

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



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DECAL By the Numbers

- 4,471 - Licensed child care programs in Georgia
- 2,065 - Quality Rated programs in Georgia
- 1,865 - Sites offering Georgia's Pre-K Program
- 80,507 - Four year olds attending Georgia's Pre-K Program
- 22,275 - Followers on social media
- 173 - New hires processed by HR in 2019
- 75,839 - Unique children supported through active CAPS Scholarships

Follow DECAL on Social Media

Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs



Dear Co-workers,

It's hard to believe we have entered the 3rd decade of the 21st century. Seems like only yesterday that we nervously waited for the world's technology systems to crash as the millennium changed from 1999 to year 2000 (Y2K, they called it) ... sending the state, the country, and the world into mass chaos.

Fortunately, that didn't happen, and as we begin this new decade, I'm proud to say that our technology systems are more secure, more comprehensive, more efficient, more user friendly for us at DECAL, for providers, and for families than ever before. Former Chief Information Officer (CIO) Craig Detweiler and his staff...many of whom are still at DECAL...worked closely with DECAL leaders and their staffs to develop and implement technology systems to support the department's programs.

That work, and more, is continuing under current CIO Dennis Brice and his team. Following are just a few efforts our IT unit accomplished in 2019 that have impacted ALL of us:

- Made significant enhancements to Comprehensive Background Checks required by changes in federal legislation
- Completed KOALA OUTBACK & DECAL KOALA Phase 5 functionality
- Completed GaPDS Phase 2 that enabled the functionality of the Georgia Trainer Approval System
- Created new portal for CACDS data request and submitting service tickets
- Began moving our customer and other critical applications to Microsoft Azure Cloud
- Hired a new Chief Information Security Officer/CTO to focus on cyber security and system stability, disaster recover/high availability, and migration to cloud
- Selected and implemented ServiceNow as a new IT service management tool to serve DECAL staff in a more efficient, timely, user-friendly manner.

We live and work in a world driven by technology...especially evident when our Internet access fails, or Outlook isn't working. We can't provide services and programs for children, families, and providers; we can't collect data to evaluate our effectiveness or inform decisions; we can't conduct surveys allowing our partners and customers to communicate with us...without sophisticated, secure IT systems and programs.

That's why we should all appreciate and be proud of the incredible IT resources that support us here at DECAL...resources and systems that other departments in Georgia and in other states wish they had.

Happy computing,

Georgia Awarded \$11.2 Million to Support High Quality Early Education

Governor Brian Kemp announced in January that Georgia has received a three-year, \$11.2-million Preschool Development Renewal Grant (PDG) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education. Georgia is one of only 20 states to receive this grant that will allow the state to

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Most Popular Episodes of DECAL Download

Season 1/Episode 1 - Chat with Commissioner Jacobs (222)
Season 1/Episode 38 - Quality Rated Peer Support Network (197)
Season 1/Episode 19 - Georgia News Network interview with Carrie Ashbee (186)
Season 1/Episode 50 - Project LITTLE (183)
Season 2/Episode 5 - Celebrating 15 Years of Bright from the Start (177)
Season 1/Episode 41 - Summer Transition Program (174)
Season 2/Episode 1 - Georgia Pre-K Week (170)
Season 1/Episode 35 - Early Education Community Partnerships (166)
Season 2/Episode 2 - Nutrition Health Educator Diana Myers (165)
Season 1/Episode 43 - We Care Child Care Sweepstakes (164)



Celebrating Inclusive Early Learning Week!

By Veronica Thomas, M.S.

Program Manager, Inclusion and Behavior Support

Governor Kemp has proclaimed the week of February 10-14, 2020 as Inclusive Early Learning Week in Georgia, and we are excited to celebrate the important practice of inclusion with you all!

As champions for young children, we want children of all abilities to have equal access to quality early childhood programs that support their individualized learning and development and a sense of belonging and engagement within those programs. The National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Division for Early Childhood describe early childhood inclusion as embodying "the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society." Ensuring that children with disabilities are included in high quality early learning environments is one of main priorities of the Inclusion and Behavior Support Services unit.

Early childhood professionals and families can access support and resources from the Inclusion and Behavior Support Services Unit by calling the SEEDS for Success Helpline (1-833-354-HELP). One of the supports offered to early childhood professionals is assistance with

expand efforts to help families access high quality early childhood services statewide. This funding builds on an initial \$2.9 million PDG planning grant the state received in January 2019.

"Georgia's success in receiving this grant demonstrates the state's continued leadership in early education," Governor Kemp said. "High quality early education is foundational for children and families, and this grant will enable the state to develop and implement innovative strategies to better prepare Georgia's children for success in school and in life."

DECAL submitted Georgia's winning application and will serve as the lead agency, though implementing the grant will require collaboration among multiple state agencies and local communities.

Grant projects include expanding the effectiveness of Quality Rated, the state's system to assess, improve, and communicate the quality of care provided by child care programs. Specifically, the grant will help establish the Quality Rated Language and Literacy Endorsement that will support the acquisition of critical preschool literacy skills. The grant will also provide resources to support early learning professionals and to build workforce capacity in the early childhood field.

According to DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs, "Receiving this grant validates and supports many of the innovations on which DECAL and our partners have been working. This additional funding will help strengthen Georgia's system of early care and education in ways that will directly and substantively benefit families and children in our state."

Educators Encouraged to Help with Complete Census Count Efforts

DECAL is collaborating with the Georgia Department of Education, other state education agencies, and advocacy organizations to enlist the help of stakeholders in ensuring Georgia communities are prepared to participate in the 2020 Census.

Obtaining a complete count of all Georgians through the Census will impact everything from school meals to special education funding, the partners stated in a joint email to superintendents, principals, and teachers. The email encouraged educators to make sure their students, families, and communities know the who, what, when, where, and why of the Census:

WHO: The Census counts all people of any age or status living in the United States.

WHAT: The Census is a count of everyone living in the U.S. taken every 10 years. It is required by the Constitution.

WHEN: Census day is officially April 1, 2020. Citizens will start receiving information in the mail in mid-March.

WHERE: The Census can be filled out online, on paper, on the phone, or directly to Census workers.

WHY: The Census helps your family get the education, health care and public services they need. Census counts direct funding to programs like school lunch, Head Start, SNAP, WIC, Medicaid/CHIP, and affordable housing. The Census is convenient, safe, and required.

The email listed the following sites for downloadable resources to help stakeholders communicate about the Census:

- www.census.georgia.gov (Governor's Complete Count Committee resources, including [customizable posters](#) and more)
- www.everyonecounts.ga.org (Voices for Georgia's Children and Georgia Family Connection Partnership resources, including [printable handouts](#) and more)

Getting to know the Employee Advisory Group

By Carrie Ashbee

The Employee Advisory Group (EAG) is made up of members from each division with a three-fold purpose: Communication, Encouragement, and Engagement.

The EAG provides interdivisional communications across the agency. As a group, the EAG brings monthly updates from all divisions to the meetings so that members will then take that information and disseminate it within their divisions. The EAG also serves as a conduit of information to and from DECAL Leadership/Executives and DECAL staff (Capitol Hill & remotely based).

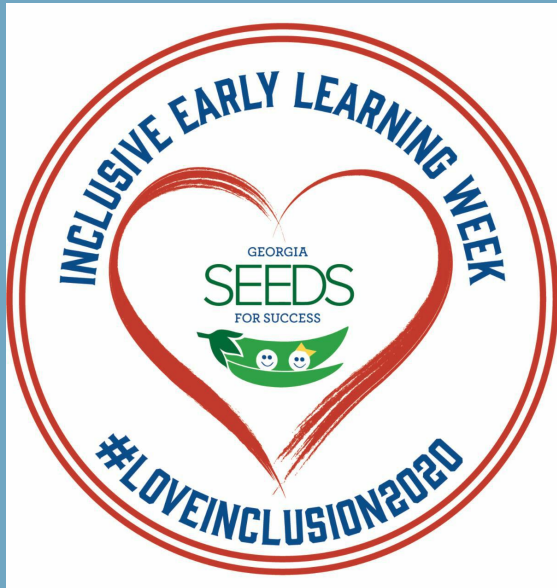
The second purpose of the committee is to encourage fellow DECAL employees and boost morale through various recognition events throughout the year, culminating in the State Employee Recognition Week. It is the job of the EAG to exemplify and encourage the five DECAL Values: Delivering stellar customer service, exhibiting organizational excellence, creating positive relationships, always valuing others, and leading the way.

Lastly, the EAG serves to engage employees in camaraderie through EAG events; your own initiatives within your department; or promoting other DECAL events hosted by the Wellness Committee, Homelessness Committee, etc. Contact your division member below with any ideas or events that you would like the EAG to discuss and/or communicate to the agency.

identifying and implementing modifications to their learning environments, daily activities, and teaching practices so that all children can participate. The unit also works with families to provide referrals to inclusive child care programs and to identify community resource agencies within their area. The goal of the Inclusion and Behavior Support Services unit is to partner with families and early childhood professionals to ensure that the social, emotional, and developmental needs of all children are met.

We are encouraging providers and staff to celebrate Inclusive Early Learning Week in a number of fun ways! A Provider Celebration toolkit will be shared with all programs containing activities that serve as examples for ways providers might engage children, staff, and families throughout the week. Commissioner Jacobs and CALi will be paying special visits to child care programs to read to classrooms, and we invite DECAL staff to select a book that promotes inclusion or individuality to read to a program of your choice!

Please join us in promoting inclusive practices during Inclusive Early Learning Week. Share how you celebrate inclusion by posting on social media with the hashtag #loveinclusion2020 and #GaSEEDSforSuccess!



CCS Rules Support SACERS-U Indicators

Since the last Decidedly DECAL, Beth Houtz of Child Care Services (CCS) and Jill West of Quality Rated (QR) have created a crosswalk of the School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale-Updated (SACERS-U) and CCS licensing rules and regulations for child care learning centers. They used the SACERS-U indicators supporting a score level of "3" which indicate minimal quality, the benchmark on which the scale was developed to meet general licensing regulations.

The resulting document will be a helpful resource identifying the CCS licensing rules and Quality Rated indicators that are shared in the quality continuum. The crosswalk demonstrates that the CCS rules support most of the indicators at the "3" score level, which will help providers as they plan quality improvement changes

Governor Meets with Georgia's Pre-K Program Teachers of the Year

2020 EAG Members

Robin Stevens (Co-host) Human Resources	Michelle Flynn Finance
Reg Griffin (Co-host) Communications	Arun Kandel Information Technology
Shannon Ricardo Audits & Compliance	Doris McQuiller Instructional Support
Thea Younge CAPS	Rosheda Doe Legal
Patricia Bebley CCS	Kate Rapp Alexander Nutrition
Danielle Williams Communications	Cindy Kicklighter Nutrition
Carrie Ashbee DECAL Foundation	Susan Breheny Pre-K
Michelle Flynn Finance	Mary Stoklas QUIP



Farm to Early Care & Education Learning Program Gets Underway

Two years ago, Georgia Organics, Quality Care for Children, Voices for Georgia's Children, and Little Ones Learning Center were awarded a W.K. Kellogg's Grant which funds a Farm to Early Care & Education Learning Collaborative Mini-Grant Program that began Friday, January 24. Fifteen child care learning centers, family day care homes, and Head Start programs gathered for training on gardening with children, procuring local foods, integrating Farm to ECE into CACFP menus, and program sustainability.



Our Georgia's Pre-K Program 2019-2020 Teachers of the Year Heather Williams and Johnathon Hines recently met Governor Brian Kemp in his office at the State Capitol. Also joining was Johnathon's Assistant Teacher Brittanie Griggs, Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs, Deputy Commissioner Susan Adams, Meghan McNail, and Carrie Ashbee.

House and Senate Proclaiming Oct. 5-9, 2020, as "Georgia Pre-K Week"

DECAL will join Voices for Georgia's Children and the Junior League of Atlanta at the State Capitol on Wednesday, February 5, 2020, to receive resolutions from the House and Senate proclaiming October 5-9, 2020, as "Georgia Pre-K Week."

Held each October, Georgia Pre-K Week emphasizes the importance of quality early childhood education by providing opportunities for leaders to engage with Pre-K classrooms in their local communities. In 2019, 134 state and local leaders made over 190 visits to local Pre-K classrooms across the state. Over 780 child care programs participated.

Georgia's Pre-K started as a pilot program in 1992 serving 750 children. DECAL and Voices launched Georgia Pre-K Week to reinforce the importance of quality early learning in legislators' minds every year. State leaders can see first-hand the effects a solid start can have on Georgia's children.

CAPS Team Members Gather for Training

It was a beautiful day in the neighborhood January 29 when our entire CAPS team came together under one roof for training. There were plenty of quotes from Mister Rogers, along with salutes to his wardrobe.



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)



Members of the Audits and Compliance Team recently received their CAPS Compliance Training at Veterans State Park in Cordele.

(Chair)

Kathy Howell, Carrollton
Third Congressional District
(Secretary)

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

Employee Suggestion Program



**Visit the Virtual
Suggestion Box now!**

**Let Us Hear
From You!**

The Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Farouk Baksh, Allison Setterlind, Ben Appling, Dana Morrison, Cynthia Strong-McCarthy, David Ginsburg, and Aletha Cicero-Brown.



Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning