

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



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DECAL By the Numbers

5,272 - Licensed Child Care Programs in Georgia

1,958 - Quality Rated Participating Programs

471 - Quality Rated Programs

80,461 - Georgia's Pre-K Program Enrollment

1,619 - Sites in 2014 Summer Food Service Program



Georgia's First Lady Sandra Deal serving lunch at a Summer Food Service Program location.

Quick Links

Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs

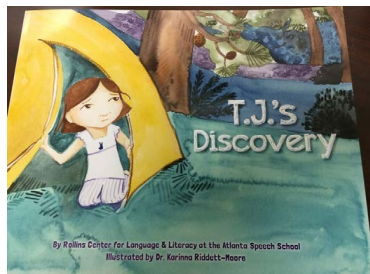
Dear DECALers,

This morning I am joining Governor Nathan Deal and First Lady Sandra Deal at the State Capitol to launch the state's annual literacy campaign called Read Across Georgia and to introduce a new book that will be given to every student in Georgia's Pre-K Program.



The First Lady originally launched Read Across Georgia in 2012 to support Governor Deal's goal to increase the percentage of children reading at grade level by the end of third grade. During March 2015, the First Lady will visit and read to Georgia's Pre-K classrooms and Quality Rated programs all across the state.

This year, the First Lady is introducing a new Pre-K book titled *TJ's Discovery* written by teachers at the Rollins Center for Language and Literacy at the Atlanta Speech School. The story is a family adventure confronting a child's fear of the dark and includes tips and resources for families and teachers to use the book effectively.



The book incorporates the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) and suggests activities and explanations of unfamiliar words to help stimulate understanding, relevance, imagination, interaction, and conversation between the adults in a child's life and the child.

We hope *TJ's Discovery* will help all Georgia's Pre-K students and their families discover the lifelong joy of reading and learning together as a family.

Reading at grade level by the end of third grade is a predictor of positive outcomes for children later in life. DECAL supports Governor Deal's grade level reading goal by laying a solid foundation of pre-literacy skills in Georgia's youngest children from birth to age five in child care settings and in Georgia's Pre-K Program.

I'm planning to visit Quality Rated Pre-K classes this month to read *TJ's Discovery*, and I encourage you to do the same. Spending time with our youngest learners and the professionals who work with them always motivates me to return to the office more determined and committed to our agency's vision, mission, and causes.

Have a great month!

Sincerely,
Amy

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[DECAL on Pinterest](#)
[DECAL Website](#)



CAPS Fraud Indictments

On Tuesday, Feb. 24, a Fulton County Grand Jury returned indictments against 14 individuals for defrauding DECAL by submitting false applications for child care assistance when their incomes exceeded eligibility levels. Collectively, the defendants are accused of defrauding the state of \$251,477.

The defendants were recipients of child care assistance from the state of Georgia through the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Program, which is administered by DECAL. CAPS provides child care assistance to low-income families by subsidizing the cost of child care while the parent works, attends school, or participates in a training program. The state pays the child care provider directly for the cost of the child care.

To receive CAPS benefits a recipient's income may not exceed the income eligibility level established by the state. The income eligibility level increases for each additional child in the family. Defendants in these cases received CAPS payments to which they were not entitled by falsely claiming that their incomes were lower than they actually were, when in fact their incomes exceeded the income eligibility level for the CAPS program. Some of the defendants also submitted forged paycheck statements to support the amount of income claimed.

"The CAPS program is intended to aid low-income parents trying to make a better life for themselves and their families," said Attorney General Sam Olens. "It is shameful that these individuals made a conscious effort to abuse a program designed for families in need. We appreciate the Georgia Department Early Care and Learning bringing these cases to our attention. We will continue to work together to ensure that tax dollars are protected from fraud."

DECAL discovered irregularities after a performance audit of the CAPS program was conducted by the Department of Audits and Accounts.

"We hope these indictments send a strong warning to anyone who might consider taking advantage of this program," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "The CAPS Program provides federal subsidies to help families access quality child care. The integrity of the CAPS Program, and all DECAL programs, is a critical and significant priority of the department. We want to thank the State Attorney General's office and Department of Audits and Accounts for their assistance."

Under the

DECAL Priority:

Ensure Health & Safety

Organizations Can Make an Impact in Their Community by Participating in the Summer Food Service Program

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a federal child nutrition program funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The purpose of the SFSP is to provide healthy and nutritious meals to students in low-income areas during the summer when school is out of session.

The Nutrition Services Division is constantly looking for new organizations to partner with DECAL to provide meal service to students across the state. Private nonprofit organizations, local governments, college and universities, schools and camps can participate as sponsors. Sponsoring organizations that serve meals that meet USDA meal pattern requirements through the SFSP are eligible to receive reimbursements. [Click here](#) to learn more.

Agencies unable to participate in the SFSP as a sponsor can get involved in other ways: serving as a vendor that sells unitized meals or meal components to sponsors; providing the physical site where children congregate for meal service; serving as a volunteer at a site or simply promoting the program to members of their community. For other ways to participate in the SFSP program, contact Shani Drake, Marketing & Outreach Manager at shani.drake@decalfga.gov or 404.656.3221

DECAL Priority:

Increase Quality & Access

Early Head Start Grant Helps Atlanta Homeless and Refugee Populations

When children enter the early learning program at Our House - Genesis Shelter in Atlanta each day, they have more on their minds than learning the alphabet or basic math skills. Of the 120 children, ages six weeks old to five years old, in attendance each day, around 90 percent are from families who are homeless, presenting a wide range of behavioral and developmental challenges.

There's a similar story across town at the Scottdale Child Development and Family Resource Center in DeKalb County, attended by 81 children from birth to four years old. About 22 percent of those students are either refugees or live in a home where English is not their primary language.

Both Our House-Genesis and Scottdale are partners with DECAL in the \$22 million Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Grant that is expanding access to high-quality services for infants and toddlers and their families. Administered annually over five years by DECAL, the grant will deliver comprehensive Early Head Start services to 184 metro Atlanta infants and toddlers along with their families through partnerships with six existing child care centers and 10-12 family child care homes.



Tyrese Lawer with children attending Our House - Genesis Shelter in Atlanta

"Our House is excited about the partnership," said Tyrese Lawer, President and CEO. "Our total capacity at this time is 120 children. With this partnership and our recent merger we will grow to serving approximately 150 children daily over the next year." In operation since 1998, Our House recently merged with Genesis Shelter and now operates sites in Atlanta and Decatur.

Lawyer has worked with young children for the past 17 years serving as a Family Advocate, Early Childhood Director, Head Start Program Director, NAEYC Validator, and Early Childhood Trainer for the District of Columbia.

"Quality matters," said Lawyer. "If we are intentional about the way we serve young children we can and will help all children reach their full potential."

Scottdale Child Development and Resource Center has served DeKalb

Gold Dome



The 153rd session of the Georgia General Assembly is well underway, and DECAL is watching proposed legislation covering age eligibility for Kindergarten, children left unattended in vehicles, and improvements to a law passed in 2013 requiring national fingerprint background checks.

House Bill 100, sponsored by State Representative Tom Dickson (R-Cohutta) calls for changing the age when students are eligible to enroll in Kindergarten. The cutoff date for students to enroll in Kindergarten has been used to determine the cutoff date for students to enroll in Georgia's Pre-K Program to ensure a seamless transition from one level to the next. Consequently, the passage of HB 100 will impact the cutoff date for enrolling in Georgia's Pre-K Program.

"We were pleased when the proposed implementation dates for HB 100 were changed to August 1 for the 2017-18 school year and July 1 for the 2018-19 school year," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "This adjustment protects access to Kindergarten for children currently in the Pre-K Program and access to Pre-K for those registering now for the 2015-16 school year. If HB 100 becomes Georgia law, we look forward to working with the Governor's Office, General Assembly, State Department of Education, parents, providers, and others to ensure smooth implementation of these changes as we continue preparing Georgia's students academically, socially, and emotionally for Kindergarten."

In January 2014, a state law went into effect requiring all new child care 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 have until 2017 to meet the requirement, unless they move to a new child care facility.

Last year, DECAL completed over 28,000 criminal records checks --- well on our way to having all 60,000 current child care employees in Georgia checked by 2017.

This year, in House Bill 401, DECAL is proposing improvements to the law which will streamline this process for everyone in the child care community including providers, parents, and early childhood education students entering the field. This bill eases the burden on employees by introducing a more efficient electronic process and creating a "Georgia Ready Workforce" in the child care industry. The Bill is sponsored by State Representative Chuck Efration (R-Dacula).

Among other benefits, HB 401 would streamline the process by which independent contractors, substitute teachers, temporary employees, or technical college and university students majoring in early childhood education are screened. The Bill also clarifies DECAL's ability to accept donations.

County for 38 years. The grant will add one infant class and one toddler class. The center has two Georgia's Pre-K classrooms.

"Serving a large refugee population presents challenges in communicating with parents," said Executive Director Maryum Lewis. "We have been able to partner with community organizations and teachers/volunteers to ensure good communication with parents who speak another language."

Lewis has been active in non-profit fundraising and administration with programs serving children for the past 15 years. "We hear all the time that 'earlier is better,' and we see it so often in our programs -- The earlier you begin working with children, the better prepared they are for school success," she said.

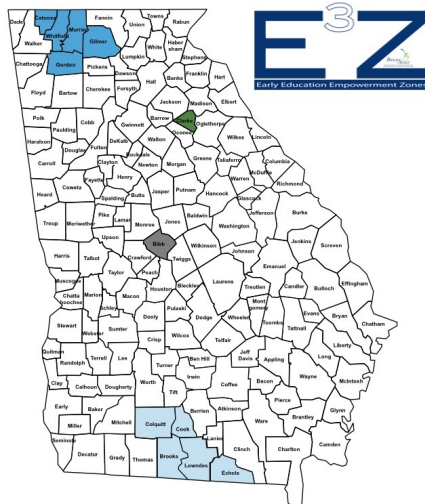
Sheltering Arms and Quality Care for Children, Inc. serve as early education hubs for the centers and family child care homes implementing the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Grant.

"The partnering centers and family child care homes are committed to delivering high-quality early education services," said Carol Hartman, DECAL director of policy and system reform. "I am thrilled that the grant funding will allow these high-quality programs to increase their capacity to serve vulnerable infants, toddlers, and their families."



Maryum Lewis with children at Scottdale Child Development and Resource Center

Community Coordinators Named for E³Zs



Community Coordinators for DECAL's four Early Education Empowerment Zones (E³Zs) have been named. The E³Zs were selected last year to promote early education system reform initiatives that support better outcomes for young children.

Suzanne Harbin is the North Georgia E³Z Community Coordinator serving Catoosa, Murray, Whitfield, Gilmer, and Gordon Counties. Harbin was previously with Georgia Family Connection Partnership as the Coordinator for Whitfield County.

Clayton Adams, Clarke County E³Z Community Coordinator, brings comprehensive knowledge of family engagement, home visiting, and early childhood education having worked with the Clarke County School District Office of Early Learning Early Head Start and Head Start prior to joining DECAL.

The above map shows the four Early Education Empowerment Zones, each of which will receive over \$1 million in targeted resources.

Technical College where she served as a Transition Specialist and Accelerating Opportunities Navigator for several counties within CGTC's service delivery area

Valerie Blackmon, Bibb County E³Z Community Coordinator, joins DECAL from Central Georgia

Jill Griffin is South Georgia E³Z Coordinator serving Cook, Colquitt, Brooks, Lowndes, and Echols Counties. Griffin has served as a Pre-K teacher in the Coffee County School System and Early Childhood Care and Education Program Coordinator at Wiregrass Georgia Technical College.

Micca Burris has joined the E³Z team as Business Operations Specialist. Formerly with the Arkansas Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education, Burris will support the team in attracting 10 new or expanded child care facilities throughout the four E³Zs.

"Our team's diverse experience of working with children and families is incredibly promising and exciting," said Laura Wagner, E³Z Director. "We look forward to leading Early Learning Challenge Grant and community-driven efforts to improve school readiness for young learners in each zone, and we are eager to partner with our co-workers across Georgia."

Each E³Z receives over \$1 million in targeted resources and will participate in research that will help the state identify sustainable and replicable implementation strategies that can be scaled statewide. Each E³Z home to around 10,000 children under the age of five.

DECAL is also monitoring Senate Bill 34, sponsored by State Senator Greg Kirk (R-Americanus) which would protect people from lawsuits if they find it necessary to break into a car to remove a child left unattended.

"Crossover Day" for the Georgia General Assembly is Friday, March 13, 2015. The final day of the session is expected to be Thursday, April 2, 2015.

For more information, contact Liz Young, DECAL Director of Government Relations and Special Projects, or Ray Higgins, DECAL Deputy Commissioner for Finance and Administration.

Economic Impact Survey Deadline

Today is the deadline for Georgia child care providers to demonstrate their impact on the state's economy and submit responses to a survey being conducted by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia.

This study, which will determine the impact of the child care industry on Georgia's economy, is the second time that DECAL has commissioned the Institute of Government to survey the more than 5,500 child care programs in Georgia. The first such study, conducted in 2007, showed that child care providers in Georgia generated \$4.1 billion in revenues annually, while creating more than 61,000 jobs.

All survey responses are confidential and are for research purposes only. DECAL will not have access to individual responses. Findings from the study will be shared with state agencies, legislators and other policymakers to inform decision-making and help with planning.

March Birthdays



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

- 2 - Katie Hagan
- 2 - Mark Waits
- 5 - Lajuana Williams
- 6 - Jo Ann Gazick
- 6 - James Holloway
- 7 - Glenda Hambrick
- 8 - Laurel Lynn Berryhill
- 9 - Susan Adams
- 9 - Angela Butler
- 10 - Kimberly Alexander
- 12 - Brian Griffin
- 14 - Joseph Scott Hall
- 15 - Brandi Swain
- 18 - Alethea Cicero-Brown
- 18 - Sondra Paster
- 19 - Bernice Henderson
- 20 - Esther Duggan
- 20 - Shannen Grimes
- 24 - Jennifer McMichael
- 27 - Brandon Cason
- 27 - Amy Page

"We are so very excited to partner with these four communities in piloting early education system reform initiatives that support better outcomes for young children," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "Each of these regions demonstrated their commitment to early childhood education through participation from their local Quality Rated child care programs, universities and technical colleges with strong early childhood education programs, and support from public school superintendents, elected officials, the business community, and nonprofit and philanthropic organizations."

Funding for the E³Z initiative is part of the \$51.7 million Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant received last year by DECAL from the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



Pictured above are (L-R starting with top row) Suzanne Harbin, Clayton Adams, Valerie Blackmon, Jill Griffin, Micca Burris, and Laura Wagner.

Work Underway on Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Transition

Over the next 12-18 months, approximately 160 employees determining eligibility for Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) Program will move from the Department of Human Services (DHS) to DECAL, completing a transition that first began in May 2012. The CAPS Program provides federal subsidies to help families access quality childcare. Eligibility for CAPS is currently administered in all 159 Georgia counties through the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS). The \$193 million dollar program provides assistance to an average 50,000 children each week, with payments issued directly to the parent's child care provider of choice.

In an effort to assist with the transition, DECAL has again contracted with North Highland, a global consulting and project management group that assisted with moving CAPS management and administrative functions from DHS to DECAL in July 2012.

"In this initial phase, our scope is to look at eligibility processes at DHS...what the impediments might be...and what improvement opportunities exist as the program transitions to DECAL," said Brande Jeidy, a North Highland project manager. "Whatever decisions are made by the DECAL leadership team, we will support those efforts."

"Fully aligning CAPS with DECAL's focus on quality early childhood education

- 27 - Ashley Shirah
- 30 - Kenyatta Wade
- 30 - Shelly Yeomans
- 31 - Mari Springs
- 31 - Pamela Stoner

February Quality Rated Programs



We are **excited** to announce the February
Quality Rated Programs

- Bryan Head Start, Pembroke ★★
- C.O.R.E. Kids Academy, Duluth ★★
- Greater Expectations Early Child Development and Learning Center, Hinesville ★★
- Home 'Z' Childcare and Development Center, Valdosta ★
- Kiddie Kastle I - Migrant EHS, Lyons ★★ ★
- Kiddie Kastle II - Migrant EHS, Glennville ★★ ★
- Kidovations Childcare II, Statesboro ★★
- Knowledge Beginnings (Medlock Bridge Road), Duluth ★★
- Lafayette Christian School and Early Learning Center, LaGrange ★★
- Lighthouse Early Start Academy One, Vidalia ★★
- Little Indians Day Care Center, Donalsonville ★★
- Maidee Smith Memorial Day Care Center, Inc., LaGrange ★
- Millennium Academy, Bremen ★★
- Polk ECDC/Steppin' Stones Day Care, Cedartown ★★
- SGMC Child Care Center, Valdosta ★★
- Jamie C. Simpson, Fairburn ★★ ★
- Smiling Faces Day Care, Donalsonville ★★
- Teaching, Loving, Caring, LaGrange ★★
- The Little School of Savannah Country Day, Savannah ★★
- The Nest Nursery School, Atlanta ★★
- Barbara G. Thomas, Atlanta ★★
- Betty A. Watkins, Columbus ★★
- Wonderland Day Care, Moultrie ★★
- YMCA Pauling Early Learning Childhood Development Academy, Hiram ★★




Let Us Hear From You!

You know that **great idea** you have for our department?

We cannot read your **MIND**.
That is why DECAL has



Phil Jessup
Information Systems Specialist

EMPLOYEE SUGGESTION PROGRAM

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Board of Early Care and Learning



Deidria Bolden

and safe and healthy childcare environments will result in a better alignment of services, policies, and communications," said Deidria Bolden, DECAL Assistant Commissioner for Federal Programs and Administration. "As Governor Deal likes to say, 'Better program alignment results in better outcomes.'"

"North Highland has jumped right in and been very helpful and supportive in charting a path for greater assessment of policies, procedures, and practice for these important services to Georgia's families," said Keith D Bostick, Deputy Commissioner for Programs.



Keith Bostick

DECAL Priority:

Foster Organizational Excellence

Commissioner Jacobs Serving on Education Reform Commission

Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs has been named by Governor Nathan Deal to the Education Reform Commission, a 33-member commission currently studying the state's education system. The commission is reviewing funding formulas, and providing recommendations to improve the system, increase access to early learning programs, recruit and retain high quality instructors, and expand school options for Georgia's families. Recommendations will be sent to Governor Deal by August 1 with some going into effect as early as the 2016-2017 school year.

Of the Commission's five subcommittees, Commissioner Jacobs chairs the group looking into early childhood education.

"I know we all share the Governor's vision for an exemplary education system driven by student need that provides local school leaders with greater control and flexibility," said Commissioner Jacobs. "It is a credit to DECAL and our team to be represented on this commission and specifically leading reforms in early childhood education."

Employee Survey is Here

This month DECAL employees are receiving an e-mail inviting them to participate in the Annual DECAL Employee Survey. Dr. Bentley Ponder, DECAL's director of Research and Strategic Planning, said the online survey will be available for two weeks and all responses are confidential. Georgia State University will compile the results of the survey, sending all verbatim comments directly to DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. The Employee Survey is used each year to help determine overall job satisfaction among DECAL's more than 300 employees and identify areas for improvement.



Educator Appreciation Day at Zoo Atlanta

DECAL will again partner with Zoo Atlanta as they host Educator Appreciation Day on Saturday, March 14, 2015, from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM. Early care and education professionals throughout the state are encouraged to bring their guests to the Zoo for a day of fun-filled activities.



Educators will receive free admission and \$2 off general admission for each of their guests. Please note that educator identification is required. Types of ID include an employee ID with a photo; a pay stub or name badge imprinted with school name or county along with a state-issued photo ID; or a homeschool declaration of intent and a state-issued photo ID.

"This is a great opportunity for educators all across the state to come and experience Zoo Atlanta, with free admission for them and discounts for their guests," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M.

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

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

Tammy Lenkeit, Hoschton
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

Tangela Johnson, Cohutta
Fourteenth Congressional District

Jacobs. "In addition to the great zoo experience, educators can visit the Educator Lounge at the Ford Tent for private animal encounters and a chance to talk with the Zoo's education staff."

In addition, guests will receive a coupon for 10 percent off purchases in the gift shop and food outlets (coupon valid on March 14 only). More information on Zoo Atlanta's Educator Appreciation Day is available by calling 404.624.WILD or through e-mail at education@zooatlanta.org.

While you're there, stop by and visit with our Georgia's Pre-K Program and Quality Rated teams representing DECAL with a table at the event.

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) Elisabetta Kasfir, Jacqueline Frederick, Sheryl Irwin, Micca Burris, James Holloway, Martinita Smiley-Smith, and Sonya Mosley.