

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



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DECAL By the Numbers

- \$945 million** - Money raised in FY14 by Georgia Lottery Corporation for HOPE Scholarships and Georgia's Pre-K Program
- 84,000** - Allotted slots for this year's Georgia's Pre-K Program
- 280** - Enrollment in Summer Transition Program for rising Pre-K students
- 992** - Enrollment in Summer Transition Program for rising Kindergarten students
- 81,453** - Official 2013-14 year-end enrollment for Georgia's Pre-K Program
- 25,749** - Georgia Head Start funded enrollment
- 2,383** - Georgia Early Head Start funded enrollment
- 404** - Quality Rated child care programs in Georgia



Commissioner's Corner

by Interim Commissioner Amy Jacobs

Dear DECAL Staff,

It's probably going to be awhile before we are all together in one place or before I have an opportunity to meet all the staff in person, so in this issue of Decidedly DECAL, I want to share some things about my approach to leadership

As a leader...not only in a time of transition like I am now, but also in general, I like to LISTEN to coworkers and advisors; to gather as much information as I can to make informed, calculated decisions. I value people with education, experience, and opinions different from my own...because I recognize that I cannot...nor do I need to...know it all especially when surrounded by experts and professionals like you.



I also learn most effectively by DOING. Last week I accompanied Rukiya Thomas as she conducted visits to a child care learning center and a family day care home. Suddenly, much of what I had been hearing about in meetings came to life as I witnessed what many of you do every day. I look forward to more visits...to nutrition programs, Pre-K programs, Head Start programs, infant and toddler classrooms, etc. to see more clearly what you do and how you do it so that together we can continue to improve and perfect our practices.

By the time you read this, school will be starting again...for our Pre-K program and for many of our own children. As our duties ramp up, I hope you took time this summer for yourselves and your families. While we have a tremendous amount of work to do and are charged with the incredibly important task of enhancing the well-being of Georgia's children in safe and healthy environments, I strongly believe that we all must achieve and maintain a healthy work-life balance.

The work of serving Georgia's children and families can't be done without you...and you can't function optimally if you're not taking time...making time...to care for yourselves and your families adequately. As a leader...as your commissioner...I believe that YOU, DECAL staff, are one of my top priorities. Thank you for all your hard work. I look forward to meeting many of you in the coming months.

Appreciatively,
Amy

DECAL Priority:

Ensure Health & Safety

Quick Links

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Summer Food Service Program



DECAL Nutrition Services Director Falita Flowers (right) is shown with USDA Southeast Regional Office Administrator Robin Bailey at a recent Summer Food Service Kickoff event at the Tallapoosa Public Library in Haralson County. This year's Summer Food Service Program saw a 20 percent increase in sponsors and a 15 percent increase in meals served.

Early Head Start - Child Care Partnership Grant

Quality Care for Children recently hosted a meeting for DECAL to share information about the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership grant opportunity with a cohort of Quality Rated family day care home educators.

In the grant application, DECAL is proposing to pilot an Early Head Start-Family Day Care Home model with Quality Care for Children and this cohort of Quality Rated family day care. The 17 members of the Latino family day care cohort who attended the meeting are eager to participate.



Georgia's Pre-K Program Welcomes 84,000 Students

School bells will be ringing soon for up to

Commissioners Compete in Kitchen to Curb Childhood Obesity

New DECAL Interim Commissioner Amy Jacobs showed off her culinary skills recently in a Quality Rated Cook-off with Department of Public Health Commissioner Brenda Fitzgerald, MD. It was no easy contest, considering they had to win the hearts and taste buds of the toughest food critics anywhere - children.

"Nothing makes you stronger than spinach," Fitzgerald said, as video cameras captured her blending of spinach, bananas, pineapple and juice along with a serving of pop culture. "I introduce the Ninja Turtle Ooze Smoothie."

The reaction of the child judges brought absolute confirmation of what researchers have known for years - healthy eating must be fun for children.

The cook-off is part of a video series being developed by DECAL aimed at reducing childhood obesity by empowering child care providers in Georgia with ideas and a set of standards.

"When we consider that 11 million children under age five in the U.S. are in some form of child care each week, reaching those care providers is essential," said Jacobs. "Care providers are a critical link to better child nutrition since many children consume a majority of their meals in child care."

Soon the video will be made available to nearly 5,500 child care facilities in Georgia through Quality Rated - a child care quality rating and improvement system. The video was made possible by an innovative private-public partnership between DECAL, Healthy Kids Georgia, and Dole Packaged Foods. Child health, nutrition and physical activity are among the key standards promoted by Quality Rated.

"We have a very special treat for everyone today. The commissioners are going to show us how to prepare an easy, healthy snack that the children in your care will actually enjoy," said Jennifer Popadiuk, DECAL's nutrition project manager and a registered dietician, as she opened the video. "Now, let's get cooking."

While Fitzgerald blended up the ooze smoothie, Jacobs reinvented the concept of French fries and ketchup with pineapple fruit fries and strawberry-banana ketchup.

So which commissioner won the cook-off? The video will be released later this month.

To learn more about Quality Rated, visit: www.qualityrated.org.

Pineapple Fruit Fries with Strawberry-Banana Ketchup Recipe

For those of you curious to try them, here's the recipe:

Prep: 10 min.

Makes: 6 servings

2 cups DOLE® Strawberries, sliced
1 ripe DOLE Banana, sliced
1 tablespoon sugar
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
1 fresh DOLE Tropical Gold® Pineapple, peeled and cut into "fries", 3" long, 1/2" thick
1/4 cup mint leaves, optional

- Place strawberries, banana, sugar and vinegar in blender or food processor container; blend until smooth. Pour into serving dish; set aside.
- Over medium heat sauté pineapple spears until slightly brown on all sides. Place on serving plate. Garnish with mint leaves. Serve with strawberry-banana ketchup.

Per Serving: 85 calories, 0g fat (0g sat.), 0mg cholesterol, 1mg sodium, 22g carbohydrate (3g dietary fiber, 16g sugars), 1g protein, 1% Vit A, 96% Vit C, 2% calcium, 3% iron, 7% potassium, 7% folate



84,000 four year olds attending Georgia's Pre-K Program. The voluntary, lottery-

funded Pre-K program has been recognized as one of the top programs in the nation, based on quality standards, teacher qualifications, and enrollment. Georgia's Pre-K Program, considered universal - meaning that any age eligible child may attend the program regardless of family income - is beginning its 22nd year.

Georgia's model for providing the Pre-K program is unique in that it is offered through a public-private partnership in local school systems, in private child care centers, and in other facilities. The first day of Georgia's Pre-K year varies based on the school system and child care provider calendar. During the 2013-2014 school year, 66 percent of all four year olds in Georgia were served by state Pre-K and Head Start, with a statewide Pre-K enrollment of nearly 82,000.

"Pre-K is an exciting time as our state's youngest learners begin their formal educational journey," said Amy M. Jacobs, Interim Commissioner of DECAL. "Recent independent studies have shown that Georgia's Pre-K helps four year olds build a solid foundation for lifelong learning, with significant impacts in school readiness skills in language, literacy, and math."

"Starting school is a significant time for children and families," said Susan Adams, assistant commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K Program. "Many children enrolling in Pre-K are 'leaving home' for their first school experience. For this reason we take our roles very seriously, and we work really hard to provide Georgia's children with positive and meaningful experiences."

Adams added that this summer DECAL offered 20 Rising Pre-K Summer Transition Classes for 280 students who will enter Pre-K this fall, and 62 Rising Kindergarten Summer Transition classes for 992 students who will enter Kindergarten. The classes help prepare students for the challenges of Pre-K and Kindergarten and make the experience more positive and productive.

For parents enrolling their children in Georgia's Pre-K Program, Adams offers the following tips to help make the first day go smoother:

- Send your child to school in clothes they can manage independently in the bathroom: No overalls.
- Make sure your child's shoes are comfortable for playtime. Slip on shoes or shoes with Velcro fasteners are easiest for children to manage.

DECAL Priority:

Increase Quality & Access

Summer Transition Program Makes a Difference

For the fifth year, DECAL offered a six-week Summer Transition Program (STP) for rising kindergartners who did not attend Georgia's Pre-K or Head Start or who attended but needed additional support to be ready for Kindergarten. The program targets children whose families are eligible for Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program. This year, 62 STP classes were held across the state with 16 students in each class.

In addition, 20 classes of rising Pre-K students were held with 14 students in each class for students whose first language is Spanish. Participation in the STP for rising Pre-K students was also based on family income.

"This was a great opportunity for these young students to build their skills and confidence before moving up into Pre-K and Kindergarten," said Susan Adams, assistant commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K.

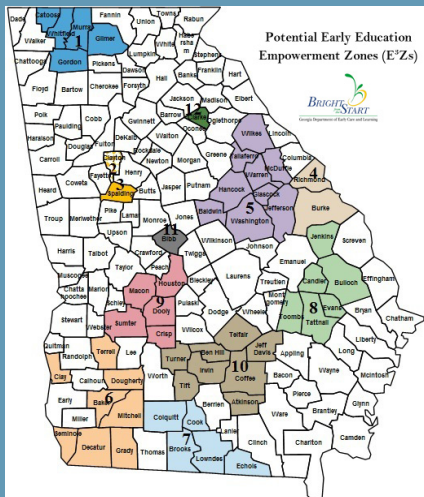
Each year the STP has been evaluated by independent researchers, and results have indicated strong impacts for the children served - especially in crucial language and literacy skills.



Georgia's Pre-K Program sponsored 20 Rising Pre-K Summer Transition Classes for 280 students who will enter Pre-K this fall. Calhoun City Schools in Gordon County hosted one of the classes this summer with strong parental involvement.

- Visit the classroom before school starts so children are familiar with the new surroundings.
- Tell your child's teacher about any fears he or she may have.
- Inform the teacher of any special dietary needs or allergies your child may have and ask the teacher to explain program policies around meals.
- Complete necessary forms or releases your Pre-K provider may require for dispensing medication during the school day.
- Locate the bathroom with your child and determine any special bathroom routines the school observes.
- Build in extra time for the first day: Make sure you have time to say good-bye.
- Determine if your child needs a blanket for rest time: Can they bring a favorite stuffed animal?
- Send along a family photo in your child's backpack in case they get lonely.

Potential Early Education Empowerment Zones



August Birthdays



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

- 1 - Gwen Kahn
- 5 - Paula Lawrence
- 6 - Valerie Coulton
- 6 - Ira Sudman
- 7 - Kay Pollard
- 11 - Vicki Watts
- 12 - Kristie Lewis



Our Summer Transition Program prepared these rising Kindergarten students at Rainbow Academy and Whiteford Learning Center for school this fall.

Site Visits Underway for New Early Education Empowerment Zones

Site visits and interviews are underway this summer to help determine the location of four Early Education Empowerment Zones, or E³Zs. Funding for the initiative is part of the \$51.7 million Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant received last year by Bright from the Start from the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

E³Zs, as defined in the state's grant, will be multi-county regions of the state that are home to around 10,000 children under the age of five. Each E³Z will receive over \$1 million in targeted resources to improve early childhood outcomes in the region.

Kristin Bernhard, Deputy Commissioner for System Reform, said DECAL first used quantitative data from the Department of Public Health, the Department of Economic Development, the Department of Community Affairs, and the Department of Education to identify eleven geographic regions of the state with challenging circumstances for children.

"We will ultimately decide the final locations considering both quantitative data and qualitative data," Bernhard said. "First, we looked at indicators like third grade reading proficiency, poverty level, premature birth rates, the percentage of licensed childcare capacity filled by children receiving subsidy, Pre-K saturation, and other factors to determine regions of high need."

Bernhard said DECAL is now conducting site visits to each of the potential zones to examine qualitative data to narrow the list of eleven potential zones to the final four. Communities could improve their chances of becoming E³Zs by having strong Quality Rated child care programs in or nearby, universities or technical colleges with strong programs in early childhood education, and demonstrating support from public school superintendents, elected officials, the business community, and nonprofit and philanthropic partners.

- 14 - Denise Jensen
- 16 - Karen McGill
- 19 - Monique Johnson
- 21 - Rachael Lee
- 23 - Susan Simpson
- 25 - Bart Ellington
- 26 - Kay McCorkle
- 31 - Sylvia Boykin

Community visits were held in June for the Statesboro area. In July the team visited regions around Albany, Macon, Sandersville, Dalton, and Valdosta, with the remaining potential zones on the calendar for this month. DECAL hopes to have the four zones selected early this fall.



Governor Nathan Deal designated DECAL as the lead agency for the Early Learning Challenge Grant on behalf of the state.

Georgia's Early Learning Challenge grant will be implemented over a four-year period. Georgia's grant includes a variety of projects, all of which focus on improving services to Georgia's children from birth to age eight and their families. While DECAL is the lead agency for the grant, the work will be accomplished through partnerships with other state and federal agencies and non-profit organizations.



DECAL's Dr. Laura Johns, Board Member Susan Harper, and Deputy Commissioner for System Reform Kristin Bernhard visited Albany with partners from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, GEEARS, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and community stakeholders to discuss the new Early Education Empowerment Zones.

You know that **great idea** you have for our department?
We cannot read your **MIND**.
That is why DECAL has

Jackie Shivers
Director of Quality Support

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

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

DECAL Priority:

Foster Organizational Excellence

DECAL Welcomes New Board Member

Governor Nathan Deal recently appointed Tangela W. Johnson to the Board of Early Care and Learning to represent the 14th Congressional District. She, her husband John, and daughter Caylor live in Cohutta.

Johnson is the President of North Georgia Center for Educational Excellence (NGCEE). She has successfully worked as an organizational development consultant and corporate trainer for the past 16 years and served as an adjunct faculty member at Dalton State College. Johnson is dedicated to helping businesses create high-performing, engaged work environments with a culture of integrity, accountability, excellence, and teamwork.



She has a bachelor's degree from the University of Georgia and a master's degree from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. She started her career in the insurance industry,

(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

*We are committed to nurturing
Georgia's youngest children, keeping
them safe and healthy, and to enriching
their lives.*

The Faces of DECAL

*DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue
are (L-R) Kelly Bastis, Stanley Cooper, Erica
Sims, Christi Bedwell, Thea Stevens, Craig
Detweiler, and Kaisha Sherrills.*

served as Vice-President of a medical software company, and also worked as a practice management consultant for several years. During that time, she received her Certified Medical Practice Executive Certification from The American College of Medical Practice Executives.

Johnson credits her success to the priority her family placed on education, and she is dedicated to improving educational opportunities for Georgia's children.

"Education is a great multiplier that extends beyond one individual. As a first generation college graduate, I've experienced firsthand the difference education can make," she said. "My parents made sure my brothers and I understood that education was a priority. They provided support and encouragement at every stage; consequently, all of their children are college graduates."

"The earlier you expose children to learning opportunities the better chances they will have of a successful future," Johnson continued. "DECAL is nationally recognized for its proactive, progressive approach to making sure our youngest citizens are 'Bright from the Start.' I'm honored and excited to be a part of that conversation. As a life-long resident of this great state, I want to see all of our youngest citizens and their families have the best educational opportunities possible. Finding additional resources and more innovative, sustainable ways to support DECAL's efforts can only strengthen Georgia's future for all of us."

Johnson has an extensive background in volunteerism. She chaired the Marketing and Management Advisory Committee for Dalton State College's Technical Education Division and served on the Rotary Club of Dalton's Board. She serves or has served on the following Boards: the Dalton-Whitfield Library Board Authority (current Chair), the Northwest Georgia Healthcare Partnership, Christian Heritage School, and was Vice Chair of the Northwest Georgia Trade Center Board Authority. She has been involved in UGA's Archway Partnership visioning process for the community and previously served on the United Way's Campaign Cabinet's Small Business Division. She was the Vice-Chair of the Dalton-Whitfield Charter-Consolidation Commission, and co-author of the final commission report. She is a member of the Whitfield-Murray Economic Development Board. Additionally, Johnson is the founder of Stiletto and Grace Network, a networking and mentoring group for women, and she serves on Girl Scouts Board of Greater Atlanta.