

# Decidedly DECAL

*Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are*



Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning



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## DECAL By the Numbers

**1,093** - Child care programs  
volunteering for Quality Rated

**600** - Teachers participating in  
recent Infant/Toddler training across  
Georgia

**84,000** - Children served through  
CAPS (FY2011-12)

**80%** - Georgia's Pre-K teachers  
conducting student work sampling  
online

**315** - Pounds of food donated by  
DECAL employees for Atlanta  
Community Food Bank

## Commissioner's Corner

*by Commissioner Bobby Cagle*



Happy New Year!

I enjoyed our All Employee Meeting last month and hope that the meeting met your expectations. As you know, I outlined DECAL's top priorities and strategic goals for 2013: Health and Safety, Quality, and Organizational Excellence.

Under Health and Safety, I talked about the need for cross-divisional collaboration. As you know, we have four main program areas: Child Care Services, Georgia's Pre-K, Quality Initiatives, and Nutrition. For DECAL to succeed, these four divisions must communicate and work together. As someone once put it, silos only work on farms --- not in organizations, and certainly not in our agency.

This is why I have announced organizational changes within DECAL, beginning this month. Most of these changes will have no direct impact on your daily job responsibilities; however, I trust you will see dramatic improvement in the effectiveness and collaboration of the agency as a result.

These changes will take several months to fully implement, so this will be a gradual process through approximately September 2013.

First, Ray Higgins will move from Chief Financial



## Spotlight On... Cassa Andrews

When most people think about summer vacations, they think about short trips to the beach or mountains and the welcome opportunity to put work completely out of their minds. Not so for Cassa Andrews, inclusion coordinator for Georgia's Pre-K Program. Over four recent summers, Cassa has taken the nearly 8,000-mile journey to Pakistan where she leads workshops for teachers in early childhood education, special education and autism spectrum disorders.

"I was working as a teacher for autistic preschoolers here in metro Atlanta, and the director for the Presbyterian Education Board came to visit and learn more about schools for individuals with special needs," Cassa explained. "I was so impressed by her and the work she was doing that I asked what I could do to help. She said 'You can come.'" Four months later Cassa was on her way to Pakistan.

Cassa joined the DECAL team in December 2011 after 10 years as a teacher for students with autism in Georgia, North Carolina and Texas. As the Pre-K inclusion coordinator, she works closely with programs that have students with

Officer to Deputy Commissioner of Finance and Administration where he will continue to oversee finance, audit coordination, human resources and legislative outreach. Ray also will oversee Dr. Bentley Ponder and his team as we focus more on research and strategic planning. Going forward, we plan an aggressive data agenda for DECAL, and Ray and Bentley will be crucial to the success of those efforts.

Keith Bostick recently joined DECAL as Deputy Commissioner of Programs where he will eventually oversee Child Care Services, Georgia's Pre-K, Nutrition and Quality Initiatives, including Quality Rated, Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) and the Program for Infant and Toddler Care (PITC). With more than 30 years working in key positions with the Georgia Department of Human Services and the Department of Family and Children Services, Keith is uniquely qualified to oversee these programs and help the assistant commissioners and directors work together across their respective areas and roles. Working with Assistant Commissioner Kay Hellwig, who retires next month, has been a big help to Keith in transitioning into this new role. Hopefully, you have had a chance to meet Keith and see firsthand how he shares our passion for ensuring that Georgia's children have the very best in life.

Chief Information Officer Craig Detweiler, Chief Legal Officer Ira Sudman and Chief Communications Officer Reg Griffin will continue to report directly to me. They all play important roles in meeting our goals of public transparency, continued stakeholder engagement and outstanding customer service.

This new structure will allow me to spend more time visiting in the field with you as well as developing more public-private partnerships, such as the recent partnerships with Dole Foods, Turner Broadcasting and Cox Enterprises.

Since I arrived here in January, 2011, I have emphasized the importance of our agency remaining flexible and nimble to keep us on the cutting edge of early education, constantly improving our existing services. These organizational changes will help us do just that.

Thomas Jefferson once said, "Every generation needs a revolution." You are part of our revolution to protect the health and safety of Georgia's youngest learners, serving

behavioral or developmental concerns. Cassa provides them with tips, resources and strategies to help the students be more successful in the Pre-K setting. "The thing that I enjoy most about working at DECAL is that I have the opportunity to positively impact Georgia's youngest students," she said.

In addition to teaching in Pakistan, Cassa does fundraising throughout the year to assist special needs Pakistani students with scholarships, school supplies and meal fees.

"The schools that I work with play a crucial role not only educating Pakistani children to be future leaders but also providing a way forward for minorities, such as Christians and young girls, to free themselves from poverty and oppression," Cassa said. "The schools also provide a much-needed model for respect and peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims."

Cassa and her husband, Garrett, have been married for 11 years and are proud of their English bulldog, Nellie. When not helping teachers in Georgia and Pakistan, Cassa enjoys reading, watching TV and traveling. She's headed back to Pakistan next summer.



Cassa Andrews in Pakistan

them through quality programs with organizational excellence.

If you should have any questions or comments for me concerning the organizational changes, please call me at 404-651-7432 or e-mail me at [bobby.cagle@dec.al.ga.gov](mailto:bobby.cagle@dec.al.ga.gov). I always enjoy hearing from you.

Again, Happy New Year and thanks for all you do for Georgia's youngest learners.

## DECAL Priority:

# Health & Safety

## Emergency Closures and Employee Background Checks

In July 2011, the Georgia Legislature granted authority to the Commissioner of DECAL to close on an emergency basis early care and education programs. Emergency closures are used by the agency when a child dies in a child care facility and the death was not medically anticipated or when a child's safety or welfare is in imminent danger. The order allows for the immediate and temporary closure of a facility. The statute was first used in July 2011, at an early learning center in Jonesboro, Georgia, where a two-year-old child was left in a vehicle after a field trip and later died.

"Since I arrived here in January 2011, my top priorities for DECAL have been the health and safety of children, ages birth to five years old," explains Commissioner Bobby Cagle. "Parents entrust their children to these programs every day. We estimate that 350,000 children are enrolled in about 6,300 child care programs across the state."

Since being granted the authority, Commissioner Cagle has used the emergency closure statute four times in 2011 and six times in 2012. Incidents have included a family day care home in Waycross, Georgia, where the provider's spouse was arrested and charged with child molestation; a child care learning center in Columbus, Georgia, where children were transported from one location to another without parents' knowledge or permission; and a child care learning center in Marietta, Georgia, where a two-year-old medically fragile child was left in a vehicle for over four hours.

## In Case You Missed It

### Panel Presentation on Website

As you know, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) held its annual Conference and Expo at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta in November 2012. Among the 50 hours of presentations on early childhood education was a 90-minute panel presentation entitled "Georgia's Pre-K Program: Celebrating 20 Years - Looking Back but Moving Forward." Thanks to Craig Detweiler, Connie Fisher and Barbara Sanders, presentations from this panel have been posted on our website for you and our customers to view at your convenience. [Take a look.](#)

### DECAL in the News

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported that lawmakers will consider restoring Pre-K days and mandating FBI fingerprint checks for child care workers. [Read more.](#)

### Nutrition Delivers 'Mud Pies'

DECAL's Nutrition team recently sent 5,000 copies of the popular nutrition education curriculum "More than Mud Pies" to child care programs across Georgia. Nutrition Director Lou Brienza said the recently updated curriculum provides staff and children with a variety of activities about nutrition, foods and gardening. The material was created by the National Food Service Management Institute at the University of Mississippi.



*Lou Brienza*

"There are 54 lessons built around the seasons of the year," Brienza explained. "Children will use these

"These are serious offenses that will not be tolerated. Our providers need to know that we will prosecute every case to the full extent of the law," Cagle said.

In the upcoming legislative session, which begins January 14, DECAL will work to require all employees of a child care program --- not just owners or directors -- to have a satisfactory national background check based on fingerprints.

"By requiring only state and local background checks on employees, as we do today, it is possible for people with criminal backgrounds to be cleared to work in Georgia child care programs," said Cagle. He points to a recent incident in Macon, Georgia, where two staff members of a child care program had criminal records in Florida with multiple felonies including fraud at a child care center and robbery.

"I have found the vast majority of employees in Georgia's child care industry to be people of great integrity and honesty with a genuine love for children," Cagle said. "But we must be vigilant to protect our youngest learners from anyone who would seek to do them harm, either intentionally or through neglect."

### Commissioner Issues Statement on DECAL's Policies for Handling Emergencies

*The following is a statement issued by Commissioner Cagle following the school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut:*

"In response to the elementary school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) is reminding all of the state's child care programs and Georgia's Pre-K classes of DECAL's required policies for handling emergencies. There are approximately 6,300 child care programs in Georgia and all of them are required to conduct fire drills monthly and regular drills for tornados and other emergency situations. Each child care program should have evacuation plans, including keeping children and staff in place and securing the location or off-site evacuations where children and staff would move to a safe designated area. As we saw in Newtown, teachers and providers are the first responders in emergencies like these and should be trained and supported in every way possible. Parents must be informed of the center's emergency policies and procedures. Our child care consultants work with providers and teachers to ensure

age-appropriate activities to learn about growth, nutrition and preparation of foods. They really love this material."

## Quick Links

[DECAL on Facebook](#)

[DECAL on Twitter](#)

[DECAL Website](#)



## January Birthdays



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

- 4 - Tameyer Evans Nealy
- 5 - Kimberly Jenkins Mitchell
- 10 - Phillip H. Jessup
- 11 - Sherrie Moore Mullis
- 12 - Herline Perard-Ford
- 14 - Elisabetta Kasfir
- 18 - Marissa L. Hamm
- 19 - Sharon H. McPherson
- 20 - Nicole N. Cook
- 21 - Margaret B. Pringle
- 26 - Mary J. Jerrell
- 29 - Morgan M. Stahl
- 30 - Rosheda Jamika Doe
- 30 - Rhonda S. Parker
- 31 - Cynthia E. Tharp

## Board of Early Care and Learning

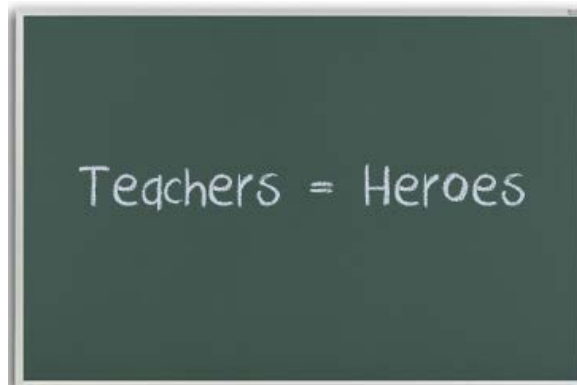
*Supporting and guiding the mission and vision of Bright from the Start:*

### Board of Early Care and Learning

Vacant  
First Congressional District

Susan Harper, Albany  
Second Congressional District

that emergency plans are up-to-date and recommend support materials for helping children and teachers cope with the aftermath of any emergency. At DECAL, our top priority is the health and safety of Georgia's youngest learners. My thoughts and prayers continue to be with the families and children at Sandy Hook Elementary School and local officials there in Newtown."



## DECAL Priority:

## Quality

### Partnership to Improve Early Childhood Nutrition Standards



Officials with Dole Foods, Healthy Kids Georgia, YMCA, DECAL and the Atlanta Falcons announce partnership.

Dole Food Company and Lt. Governor Casey Cagle's Healthy Kids Georgia Program announced in December a partnership with DECAL to promote good nutrition and increased physical activity in early child care and education programs.

"Georgia's childhood obesity epidemic is too large for any one organization or person to address alone. We must work together to collaboratively present our children and families with healthy lifestyle options so we can bring about real change and tackle this daunting challenge,"

(Secretary)

Kathy Howell, Carrollton  
Third Congressional District

Vacant  
Fourth Congressional District

Carlene Talton, Decatur  
Fifth Congressional District

Dawnn Henderson, Marietta  
Sixth Congressional District

Phil Davis, Stone Mountain  
Seventh Congressional District

Luann Purcell, Ed.D.,  
Warner Robins  
Eighth Congressional District  
(Vice Chair)

Vacant  
Ninth Congressional District

Janice Gallimore, Greensboro  
Tenth Congressional District

Victor Morgan, Cartersville  
Eleventh Congressional District (Chair)

Kay A. Ford, Savannah  
Twelfth Congressional District

Maggy Martinez, Hampton,  
Thirteenth Congressional District

said Lt. Governor Casey Cagle. "Innovative public-private partnerships, like the one we are launching today, that bring together state, private, and community resources to confront the troubling trends we face in childhood obesity will have a lasting impact on future generations."

DECAL is partnering with Dole and the Lt. Governor through a new program called Quality Rated, Georgia's newly implemented quality rating and improvement system. Programs voluntarily participating in Quality Rated receive points by demonstrating commitment to five program standards, including child health, nutrition and physical activity. Standard 2 offers early care and education programs the opportunity to reflect on their current health and nutrition standards and identify areas that can be improved. Points are assessed for this standard based on the completion of the Nutrition and Physical Activity Assessment; written improvement plans with documentation of actions taken to complete the plans; and evidence that the program has met each of the requirements listed for the standard.

"This is the third year of our partnership with the Lt. Governor and Healthy Kids Georgia. The DECAL program is the most comprehensive element to date," said Marty Ordman, Vice President, Marketing and Communications, Dole Food Company. "Quality Rated rewards early childhood education programs that are meeting important nutrition standards, and we're honored to help programs hit these goals by exposing young students to more fruits and vegetables on a daily basis."

As many schools are scaling back their implementation of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act, Georgia is providing incentives to schools that are working to serve better food to their students. Research shows that children must be exposed to vegetables 10 to 12 times before they will eat them on their own. Programs that increase this exposure in new settings will help young people develop healthy eating habits that they will carry with them into adulthood.





Quality Rated Assessor Melissa Davis (left) is pictured with Suezenette McDonald of Explorations Christian Academy, a three-star Quality Rated program.



The first Quality Rated programs in Georgia received commendations at the December 14 event with Dole Foods and Healthy Kids Georgia.

## DECAL Priority:

# Organizational Excellence



Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

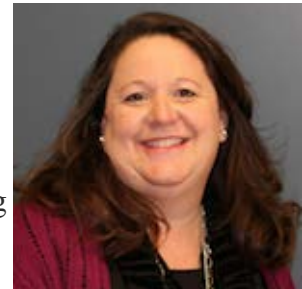
*We are committed to nurturing Georgia's youngest children, keeping them safe and healthy, and to enriching their lives.*

### The Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Mona D. Jackson, Jennifer Bridgeman, Bridget Bunch, Christie Bearden, Sunil Gavini, Jackie Shivers, and Kay Pollard.

## Georgia Joins BUILD

Georgia is the latest state to be accepted into a national initiative building a coordinated system of programs, policies and services for early learning. BUILD: Strong Foundations for Our Youngest Children includes Arizona, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Washington State and now Georgia.



Dr. Laura Johns

"Dr. Laura Johns, who oversees Quality Initiatives work at Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, is the new BUILD lead," said BUILD Executive Director Gerrit Westervelt, Ph.D. "Laura, Commissioner Cagle and their many private and public sector colleagues bring a real passion for systems-building results and a dedication to serving all kids. Even at this very early stage, it's already clear that Georgia is going to add tremendous value to the BUILD Learning Community, and I know you're going to love working with (Laura) and her Georgia team."

"We are big believers in networking and leveraging our resources across many areas, so being officially accepted into BUILD is great news," said Commissioner Bobby Cagle. "Carol Hartman, Dr. Laura Johns and their team are to be commended for pursuing this strategic

partnership that is preparing our youngest learners for a successful future, including school readiness."

For more information on BUILD, visit their website at [www.buildinitiative.org](http://www.buildinitiative.org).

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