holland
- 7 - Tabitha Moreland
- 10 - Aleta Gass
- 10 - Demetria Thornton
- 13 - Nadine Hollis
- 16 - William Cox
- 17 - Cassandra Jakes-Beasley
- 19 - Lisa Prather
- 20 - Jennifer Taylor
- 21 - Rob O'Callaghan, Jr.
- 25 - Ray Higgins, Jr.
- 25 - Brianne Kersey
- 25 - Liz Young
- 26 - Bridget Bunch
- 28 - Clare Michaud
- 28 - Sonya Mosley
- 29 - Stephen Knighton
- 30 - Johnathan Davis

## March Quality Rated Programs

### Congratulations to the newest **QUALITY RATED** child care programs!

- 5-Star Childcare Center, College Park ★★
- All About Kids, Inc., Conyers ★★
- Blackshear Presbyterian Church, Blackshear ★
- Bright Beginnings Day Care & Learning Center, Statesboro ★
- Bright Ones Learning Center, Inc., Fitzgerald ★
- Bumblebees Childcare Learning Center, Statesboro ★★
- Chapman's Learning Center, McRae ★★
- Childcare Network #184, McDonough ★★
- Destiny Starr Academy, Conyers ★★
- Elizabeth Burch Early Learning Center, Atlanta ★
- Especially For Kids Christian Academy, Riverdale ★★ ★
- Paquita Few, Gainesville ★★ ★
- First Step Learning Center, Fort Valley ★
- Flintstone Child Care Center, Flintstone ★
- Sonja L. Glaze, Elberton ★★
- Jessica N. Gresham, Helena ★★
- Irma L. Jones, Demorest ★★
- Kids First Learning Center, Inc., LaGrange ★★
- Kidz Fortress Childcare and Learning Center, Augusta ★★
- KinderCare Learning Center #1342, Atlanta ★★
- Kuddles & Huggs Learning Academy LLC, Valdosta ★

## Increase Quality & Access

### Quality Rated Welcomes 500th Rated Program

A Riverdale child care center has become the 500th child care program rated in a State of Georgia initiative designed to help parents in selecting quality early education programs in their communities. Especially for Kids Christian Academy, located at 11 Upper Riverdale Road, received the highest rating possible from Quality Rated, three stars, demonstrating its commitment to exceed the state's minimum health and safety requirements. The process involves preparing an extensive portfolio of the program's curriculum and practices, and independent observations of each classroom.

First Lady Sandra Deal and DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs visited the center on Monday, March 30, to make the announcement and read to students for Read Across Georgia Month.

"From birth to five years old, a child's brain can make 700 new connections per second and a high quality early education program can partner with parents to build a foundation for success in these critical early years," said Mrs. Deal. "Quality Rated is our community-powered child care rating system that identifies which early education programs are using best practices to help prepare children for success in kindergarten and beyond."

"Programs participating in Quality Rated receive free approved training, free technical assistance, and are eligible for a \$1,000 Materials Mini Grant," said Commissioner Jacobs. "In addition, star-rated programs receive generous bonus packages of classroom materials contributed by private philanthropic partners and are eligible to collect higher reimbursements from our child care subsidy program."

[Click here](#) to learn more about Quality Rated.

Pictured with students at Especially for Kids Christian Academy are DECAL Deputy Commissioner for System Reform Kristin Bernhard; Pre-K Lead Teacher Garyson Striggers; Senator Valencia Seay; Especially for Kids Director Diane VanDyke; Georgia Family Connection Partnership Executive Director Gaye Morris Smith; Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) Executive Director Mindy Binderman; DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs; First Lady Sandra Deal; and Pre-K Assistant Teacher Michelle Taylor.

- Destiny Starr Academy, Conyers ★★
- Elizabeth Burch Early Learning Center, Atlanta ★
- Especially For Kids Christian Academy, Riverdale ★★ ★
- Paquita Few, Gainesville ★★ ★
- First Step Learning Center, Fort Valley ★
- Flintstone Child Care Center, Flintstone ★
- Sonja L. Glaze, Elberton ★
- Jessica N. Gresham, Helena ★★
- Irma L. Jones, Demorest ★★
- Kids First Learning Center, Inc., LaGrange ★★
- Kidz Fortress Childcare and Learning Center, Augusta ★★
- KinderCare Learning Center #1342, Atlanta ★★
- Kuddles & Huggs Learning Academy, LLC, Valdosta ★
- Robbin D. Lamattina, Loganville ★★ ★
- Louisville Head Start, Louisville ★★ ★
- Lowndes I Head Start Center, Valdosta ★
- Ms. Niecy's Home Away From Home Learning Center, Atlanta ★
- Yvette N. Murphy, Stone Mountain ★★
- Oakwood School, Valdosta ★
- Our House, Decatur ★★
- PCA Head Start - Rockdale, Conyers ★★
- Ruth Pryor, East Point ★
- Bonnie R. Reynard, Blairsville ★★
- Rising Stars Child Development Center, Cataula ★★
- Sheltering Arms - Longview Drive Center, Douglasville ★★
- Sheltering Arms - Mansour Center, Marietta ★★
- St. Paul's Lutheran Pre-School, Savannah ★★
- Sunbrook Academy at Legacy Park, Kennesaw ★★
- The Children's House, Savannah ★★
- The Family Tree Child Development Center, Albany ★
- The Right Start Development Center, Inc., Demorest ★★
- Tomorrow's Child Learning & Development Center, Inc., Cartersville ★
- Wadley Head Start, Wadley ★★
- Lethia P. Walker, Lithonia ★
- Renata M. Ward, Stone Mountain ★★
- Wrens Head Start, Wrens ★★
- Yvette's Little World Day Care Center, LaGrange ★



**Let Us Hear  
From You!**



## Applications to Provide Georgia's Pre-K Program Made Available

DECAL has posted the application packages for Georgia's Pre-K Program for the 2015-2016 school year on our website at [www.dec.state.ga.us](http://www.dec.state.ga.us). Providers currently participating in Georgia's Pre-K Program must reapply and can request expansion classes. New providers wanting to participate in the program can access the application and receive important information about the application review, award process, and grant funding. All applications are due Tuesday, April 21, 2015, at 5 PM EDT.

Georgia's Pre-K Program is an educational program for age-eligible children in Georgia. This year, approximately 84,000 four year olds are being served through Georgia's Pre-K Program in over 3,800 funded classes in every county in the state. Programs are offered at local public schools and through private for profit and non-profit providers of preschool services.

The goal of Georgia's Pre-K Program is to foster each child's social, emotional, physical, and

You know that **great idea** you  
have for our department?

We cannot read your

**MIND.**

That is why DECAL has



Randy Hudgins  
Research Specialist

EMPLOYEE  
SUGGESTION  
PROGRAM

[Visit the Virtual Suggestion Box](#)  
**Now!**

## Board of Early Care and Learning

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

### Board of Early Care and Learning

Kay Ford, Savannah  
First Congressional District

Susan Harper, Albany  
Second Congressional District  
(Secretary)

Kathy Howell, Carrollton  
Third Congressional District

cognitive development through a rich learning environment, developmentally appropriate practices, and effective interactions with teachers. The nationally recognized full-day educational program is funded through the Georgia Lottery for Education and administered by DECAL.

"Georgia's Pre-K Program significantly improves school readiness skills in language, literacy, math, and general knowledge," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs, pointing to a recent study by the FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "By acquiring these skills at an early age, our students stand a greater chance of reading on grade level by the end of the third grade, which better positions them for future academic excellence."

## Summer Transition Program Returns This Year

DECAL will again offer a six-week Summer Transition Program (STP) for rising kindergartners who did not attend Georgia's Pre-K or Head Start, or attended but need additional support to be ready for Kindergarten next fall. The program, targeting children whose families are eligible for subsidized child care through Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS), will be offered in 80 classrooms across the state.

"The goal of Georgia's Pre-K Program is to prepare four year olds to successfully enter Kindergarten, but some students either miss that opportunity or need additional help. The Summer Transition Program was created to support those students," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "Dedicated Pre-K teachers and providers make this program successful, and we appreciate their willingness to participate again this summer."

"The Summer Transition Program is a great opportunity for these young students to build their skills and confidence before moving into Kindergarten," added Susan Adams, Assistant Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K Program and Instructional Supports. Adams said the intensive, high quality instructional program will begin in early June. Child care providers are chosen to participate in the STP through a competitive application process.

To be eligible to provide summer transition services, a program must be a current Georgia's Pre-K provider in good standing with Pre-K and in compliance with CAPS, Child Care Licensing, and Nutrition, as applicable.

Applications were made available last month with a deadline of March 23, 2015. Locations chosen to provide the STP will be announced late this month. After classes are awarded, a list of programs will be posted to [www.decal.ga.gov](http://www.decal.ga.gov) and parents can register their children directly with the programs.

Summer 2015 will be the sixth year DECAL has offered the STP. Each year the program has been evaluated by independent researchers with results indicating strong impacts for the children served - especially in crucial language and literacy skills.

Phil Davis, Stone Mountain  
Fourth Congressional District

Carlene Talton, Decatur  
Fifth Congressional District

Dawn Henderson, Marietta  
Sixth Congressional District

Sherron Murphy, Lawrenceville  
Seventh Congressional District

Luann Purcell, Ed.D., Warner Robins  
Eighth Congressional District  
(Vice Chair)

Tammy Lenkeit, Hoschton  
Ninth Congressional District

Janice Gallimore, Greensboro  
Tenth Congressional District

Victor Morgan, Cartersville  
Eleventh Congressional District  
(Chair)

Jerri Kropp, Statesboro  
Twelfth Congressional District

Judy Neal, Stockbridge  
Thirteenth Congressional District

Tangela Johnson, Cohutta  
Fourteenth Congressional District

### **The Faces of DECAL**

*DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Charles Cobb, Jr., Annie Blair, Jeannie Lippy, Sharda Short, Lindsey Urry, Shayla Lewis, and Clayton Adams.*

## **Kindergarten Entry Assessment Coming Soon**

A new Kindergarten Entry Assessment, funded with \$10 million from the Early Learning Challenge Grant, is in development. Susan Adams, Assistant Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K Program and Instructional Supports, says the new tool is designed as a formative assessment which Kindergarten teachers can use to better plan instruction tailored for their students.

"The assessment will be administered during the first six weeks of school and will focus on standards appropriate for the beginning of the school," Adams explained.

Adams said the new assessment will be used as part of the Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (GKIDS), a year-long, performance-based assessment aligned with the state standards. She said the assessment should be piloted with Pre-K students this spring, Kindergarten students in the fall, and fully implemented in the 2016-2017 school year.

A Kindergarten Readiness Assessment was included in the ELC's proposals for Measuring Outcomes and Progress.

## **DECAL Priority:**

# **Foster Organizational Excellence**

## **Linked In: Georgia Applauded for Early Childhood Data Sharing**

Georgia, DECAL, and Georgia Head Start are getting plenty of accolades in a new national policy brief on the importance of data sharing among Head Start, State Pre-K, child care, and other publicly-funded early care and education programs. In its March 2015 Policy Brief, the Early Childhood Data Collaborative (ECDC) recognized Georgia for implementing data-sharing agreements with 100 percent of the Head Start grantees in the state. The agreements involve sharing 17 data elements including demographic information and program site descriptions.

"When linked to other early care and education data systems, data collected by Head Start programs on their children, program services, and workforce can inform key decisions by state policymakers and guide efforts to improve early childhood program responsiveness and effectiveness," wrote the ECDC in its executive summary.

"We initiated a data-sharing effort to improve transition of our students into public schools and to provide kindergarten teachers with information to help them make more informed decisions about instruction," said Janice Haker, Director of Georgia's Head Start Collaboration. As to the 100 percent buy-in among Head Start grantees, Haker said "it's all about relationships."





*Janice Haker* Haker said in Georgia conversations about linking early childhood data began in 2010 when the State Advisory Council identified building a unified data system as one of its top three priorities. Head Start helped establish the goals of data-sharing efforts and established buy-in from all stakeholders.

## April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

We're joining First Lady Sandra Deal, Governor Nathan Deal, and the First Lady's Children's Cabinet on Friday, April 17, 2015, in wearing blue for Child Abuse Prevention Month. Ask your team to wear blue, get together for a photo, and post it to Facebook or Twitter with the hashtag #BlueDay. The First Lady is pictured below with her Children's Cabinet at a recent kick-off event held at the Capitol.

