

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



March 2016 - In This Issue

[By the Numbers](#)

[Important Links](#)

[March Birthdays](#)

[A Day in the Life...](#)

[New Web Application for Nutrition Services](#)

[Virtual Suggestion Box](#)

[Board of Early Care and Learning](#)

[Commissioner's Corner](#)

[First Lady Promotes Quality Rated](#)

[State Awards Family Engagement Grants](#)

[Zoo Atlanta Educator Appreciation Day](#)

[Murphy Leaving for Role at Johns Hopkins University](#)

[February Quality Rated Programs](#)

DECAL By the Numbers

\$194 million - Federal funds made available annually to Georgia through Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)

57,431- Background checks issued by DECAL since law passed in 2014

80,813 - Students currently enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K Program

67,000 - Early care and education jobs in Georgia

24,823 - Children funded for Head Start in Georgia

3,661 - Children funded for Early Head Start in Georgia

415 - Early childhood education students in Georgia supported by DECAL Scholars' SCHOLARSHIPS Program

5,034 - Licensed child care programs in Georgia

Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs

Dear DECAL Staff:

I am happy to announce that, after working on it for almost a year and referring to it in this newsletter for months, we have officially submitted to the federal government our proposed Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Plan for Georgia FFY 2016-2018. Simply put, this plan outlines how we will use the approximately \$194 million Georgia receives each year to help low-income, working families find and pay for child care and to enhance the quality and availability of child care in Georgia. And remember: directly or indirectly, the CCDF impacts every program and thereby every employee of DECAL.



Drafting the Plan was a huge undertaking coordinated by our CCDF Co-administrators, Assistant Commissioner for Child Care Services Kristie Lewis and Chief Legal Officer Ira Sudman. I thank Kristie and Ira for their hard work in developing our plan, holding public hearings, and shepherding DECAL through this tedious process.

Highlights of Georgia's new CCDF plan include:

- Increasing payments to providers for subsidized child care by raising subsidy rates to the 50th percentile
- Increasing the tiered bonus percentages to 5%, 10%, and 25% for one, two, and three star providers in Quality Rated
- Allowing more families to be eligible for Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) by setting the income threshold at 65% of the state median income (SMI) or below
- Increasing supports for the state's early education workforce to benefit children with disabilities, and dual language learners
- Requiring additional monitoring and reporting for programs receiving CCDF funds who are exempt from licensing
- Piloting different service models geared toward increasing the quality of infant and toddler



Quick Links

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March Birthdays



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

2 - Katie Hagan
2 - Mark Waits
5 - Jennifer Johnson
5 - Lajuana Williams
6 - Jo Ann Gazick
6 - James Holloway
7 - Glenda Hambrick
8 - Lynn Berryhill
9 - Susan Adams
9 - Angela Butler
12 - Brian Griffin
14 - Scott Hall
14 - Julie Harnage
16 - Elizabeth Crofton
16 - Alicia Young
18 - Alethea Cicero-Brown
18 - Sondra Paster
19 - Bernice Henderson
20 - Esther Duggan Dykes
20 - Titus Dyson
20 - Shannen Grimes
20 - Monica Jennings
23 - Paul Ominde
27 - Brandon Cason
27 - Amy Page

classrooms

As a state, Georgia is strategically positioned to implement our State Plan because we are already doing a lot of the things called for in the CCDF reauthorization. And we are excited about the new efforts we'll initiate in the next couple of years to comply with our Plan. I'll keep you posted on what and when we hear back from the federal government.

Also, you'll remember that March is the month for Read Across Georgia, the First Lady's annual project to promote reading and literacy skills among our youngest learners. This year will be different as we introduce CALi, our new agency mascot, to participate in Read Across Georgia. CALi will attend the Read Across Georgia kick-off event at the Capitol, and CALi and I will soon visit White Oak Learning Academy in Dawsonville, the winning school drawn from more than 50 entries in a recent contest in which Pre-K classes created invitations for CALi to visit. Hopefully CALi and I can visit many of Georgia's child care learning centers, family child care learning homes, and Pre-K classes in the months and years to come.

Best wishes as Spring 2016 and daylight savings time (March 13) begin this month. I suspect you're looking forward to warmer weather and longer days as much as I am.

Sincerely,



Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs and DECAL mascot CALi to visit White Oak Learning Academy in Dawsonville. The school won a drawing in which more than 50 Pre-K classes created invitations for CALi to visit..

First Lady Promotes Quality Rated in Northwest Georgia

27 - Ashley Shirah
29 - Meghan Pendergast
30 - Kenyatta Wade
30 - Shelly Yeomans
31 - Mari Springs
31 - Pam Stoner

A Day in the Life of Thea Stevens

Whether on the job or off, much of life for Thea Stevens centers around serving, encouraging and mentoring others.

An Infant Toddler Specialist for DECAL since July 2014, Stevens supports child care directors and teachers in their efforts to provide relationship-based quality care to Georgia's infants and toddlers. She does this by providing technical assistance and professional development training.

"I observe classrooms, share strategies, and develop action plans where administrators and teachers can achieve goals through coaching and individualized professional development." Stevens said.

On a typical day, Stevens visits infant and toddler classrooms in various child care centers and family child care programs where she meets with directors and teachers and observes classrooms. She develops and assesses the progress of action plans, provides resources and coaches directors and teachers toward meeting their goals.

"My favorite thing about my job is helping directors and teachers reach their 'Aha Moment' where they truly realize the impact they have on the children and families they serve," said Stevens. "I always aim to support the directors and teachers by listening with an open mind and encouraging them to do their best in their work."

Twice monthly, Stevens also co-facilitates a Professional Learning Community training to a small group of directors in which "participants engage in reflective conversations about their practices, give productive feedback to impact child outcomes and expand their knowledge of classroom practices that support ITERS-R, PITC (Program for Infant and Toddler Care) and Quality Rated."

Stevens' passion for mentoring would come into play if she were



*Thea Stevens says about her work:
"Every day I look forward to seeing smiling and happy children engaged in play and learning with their peers and their teachers."*

Georgia's First Lady Sandra Deal, a strong proponent of early childhood education, visited Northwest Georgia last month to promote Quality Rated, Georgia's system to assess, improve, and communicate to families and communities the level of quality provided by early education programs. Governor Nathan Deal and DECAL formally launched Quality Rated in July 2013.

Mrs. Deal spoke at a Quality Rated breakfast at the Dalton Golf and Country Club. Following breakfast, she visited the First Baptist Church of Dalton's Children's Learning Center, a two-star Quality Rated child care program, and Brighter Tomorrows Child Development Center, a one-star Quality Rated child care program in Calhoun.

Dalton/Whitfield County are located in one of Georgia's four Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs). The E3Zs are regions of the state that work with DECAL and other state agencies to pilot early education system reform initiatives and partnerships to support better outcomes for young children. The North Georgia E3Z is composed of Whitfield, Catoosa, Murray, Gilmer, and Gordon counties.

At the breakfast, Debbie Rector, director of the Whitfield Dalton Day Care Center, a three star Quality Rated child care program, shared these quotes from a teacher, board member, and parent in her center:

Jillian Murphy, Board Member:

"The Quality Rated system offers a thorough examination of the Center's performance and then a consistent comparison to other child care centers. As an organization, we are committed to top quality care for families. Achieving top ranking three stars gives us trustworthy feedback on the Center's performance and helps as we pursue funding and recruit families to the Center."

Derek Cerentano, Parent and Board Member:

"The fact that the center has the highest possible Quality Rating gives my wife and me comfort. We know the center is providing our child with not only a great environment in which to learn, but also that he's learning at a high level. We have seen the difference in his development from his days before attending The Center, and his current development due to The Center."

Marlen Salaises, teacher and student at Dalton State College majoring in Early Childhood Education:

"Teachers, like me, are always challenged to keep up to a certain standard that helps the children have a learning, friendly environment. Being Quality Rated pushes me to strive for the best. The standards make sure that quality is not compromised. The quality rating reminds me that the children are affected by what they learn here which will help them later on in their education."

Families looking for child care can learn more about the importance of selecting a Quality Rated child care program at www.qualityrated.org and can search for Quality Rated child care programs on the DECAL website at www.decals.gov.

appointed DECAL Commissioner for a day.

"I would create a mentoring program for college students and recent college graduates to spend a day with a member of DECAL to learn more about early childhood education and the roles of the various divisions of DECAL," she said.

As co-founder of Ladies with Potential, Inc., Stevens serves others during her personal time as well. Ladies with Potential, explained Stevens, "is a mentoring program created to foster the lives of metro Atlanta teenage girls and assist with school, community, and family situations through enrichment workshops, community service and new experiences."

Stevens also enjoys spending time with friends and family (which she refers to as "Framily"), reading novels and autobiographies, photography, and relaxing using art therapy. A line from the movie character Forrest Gump is her favorite quote: "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get."

A native of East Point, Georgia, Stevens has Bachelor's Degree in Economics from Spelman College and a Master's Degree in Education with a concentration in Secondary Education from Grand Canyon University. She resides in Marietta with her husband of three and a half years.



Georgia's First Lady Sandra Deal spoke in February at a breakfast at the Dalton Golf and Country Club to promote Quality Rated.

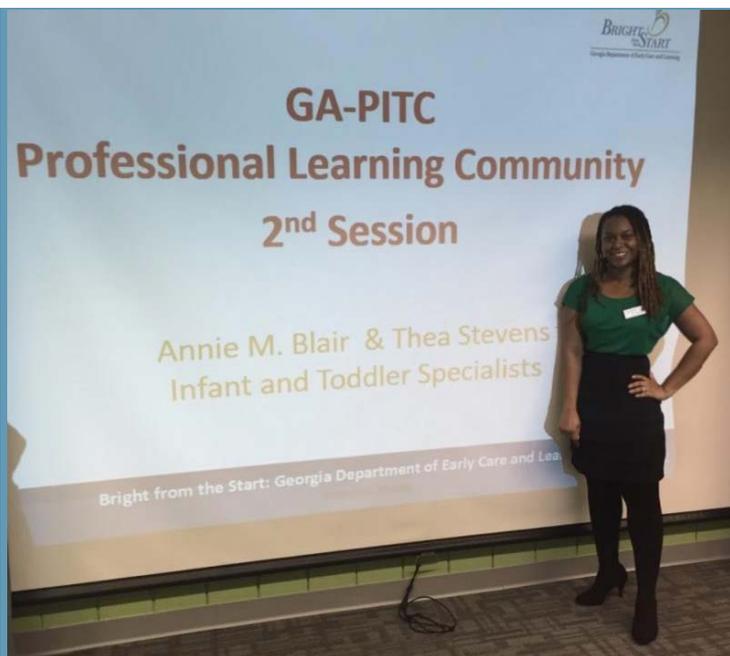
State Awards Family Engagement Grants to Five Georgia Early Care and Education Organizations

DECAL recently awarded Family Engagement Opportunity Grants to five early childhood care and education organizations across Georgia. The purpose of the grants, which total over \$60,000 from the federally funded Early Learning Challenge, is to promote, encourage, and support community and family awareness and advocacy and to provide families access to free resources related to parent leadership and child development.

Grant recipients include Prevent Child Abuse Athens, Inc. in Clarke County; Sandy's Sandbox in Bibb County; Georgia Hope in Gilmer County; Emmaus House in Fulton County; and Moultrie YMCA in Colquitt County. To be eligible, applicants had to be located in one of Georgia's Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs) or Metro Atlanta. The E3Zs are regions of the state that work with DECAL and other state agencies to pilot early education system reform initiatives and partnerships that support better outcomes for young children. Eligible applicants could apply for a maximum of \$15,000 for a one-year program or project.

"An effective partnership among families, communities, and educators helps lay a solid foundation for children's success in school," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "We congratulate these organizations on receiving family engagement grants and wish them well as they equip their communities to partner with families and create a better future for our youngest learners."

Prevent Child Abuse Athens will use grant funds to involve parents in healthy cooking sessions, first aid and CPR training, and a literacy/back-to-school event. Sandy's Sandbox requested funding to inform parents and families about healthy childhood development and to teach useful skills to reinforce education at home. Georgia Hope will receive funds to offer two consecutive 14-week parent skills training series to high-risk families in Gilmer County. Emmaus House will use funding to offer spring and fall training on stress management skills for parents. The Moultrie YMCA will



Thea Stevens co-facilitates twice-monthly training sessions for child care providers.

DECAL News in Brief

During the fall 2015 INCENTIVES period, DECAL Scholars awarded 1,112 recipients \$584,330 in salary supplements. The spring INCENTIVES period is now open and runs through April 15, 2016. Visit www.DECALscholars.com for more information about the INCENTIVES program.

Since the beginning of FY 2015, DECAL Scholars' SCHOLARSHIPS program has supported 415 students in Georgia studying early childhood education at 41 of Georgia's universities, colleges, and technical schools. Learn more about SCHOLARSHIPS by visiting www.DECALscholars.com.

Nutrition Services Rolls Out GA ATLAS

DECAL welcomes another bear to the family in the form of a new online web application for Nutrition Services. Nutrition Services has begun rolling out GA ATLAS (Access, Training and Learning Application System) to replace CNP 2000 as the application for sponsors and participants of the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). GA ATLAS is a user-friendly web application that provides institutions with immediate access to all nutrition program applications, claims,

use this grant opportunity to offer programs on developmental milestones for preschoolers, to develop literacy in young children, and to promote overall wellness for families.

DECAL Joins Zoo Atlanta for Educator Appreciation Day

DECAL is partnering again this year with Zoo Atlanta for Educator Appreciation Day on Saturday, March 19, 2016, from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM. Early care and education professionals throughout the state are encouraged to bring their family and friends to the zoo for a day of fun-filled activities. Educator Appreciation Day is presented by PNC Bank and sponsored by Kaiser Permanente and Macy's.



Educators will receive free admission and \$2 off general admission for each of their guests. Educator identification, such as an employee photo ID; a pay stub or name badge with school name or county and a state-issued photo ID; or a homeschool declaration of intent and a state-issued photo ID, is required. Educators are encouraged to pre-register to attend at

<http://shop.zooatlanta.org/webstore/shop/ViewItems.aspx?&CG=105&C=55>.

"Educator Appreciation Day provides a great opportunity for educators and their guests from across the state to experience Zoo Atlanta," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "In addition to enjoying one of Georgia's most interesting and extensive nature resources, educators can access the Educator Lounge at the Ford Pavilion to personally encounter exotic animals and to talk with the Zoo's education staff."

"Educators play a tremendous role in shaping the lives of the next generation, and as a conservation organization, we rely on educators to introduce the concepts of wildlife and ecology that can be experienced firsthand at Zoo Atlanta," said Raymond B. King, President and CEO of Zoo Atlanta.

and related nutrition program functions.

The roll out of the new application system has begun with SFSP sponsors who will use the system to submit applications to participate in the summer meals program this fiscal year. Gradual roll out of the system for CACFP institutions and sponsors will begin later this year, because they represent the greatest number of customers who will use the program. Through GA ATLAS, applications will be streamlined for organizations that participate in both the SFSP and CACFP. This should make for a more user-friendly experience and eliminate the need for providing multiple sets of the same information. GA ATLAS will provide institutions a better overall user experience while upgrading functionality.

And yes, ATLAS is a breed of brown bear that once lived in Africa. Unfortunately, the bear is extinct...but its name lives on at DECAL.

**Let Us Hear
From You!**

**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:

"We're proud to partner with DECAL on helping Georgia students not only excel in the sciences, but also grow into stewards of our state's priceless natural resources."

In addition, guests will receive a coupon for 10 percent off purchases in the gift shop and food outlets (coupon valid on March 19 only). For more information on Zoo Atlanta's Educator Appreciation Day, call 404.624.WILD or e-mail education@zooatlanta.org

Murphy Leaving for Early Ed Role at Johns Hopkins University

Sherron L. Murphy, a veteran early childhood care and education instructor who has served on Georgia's Board of Early Care and Learning since April 2013, has resigned. She is relocating to Baltimore, Maryland to accept the position of executive director of the Weinberg Early Childhood Center at Johns Hopkins University. Most recently Murphy served as the associate director and academic curriculum coordinator at Gwinnett Technical College's D. Scott Hudgens, Jr. Early Education Center. Last year she was honored with the school's 2015 Rick Perkins Award of Excellence in Technical Education.

At the February 18 board meeting, Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs and Chairman Victor Morgan presented Murphy with a proclamation from Governor Nathan Deal recognizing her service to the DECAL board and contributions to early childhood education in Georgia. They are pictured below.

Murphy earned her bachelor's degree from Clark Atlanta University and her master's degree from New York University.



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

Sherron Murphy, Lawrenceville
Seventh Congressional District

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

Vacant
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

Congratulations to the newest QUALITY RATED child care programs!

| | |
|--|--|
| 1st Creative Learning Academy #3, Lilburn ★★ | ★★★ Gloria A. Gren, Jonesboro |
| Advance to the Future, Statesboro ★★ | ★★★ Johnson's Learning Center, Inc, Atlanta |
| Albany Technical Institute C. D. C, Albany ★ | ★★★ Andrea L. Lee, Macon |
| Amazing Grace Academy, Marietta ★ | ★★★ Lighthouse Academy, Marietta |
| Atkinson County Head Start, Willacoochee ★★ | ★★★ Lil-T-Pot Christian Nursery, Carrollton |
| Bacon County Southside Head Start, Alma ★★ | ★★★★ Literacy Link Learning Center, Inc., Conyers |
| Blessings Daycare, Sylvania ★ | ★★★ Little Angels Learning Center LLC, Warner Robins |
| Brantley County Early Head Start, Nahunta ★★ | ★★★ Jacqueline D. Major, Evans |
| Brantley County Head Start, Nahunta ★★ | ★★★ Sonya R. Martin, Tifton |
| Tamara Y. Cameron, Riverdale ★★ | ★★★ Rochelle S. Patrick, Crawford |
| Melissa L. Carter, Tifton ★★ | ★★★★ Tracy Piazzon Gordon, Hahira |
| Childcare Network #119, LaGrange ★ | ★★★ Wilma L. Stevens, Lawrenceville |
| Childcare Network #214, Milledgeville ★ | ★★★ The Kids Zone Learning Center, Milledgeville |
| Childcare Network #231, Conyers ★ | ★★★ The Learning Treehouse, Rincon |
| Childcare Network #251, Stockbridge ★★ | ★★★ Toombs County Head Start, Lyons |
| Childcare Network #32, Smyrna ★★ | ★★★ Kimberly M. Vinson, Cedartown |
| CJ's Daycare, Savannah ★ | ★★★ Debra A. Wilborn, Jonesboro |
| Clinch County Head Start, Homerville ★★ | ★★★★ Wilma J. Wilson, Sparks |
| Discovery Point #10, Dacula ★★ | ★★★ Rhonda Young, Greensboro |
| Friends & Co., Moultrie ★ | |

The Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R)
Falita Flowers, Karen Brown, Brian Collin, Lari Lyn Beyer, Pam Bojo,
Arlene Green, and Donna Marks.