

Decidedly DECAL

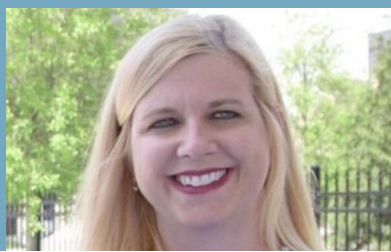
Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



DECAL By the Numbers

- 4,370** - Licensed child care programs in Georgia
- 300** - Pending applications for child care licenses
- 3,811** - Funded classes in Georgia's Pre-K Program
- 20** - Students in a Georgia's Pre-K classroom beginning this school year
- 2,902** - Quality Rated child care programs in Georgia
- 1,770** - Average daily number of CAPS calls
- \$1.67 billion** - DECAL expenditures in 2024

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Commissioner's Corner by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs

Dear DECAL Co-workers,

This issue of Decidedly DECAL covers August and September, months that are typically busy times for us as Pre-K programs get up and running and schools/after school programs start. So, we hit the floor running... with little time to breathe.

August is a month with no state holidays, and September has only one. But after a little research, I found several days in each month that we can choose to celebrate or recognize even if we don't get a day off.



August:

Until Aug. 11th, the **Summer Olympics**. Go Team USA!

Aug. 4th, **Friendship Day**. Tell your friends how grateful you are that they're in your life.

Aug. 8th, **International Cat Day**. You know who you are!

Aug. 11th – 13th, **Perseid Meteor Shower**. Look up at night for a celestial extravaganza.

Aug. 26th, **International Dog Day**. Celebrate man's (and woman's) best friends.

September:

Sept. 2nd, **Labor Day**. A federal and state holiday and the unofficial end of summer (but no one told the temperature!)

Sept. 6th, **Read a Book Day**. Aligns perfectly with our focus on literacy.

Sept. 8th, **Grandparents' Day**. Think about these important relationships even if they're no longer around.

Sept. 8th, **International Literacy Day**. Celebrating literacy around the world.

Sept. 11th, **Patriots' Day**. Remembering and honoring Americans killed on this tragic day in 2001.

Sept. 20th, **Autumnal Equinox**. The beginning of Fall (with summer temperatures!)

Sept. 21st, **International Day of Peace**. We can only hope...

I hope you identified at least one (and perhaps more than one) special day to celebrate or recognize during this dry spell of state and federal holidays.



**New Episodes
Every Wednesday**



Cultural Spotlight: Caribbean Carnival Reminds Dianne Clarke of Home

CCS Northeast Lead Consultant Dianne Clarke was born and raised in Trinidad and Tobago, a dual-island Caribbean nation located near Venezuela. In 1987, she relocated to the United States, first stopping in Providence, Rhode Island in 1987 and on to Atlanta in 1999. Dianne has worked at DECAL for nine years.

Each May, Dianne is reminded of home by the Caribbean Carnival, the cultural celebration held annually in many Caribbean islands and worldwide. It's a highly anticipated event in the Caribbean where locals and visitors come together to dance, savor cultural music, and indulge in delicious foods.

“It is a part of my Caribbean culture in Trinidad where it is celebrated annually on the Monday and Tuesday just before Ash Wednesday,” Dianne explained. “It reminds me of home, my birthplace.

to celebrate or recognize during this day upon state and federal holidays. Most of these options are important and remind us to think about people, things, or events that deserve to be recognized and remembered.

Until next time,



New GACAPS System Is Improving

It's been eight months since DECAL took over the provider management function of the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Program, something previously handled by our contractor, Maximus. We implemented these changes to offer more streamlined and effective services to child care providers who play a crucial role in supporting Georgia's children and families.

A major component of offering improved services is a new system called GACAPS that allows for streamlined attendance tracking, enrollment and completion of annual renewals directly through the system, quality assurance for accurate billing, and more. Last month, Deputy Commissioner Elisabetta Kasfir and Provider Relations Customer Support Manager Latisha Lewis discussed the transition on a special episode of DECAL Download.

“Things got off to a little bit of a rocky start,” Elisabetta explained. “Whenever you change systems, there are always things you try to anticipate...but you can't always anticipate everything. Most recently we've seen a lot of improvement.”

The CAPS Program pays more than \$12.5 million every week to child care providers in Georgia, which is consistent with payments made before and after the November 2023, transition.

Some providers complained to Atlanta media that they were mostly owed payments by the CAPS Program, but Elisabetta says those incidents were rooted in a “misunderstanding on the way our processes work.”

Providers can submit their invoices for child care scholarships starting Fridays at 5:00 PM until Tuesdays at 11:00 AM. If they meet that deadline, they are paid within a week; however, if they miss the deadline they are paid the following week.

“Sometimes people were getting two payments at once and they thought it was an error, but in fact it was based on when they submitted their billing,” Elisabetta said.

Latisha talks with providers every day and agrees that the most common questions are around how the payment cycle works. “If there are any adjustments needed, our Quality Assurance Team has been wonderful in educating them as well as providing resources for providers so they can get paid in a timely manner.”

CAPS is DECAL's largest division, representing 33 percent of our workforce.

It's about food, costumes, Soca/Calyпсо music, and unity.”

Each year, Dianne and her family attend Carnival in Atlanta, held on the Saturday of Memorial Day Weekend, to foster the vibrant cultural and artistic expressions of the Caribbean as agents of social change, engines of economic growth, and catalysts for integration. One of her favorite parts of the festival is hearing Soca (meaning Soul of Calypso) music, a fusion of East Indian and African Riddims created by Ras Shorty I.

“In Trinidad, Carnival celebrations begin right after Christmas with various shows and performances which include Panorama, a steel pan competition,” Dianne said. “There are other areas that have a Carnival every year like Miami, New York, of course, Atlanta.”

Dianne said Machel Montano is known as the King of Soca and is compared to Michael Jackson. Other celebrities of Caribbean descent, specifically Trinidad, include Alfonso Ribeiro, Nia Long, Nicki Minaj, Billy Ocean, Winston Duke, and Heather Headley.

Dianne invites DECAL co-workers to join her next May at the Atlanta Caribbean Carnival. It's the next best thing to a cruise or vacation in this beautiful part of the world, she said.

For more information, visit www.atlantacarnival.org/.

Georgia's Pre-K Program Kicks Off 32nd Year

School bells are ringing for the state's youngest learners as Georgia's Pre-K Program begins its 32nd year. The first day of Georgia's Pre-K Program will vary based on school system and child care provider. It starts as early as July 26 in Chattooga County and as late as the week of September 3 in Murray and Webster counties. Most

If you speak with a provider who has questions about CAPS payments, ask them to call CAPS Provider Relations at 833-442-2277 or e-mail capsprovidersupport@dec.al.ga.gov.

Predictable Routines Help Calm First Day Jitters

If you can't tell from the book bags and school supplies in all the local stores these days, it's back-to-school time in Georgia, with local school systems starting classes practically every other day now through Labor Day.

But what if this is your child's first time going to Georgia's Pre-K Program or Kindergarten? How do you prepare them for changes ahead? It takes more than a book bag, school supplies, or even new clothes to help them feel more comfortable and prepared.

“Children manage transition best when their parents and families make sure they have a daily, predictable routine, with regular times for healthy meals, naps, and night sleep at home,” explained Laura Lucas, DECAL's Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Director. “Having a rested body and knowing what to expect at home helps children cope.”

Lucas suggests that parents connect with other parents who have children in the same school or child care program and who can provide information to make them more comfortable. She also recommends talking with teachers about the best way to separate from your child at the start of each day – brief goodbyes are often the best.

“This is going to be a hot topic for your child this summer so try to stay calm and reassuring, using a calm voice, with a relaxed face and body language to let your child know that you wouldn't leave them if they were not safe and protected,” Lucas said.

This is also the time to make sure your child is caught up on well-visits with their healthcare provider and up to date with recommended vaccines to ensure that they are healthy and well protected.

“Remember that this is a phase — building new relationships is a skill, and with support, children can be resilient,” Lucas said. “Even if it's hard to separate, children will gain a trusted relationship with their new teacher and feel more secure overall.”

Summer Transition Program Has Fun, New Assessment Tool

Georgia's Pre-K Program has a new tool in its toolchest for assessing students' progress in the Summer Transition Program (STP) that is fun for students and welcomed by teachers. The five-week intensive academic program for rising Pre-K and rising Kindergarten students is in its 13th year. It was created to support students who either did not attend Georgia's Pre-K Program or Head Start or who need additional help before taking that next step.

Meghan McNail, Director of Pre-K Instruction and Regional Operations,

Georgia school systems begin classes during the first two weeks of August.

“Research shows that the early education of children from birth to age five is critical to their success in kindergarten and elementary school,” said Amy M. Jacobs, Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, the state agency that administers the program. “We believe laying a solid foundation for academic and social emotional success in our youngest learners is also important for the long-term economic growth of Georgia by helping to build a competent and qualified workforce.”

Last year statewide Pre-K enrollment was around 72,000 students. Thanks to increased funding from the Georgia Lottery, class sizes will be reduced this year from a maximum of 22 to 20 students.

said since the beginning of STP, DECAL had not used a formal assessment tool due to the short six-week term of the program. “During the regular school year, Georgia’s Pre-K uses Work Sampling Online (WSO), a time-consuming assessment tool that we knew could not be implemented during the short summer session,” Meghan explained.

Three years ago DECAL piloted the HATCH Ignite assessment program in 156 Rising Kindergarten classes. Each classroom received two colorful HATCH tablets for their children to use along with training for the lead teacher.

The tablets are getting rave reviews. “Teachers loved the easiness of the program and how quickly they could get data to help inform instruction in their classrooms,” Meghan said.

HATCH Ignite is a digital learning platform which uses an app that delivers engaging, research-based learning experiences through a play-based environment. It may look like fun and games, but just like Pre-K, serious learning is going on. Children play on the tablets, and teachers have immediate access to their data. HATCH Ignite will also group children by their ability level and provide small group activities to address individual needs.

Meghan said in 2022 DECAL expanded the program to all 324 Rising Kindergarten classes providing many classrooms with one additional tablet. “We continue to offer training on HATCH Ignite to all new Rising Kindergarten classes each year and provide updates and resources for our returning teachers,” she said.

LOOK AGAIN
GA • USA



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ALONE IN A VEHICLE

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New CAPS Webinar Series Underway

Teams from the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS), and Quality Innovations and Partnerships (QIP) divisions have been collaborating to produce and deliver a three-part webinar series outlining important changes to CAPS policies affecting providers and families participating in the CAPS program. The changes began to take effect on July 1, 2024 and will continue in late September and the beginning of October. DECAL and CAPS had to implement the changes because pandemic funds are ending, new federal rules have been issued that impact child care subsidy programs, and payment rates to CAPS providers are changing under the new Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) State Plan for Georgia. The webinar sessions are aimed at explaining the changes and their impacts to providers.

Webinar 1, held on July 10, 2024, introduced new eligibility requirements for families, explained changes to emergency policy waivers, and discussed the impact of the ACCESS initiative's expiration.

Webinar 2, held on July 23, 2024, covered the new state maximum reimbursement rates for CAPS providers, procedures for updating CAPS provider tuition rates in GA CAPS, and services offered by the CAPS Provider Relations Team.

Webinar 3, scheduled for August 13, 2024, 12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. This webinar will focus on upcoming changes to CAPS state maximum reimbursement rates, tier reimbursements for Quality Rated (QR) providers, new bonuses for the QR workforce, and new resources and supports that will be available through the Thriving Child Care Business Academy to support CAPS providers who are navigating these changes.

The CAPS Provider Relations Team will also continue to assist and inform providers about developments related to these changes through weekly GACAPS 101 sessions that are available through GaPDS and through updates, FAQs, and training videos posted on the Provider Relations web page :

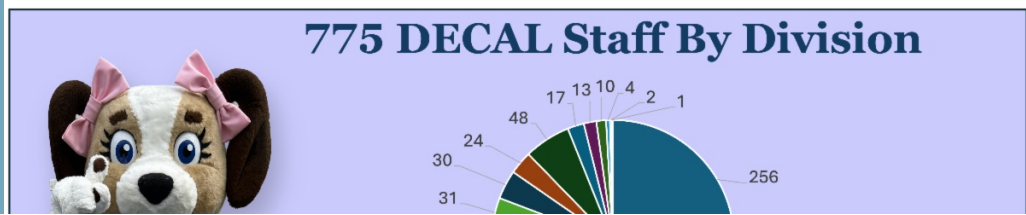
<https://dcl2capsdev.azurewebsites.net/en/ProviderRelations/1SS1> .

CAPS will continue to inform families as well. All archived emails and letters can be found here:

<https://caps.dec.al.gov/en/Updates>

Employee Suggestion Program

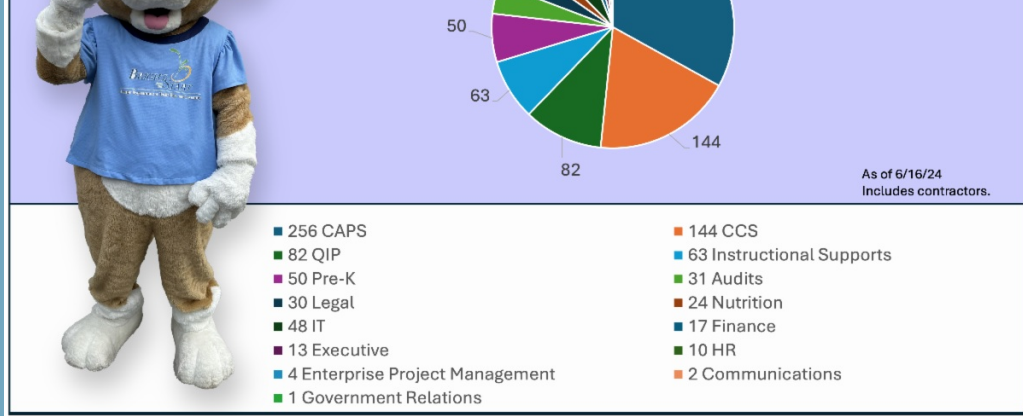
ideas?





Visit the Virtual Suggestion Box now!

Sign up for DECAL text messages by texting DECAL to 474747



Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Lawanda Jenkins, Antigone Honerbaum, Gwendolyn Howard, Krista Sherrod, and Joveta Watson.

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