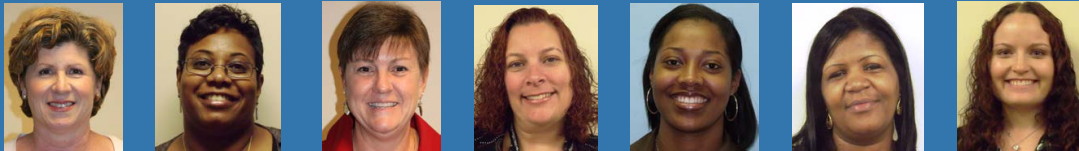


Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



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DECAL By the Numbers

286 - Quality Rated programs

1,214 - Child care programs participating in Quality Rated

28,343 - Children served by Georgia Head Start in 2012-2013

60,000 - Child care workers in Georgia

6,000 - Approximate number of child care programs in Georgia

3.6 million - Meals served in 2013 by Summer Food Service Program

90 - 2013 Summer Food Service Program Providers



Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Bobby Cagle



Happy New Year and welcome back to another exciting year working for Georgia's youngest learners and their families. I hope you had a great holiday season enjoying some well-deserved time away with your family and friends. We return rested and invigorated by the progress we have made, culminating last month with our receiving the \$51.7 million Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge Grant. Congratulations to everyone on this historic accomplishment. You'll read more about the grant later in this newsletter.

Last year, in response to your requests for greater visibility of our senior leadership in the field, I began a series of meetings called *Chats with the Commissioner*. Around 66% of our total employee population of 236 was invited to attend one of our *Chats* in Tifton, Macon, Columbus, Savannah, Augusta, Athens, Rome, and Atlanta. I also met with members our Employee Advisory Group (EAG) at the Twin Towers. All of the meetings were very productive and certainly enlightening for me.

I want to clarify something about the invitations to these meetings. We kept these meetings relatively small to make everyone more comfortable sharing their observations, concerns and questions about our agency. Members of our Senior Leadership Team and Senior Management Team (approximately 45 people) were not included because I meet with them regularly. I intend that everyone outside those groups will have an opportunity to attend a *Chat*. So, if you have not received an invitation at this point and you're not on the SLT or SMT, never fear, you will in the near future.

The agenda for the *Chats* is simple, built around three questions: *What are we doing well? Where can we improve? And what would you do if you were Commissioner for a day?* I am constantly impressed with your honesty and candor, and I appreciate the trust you place in me in sharing so openly.

So what have I learned? I'm currently compiling a more complete report on what I've learned from you, but following are a few things I will share now:

You are concerned about **job vacancies and staffing** across our agency and the impact this has on our overall performance. I share your concerns and am currently working with DECAL's Deputy Commissioners and Human Resources to hire a pool of additional staff who can be deployed to different parts of the state on an "as needed" basis. We see this strategy being especially beneficial in

Quick Links

[DECAL on Facebook](#)

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[DECAL Website](#)



DECAL Participates in "Clark's Christmas Kids"



DECAL was proud to participate in this year's "Clark's Christmas Kids" with WSB Radio in Atlanta and popular consumer advocate Clark Howard. The annual program helped provide toys to more than 5,000 kids in foster care. DECAL's Donna Pettigrew-Jackson, special assistant to Commissioner Bobby Cagle, helped start this program when she was with [Georgia Department of Human Services](#). Here's Donna (left) with Clark and Executive Producer Christa DiBiase.

DECAL Represented at Educators Conference



Laura Evans (left) and Deanna Hibbard represented DECAL at the Georgia School

Child Care Services (CCS) where, despite vacancies, we must inspect each child care program twice each year and conduct investigations as needed. You will learn more about this soon.

You appreciate the **increased focus on enforcements and adverse actions**, demanding higher accountability from our providers. This requires a lot of hard work from a lot of people, but we know it pays huge dividends in ensuring the health and safety of children. We will continue to focus on this area since, until health and safety are ensured, we cannot build successful Pre-K, Quality Rated and Nutrition programs anywhere.

You want to see continued efforts to **improve communications** between CCS, Pre-K, Quality Initiatives and Nutrition. There are signs that this is improving, but you would like to see more, and I completely agree. We're looking across the divisions for innovative ways to achieve this goal using new technology and best practices.

You want to see more **positive recognition of DECAL employees**. As one person put it, "We don't really get any recognition from DECAL and when we get it, it usually comes from outside." That was disappointing for me to hear and certainly not our intention. Through the efforts of our EAG, we're creating a new tab on SharePoint called "Shining Stars." This site will be for managers, supervisors and employees to recognize DECAL team members who have helped them in some way; who have gone "above and beyond" their job responsibilities; or who have demonstrated exemplary customer service to children, families, or providers. You'll receive more information about this soon.

Also during the *Chats*, we discussed concerns around **compensation, scholarships for continuing education** and **staff teambuilding** exercises. As decisions are reached on these issues, I will address them in this newsletter. Someone had a great idea about engaging parents more through an Ambassadors program where moms and dads could help serve as DECAL's "eyes and ears" in the thousands of child care programs we license and regulate.

To those of you who participated in the *Chats* last year, thanks again. To everyone else, I look forward to seeing you at our meetings this year.

DECAL Priority:

Health & Safety

New Fingerprint Law Effective Today

A new state law requiring all employees of Georgia's approximately 6,000 child care facilities to undergo national fingerprint-based background checks takes effect today.



The law requires all new employees hired on or after January 1, 2014, to have satisfactory national background checks based on fingerprints, not just a name search of Georgia records. Existing employees hired before January 1, 2014, will have until 2017 to meet the requirement, unless they move to a new child care facility. In addition, all DECAL employees must now have the national fingerprint background check, along with any temps or contractors whose work takes place in a child care center.

"We expect around 20,000 of the 60,000 child care employees in Georgia to have background checks in the first year," explained DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle. "With a 30% turnover rate in the child care industry each year, we anticipate having everyone checked by 2017."

House Bill 350 was sponsored by State Representative Alan Peake (R-Macon)

Board Association and Georgia School Superintendent Association Annual Conference held December 6, 2013, at the Cobb Galleria. This provided a great opportunity to talk with top educators about our new Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS).

January Birthdays



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

- 3 - Martinita Smiley-Smith
- 5 - Kimberly Jenkins Mitchell
- 10 - Phillip H. Jessup
- 11 - Sherrie Moore Mullis
- 12 - Herline Perard-Ford
- 14 - Elisabetta Kasfir
- 19 - Sharon H. McPherson
- 20 - Nicole N. Cook
- 21 - Susan E. Breheny
- 21 - Margaret B. Pringle
- 22 - Diane M. Naranjo
- 23 - Jewel O. Pyle
- 26 - Leigh Ann B. Hendrix
- 26 - Mary J. Jerrell
- 29 - Morgan M. Stahl
- 30 - Rosheda J. Doe
- 30 - Rhonda S. Parker

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

and carried in the Georgia Senate by Senator Butch Miller (R-Gainesville). The bill was supported in testimony by the Georgia Child Care Association (GCCA), VOICES for Georgia's Children, Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS), and the Interfaith Children's Movement. It was also supported by Quality Care for Children.

"Having full and reliable information about the criminal histories of employees in child care facilities across the state is imperative to ensure safety for Georgia's youngest learners," said Keith Bostick, DECAL Deputy Commissioner for Programs.

Sponsors Needed for 2014 Summer Food Service Program

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is looking for eligible sponsors to serve nutritious meals to children throughout Georgia next summer. The SFSP, administered by DECAL, is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

"Providing nutritious summer meals to children who would normally receive free breakfast or lunch during the school year is part of DECAL's commitment to keeping Georgia's children healthy," said DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle. "The Summer Food Service Program has a significant impact across our state thanks to the nearly 100 sponsoring organizations that step up each year to provide this important service in their communities."



Falita Flowers

Falita Flowers, DECAL's Interim Director of Nutrition Services, said the SFSP provides reimbursement to non-profit and government organizations that provide free meals to eligible children especially in low-income areas during the summer months when students are out of school where they would normally receive breakfast and/or lunch.

"Approximately 3.6 million meals were served through the SFSP during the summer of 2013," said Flowers. "Bright from the Start is always looking for additional sponsors to serve even more meals to children who receive free and reduced price lunches during the school year. Sponsors are especially needed in rural areas of the state."

Flowers said the following entities can qualify as sponsors: public or private nonprofit schools; universities, colleges, or camps; units of local government; private nonprofit organizations, including faith-based organizations considered tax exempt by the IRS.

"Sponsors can operate the program and feed children at sites such as schools, churches, recreation centers, community and migrant centers, and other local community areas where children congregate and play," said Flowers. "They can also get creative and serve meals through mobile sites."

Sponsors are reimbursed according to federal guidelines for the meals they serve. They can prepare and serve meals themselves, receive bulk items from a vendor or contract with a food service management company to prepare meals for the program. For more information on becoming an SFSP sponsor, [click here](#) or contact the Summer Food Service Program team toll free at 1-855-550-SFSP (7377) or via e-mail, SFSP@decalfga.gov. In accordance with federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability.

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

Tammy Lenkeit, Flowery Branch
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

Vacant
Fourteenth Congressional District

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

your brain is only young once

If your child is 5 or under, now is the time
to help them live a happier, healthier life.

Introducing Georgia's
community-powered early
education rating system.

Make the right choice
for your child.
Choose Quality Rated.



qualityrated.org
877-ALL-GAKIDS

The Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue
are (L-R) Faith Duncan, Sabrina Henry, Peggy
Kosater, Amy Hill, Jessica Grant, Martinita
Smiley-Smith, and Bridget Bunch.

DECAL Priority:

Quality

Deal: Georgia Wins Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge

Gov. Nathan Deal has announced that Georgia was selected as a winner in the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge. The state is projected to receive more than \$50 million to implement its plan over four years.



"Increasing the percentage of Georgia students reading on grade level by the completion of third grade has been a top priority of my administration," said Deal. "With this strategic investment in our state's work, we will be able to ensure that more of our youngest students are positioned to meet this critical benchmark and thus improve our long-term economic competitiveness."

The Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grant competition provides funding for states to create a four-year early learning agenda that builds on and strengthens their current early learning and development systems. Georgia's application focused on strengthening the state's 20-year commitment to high-quality early learning. The projects proposed in the grant address all elements of the state's system, with a focus on meeting Deal's goal of all children in Georgia reading on grade level by third grade, thereby moving the needle in preparing Georgia's youngest learners for school, for the workforce, and for life.

"Georgia's plan for high-quality early education was created by hundreds of stakeholders across Georgia over the past three years," said Bobby Cagle, commissioner of Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). "We look forward to making the work of these stakeholders a reality and maximizing the return on this substantial investment in our state's youngest learners."

DECAL submitted the application, which encompassed four broad strategies:

- 1) Increasing Effectiveness: focus on increasing the quality of early education across the state and ensuring that parents have access to higher quality programs.
- 2) Workforce Development: create and expand educational opportunities and incentives for Georgia's early care and education workforce.
- 3) Alignment: align many of Georgia's early education initiatives and create geographical service areas to better serve all Georgians across the state.
- 4) Accountability: ensure the state can prove the effectiveness of investments in early childhood education through improved student outcomes.

Congressman Visits a Georgia's Pre-K Classroom

U.S. Congressman Phil Gingrey (R-11th District) recently visited a Georgia's Pre-K Class at Allatoona Elementary School in Bartow County. Shown in bottom photo (L-R) are Bartow County School Superintendent Dr. John Harper, DECAL Deputy Commissioner of Programs Keith Bostick, Congressman Gingrey, Principal Jim Bishop and Pat Willis with Voices for Georgia's Children.



DECAL Priority:

Organizational Excellence

DECAL Employees Support Non-Profits through SCCP

DECAL employees have pledged nearly \$8,000 to the 2013-2014 State Charitable Contributions Program (SCCP), up almost \$1,500 from last year's campaign.

Human Resources Assistant Sabrina Henry coordinated this year's effort along with a committee of employees representing each of DECAL's divisions. Popular fundraising events this year included Penny Wars collecting \$840, Bizarre Bazaar raising over \$400, and Jeans Passes raising over \$380. Fundraising activities raised close to \$2,000 for the SCCP.

"This was an outstanding year for the SCCP program at DECAL," said Robin Stevens, Director of Human Resources. "Of the 58 state agencies participating, most of whom are much larger than us, DECAL exceeded the giving of 40 agencies. We saw nearly a 26% increase over last year, and everyone is to be commended."

This year's campaign motto was "Give TODAY. Change TOMORROW," suggesting that donations made today will continue to make a difference tomorrow through the delivery of local, national and international services.

"Whether through a donation of time, goods, or money with our fundraising activities, your support during the campaign is appreciated," said Henry. "From all of us on the SCCP Committee and the over 1,000 charities of the SCCP,

thank you very much for your participation and patronage."
