

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



DECAL By the Numbers

3,224 - Licensed child care learning centers

1,085 - Licensed child care family child care learning centers

2,919 - Quality Rated programs

261,151 - Georgia children ages birth - 4 receiving care outside the home (2019)

64,631 - Early childhood education and care workforce in Georgia (2021)

\$2.16 billion - COVID relief dollars received by DECAL (2020-2024)

Follow DECAL on Social Media



Commissioner's Corner by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs

Dear DECAL Co-workers,

I don't know about you...but I'm encouraged when someone tells me I'm doing a good job or when I learn that someone appreciates something I've done. Being recognized and appreciated helps keep me going.

That's why I believe one of my most important jobs as DECAL's commissioner is recognizing and praising YOU, so you'll KNOW I see and appreciate your hard work, day in and day out.



Likewise, I believe it is incumbent on us at DECAL to let the people who work in the child care industry in Georgia know that we see and appreciate their hard work as they serve children and families in their communities.

That's why I'm proud of our upcoming initiatives and activities:

1. In April we began awarding *Quality Rated Workforce Bonuses* to incentivize excellence and reward staff in Georgia's child care programs. Education AND support staff at Quality Rated family child care learning homes, child care learning centers, and stand-alone school age programs can apply to receive an annual bonus of \$500 per year.
2. Governor Kemp has declared May 4-10, 2025, as State Employee Recognition Week, an annual event that forces ALL of us to slow down long enough to recognize the work we do. As usual, we'll host fun activities, give-aways, and special events to celebrate YOU that week.
3. May 4-10 we'll also be observing *Children's Mental Health Week* when we focus on identifying and serving the mental health needs of Georgia's youngest citizens and on the professionals who meet those needs every day.

Dale Carnegie, an American writer and lecturer on self-improvement, public speaking, and interpersonal relationships, said the following: "*People work for money but go the extra mile for recognition, praise, and rewards.*"

As we begin this second quarter of the year, I assure you that I recognize, appreciate, and value that you...and most of the child care professionals in our state...are committed to our work. Thank you for going the extra mile for children and families.

Gratefully yours,





NEVER LEAVE A CHILD
ALONE IN A VEHICLE

WWW.DECAL.GA.GOV

P.S. Another unrelated but important activity: The day you receive this newsletter we'll be conducting the annual *Look Again* campaign in Cobb County. Every year before Georgia's temps ramp up, we remind child care providers, families, and the public that pediatric vehicular heatstroke is preventable IF drivers will simply *Look Again* when exiting their vehicles while transporting children.

DECAL Receives Model Agency Award

DECAL has been honored with the Model Agency Award for Fiscal Year 2025. This award is part of the annual Human Resources Assessment conducted by the Georgia Department of Administrative Services Human Resources Administration (HRA).

The assessment covers five module areas along with an optional policy review module. In the FY2025 assessment, thirteen agencies achieved the Tier 1 ranking, indicating model compliance. The Tier 1 category is defined by the HRA as agencies that possess a robust and exemplary Human Resources program, demonstrating a solid understanding of and compliance with Human Resources laws, regulations, rules, and best practices.

Deputy Commissioner of Finance and Administration, Rian Ringsrud, expressed his pride in the achievement: "We are incredibly honored to receive the Model Agency Award. This recognition reflects our unwavering commitment to excellence in Human Resources and our dedication to serving the people of Georgia."

Other agencies that received the Tier 1 ranking include Georgia Northwestern Technical College, Employees' Retirement System of Georgia, Georgia Department of Administrative Services, Georgia Department of Agriculture, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Georgia Department of Public Health, Georgia Technology Authority, Gwinnett Technical College, South Georgia Technical College, Southern Regional Technical College, and West Georgia Technical College.



**New Episodes
Every Wednesday**

State Employee Recognition Week



Governor Brian Kemp has proclaimed **May 4-10, 2025**, as **State Employee Recognition Week**.

DECAL is pulling out all the stops with themed casual dress days, daily prize

drawings, DECAL Bingo, and brand-new contests.

Stay tuned for more details and a special video email from Commissioner Jacobs on May 5 to kick off the week.

Fields and Figures: A DECAL Employee's Dual Passions





This month, we shine a spotlight on Bart Ellington, an integral part of DECAL's Finance team for 14 years. Bart began his career with DECAL on a special project when the department moved from 10 Park Place to our offices in the Twin Towers. Since then, he has risen through the ranks to become our current budget manager.

Working at DECAL has had a meaningful impact on Bart. "I enjoy knowing that I am working for the children of Georgia, even though my wife and I don't have children of our own. As DECAL's budget manager, I've developed close relationships with all our programs and enjoy ensuring DECAL's budget goals are accomplished."

But there's more to Bart than managing budgets. When not crunching numbers at DECAL, Bart is fulfilling his long-time passion of managing a herd of cattle (80 cows, 3 bulls, and 45 calves) on his 255-acre farm near Madison. Friends and neighbors help the operation run smoothly until he can sell the cattle at auction or to a processor in Augusta.

A Family Passion

For Bart, farming is more than just a pastime: it's a passion that honors a tradition. His father, who grew up on a farm in Fayette County, pursued his dream of owning a farm when he returned from World War II.

Farming for Bart is about making sure that this way of life continues as he honors his father and the land. "I feel like I am carrying on a tradition that is in danger of going away, especially with the growth of Atlanta encroaching on



CAPS Advisory Councils Set to Launch in May

To ensure that families and child care providers have a meaningful voice in shaping the CAPS program, CAPS has established two advisory councils: the CAPS Provider Advisory Council and the CAPS Family Advisory Council. These councils will provide feedback on policy changes, system improvements, and program workflows, ensuring that the people directly impacted by CAPS play an active role in its development and implementation.

Both councils have been selected following an application and review process. Applicants from across Georgia submitted responses highlighting their experiences, dedication, and vision for improving the CAPS program. Members were chosen to ensure that different perspectives and backgrounds are represented. The first council meetings will take place in May–June 2025, supporting the important partnership between the CAPS program and child care providers and families participating in CAPS.

The CAPS Provider Advisory Council consists of child care providers with firsthand knowledge of how CAPS policies and systems impact their businesses and the families they serve. These members will serve as key advisors, lending their perspectives on policy decisions, program workflows, and potential improvements to ensure the program is effective and sustainable. Providers will help refine policies that affect their daily operations and strengthen the relationship between the CAPS program and the child care community.

The CAPS Family Advisory Council, composed of parents and caregivers receiving CAPS scholarships, will ensure that family voice remains central to decision making. Members will share their experiences with CAPS policies and procedures, providing critical feedback to enhance program accessibility, efficiency, and effectiveness. Their insights will help identify opportunities for improvement, ensuring that CAPS continues to meet the evolving needs of families across Georgia.

While the two councils will meet separately, their combined efforts will create a more responsive and transparent CAPS program. Meetings will be held virtually and in person throughout the year, fostering ongoing engagement and collaboration.

The CAPS Advisory Councils are a significant step toward a more comprehensive CAPS program. We look forward to working together to inform meaningful change and improve the experience of families and providers across Georgia.

Stay tuned for updates as we embark on this new chapter.

Spotlight Award Recognizes Outstanding Staff for Excellence

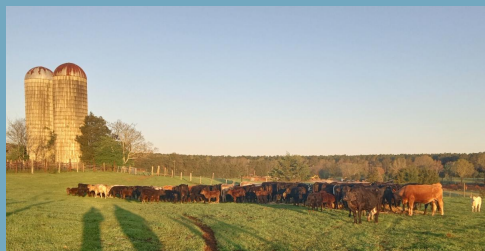
On Wednesday, March 13, Child Care Services (CCS) celebrated excellence by hosting the first annual CCS Spotlight Award ceremony during their all-team meeting in Macon. This new award recognizes staff members who exemplify the core values of CCS:

• Consistent exceptional work performance

farmland.”

And while he finds fulfillment in his DECAL role, he’s also looking forward to his next chapter watching the sun rise and set on his beautiful farm. “I look forward to being able to spend my days on the farm when I am eventually able to retire.”

Bart embodies dedication and care in all he does. We’re grateful to have him on the team.



DECAL Issuing Quality Rated Workforce Bonuses

On April 1 Georgia child care teachers and staff began receiving strong recognition of their ongoing hard work and commitment: a \$500 bonus.

DECAL launched a new initiative – Quality Rated Workforce Bonuses (QRWB) – to distribute an annual bonus to eligible staff members at Quality Rated Child Care providers. It reflects our commitment to investing in the 34,000 Georgia teachers and support staff who play a crucial role in fostering quality early education and care for young children. The initiative is among the first of its kind in the nation.

“I am pleased that DECAL is able to invest \$17 million a year to award these bonuses to the hard-working professionals and staff at programs delivering high-quality care and education to Georgia’s children,” said Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. “The annual \$500 QRWB payments are an important addition to the programs we already offer that support Georgia’s child care workforce.”

The bonuses are available to all on-site teaching and support staff at Quality Rated child care programs, with each staff member eligible to receive one payment per year.

- C – consistent exceptional work performance
- C – commitment to innovation and collaboration
- S – stellar customer service

This year, CCS proudly honored the following team members: Twantaye Compton, Khayla Henry, and Kaycee Purvis. Pam Stevens, Deputy Commissioner for CCS, praised the recipients stating, “All three Spotlight Award recipients are true CCS leaders. They have a passion for the work that spreads to the entire team, and we can’t thank them enough for all they do.”

Nominated by their peers and selected through a blind review process, these individuals have gone above and beyond in their roles, demonstrating dedication, teamwork, and exceptional service. Their commitment to maintaining high performance and supporting colleagues and the community has made a lasting impact.

Jennifer Bridgeman, CCS Director of Process and Policy Initiatives, shared her enthusiasm for the award’s future saying, “We hope that the CCS Spotlight Award will continue to celebrate and acknowledge staff who embody CCS’s core values and who stand out among their peers as dedicated individuals, committed to the work we do and the people and programs we serve.”

CCS colleagues of the recipients added the following comments about them: About Twantaye: “His proactive approach to problem solving and his ability to build strong relationships makes him a vital asset to CCS, continuously contributing to the department’s overall growth and effectiveness.” - Nadia Bernard

About Kaycee: “She regularly identifies potential challenges before they arise and develops innovative solutions that not only address immediate concerns but also improve overall processes.” - Ashley Richard

About Khayla: “Her unique ability to lift others with humor and thoughtful connections creates an inclusive and supportive environment.” - Lekeisha Weems

CCS congratulates Twantaye, Khayla, and Kaycee for their dedication and excellence and looks forward to continuing this tradition of recognizing outstanding team members in the years to come.

Cross-Functional Collaboration Efforts Continue

DECAL is taking a major step toward fostering stronger collaboration across divisions. On February 5, DECAL hosted its inaugural Cross-Divisional Collaboration Meeting, an initiative spearheaded by Child Care Services (CCS). The meeting provided an opportunity for staff to collaborate and share insights to better support the children, families, and programs that DECAL serves.

The project was organized by Jennifer Waters, CCS Technical Assistance Manager, and Candace Gilbert, CCS Training and Communications Manager.

“DECAL is large, and all divisions are working steadily to support the programs, families, and children we serve,” Waters said. “Without intentional action to communicate and collaborate among divisions, we can unintentionally get so busy that we work in parallel, focused on our own work and initiatives, creating what is often internally described within DECAL as the ‘silo effect.’”

With more than 40 managers and coordinators from every division, attendees

Among the first staff members receiving the bonus was Michelle Ward, a teacher at the Greenbrier school in Evans.

“The bonus is a recognition of the work we do,” she said. “It shows that we are seen and appreciated. I try to give the students teachable moments and ensure that they have an enriching experience each day. I have taught here for almost six years and the children are my inspiration to get up each morning.”

“The QRWB program gives child care providers who meet our highest standards some much-needed staff recruitment, retention, and recognition support,” explained Dr. Bentley Ponder, Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships. “These payments serve as recognition for the hard work and dedication that early education professionals demonstrate daily in their efforts to help child care programs achieve and maintain their star ratings.”

The bonuses are funded through the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) grant.

Supporting and guiding the mission and vision of Bright from the Start:

Board of Early Care and Learning

Phil Davis, Savannah
First Congressional District
(Chair)

Susan Harper, Albany
Second Congressional District

Joyce Ann Freeman, Bowden
Third Congressional District

Kristy Beam, Ed.D., Atlanta
Fourth Congressional District
(Vice Chair)

Karla Zisook, PhD., Decatur
Fifth Congressional District

With more than 40 managers and coordinators from every division, attendees eagerly collaborated and shared ideas to strengthen their collective efforts. The curriculum focused on strategies for improving collaboration, such as identifying natural opportunities for teamwork across divisions and working together to present consistent messaging. Participants discussed barriers to collaboration and identified that limited communication can often lead to divisions working in isolation. By fostering more interaction and connection across DECAL, the staff hopes to increase the agency’s collective impact.

Participants expressed excitement about the opportunity to work more closely together and build on the relationships established in the meeting. CCS has volunteered to lead this project moving forward, and the next meeting is scheduled for August 26, 2025.



Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Amanda Terrell, Nathan Winston, Connie Degrandis, Savannah Ennis, and Tyler Duggins.

Employee Suggestion Program



Jen Bennecke, Atlanta
Sixth Congressional District

Kristin Morrissey, Cumming
Seventh Congressional District
(Secretary)

Karen Jones, Ed.D., Warner Robins
Eighth Congressional District

Cristina Washell, Ed.D., Cleveland
Ninth Congressional District

Joanna Hill, Watkinsville
Tenth Congressional District

Maria Franklin, Adairsville
Eleventh Congressional District

VACANT
Twelfth Congressional District

VACANT
Thirteenth Congressional District

Sylvia Washington, MD, Rome
Fourteenth Congressional District



**Visit the Virtual
Suggestion Box now!**

**Sign up for DECAL text messages by
texting DECAL to 474747**

Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive SE, 754 East Tower,
Atlanta, GA 30334
404-656-5957

[Contact Us](#)



**Georgia Dept
of Early Care
and Learning**
BRIGHT FROM THE START



DECAL | 2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive | Atlanta, GA 30334 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!