

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



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DECAL By the Numbers

\$36.4 million - Additional lottery funds for Georgia's Pre-K Program in SFY2017

\$665 million - Federal, state, and lottery funds annually passing through DECAL to vendors and sub-recipients

\$3.6 million - Improper payments identified by Audits and Compliance Division during FY2015

117 - Summer Food Service Sponsors for 2016

9 - Targeted counties for 2016 Summer Food Service Program

11 - Heatstroke-related child deaths in Georgia since 2010

1,040 - Quality Rated child care programs in Georgia

6 - Child Care Resource and Referral Regions

51 - Applications for Georgia's Pre-K Program Teachers of the Year

Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs

Dear DECAL Co-workers,

It's amazing to me that June is here already and that almost half of 2016 is history. We've just celebrated Memorial Day, the unofficial beginning of summer, which means that children are out of school, and traditionally, at least in school, there is some "downtime."

Well, as we know, that's not the case here at DECAL. If anything, the need for child care increases; the Summer Food Service Program jumps into high gear; Pre-K is wrapping up the 2015-2016 school year and preparing for the next; Finance is closing out this state fiscal year reconciling the hundreds of millions of dollars that pass through DECAL every year. "Downtime" - if it ever existed here - is a thing of the past.

But, as we continue serving children and families and supporting providers who care for children every day, I hope you'll MAKE time for some downtime this summer. Ever since coming to DECAL, I've stressed the importance of work-life balance. I truly believe we all deserve to take time to spend with family, to rest, to relieve ourselves of carrying the weight of work...if only for a short time.

I once heard someone say, "Never get so busy making a living that you forget to make a life." I look forward to heeding that advice as I spend time away with my family later this month, and I highly encourage you to do the same (if you have the requisite leave time!). Even staying at home - taking a "staycation" - can be as refreshing and therapeutic (and less expensive) as going away. I believe that taking time to "make a life" will ultimately make us more productive and more satisfied at work.

Another thing that I think about at this time of year is my anniversary, my DECAL anniversary. On June 16th, I'll begin my third year as commissioner of this amazing department...and it is amazing, not just because of the work we accomplish, but especially because of you, the people who do the work. When I came here in 2014, I told you DECAL was considered the gold standard of state agencies. In these two years, I've come to understand and experience why and how that reputation



Quick Links

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June Birthdays



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

1 - Jonique Hale
 3 - Miranda Waller
 4 - Nikki Beavers
 4 - Aleisha Golden
 4 - Princess Walton
 6 - Jennifer McCreary
 7 - Rukiya Thomas
 12 - Annie Blair
 14 - Ashley Cunningham
 14 - Dorothy Mitchell
 15 - Janice Haker
 16 - Benjamin Appling
 16 - Courtney Moody
 17 - Karyn Presley
 20 - Ashia Jackson
 20 - Carolyn Morkeh
 22 - Janika Young
 23 - Diane Dye
 24 - Edward Rowell
 25 - Toni Anderson
 25 - Bethea Mechelle
 26 - Charles Cobb Jr
 27 - Rosalyn Elder
 28 - Lisa Henderson
 28 - Bridgette Washington
 29 - Charlene Godfrey
 30 - Coty Johnson
 30 - Marybeth McGee

Elisabetta Kasfir Embracing New Leadership Role

In addition to two decades of experience in the early care and education field, Elisabetta Kasfir brings to her position as Assistant

was earned.

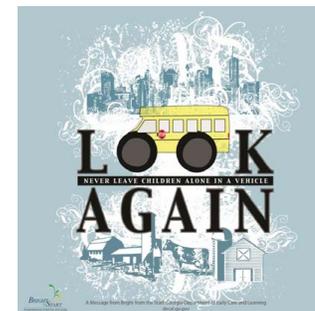
You truly are a group of dedicated professionals who are making a difference in the lives of children, families, and the early care and education industry in our state. It's an honor to work with you.

Gratefully,

P.S. If you do take some time to be with family or friends this summer, send me a picture of or a note about where you are and what you're doing. I'd love to hear from you as you continue to "make a life."

Public Reminded to "Look Again"

In a news conference Tuesday Governor Nathan Deal, First Lady Sandra Deal, and DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs called for families and caregivers of children to have heightened awareness of the dangers of leaving children unattended in vehicles. Officials hope the news conference and a new public service announcement will help prevent children's heatstroke deaths this summer.



"During our state's hot summer months, there is a higher risk of serious injury or death as a result of a child being left alone inside a vehicle," said Gov. Deal. "Since 2010, 11 children in Georgia have died due to vehicular heatstroke. 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 take the time to Look Again."

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

Commissioner Jacobs said over 370,000 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 incidents where children are left in vehicles, we investigate each incident," Jacobs explained. "In FY2014, 18 children were left in vehicles by child care providers; in FY2015 eight children were left in vehicles; and so far in FY2016, seven children have been left. All of these children survived, and, thankfully, we have not seen any heat stroke related deaths in child care centers since 2011. But one child left unattended in a vehicle is one child too many. As a result, safely transporting children remains a focus for our agency."

Commissioner Jacobs said "Look Again" is a message not just to 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.

Commissioner for Federal Programs several personality traits that are sure to be assets in fulfilling her new responsibilities.

Enthusiastic, driven, persistent and committed, Kasfir welcomes new challenges and is embracing her leadership role overseeing Nutrition Services and the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program.



Elisabetta Kasfir

Selected to fill the position last month, Kasfir's priorities include familiarizing herself with the work Nutrition Services and CAPS are already doing and looking at how they align with the requirements in the new Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) State Plan as well as DECAL's strategic plan. She said she is looking forward to identifying "our opportunities to be innovative and to move the work of both programs forward."

Kasfir added that with the eligibility function of the CAPS program moving to DECAL from the Georgia Department of Human Services in the near future, "it will be a high priority to assess the best and most efficient ways to set up a structure and systems to best serve the citizens of Georgia."

"This is such an exciting time to be joining the team of dynamic individuals already working toward these goals," she said.

The tasks at hand appear a perfect fit for Kasfir considering her response when asked what motivates her professionally: "Getting to participate in dynamic and exciting work that is meaningful and has impact for children and families in Georgia; also, working to improve processes and systems to be more efficient and to help drive positive outcomes."

Kasfir, who earned a bachelor's degree from Emory University with a double major in Psychology and Sociology, has held a wide variety of positions - including 15 years in management - with organizations serving children. She worked in child care programs as a behavioral specialist, a toddler teacher and a center director, and as a district manager and project director for 19 Georgia Pre-K classes before joining the Office of School Readiness (OSR) in 2003.

"I started at DECAL / OSR in the Child Care Services (CCS) division as a child care licensing consultant, then became a lead consultant then a regional director, then complaint unit director, and then a child care services director, before this most recent change," said Kasfir. Among the most significant challenges she's seen at DECAL were when child care licensing at the Office of Regulatory Services was merged into the Office of School Readiness, creating DECAL in 2004, and when the workloads of Child Care Learning Center and Family Child Care were blended in 2009.

In both instances, said Kasfir, the challenge was to effectively merge

State officials hope the public will help distribute a new "Look Again" public service announcement to family and friends using social media. The video is posted on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6Q-GA7tfkE> and on DECAL's Facebook and Twitter pages.

Officials also asked 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.



DECAL employees showed their support of the "Look Again" campaign at a news conference held Tuesday by Governor Nathan Deal, First Lady Sandra Deal, and DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs.

Finalists Announced for Georgia's Pre-K Program Teachers of the Year

DECAL has announced the six statewide finalists in the search for Georgia's Pre-K Program Teachers of the Year for 2016-2017. In May, each finalist received a surprise visit by Susan Adams, Assistant Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K Program and Instructional Supports.

The finalists are Connie Ellington of Bethlehem Elementary School in Bethlehem/Barrow County; Stacy Tidwell of Duncan Creek Academy in Dacula/Gwinnett County; Tonya Freeman of Green Acres Preschool in Douglasville/Douglas County; Kelly Harris of Crescent Elementary School in Griffin/Spalding County; Rondrikus Fletcher of Lamar County Primary School in Barnesville/Lamar County; and Channie Frazier of Kids World in Statesboro/Bulloch County.

"Now in its 23rd year, Georgia's Pre-K Program is nationally recognized as an exemplary early childhood education program for four year olds that significantly impacts school readiness skills in language, literacy, and math," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "The program's success can be attributed directly to the outstanding Pre-K teachers and assistants who implement this program daily. This is a small way for us to recognize their efforts."

different processes, policies and cultures into one.

"These were formidable and significant changes, but they resulted in incredible gains moving Georgia forward in the child care licensing arena," she said.

No matter the challenges she's faced over the years at DECAL, Kasfir has always enjoyed working for the agency.

"When I came to OSR and ever since, I felt like I'd found my home or my work family," she said. "I love being with a group of people who feel the same way I do about doing good things for children, who strive to meet a standard of excellence in everything they do, and who truly care about one another."

Kasir lives in Decatur with two cats and a dog "that rather think themselves children of the four legged variety, and manage to keep me very busy entertaining them."

The best advice she ever received was: "You must do the thing you think you cannot do," and her favorite quote is: "Life is not a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well-preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming... 'Wow! What a ride!'"

State Officials Urge Safe Infant Sleep from the Start

First Lady Sandra Deal, the Georgia Children's Cabinet, and the Georgia Department of Public Health have launched a Safe to Sleep initiative in partnership with every birthing hospital in the state to prevent sleep-related infant deaths.

Beginning May 19, every mother and newborn in Georgia will be given an infant gown with "This Side Up" messaging to reinforce the fact that babies sleep safest on their backs. They will also receive a Safe to Sleep book to remind all parents and caregivers about the importance of safe sleep position and environments and to promote reading out loud to babies.

If the mother or infant receives Medicaid or is uninsured, they will be given a travel bassinet that provides a separate sleep space with a firm mattress and fitted sheet for the infant.

Through this first of its kind statewide collaboration, all 77 birthing hospitals in Georgia have pledged to model safe sleep behaviors throughout their facilities and ensure that parents of newborns, their families and caregivers are educated on and have the resources to create safe sleep environments for their babies before they leave the hospital.

Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs spoke at the May 19 launch event. She is shown here with (L) CCS Northwest Regional Manager Marsha Ruiz-Crosby and Child Care Services Consultant Karyn Presley.

This fall, DECAL will select a winner from a local public school system and a winner from a private child care center. Finalists were nominated by Georgia's Pre-K Project Directors and Pre-K teachers.



Quality Rated Welcomes 1,000th Quality Rated Program

DECAL has met a significant milestone, naming The Creative COMFY Day School @ Lynn's House in Decatur as the state's 1,000th Quality Rated provider.

The Creative COMFY Day School @ Lynn's House joins 999 other programs that have been evaluated by credentialed early childhood experts and identified as high quality, and rated based on providing children with an environment and experience that is best for their development. Quality Rated is a program of DECAL.

DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs congratulated The Creative COMFY Day School @ Lynn's House and its owner Lynn Manfredi/Petitt for earning its three-star rating, the highest rank awarded by DECAL.

"We are so proud to reach the 1,000th provider milestone and even more excited to award three stars to Lynn and her program." Jacobs said. "Quality Rated helps us identify programs like Lynn's that provide children with a nurturing and educational environment to help them learn and develop their social skills so they have a strong



Quality Rated Names its 1000th Provider!

Congrats to the Creative Comfy Day School @ Lynn's House!





Witness the Fitness

DECAL's Wellness Committee took over Liberty Plaza last month for a Fitness Challenge during the lunch hour. Organized by Business Analyst Barbara Sanders, the relay course included five pushups, 10 sit ups, 20 jumping jacks, a bean bag toss, and a jump rope to the finish line. Everyone had a great time.



Let Us Hear From You!

foundation as they grow. Parents and families who use Quality Rated can have peace of mind knowing they have a tool to identify high-quality programs, so that when they search for child care, they can focus on the details that matter most to their family."

All Quality Rated programs can be found on www.QualityRated.org in an easy-to-use, free, online database designed for Georgia parents and families. All child care providers who participate in Quality Rated - whether they have one, two or three stars - have gone above and beyond state health and safety requirements.

"My heart is overflowing with joy knowing that the care we provide at The Creative COMFY Day School is Quality Rated and three stars." said Manfredi/Petitt. "As we continue to provide home-based quality care and learning to our children and families, I feel proud knowing that our family child care learning home is part of a larger network of Quality Rated providers supported by the State of Georgia."

In the photo below are (L-R) Ellen Whitlock, Georgia Family Connection Partnership; Board of Early Care and Learning Chairman Victor Morgan; DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs; Deputy Commissioner for System Reform Kristin Bernhard; and Lynn Manfredi/Petitt of The Creative Comfy Day School @ Lynn's House.



Exempt Programs Get Closer Look This Summer

You know that great idea you
have for our agency?

We cannot read your mind.

That is why DECAL has

ESP

Employee Suggestion Program



[Visit the Virtual Suggestion Box Now!](#)

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
(Vice Chair)

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

Georgia law allows for situations when a child care service or program can be exempt from state licensing requirements. These exemptions can be based on the ages of children, duration of the program, hours of care and operation, specific activities, or situations where services are offered free of charge. Currently, approximately 4,500 programs in Georgia have been designated exempt by DECAL. And many of these programs such as summer camps, church camps, sports and recreation camps, and other traditional summer programs and activities are approaching their busiest time of the year.



Kristie Lewis

In the past couple of years DECAL began focusing efforts on exempt programs, some of which had held their exemptions for decades. Consultants began working through paper files, making phone calls, and actually visiting sites when necessary to determine if the exempt program was still operating and if so, if it was operating within the parameters of its exemption.

This work will increase this summer as retired DECAL licensing consultants will be trained in June to visit 500 -700 exempt programs across the state. The group will look at all exemption categories, not just summer camps and activities. The purpose of the visits will be to determine if exempt programs are properly operating within their approved category; to observe and collect data on health and safety standards; and to specifically verify that parents have signed enrollment forms acknowledging that they are aware the program is exempt from licensing.

"Parents should be aware that there are no assurances that the state's health and safety requirements are met or enforced in exempt programs," said Assistant Commissioner Kristie Lewis. "One of the requirements of an exempt program is that they notify and inform parents or guardians that they are not licensed by the state. And, this summer, CCS will check to ensure that the programs are following this requirement."

The consultants will also check for compliance with other regulations. In 2012, DECAL revised the exemption rules by requiring that programs seeking exempt status must submit an application, provide a valid and current e-mail address, and report specific details on services, fees, and ages of children served. In addition, exempt programs must post a notice that the program is exempt and must notify parents and the public when they do not carry liability insurance. These requirements provide information to help families make informed decisions about the programs they are considering for their children.

If an exempt program submits false information, loses accreditation, or fails to comply with requirements of local, regional and state health departments, fire marshal, fire prevention, and building and zoning guidelines, then DECAL can rescind their exemption.

As is the case with all of DECAL's work, the health and safety of children are the department's priorities regardless if a program meets the criteria for an exemption or is licensed.

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
(Chair)

Jerri Kropp, Statesboro
Twelfth Congressional District

Vacant
Thirteenth Congressional District

Tangela Johnson, Cohutta
Fourteenth Congressional District

The Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Jennifer Sallies, Crystal Germany, Atlantis Wright, Rebecca McDonald, Devon Porter, Crystal Hoffman, and Grushan Robinson.

A NEW AND IMPROVED PDR IS COMING YOUR WAY
IT'S CALLED



Georgia Professional Development System for Early Childhood Educators

Good news! A new online Professional Development System is launching in June, making it easier for Georgia's teachers to track and register for their DECAL trainings. Watch for regular emails with details and updates.



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DIY Summer School

Check back daily
for tips on
preventing
summer
brain drain.



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