

# Decidedly DECAL

*Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are*



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## DECAL By the Numbers

**4,815** - Licensed child care programs in Georgia

**2,946** - Child care programs participating in Quality Rated

**1,350** - Child care programs that are Quality Rated

**2,320** - Children participating in Rising Kindergarten Summer Transition Program

**770** - Children participating in Rising Pre-K Summer Transition

## Commissioner's Corner

*by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs*



Dear DECALers,

By the time most of you read this issue of Decidedly DECAL, we will have enjoyed a day off as we celebrated America's 241st birthday. The 4th of July means different things to each of us. But no matter how different we are (in gender, age, education, ethnicity, race, politics, religion, or interests) or how differently we celebrated - or didn't celebrate - July 4th (swimming, eating, parades, picnics, watermelon, the Peachtree Road Race, baseball, fireworks, etc.), I believe we in our country are bound by our "American-ness," not defined by our differences.

That's the way I see DECAL also. We're hundreds of individuals...different in so many ways...working for different programs in different divisions...but bound by a common desire to enhance the well-being of children and families in some way, directly or indirectly (while also earning a paycheck!)

This month, specifically July 1st, we also celebrate DECAL's birthday. Thirteen years ago the law that created the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning went into effect on July 1, and since that day, preschool education and the early care and education industry in Georgia have been positively impacted by the work we do.

It's amazing to think of how the department has evolved in 13 years...Georgia's Pre-K Program; child care licensing; the CACFP and SFSP; Head Start State Collaboration; Quality Rated; Inclusion; Infant and Toddler; CAPS; Legal; Audits and the requisite support units that make it possible to administer these programs.

Program

**77,572** - Early childhood educators registered in Georgia Professional Development System

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## Decidedly DECAL CALi Quiz Winner



Tamara Hall

CAPS Special Projects and Initiatives Director Tamara Hall is the winner of this month's Decidedly DECAL CALi Quiz. She won two tickets to the Atlanta Botanical Garden. Tamara's name was drawn from all employees who took the quiz and scored 100. To win, read this issue of Decidedly DECAL and look out for the next quiz for your chance to score some fun prizes donated by local businesses!

## Helpful New Tool on POLAR

Do you understand what your colleague in another division does? Have you encountered questions from a provider, client, or colleague that needed a prompt response and you weren't sure where to go for the answer?

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to the rescue!

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) is the latest DECAL aid for your employee development toolbox. Accessible via a tab at the top of DECAL's POLAR website <https://polar.decgal.ga.gov/>, with a couple clicks of a mouse, you can easily find the answers to many of those common questions regarding the program and support units in DECAL. In addition to the FAQs, you will also find the mission/purpose and list of contact numbers for each unit. How helpful is that!

The concept for the FAQs arose during discussions of the Strategic Planning Committee during their work on DECAL's FY 2020 Strategic Plan. The strategy was to identify new ways to expand our employees' knowledge of the agency beyond the scope of their jobs



Today, I clearly see how we as individuals compose one department bound by a common mission and commitment...by our "DECAL-ness," not defined by or focusing on our differences. I look forward to moving with you into America's 242nd and DECAL's 14th years continuing to provide exemplary services to Georgia's children, families, and early care and education providers.

Grateful to be your co-worker and commissioner,

## Governor and Mrs. Deal Join State Agencies in Warning About Dangers of Leaving Children Unattended in Vehicles

For the fourth consecutive year, Governor Nathan Deal, First Lady Sandra Deal, and leaders of several state agencies are calling for families and caregivers of children to have a heightened awareness of the dangers of leaving children unattended in vehicles. Officials hope a news conference held recently at the State Capitol and a new public service announcement will help prevent heatstroke deaths of children this summer.



Gov. Nathan Deal and First Lady Sandra Deal

"Since 2010, 13 children in Georgia have died due to vehicular heatstroke," said Governor Deal. "I ask all Georgians to join me in preventing future loss of life by being aware of your surroundings and never leaving a child in a car, even for just a minute. Lives can be saved if we all just take the time to Look Again."

"We as parents and grandparents work hard to keep our children safe and out of harm's way," added Mrs. Deal. "By increasing awareness and reminding your family and friends to Look Again, together we can prevent future tragedies here in Georgia."

DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs said over 337,000 children in Georgia are cared for daily by approximately 5,000 child care providers, most of whom regularly transport children.

"When we receive reports of children left in vehicles, we investigate each incident," Jacobs explained. "During FY2015 and again in FY2016, eight children were left in vehicles by child care providers statewide; so far in FY2017, four children have been left. Thankfully all of these children survived, but one child left unattended in a vehicle is one child too many."

Jacobs said "Look Again" is a message not only for child care programs and teachers but to anyone caring for a child -- parents, grandparents, other family members, neighbors and friends -- to always account for the children in their care as they drive them from place to place. "When you arrive at your destination, check the front and back of your car, and after you've looked, just to be sure, Look Again. There is absolutely no reason for a child to suffer or die in these conditions," she stressed.

State officials hope the public will help share a new "Look Again" public service announcement with

and to improve customer service to those whom we serve. Coincidentally, a suggestion submitted through the Employee Suggestion Box mirrored the same idea as did your feedback during the All Staff meetings.

Members of the Employee Advisory Group were tasked with this project and diligently reached out to DECAL program and support areas. Following hours of research, writing, edits, and proofs, and with the assistance of our IT production team, you can now find DECAL FAQs residing on POLAR (top of the page, just under the polar bear). Note that many FAQs concerning our program units can also be found on DECAL's public website (<http://decal.ga.gov/>).

The FAQs are another example of our intentional effort to strengthen internal communication and enhance employee knowledge throughout the department. Many recent efforts: the Quarterly Orientation program, DECAL University, DECAL TV, and our social media sites make the latest news and organizational information on DECAL more accessible to all.

## CAPS Launches Pilot This Month

Georgia's new Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Program is preparing to launch its pilot project for families in Bibb, Brooks, Catoosa, Clarke, Colquitt, Cook, Douglas, Echols, Gilmer, Gordon, Lowndes, Murray, and Whitfield counties by mid-July. This is the first of three phases in moving the eligibility function of CAPS from the Division of Family and Children Services to DECAL by early 2018.



*Elisabetta Kasfir*

"We are looking forward to the opportunity to try out our new processes in the pilot, so we can iron out any wrinkles and work toward how to best support families," said Elisabetta Kasfir, Assistant Commissioner for Federal Programs.

Construction of new CAPS offices is well underway on the second and fifth floors of the State Agriculture Building across from the Capitol. Completion of the buildout with telecommunications and equipment is currently scheduled for this fall.

CAPS has hired staff for each of its units, growing from a team of ten to a team of more than forty. New positions are spread throughout each of the three CAPS functional areas: Program Administration, Scholarship Administration, and Family Support. The Scholarship Unit will be centrally located in Atlanta, while Family Support staff will be regionally based throughout the state.

In May, new CAPS management hosted a day of training for the new team at the DECAL Twin Towers offices.

family and friends using social media. The video is posted on [YouTube](#) and on DECAL's website ([www.decals.ga.gov](http://www.decals.ga.gov)), as well as Facebook and Twitter pages.

Officials also ask the public to be their eyes and ears in the community, and if they see a child left alone in a vehicle, call 911 immediately; emergency personnel are trained to respond.

Agencies participating in the campaign include DECAL; Georgia Department of Public Health; Georgia Department of Human Services; Georgia Department of Public Safety; Georgia State Patrol; Governor's Office of Highway Safety; Georgia Department of Transportation; and the Georgia Children's Cabinet. Supporting partners included Safe Kids Georgia, Emory Center for Injury Control, Get Georgia Reading Campaign, Georgia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Georgia Child Care Association (GCCA), Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS), Georgia Family Connection Partnership, and Voices for Georgia's Children.



*DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs, Governor Nathan Deal, and First Lady Sandra Deal are joined by other state leaders and child advocates at a press conference to kick off the "Look Again" campaign.*

## Georgia Center for Early Language and Literacy Holds Ribbon-Cutting

Representatives from DECAL were among those joining Gov. Nathan Deal and First Lady Sandra Deal at a ribbon-cutting ceremony on June 22 for the Georgia Center for Early Language and Literacy at Georgia College. A total of \$5.1 million in funding was allocated to establish the Milledgeville facility. The Center's mission to improve Georgia's literacy rate is founded in research-based practices for children from birth to age eight, providing support to educators in K-3 classrooms, child care centers and preschools through professional learning and training.

"Today marks a pivotal milestone for both Georgia's educators and youngest learners," said Deal.



## New Faces and Places

Congratulations to the following employees who joined the DECAL team in June:

**CAPS** welcomes Family Support Consultants Tina Crooms and Tawanda Dortch, Scholarship Administration Specialists Tahesha Cook and Rhae-Nicole Holloway, and Federal Programs Intern Jasmine Barnes.

**CCS** welcomes Administrative Assistant Cheri Smithson.

**Instructional Supports** welcomes Child Development Specialist Bridget Ratajczak and Professional Learning Intern Phelina Robinson.

**Research** welcomes Research and Policy Intern Ian Parker.

**System Reform** welcomes Quality Rated Assessors Mary Berry, Jennifer Bowen, Kimberly Brickey, and LaSonia Evans, and System Reform Intern Alena Antonowich.

## Privacy Matters

"Sandra and I strongly believe that early language development and literacy are vital skills for putting our young children on the path to success, and the Georgia Center for Early Language and Literacy will work tirelessly to ensure our educators are equipped with the right tools and instruction to get them there. I commend the members of the General Assembly for working with me to bring the Center to life, and I look forward to working with its governing board as it works to foster a positive impact on children, families, educators and communities across our state," Deal added.

The ceremony followed the Center's first annual Governor's Summit on Early Language and Literacy, attended by representatives from DECAL, statewide partners, the University System of Georgia, the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), the Georgia Library Association, the Regional Educational Service agencies and other county educational teams.

In March, Deal announced the creation of the Georgia Center for Early Language and Literacy board, a nine-member governing board composed of representatives from DECAL, TCSG, the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, the Georgia Public Library Service, Georgia College, the Georgia Board of Education, and providers of primary health care and other education advocacy organizations.

For more information about the Georgia Center for Early Language and Literacy at Georgia College, visit [www.galiteracycenter.org](http://www.galiteracycenter.org).



*DECAL's Jill O'Meara and Suzanne Harbin*

## DECAL Celebrates Activity Challenge

The DECAL Activity Challenge Celebration took place last month. Top walker, with an average of 24,548 steps per day, was Database Administrator Trilok Takhi, who won a \$50 Visa gift card. Second place was Legal Administrative Assistant Emmanuel Asumadu, who won a \$30 Visa gift card, and third place was Pre-K Consultant Margaret Tarrant, who won a \$20 Visa gift card. First place (again) was the combined team of Finance, HR, and Research, with an average of 7,267 steps

## by Brian McKeen, Privacy Attorney



Brian McKeen

Keys to the vault...

Here at DECAL, IT has implemented significant data security measures to protect our information. We have encryption, firewalls, antivirus software and the list goes on. All of these technological security solutions work together to create a virtual vault around our information resources. With all of this security in place, you might think we have nothing to worry about. However,

much like placing your valuables in a vault in your home, the information secured here at DECAL is only truly secure if we close the door to the vault and keep the keys safe. You hold the keys.

The passwords that you use to access the DECAL network and our other databases are the keys. It can be a burden to create a 10-digit alpha-numeric password with upper case, lower case and special characters built into it. Then, just about the time you have it memorized, it is time to change it again. Well, it is supposed to be hard. If it is difficult to create, it is difficult to hack. However, we must make sure we do not undermine the integrity of the passwords we create. While conducting walk through privacy audits at some companies, I have seen passwords written on Post-It notes and stuck to computer screens, placed under keyboards or in the center desk drawer. In the worst cases, I have seen people actually write their passwords on the outside of their laptop with a Sharpie marker and even engrave it into the laptop's lid. All of these scenarios would be like placing your most valuable possessions in a vault, locking the door and then hanging the keys on the vault door.

Here are a few tips on how to make this process easier without compromising the integrity of the password:

**Don't:** Include your name/nickname or the names of your family members in your password.

**Do:** Use a term or phrase that means something to you but is not meaningful to others (e.g., favorite place, friend, motto).

**Don't:** Use common numbers such as portions of your SSN, birthdate or phone number.

**Do:** Incorporate numbers strategically within the password. Replace letters or words with numbers and characters (e.g., E=3, 7=T, for=4, ate=8, to/too=2, won=1). Be creative.

**Don't:** Write your password down and certainly don't place it on or near your computer

**Do:** Create a password that is easy for you to memorize and difficult for others to guess.

Itisup2you!; !tisupt00U; i7isuptoYou!; It is up to you to make sure that DECAL's information stays secure.

per day. Second place team was Legal, and third was Information Technology. Team Spirit Award went to System Reform for their overall enthusiasm. The Liberty Plaza Relay Race winner was the Blue Team, which consisted of Dorothy Mitchell-CCS, Lashawnda Evans-HR, Charnele Dobbins-Nutrition, Tanya Rowe- Pre-K /ISS, and Part-time Coach Jeffery Arnold. On behalf of the Wellness Committee, thank you for participating!



DECAL Activity Challenge Winners

## Person on the Street Interviews

*What clique were you part of in high school?*



Esther Dykes, Inclusion Specialist:

The Nerds! I love to learn, and I have always been that annoying person that always asks questions!



Glenda Davis-Canteen, Quality Rated Portfolio Coordinator:

Hmmm...although I didn't consider myself being in a "clique" in high school, by default, I was a member of the varsity cheerleaders, student council, and choir/glee club.

## July Birthdays



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

- 1 - Jackqueline Frederick
- 2 - Morlinda Dawson
- 4 - Jan Duke
- 5 - Glen Clardy
- 6 - Maranda Powell-Burr
- 7 - Zara Handsford
- 8 - Haley Carwile
- 8 - Laura Wagner
- 8 - Tina Williamson
- 9 - Nakilia McCray
- 9 - Darlene Sims
- 9 - Robin Stevens
- 9 - James White
- 11 - Candace Gilbert
- 11 - Rosalind Morris
- 11 - Wakisha Newton
- 13 - Brandy Locchetta
- 13 - Nicki Underwood
- 14 - Connie Boatwright
- 14 - Beverly Browning
- 14 - Sonya Price
- 14 - Marsha Ruiz-Crosby
- 15 - Tashai Gilman
- 15 - Suze Neal
- 16 - Kim Pratt
- 17 - Greg Brown
- 17 - Stephine Newberry
- 18 - Tina Crooms
- 19 - Jennie Couture
- 19 - Tawanda Dortch
- 19 - Maria Mondragon
- 20 - Jackie Shivers
- 23 - Carol Hartman
- 23 - Bridgette Merrett
- 25 - Pam Stevens
- 28 - Christie Bearden
- 28 - Shannon Curtis
- 28 - Glenda Davis-Canteen
- 28 - Arielle Deadwyler
- 28 - Rhonda Gunn
- 28 - Nathan Thompson
- 29 - Paula Gordon-Near
- 29 - Gail McNeely
- 30 - Sonija Bacon



### Instructional Supports:

I am not sure which clique I was in high school... I was on the yearbook staff so I am pretty sure that didn't put me in the "cool" crowd.



30 - Demetria Joyce  
 31 - Judy Carter  
 31 - Patty Malone  
 31 - Bentley Ponder  
 31 - Jacquelyn Sims

## Watch on POLAR



Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

## DECAL Wins Commissioner's Award for SCCP 2016-2017

DECAL was recently awarded the Commissioner's Award for the State Charitable Contributions Program (SCCP) 2016-2017. Shown accepting the award is Ray Higgins, Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration. The Commissioner's Award is given to the runner up for the highest contribution per employee population (which is the Governor's Cup). DECAL's total for the 2016-2017 SCCP campaign was \$11,791.42. DECAL's SCCP Committee includes Taijha Harden, Jessie Bruno, Keia Cole, Quandra Collins, Lashawnda Evans, Carolyn Morkeh, Nikiesha Neil, Emily Smith, and Kenya Taylor. The 2017-2018 SCCP Campaign will run from September 5 - November 17, 2017. The chair of the 2017-2018 campaign is our very own Commissioner Amy Jacobs.

## Congratulations to the newest QUALITY RATED<sup>™</sup> child care programs!

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| Children First, Waycross ★                               | ★★ Harmony Academy, Norcross                                |
| Sunbrook Academy at Mirror Lake, Villa Rica ★★           | ★★ Country Kids Daycare, Jesup                              |
| Little Castle Child Care, Martinez ★                     | ★ Small World Day Care, Calhoun                             |
| Wesley Academy of Early Learning, St. Simons ★★          | ★★★★ Union General Child Care, Blairsville                  |
| Wee Care (Weekday Early Ed), LaFayette ★                 | ★★★★ Vanessa A. Holloway, Atlanta                           |
| Little House of Love Learning Too, Stockbridge ★         | ★★ All Star Kids Academy, Decatur                           |
| Susie's Daycare, Hoboken ★★                              | ★★ Preferred School Care at Bolton Academy, Atlanta         |
| Banks County Pre-K/Head Start, Homer ★★                  | ★★ Paramore Preschool Academy, Cairo                        |
| Ethel D. Scott, Savannah ★★                              | ★ Peaceful Learning Center, Eatonton                        |
| Glory N. Okezie, Powder Springs ★★                       | ★★ APEC After School Enrichment at Sandtown, Atlanta        |
| Kids University at Mirror Lake, Villa Rica ★             | ★ Lollipop Kids Inc., Blackshear                            |
| Northside Prep Learning Center, Macon ★                  | ★★★★ White County Head Start, Cleveland                     |
| Inspiration Station Academy, Atlanta ★★                  | ★★ The Creative Learning Center, Clayton                    |
| The Success Learning Academy (Point South), Jonesboro ★★ | ★★★★ Pickens County PreK, Tate                              |
| Children's Learning Center, Buford ★★                    | ★★★★ Karen M. Jones, Pooler                                 |
| Prime Time - Sweet Apple, Roswell ★★                     | ★★★★ Cathy G. Battle, Macon                                 |
| Little People's Learning Place, Lavonia ★★               | ★★ Crisp County Head Start, Cordele                         |
| Fort Valley Head Start, Fort Valley ★★                   | ★★ Kid's Advocacy Coalition Inc.- Annie Belle Clark, Tifton |
| Kids' Stop Learning Center, Cartersville ★               | ★★ Prime Time - Manning Oaks, Alpharetta                    |
| Montessori School of Cumming, Cumming ★                  | ★★ Kid's Advocacy Coalition At G. O. Bailey, Tifton         |
| Glynn County Early Head Start, Brunswick ★★              |   |
| Melissa's Little Friend's Daycare, Hortense ★            |   |



## 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, Midway  
First Congressional District  
(Secretary)

Susan Harper, Albany  
Second Congressional District  
(Chair)

Kathy Howell, Carrollton  
Third Congressional District

Phil Davis, Stone Mountain  
Fourth Congressional District

Carlene Talton, Decatur  
Fifth Congressional District

Dawn Henderson, Marietta  
Sixth Congressional District



*Congratulations to all of our  
QUALITY RATED™ child care programs  
who've increased their star rating  
in June!*

★★★ Lanoria Buttrum, Stone Mountain (2 to 3 stars)

★★★ Samuel Nabrit Child Care Center, Atlanta (2 to 3 stars)

★★★ The Greenbrier Preschool, Evans (2 to 3 stars)

★★★ Childcare Network #36, Columbus (2 to 3 stars)

★★ Small Steps Childcare Academy, Savannah (1 to 2 stars)

★★★ Little Ones Day Care Center, Forest Park (2 to 3 stars)

★★★ Stacey E. Cochran, Winder (2 to 3 stars)

★★ Phyllis A. Wallace, Ellenwood (1 to 2 stars)

★★ Floyd Head Start, Rome (1 to 2 stars)

★★★ Easter Seals Child Development Center in Madison County,  
Danielsville (2 to 3 stars)

★★ Albany Technical Institute CDC, Albany (1 to 2 stars)

*Visit [qualityrated.org](http://qualityrated.org) to find  
Quality Rated child care programs in your area!*

**Let Us Hear  
From You!**

Vacant  
Seventh Congressional District

Luann Purcell, Ed.D., Warner Robins  
Eighth Congressional District

Sheri Hooper, Gainesville  
Ninth Congressional District

Janice Gallimore, Greensboro  
Tenth Congressional District

Victor Morgan, Cartersville  
Eleventh Congressional District

Jerri Kropp, Statesboro  
Twelfth Congressional District  
(Vice Chair)

Melissa Boekhaus, MD., Mableton  
Thirteenth Congressional District

Tangela Johnson, Cohutta  
Fourteenth Congressional District

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### **The Faces of DECAL**

*DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R)  
Christopher Linn, Latashi Laster, Gwen Kahn, Tina Crooms,  
Vanessa Brown, Kinsey Harper, and Chrische' Walker.*

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## **Employee Suggestion Program**



**Visit the Virtual  
Suggestion Box now!**