

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



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DECAL By the Numbers

80 million - Meals and snacks served in Georgia through CACFP during FY2015

248,000 - Snacks and supper meals served by City of Atlanta CACFP during FY2015

5,020 - Licensed child care programs in Georgia

80,821 - Students enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K Program

3,863 - Classes funded in Georgia's Pre-K Program

21,342 - Enrollment in Georgia's Head Start Program

2,951 - Enrollment in Georgia's Early Head Start Program

Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs

Dear DECAL Colleagues,

I'm excited to announce that, now that the General Assembly 2016 has adjourned, we're turning our attention to the department's strategic plan. DECAL's most current plan was being updated when Governor Deal appointed me as commissioner. Since then, I have enjoyed learning more specifically about what the department does...about the direction in which the department was heading...and about you, the people who accomplish the department's critical work.

At the 2020 Employee Meetings last fall, I shared with you MY personal vision for the department and for each of us as DECAL employees: "Every employee of DECAL will clearly recognize and appreciate how her/his job contributes, directly or indirectly, to fulfilling the SHARED mission of the department."

To help make my vision a reality, it's now time to focus on the strategic plan that will explain for us all the SHARED mission of the department. To that end, we have enlisted the help of the BUILD Initiative, an organization that helps states build systems to support quality early childhood development.

Our plans are to review the existing document; look at information and ideas you gave us at the 2020 meetings; and develop a multi-year strategic plan that will take DECAL where we want to go between now and the year 2020. And one of my most sincere professional goals is that when our new strategic plan is completed, we will all clearly see how our work contributes to fulfilling the plan to enhance the well-being of Georgia's children and families.

I'll keep you posted on the work of the strategic plan.

Also, you will soon receive the annual employee survey on which you can anonymously



13,531 - Families participating in Parenting Classes through Head Start Georgia

959 - Quality Rated child care programs in Georgia



Quick Links

[DECAL on Facebook](#)

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[DECAL Website](#)



April Birthdays



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

- 1 - Reisha Merriman
- 3 - Meggan Hemans
- 3 - Shawnell Johnson
- 6 - Sharelle Cross
- 7 - Elizabeth Holland
- 7 - Tabitha Moreland
- 10 - Aleta Gass
- 10 - Demetria Thornton
- 16 - William Cox
- 17 - Cassandra Jakes-Beasley
- 17 - Veronica Thomas
- 19 - Lisa Prather
- 20 - Jennifer Taylor
- 21 - Rob O'Callaghan
- 21 - Bridgett Walker
- 25 - Ray Higgins
- 25 - Brianne Walters
- 25 - Liz Young
- 26 - Bridget Bunch
- 29 - Stephen Knighton

communicate with me about your satisfaction with your work and with the department. I take these surveys seriously; I alone see the open-ended comments and determine if they should be passed on to other DECAL staff; I assure you that all responses remain anonymous.

So, I encourage you to thoughtfully, honestly complete the survey so that I, as your Commissioner, can help create a positive work environment in which we all can succeed...ultimately to benefit our state's children, families, and the professionals who care for them every day.

Sincerely,

Deals and DECAL Celebrate "Read Across Georgia" Month

Governor Nathan Deal and First Lady Sandra Deal were joined March 3, 2016 by DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs, State School Superintendent Richard Woods, and author Coy Bowles of the Zac Brown Band to kick off "Read Across Georgia" month, a campaign supporting increased childhood literacy in the state.

"During my administration, Sandra and I have made increasing the percentage of Georgia's third grade students reading at grade level a top priority," said Governor Deal. "A firm literary foundation is essential for the academic success of our state's youngest learners, and the 'Read Across Georgia' initiative helps to provide just that. With the help of state agencies and organizations, we have made great strides in achieving this goal. By prioritizing early childhood education, we ensure that our youngest students are positioned for future academic excellence."

First Lady Deal has visited and read to Georgia's Pre-K Program and elementary school students across the state throughout March.

"March is 'Read Across Georgia' month, the specific time set aside to emphasize the importance of learning how to read and practicing that skill until it is mastered," said Mrs. Deal. "For those of us who attained that treasure earlier, this month is a time to give back. Offer to be a guest reader at a school or library, or listen to a child read. Help a second language non-reading adult sign up for classes and give back the gift of reading."

As a part of celebrations, First Lady Deal introduced Bowles' new book, "Will Powers: Where There's a Will There's a Way," a story about overcoming self-entitlement and achieving goals with dedication and a strong work ethic.

"I'm so excited to work with Mrs. Deal on this collaboration for 'Read Across Georgia'," said Bowles. "The idea of reading my children's book to kids and exposing them to the positive message of the power of hard work and self-confidence is so awesome. Self-entitlement is a big issue facing our kids, parents, and teachers today. Hopefully Mrs. Deal and I can help by sharing a story with them that provides an example and answers."

The "Read Across Georgia" campaign, launched in 2012, supports the Governor's Grade Level Reading initiative with the goal that all Georgia students are reading at grade level or better by the

A Day in the Life of Marybeth McGee

As a Child Care Services (CCS) consultant for DECAL, it is Marybeth McGee's responsibility to ensure that children being cared for outside of their homes are in a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment that is compliant with the state's rules and regulations for child care. Each workday, she conducts site visits to care and learning centers in the Augusta area to monitor for compliance, provide technical assistance and training, and investigate incident reports. Despite the weight of her regulatory duties, McGee never loses sight of the importance of engaging with children.



Marybeth McGee

McGee, who has a bachelor's of science degree in Family Studies from Western Michigan University, says she strives to be a good role model for providers and makes a point during her visits to interact with the children.

"I enjoy the brief moments when a child reaches out for a hug, wants you to read a story with them or just wants to tell you about their day," she said. "A caregiver's day is busy; I love when I get to model for them that the little moments are just as important as rules and regulations, and that we can all take a moment to engage with a child."

McGee views her relationship with child care providers as a partnership, which is one of the most enjoyable aspects of her job.

"I am in it for them and their children, and many of them know that," she said. "I love when they share their struggles and victories with me. I love the look of pride they get when they 'get it right,' sometimes after many failed attempts," said McGee, who has worked as a CCS consultant for two years.

Each day she looks forward to seeing providers, although she acknowledges that the feeling may not always be mutual.

"I think the most challenging aspect of my job is that sometimes regulatory visits can make you feel like you are facing the day alone, ruining other people's day one visit at a time," she said. "Not all providers are happy to see us and sometimes ensure that we know that as soon as we walk through the door. It can be discouraging to feel

end of the third grade.

"Once again, DECAL is excited to partner with the First Lady in her annual 'Read Across Georgia' campaign," said Commissioner Jacobs. "For years, the Governor and Mrs. Deal have demonstrated their unwavering commitment to early literacy by reading to children in child care learning centers and Georgia's Pre-K classrooms across the state. Together we are guiding Georgia's youngest learners toward a path to read on grade level by the end of the third grade, a predictor of future positive outcomes for children."



Commissioner Jacobs (left) is shown holding a "Read Across Georgia" proclamation with (L-R) Governor Nathan Deal, CALI, First Lady Sandra Deal, and Pam Williams, Education Outreach Coordinator with the Governor's Office.

Pre-K Summer Transition Program Returns for 2016

For the seventh year, DECAL is offering a six-week Summer Transition Program (STP) for rising kindergartners who did not attend Georgia's Pre-K Program or Head Start or attended one of those programs but need additional support before entering kindergarten this fall. The program, targeting children whose families are eligible for subsidized child care through Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, will be offered in 120 classrooms across the state.

"The goal of Georgia's Pre-K Program is to optimally prepare four year olds for kindergarten, but some students either didn't have an opportunity to attend Pre-K or Head Start or need additional help before moving on. The Summer Transition Program was created to support those students," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs.

"The Summer Transition Program helps build academic skills and confidence before these young

unwelcomed."

Nevertheless, McGee takes on those days with a positive attitude. "I look at those times as an opportunity to change the perception of licensing and work harder to build rapport, showing them that I am also here to help them be the best they can be...even when there are challenges during a visit, I look forward to assisting them in being the best that they can be for the children they serve," she said.

If McGee were made DECAL Commissioner for a day, she would likely hold a team meeting.

"Being in the field can sometimes feel isolating," she said. "I enjoy the opportunities to get together as a team and enjoy each other's company, stories, laughter, and support. We have a great team at DECAL and it shows the most when we are all together!"

When not on the job, McGee enjoys camping, sewing, baking, traveling, and spending time with friends and family. She has been married to her husband, Brian, for eight years, and they are in the process of adopting a group of siblings from foster care.

Her favorite quote is from Walt Disney: "Around here, however, we don't look backwards for very long. We keep moving forward, opening up new doors and doing new things, because we're curious and curiosity keeps leading us down paths."

DECAL and GEEARS to Launch New Quality Rated Marketing Campaign

The Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) and DECAL are excited to announce the launch of a statewide public awareness campaign for Quality Rated!

The message of the Quality Rated campaign is simple: Quality Rated helps families take the mystery out of searching for child care.

We will begin sharing this message early this summer with public service announcements on television and radio throughout Georgia and through online advertisements specifically targeting families searching for child care. The campaign will officially launch on April 16th at the Atlanta Baby & Child Expo at the Fox Theater in Atlanta.



A key first step to the campaign was to enhance the Quality Rated logo by adding the words "child care" to the existing logo. This addition will help families and the public more clearly

understand that Quality Rated relates specifically to child care offered in Georgia.

students transition 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.

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

All current Georgia's Pre-K Program providers were eligible to apply to offer the STP, but providers in the following counties will be given priority: Baker, Ben Hill, Bibb, Brooks, Burke, Catoosa, Chatham, Clarke, Clay, Clayton, Colquitt, Cook, DeKalb, Dooly, Dougherty, Echols, Emanuel, Fannin, Franklin, Fulton, Gilmer, Gordon, Hancock, Hart, Jefferson, Jenkins, Lamar, Lowndes, Macon, Marion, McDuffie, Montgomery, Murray, Muscogee, Peach, Quitman, Randolph, Richmond, Screven, Seminole, Spalding, Sumter, Talbot, Taliaferro, Taylor, Telfair, Terrell, Turner, Twiggs, Upson, Warren, and Whitfield.

Programs will be chosen through a competitive application process. Applications were made available on the DECAL website starting March 7, 2016, with a deadline of March 24, 2016. Programs chosen to provide the STP will be announced later this month and a list of participating programs will be posted to www.decgal.ga.gov. Families can register their children directly with the programs.

Independent evaluations of the STP indicate that the program has resulted in significant positive impacts for children, especially in language and literacy skills.

CACFP Week Raises Awareness of At-Risk Afterschool Program

Last month DECAL joined the City of Atlanta's Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to celebrate National Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Week at the Center of Hope at Adamsville Recreation Center. National CACFP Week is a national campaign to raise awareness of the CACFP's work to combat hunger. The City of Atlanta's DPR partners with the DECAL to provide snacks and dinner to students participating in its afterschool programs in the Center of Hope.

DECAL and DPR are partnering to raise awareness about the At-Risk Afterschool Program, an important component of the CACFP. "Over sixty percent of children in Georgia qualify for free or reduced-price meals at school," said DECAL Nutrition Services Director Falita Flowers. "The At-Risk Afterschool Program provides children in afterschool programs with enrichment activities and nutritious snacks and supper meals that meet federal requirements for balanced and healthy meals."

According to DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs, "Our goal is to increase the number of meals and snacks served this year, enabling more children across the state to benefit from this special program. To accomplish that goal, we need organizations in communities throughout Georgia to partner with us as sponsors and as workers 'in the trenches.' Together, we can help ensure that more children receive the nutrition they need to be successful in school...and ultimately, in life."

The CACFP is funded by USDA and administered in Georgia by DECAL. 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. The At-Risk Afterschool component of the CACFP provides free meals and snacks to children 18 and under enrolled in afterschool programs located in low-income areas that offer approved enrichment activities. Facilities approved by DECAL to provide meals that meet USDA meal pattern requirements can be reimbursed

The new logo is available on the G:Drive under: G:\System Reform\Quality Rated\Logos\New QR Logos.

If you have ideas about how to share Quality Rated with families searching for child care, please email Sarah Beck at sarah.beck@decalfga.gov.

New Look, Improvements for DECAL Website

Over the past several months, our IT team has been working to give www.decalfga.gov a "makeover" for 2016, and on Monday, April 4, 2016, we will officially launch the new site to the public. "In this electronic age, the front door of any organization is its website," said Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "This technology allows us to serve members of the public on a 24/7 basis placing a wide variety of information, forms, and resources at their fingertips. Here at DECAL, our website has traditionally been a powerful resource in assisting and empowering families, providers, teachers, and the general public...and we are always looking for ways to improve it."

The homepage has been streamlined with prominent photos reflecting our mission and featuring our major initiatives. These will be updated regularly. Visitors will find easy menus at the top aimed at Programs, Families, Teachers, and Providers. You will see clear buttons for Finding Childcare, Finding Georgia's Pre-K, Finding a Meal Site, FAQs, Employment Opportunities, and License Fee Payments. These buttons are based on the most popular visits and searches on our site. We have placed live "news feeds" for our DECAL newsroom, Facebook, and Twitter. There are Quick Links for KOALA, PANDA, Professional Development, and Training Approval, among other links. Thanks to the IT team for their continued efforts to improve the website and our overall customer service.

for those meals.

"The hot meals program is critical to the services we provide to our youth participating in afterschool programs in our centers," said Atlanta's Department of Parks and Recreation Commissioner Amy Phuong. "For many of the families we serve, the hot meals program is the difference between a child going to bed with a full stomach or a child going to bed hungry."



The National CACFP Week event at the Adamsville Recreation Center included a press conference with DECAL's Commissioner Jacobs, City of Atlanta's Commissioner Phuong, Robin Bailey, Regional Administrator for the Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, and a physical education activity presented by GA SHAPE.

In photo at left are (L-R) USDA Regional Administrator Robin Bailey, Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs, and Department of Parks and Recreation Commissioner Amy Phuong.

CALi Making Special Appearances, Meeting New Friends

DECAL's new mascot, CALi, made lots of new friends last month with special appearances at Read Across Georgia, Children's Day at the Capitol, and the DECAL Atlanta offices. She is shown here meeting Lt. Governor Casey Cagle, Georgia's Pre-K Program, our IT team, Inclusion Team, Infant Toddler specialists, and officials with the Georgia Child Care Association. CALi looks forward to meeting more new friends in the coming months.



White Oak Learning Academy Wins DECAL Facebook Contest



White Oak Learning Academy in Dawsonville, Georgia, was the winner of a recent DECAL Facebook contest where programs were encouraged to post photos of their children inviting Commissioner



Step into Spring with the DECAL Activity Challenge 2016

The DECAL Wellness Committee hopes to help motivate DECALers in May with the "DECAL Activity Challenge 2016." This friendly walking/activity competition begins Monday, May 2, 2016. Increasing your daily activity can benefit you in one or more of the following ways:

- * Maintaining or achieving a healthy weight
- * Preventing or managing various conditions (type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, etc.)
- * Strengthening your bones
- * Improving your mood
- * Increasing your energy
- * Boosting your immune system

An activity log will be available in POLAR to enter daily steps. Those that participate in activities other than walking can convert their activity into steps with a conversion chart. While participation is not mandatory, team walking averages will be based on the entire team's average steps. The winning DECAL team will maintain "bragging rights" for one year.

Amy M. Jacobs and CALi to visit their classroom. More than 50 programs entered the contest and White Oak was chosen in a random drawing. Officials with Georgia State University and the Dawson County Chamber of Commerce participated in the March 28 event which included Commissioner Jacobs and CALi reading to the students and a dance party with CALi. It was a great day! [Watch a video of the visit by clicking here.](#)

Let Us Hear
From You!

You know that great idea you
have for our agency?

We cannot read your mind.

That is why DECAL has

ESP

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, Midway
First Congressional District
(Secretary)

Susan Harper, Albany
Second Congressional District
(Vice Chair)

The Wellness Committee will award gift cards to the three individuals with the most steps.

Let's Witness the Fitness in 2016!

Congratulations to the newest  QUALITY RATED child care programs!

M & S Magical Stars Daycare, Ellenwood ★	★★★ Patricia A. Jones, Albany
Antoinette O. Barnes, Fayetteville ★	★★★ King David Academy, Norcross
Brandy. L. Blake, Marietta ★	★★★ Kimberly N. McIver, Macon
Sabrina A. Coleman, Brunswick ★	★★★ Nathalie S. Queen, Douglasville
CRK Child Development Center, Albany ★★	★★★ Rising Star Learning Center, Mableton
DAIZY BUSY BEE GROUP, Savannah ★	★★★ Sherry Harrigan, Grayson
Gleydis Estrada, Lawrenceville ★★	★★★ Steps To The Future Daycare and Learning Center, Inc., Statesboro
Gilmer County Head Start, Ellijay ★★	★★★ The Greenhouse Newell Rubbermaid Child Development Center, Alanta
Charlene D. Green, Springfield ★	★★★ Union County Head Start, Blairsville
Karima T. Guilfo, Hinesville ★★	
Cynthia D. Harper, Riverdale ★★	

The Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Kori Woodward-Dickens, Julie Harnage, Michael Chandler, Reisha Meriman, Deidrea Thompson, Diane Swift, and Brian Griffin.

Kathy Howell, Carrollton
Third Congressional District

Phil Davis, Stone Mountain
Fourth Congressional District

Carlene Talton, Decatur
Fifth Congressional District

Dawnn Henderson, Marietta
Sixth Congressional District

Sherron Murphy, Lawrenceville
Seventh Congressional District

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

Vacant
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