

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



DECAL By the Numbers

- 4,373** - Licensed child care programs in Georgia
- 73,622** - Students enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K Program
- 125,391** - Active Registrants in GaPDS
- 9** - Percentage of all CAPS parents who are student parents enrolled in an education or training program
- 2,861** - Quality Rated child care providers in Georgia
- 61,603** - Applications processed for Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Scholarships during FY2022
- 80,686** - Unique children with active CAPS Scholarships during FY2022

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Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs



Dear Fellow DECALers,

As I write this quarter's letter, the Georgia General Assembly is back in session; Atlanta traffic is back like it was before the pandemic (which will make those of you now based in your homes more grateful!!!); and our work is back to a breakneck speed.

Yesterday, Governor Kemp delivered his State of the State

speech, and I was encouraged by what he said. First, he confidently declared, "The state of our State has never been stronger or more resilient." Coming out of a two-and-a-half-year pandemic as strong as Georgia has emerged was no easy feat.

Second, he announced that he is including in his budget proposal a \$2,000 raise for teachers and state employees. Of course, that budget must be approved by the General Assembly, but it is hopeful news for us all.

Third, he explained that he is clearly aware of the workforce shortage in our state...a shortage that we've experienced somewhat here at DECAL but more clearly in the early care and education industry in Georgia. The Governor is introducing policies and programs to help resolve the shortage of qualified workers, and we at DECAL will continue to do all we can to support child care providers and to offer support and incentives to professionals who want to join the child care workforce.

Fourth, he used the word TOGETHER many times in his comments...as he addressed a General Assembly AND a Georgia public composed of Republicans, Democrats, Libertarians, Independents, and others. The Governor is aware that for state



**New Episodes
Every Wednesday**

government to work, ALL Georgia citizens must listen to and work TOGETHER to get things done that will benefit all.

And this idea of working TOGETHER is the same here at DECAL. We work in different units with different jobs; we are different genders; different ages/generations; different ethnicities; different personalities with varying communication and learning styles. BUT, we work TOGETHER to help meet the needs of Georgia children and families.

I'll end this letter the way Governor Kemp ended his speech yesterday: "They (*the people of Georgia*) have given us our marching orders, and it's time to get back to work! So, for the Georgians of today and tomorrow... let's get it done."

I'm proud to be getting "it done" with you...

Seventh Floor Construction and Renovations Near Completion

Construction began November 17 on the seventh floor of the East Tower for new offices housing DECAL's Human Resources and Legal divisions. Legal, Audits and Compliance, and Finance are moving back to the East Tower from the West Tower. DECAL Procurement and Facilities Supervisor Lisa Rambhajan says the work is being performed by the Georgia Building Authority (GBA).

GBA asked that no employees be in the construction zone from the date demolition began on November 17 through January 20, 2023 due to the amount of noise and dust generated from construction. Many teams vacated their workspaces and worked from home. "Keep in mind we do have hoteling space and conference rooms on floors 6 and 8 that can be utilized when needed," Rambhajan explained. She hopes to have everyone in their new workspace by early March 2023.

Child Child Care Services Launches Compliance At A Glance Dashboard

The new CCS Compliance At A Glance Dashboard went live in January. CCS partnered with the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) to hold focus groups with our DECAL team and Georgia child care providers in developing this tool.



Pam Stevens

"The Compliance At A Glance Dashboard gives families information at their fingertips about licensed Georgia child care programs," explained Deputy Commissioner for Child Care Services Pam Stevens. "The dashboard was created with families in mind and provides an overview of child care programs in a user friendly, easy access format. The foundation of the dashboard is compliance and prominently displays a program's most recent compliance zone determination of Good Standing, Support, or Deficient."

Stevens said the dashboard includes definitions and explanations of the regulatory language to help families understand the rules child care programs are required to follow daily. It's also a tool providers can use to showcase their compliance history to

families. It's important for families to know that the majority of

The seventh floor reception area, Commissioner's office, Deputy Commissioner of Finance and Administration's office, Chief Information Officer's office, and Executive Conference Room continued to operate during construction.

For the eight new offices, walls are up and painted; doors are hung; and outlets are cut and placed, said Rian Ringsrud, Deputy Director of Finance and Administration. HR Cubicles between Dogwood and Chestnut are up and wiring for data and phones is underway. Chestnut Conference room is now the new HR File Room. Cubicles for Legal have been constructed.

Due to the renovations, the Dogwood Conference Room on the seventh floor has been unavailable, but a new conference room is being constructed in the former IT storage room on the eighth floor near Oak.

"I thank everyone for their flexibility and cooperation as we have worked through the renovations," said Ringsrud. "It will be great to have our teams back in one location when this work is completed."

In addition to construction inside our offices, the Georgia Building Authority has also been renovating the elevator lobbies and common areas on the sixth and seventh floors of the East Tower. Most of this work is being conducted after hours as to not interrupt regular office hours for DECAL.

families. It's important for families to know that the majority of child care programs in Georgia maintain a good standing compliance status. Full licensing reports will continue to be posted on the DECAL website.

The dashboard is incorporated into search functions on the decals.ga.gov and qualityrated.org websites. Four icons were developed to depict if a program is in Good Standing, Support, Deficient, or Pending Licensure. Families will be able to click the icon that will lead them to Compliance At a Glance for the specific child care program they are researching. The Compliance At a Glance Dashboard shows a child care program's compliance history for the past three years.

For more information on the Compliance At A Glance Dashboard, contact childcareservices@decals.ga.gov or anyone in CCS Leadership.

Quality Rated Celebrates A Decade of Stars

As part of Quality Rated's "Decade of Stars" 10th Anniversary celebration, DECAL named 129 child care providers to the exclusive Quality Rated Class of 2012 in recognition of their unique status as early adopters that have consistently delivered high-quality, star-rated care and education to Georgia's youngest learners. Special events were held in Dalton, Clarkston, and Valdosta. The agency also recognized state and local officials for their leadership and inspiration in launching Quality Rated.

"Part of the reason we picked Dalton and Valdosta was because these were areas where we had a lot of Quality Rated early adopters with a strong community foundation in early childhood care and education," said Dr. Bentley Ponder, Deputy Commissioner of Quality Innovations and Partnerships. "It was important that we have celebrations not only in metro Atlanta but in those regional areas."

The Dalton Community Star Award went to Dixie Kinnard, a local realtor and advocate for early childhood education; the Clarkston/Metro Atlanta Community Star recipient was former Governor Nathan Deal, and the Valdosta Community Star Award went to former Valdosta Mayor John Gayle.

"Implementing Quality Rated was a top priority in Governor Deal's education agenda," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "At that time, he clearly communicated his vision for a state where children would attend quality early care and education programs that support the whole child and prepare them for ongoing success in life." In the first six months of the program, DECAL met its goal of enrolling 700 child care

programs in the voluntary initiative.

Marquis Gets His Makeover

In our August 2022 issue of Decidedly DECAL, we told you about CAPS Scholarship Administration Manager LaQuilla Hosley, whose 19-year-old son Marquis received a bedroom and bathroom makeover compliments of Sunshine for a Ranney Day (SORD), a Roswell based nonprofit that builds custom rooms for children with special needs. Supported through donations and partnerships, SORD provides no cost wheelchair accessible bathrooms, dream bedrooms, and in-home therapy rooms. The organization was founded in 2012 by Peter and Holly Ranney after they were inspired by a church sermon. LaQuilla, who lives in Villa Rica, has worked at DECAL for five years and the State of Georgia for 11 years. We knew you would enjoy seeing this [video update](#) of the completed work!

DECAL Team Shows its True Colors: Red and Black

Maybe there is something to a #HunkerDownDay and state employees wearing red and black. It certainly worked for the Georgia Bulldogs on January 9 when they defeated Texas

The 126 providers were singled out for beginning the Quality Rated process when the program launched in 2012, earning a 1-, 2-, or 3-star rating by July 2013 and maintaining a star rating continually over the past 10 years.

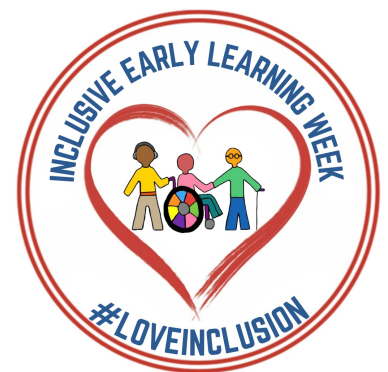
“The members of the Class of 2012 are the brightest of all the Quality Rated stars,” said Commissioner Jacobs. “They have made early and sustained commitments to the goal of creating high-quality, nurturing learning environments for Georgia’s youngest learners that have contributed significantly to Quality Rated’s success during its first decade.”

Former Governor Nathan Deal is pictured below addressing the attendees of the celebration.



Celebrating Inclusive Early Learning Week

Governor Kemp has proclaimed February 12-17, 2023 Inclusive Early Learning Week in Georgia! Inclusive Early Learning Week (IELW) promotes inclusive practices in Georgia’s early learning environments by increasing awareness, celebrating successes, and strengthening supports.



Inclusive practices nurture positive relationships and help all children develop a sense of belonging and reach their full

Christian University to win their second College Football Playoff championship. These DECAL employees showed their spirit on social media.



potential. Children with and without disabilities benefit from being in a high-quality early learning program.

We encourage providers and staff to celebrate Inclusive Early Learning Week in a variety of fun ways! Join us in celebrating by doing one or more of the activities below:

- **Take the Pledge:** Commit to promoting the values and practices of inclusion by signing the Inclusion Pledge, taking a photo with your pledge, and sharing it with us at inclusion@decals.ga.gov. [The Inclusion Pledge](#)
- **Share the Toolkit:** As part of IELW, DECAL releases a Provider Celebration Toolkit full of activities children, staff, and families can do to celebrate the week! Be sure to share the toolkit with any providers you [work](#) with. Or, if you have young children, to do some of the activities as a family! You can find the toolkit [here](#).
- **Read to an Early Learning Program:** Visit a child care provider and read a story that celebrates inclusivity, differences, or friendship. For suggested texts, you can visit our book list [here](#).
- **Share our Resources:** Encourage providers to take the Count Me In! Inclusion Training on OLLI. To access the training, Search 'SEEDS Count Me In' on GaPDS. The training is available in both English and Spanish.

Please post your IELW celebration on social media with the hashtag #loveinclusion and #GaSEEDSforSuccess!

And don't forget, DECAL promotes inclusion all year long. If you know a provider or a family seeking support for a child with disabilities or with creating an inclusive early learning environment, the Inclusion and Behavior Support Unit is always here to help. Families and providers can contact the SEEDS for Success Helpline at 833-354-4357 or inclusion@decals.ga.gov.

Thank you for joining in the celebration!

Second Year for Georgia's Early Childhood Educators of the Year

For the second year, DECAL and the Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning have named Georgia's Early Childhood Educators of the Year. The infant winner is Mary Williams with Kid's Express Learning Center, a three-star Quality Rated program in Hawkinsville; the toddler winner is Elianne Aguilera with Eli's Academy, a three-star Quality Rated program in

Lawrenceville; and the preschool winner is Tierra Faulcon with





Faulcon Prep Academy, a two-star Quality Rated program in Smyrna.

As Educators of the Year, Barber, Aguilera, and Faulcon will receive \$3,000 for their personal use, \$2,000 for a classroom makeover, and up to \$2,500 for their school to cover travel costs and stipends for substitute teachers as the teacher fulfills their duties as Georgia’s Early Childhood Educators of the Year. Winners serve as ambassadors for Georgia’s Early Childhood Educators of the Year program through activities related to modeling effective classroom practices and public speaking appearances. The program recognizes outstanding early education teachers of children ages birth to preschool with an Infant Teacher of the Year (0-18 months), Toddler Teacher of the Year (15-36 months), and Preschool Teacher of the Year (36-48 months).



CONGRATULATIONS!



Mary Williams
Kid's Express Learning Center, Inc.



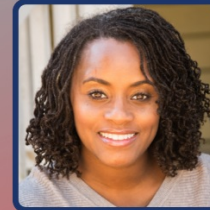
Infant



Elianne Aguilera
Eli's Academy



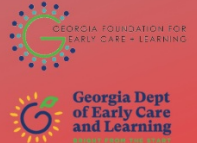
Toddler



Tierra Faulcon
Faulcon Prep Academy



Preschool



Stevens Retiring from DECAL HR in April

If things had gone according to plan, Robin Stevens would have graduated from law school at the University of Georgia in the late seventies. But plans often change, as they did for the Macon Georgia native, when instead she chose the relatively new field of Human Resources. Robin believed her Bachelor’s Degree in English and graduate studies in counseling and personnel would come in handy in the HR world. Turns out, she was right.



Robin Stevens

Inspired by a 1978 conversation with Van Gaines, former HR Director with Georgia’s Department of Industry and Trade, Robin passed the entry exam for state government and began working as an administrative assistant with the State Merit System, soon reaching the role of Compensation Supervisor.

Plans changed again when Robin moved to the private sector

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

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(Chair)

Susan Harper, Albany
Second Congressional District

Kathy Howell, Carrollton
Third Congressional District
(Secretary)

Karla Zisook, Decatur
Fourth Congressional District

VACANT
Fifth Congressional District

Kristy Beam, Atlanta
Sixth Congressional District

Kristin Morrissey, Cumming
Seventh Congressional District

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Joanna Hill, Watkinsville
Tenth Congressional District

Jen Bennecke, Atlanta
Eleventh Congressional District

Kimberly Neville, Brooklet
Twelfth Congressional District

Melissa Boekhaus, M.D.,
Smyrna
Thirteenth Congressional
District

Debra Brock, Calhoun
Fourteenth Congressional
District
(Vice Chair)

Plans changed again when Robin moved to the private sector accepting roles in compensation and HR with Continental Telecom, American International Group (AIG), and Equifax. In 2009, she returned to state government as Division Director of Human Resources with the Georgia Department of Transportation. Three years later, a co-worker at DOT heard about a new HR director role at the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning and lobbied on Robin's behalf. She joined the agency in February 2012 as DECAL's first HR director.

"The opportunity to build the agency's first independent human resources unit (apart from Finance) has been both challenging and highly rewarding," Robin explained. "Of course, there was resistance to change, as one would expect; the initial years were filled with learning what we do, prioritizing needs, establishing structure, and building productive working relationships. Resilience, self-confidence, and persistence were key!"

On April 1, Robin will retire from a 45-year career that has taken her from Macon to Hong Kong (where she worked as a relocation expert) and that's no April Fool. After that, expect to find her spending more time with her husband, adult children, and first grandchild who turns one on March 1. She hopes to read more books, volunteer with non-profits, and maybe improve her golf swing.

During her time at DECAL, staff has grown from 200 to 850, requiring additional help in HR growing from a team of two (Robin and Rhonda Gunn) to today's department of 11. "Securing the trust and support of managers and staff has been very gratifying, as is watching the development and career progression of many DECAL employees throughout my tenure," Robin said. "I am particularly proud to have left my imprint on the State Personnel Board Rule that now includes a broader definition of family members relative to sick leave and its application for bereavement purposes."

"We appreciate Robin's 11 years of service to DECAL and all her efforts building and modernizing our human resources unit," said Rian Ringsrud, Deputy Commissioner of Finance and Administration. "While I am excited for her reaching this retirement phase, it is bittersweet as we will really miss her. It's hard to imagine our HR unit without her."

Robin says DECAL's culture of high performance rests in strong relationships built throughout the agency.

"Now, post pandemic, with the majority of our staff working remotely, it is really important that we make every effort to maintain that culture by being deliberate with efforts to have cross functional/divisional meetings that afford staff the opportunity to connect and continue to build those important relationships that will not only sustain the agency's growth and continued success, but enhance the professional value and

Suggestion Program

developmental opportunities of our workforce,” she said.



Visit the Virtual Suggestion Box now!

On the next ...

DECAL Download

New Episodes Every Wednesday!

This Week's Topic:



Tierra Faulcon
Early Childhood Educator of the Year

Kelly Wilson
Inclusion and Behavior Support Specialist

Leah Brockington
Family Peer Ambassador



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BLACK HISTORY MONTH

CELEBRATE



EDUCATE



INSPIRE



Georgia Dept of Early Care and Learning
BRIGHT FROM THE START

Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Temptest Harris, Richard Bartlett, Marina Ortiz, Kishanna Digbie, and Judy Blasengame.

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Georgia Dept of Early Care and Learning

BRIGHT FROM THE START

