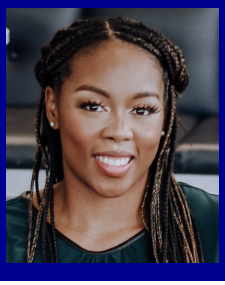
Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are

Georgia Dept of Early Care and Learning
BRIGHT FROM THE START







DECAL By the Numbers

69,713 - Students enrolled this year in Georgia's Pre-K Program
3,123 - Child care learning centers in Georgia
982 - Family child care learning homes
$6.52 billion - Annual contribution of Georgia's child care economy
52,400 - Children receiving CAPS assistance
Nearly 2,900 - Child care providers participating in CAPS
More than 2.9 million - Happy Helpings meals served in FY2025
More than 50,000 - DECAL's combined social media followers
382,000 - Georgia children served by licensed child care



Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs



Dear DECAL Co-workers,

By the time you read this letter, I will have met with the CAPS division at a regional meeting, the theme of which was "There's no place like our team" based on *The Wizard of Oz*. It was fun to speak to the group comparing their amazing accomplishments from the past year with the story of Dorothy's journey in Oz.

Like Dorothy…and like CAPS…DECAL's journey since its creation 22 years ago has at times been smooth and bumpy, praised and criticized, steady and unpredictable. BUT, through the decades, we've continued to grow and adapt as we've served the changing needs of children and families in our state.

Most recently, we've made a journey of our own in a series of road shows around the state. It was good seeing many of you at those events and updating attendees on the *State of Child Care in Georgia*. My update included the following:

- Approximately 336,000 children are served through licensed child care, Georgia's Pre-K program, CAPS, Head Start, and other regulated early education settings.
- More than 366,000 households with children under age 6 have at least one parent in the labor force. For many families, access to reliable child care is what makes workforce participation possible.
- As of June 2026, Georgia had 3,127 licensed child care learning centers and 993 family child care learning homes with a total licensed capacity of more than 382,000 children.
- DECAL's budget is more than $1.2 billion.
- Nearly 90 percent goes directly to providers through CAPS, Commitment to Quality payments, Quality Rated Workforce Bonuses, Georgia's Pre-K, and other grants and benefits paid to providers.
- Almost 11 percent of the budget goes for many other supports to providers and educators, such as training and coaching for infant and toddler teachers, early education and development support through SEEDS, and technical assistance.

Back to the CAPS theme: Dorothy didn't make it to the Emerald City overnight. It took time to get from where she started to where she wanted to go. The same is true for DECAL.



New Episodes Every Wednesday



New Podcast: A Special Look at Quality Rated

DECAL has released a special edition of the DECAL Download podcast responding to recent AJC reporting on Quality Rated. Listen to hear DECAL's perspective and additional context surrounding the issues raised.

Listen to the episode: **https://decaldownload.buzzsprout.com/211637/episodes/20037284**



Also, Dorothy never traveled alone. Helpers along the way walked with her to help her reach her destination. The same is true for DECAL. We've gotten to where we are by taking this journey *together.*

We've come a long way…overcome a lot of challenges…been innovative, resilient, and committed. But we have more work to do as we continue on this road.

Despite tornado-like circumstances, a winding unpredictable road, and unforeseen challenges, like Dorothy faced…your work, our work is impacting the future of our communities, our state, and our country, one child, one family at a time.

It's an honor to be walking with you.



DECAL Road Shows Connected Child Care Providers with Agency Leaders and Staff

DECAL hosted a series of regional road shows for child care providers in October. Child care providers received updates from agency leaders, participated in educational breakout sessions, and interacted informally with DECAL staff. Approximately 300 providers attended events in Tifton, Cartersville, Morrow, and Statesboro.

The road shows served a dual purpose. DECAL staff shared information and resources and were available to listen to providers' concerns. Each event included a plenary session, an update from Child Trends on the child care survey they are conducting, educational breakout groups, and an exhibition hall where providers could interact with DECAL staff representing ALL DECAL programs and services.

"These road shows were an important opportunity for us to meet providers where they are, share timely information, and strengthen our connection with the people who support Georgia's youngest learners every day," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "We were glad to hear directly from providers and share tools and resources that can support their work."

Below, are photos from the roadshows, including a WBHF reporter interviewing Commissioner Jacobs at the Cartersville Road Show.

Open Enrollment Continues

Open enrollment continues through November 6 at 11:59 pm. All eligible employees may process online selections for 2027 health care elections at **https://mySHBPga.adp.com** and flexible benefit elections at **www.GABreeze.ga.gov** . Review your recent email from Sabrina Henry for details.

Annual Report Available

DECAL's FY 2026 Annual Report (covering July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026) is now available. The report includes DECAL accomplishments, goals, statistics, information on the state of child care in Georgia, and much more. It's an excellent reference for all DECAL staff.
Take a look at this link.



DECAL Nutrition Wins Major Grant

DECAL's Nutrition Division has received a Team Nutrition Training Grant from the USDA Food and Nutrition Administration. This funding enables the department to develop innovative strategies to strengthen child nutrition programs in schools and child care settings.
DECAL was among five states selected to use this funding in the Child and Adult



Commissioner Jacobs is shown below at the road show in Statesboro with Jackie Habersham of Little Creative Ones Learning Center in Augusta who has been working in Georgia child care for 56 years.



Care Food Program (CACFP).

This grant supports Georgia Child Care REFRESH: **R**eal **E**ducation, **F**oods, **R**ecipes, and **E**nvironments **S**upporting **H**ealth, a project on which DECAL will partner with the University of Georgia over the next three years. The project includes a statewide assessment, in-person training and individualized menu planning, a new Plate of the Month campaign, and more.

Georgia media picked up on this story and promoted the grant statewide.

- **https://fox5atlanta.com/news/georgia-receives-federal-grant-improve-child-care-nutrition**
- **https://www.wsbtv.com/news/local/atlanta/georgia-awarded-federal-grant-new-childhood-nutrition-program/DVLITASUR5EUDCCFTXVT53RYL4/**

EXPAND Grant Pilot Program Expanded Child Care Options for Georgia Families

From 2023 to 2025, DECAL piloted a program that addressed a critical need for many Georgia families child care outside traditional work hours. The Expanding Parents' Access to Nontraditional Delivery (EXPAND) grant program tested new approaches to meeting these non-typical needs.
During those years, DECAL invested approximately $6.5 million in federal pandemic relief funds to support 13 EXPAND grants. Seven grants went directly to licensed child care providers, while six supported nonprofit or government collaboratives.

An estimated 475,000 Georgia children under age 13—43% of that age group—live in households that need nonparental care during evenings, early mornings or weekends. Yet licensed child care options during these hours have remained limited, leaving many families dependent on informal arrangements.

DECAL Distributes More Than 87,000 Books to Georgia Pre-K Students



More than 87,000…that is the number of books DECAL distributed to children enrolled in Georgia's Pre-K across the state during Pre-K Week 2026 in early October.

This year's book is the vibrant and colorful *Every Amazing Song*, co-authored by Coy Bowles, a member of the Grammy Award-winning Zac Brown Band, and Malcolm Mitchell, a former UGA football star and Super Bowl champion with the New England Patriots.

Pre-K Week, now in its 16th year, promoted early learning and literacy. DECAL gave a copy of the book to every Pre-K student and to each Pre-K classroom.

Every Amazing Song invites readers to join Coy and Malcolm on a journey aboard the Magic Music Machine, where rhythm, creativity, and confidence come to life. Children discover how to build a beat and find a melody, from a steady stomp to the boom of the bass, learning how every instrument adds its own power to the song.

The book is a follow-up to *Every Amazing Story*, which the duo authored for the 2025 Pre-K Week.

"Georgia's Pre-K is built on the belief that every child deserves joyful, meaningful learning experiences that spark curiosity and confidence," said Susan Adams, Deputy Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports. *Every Amazing Song* gives teachers and families a wonderful way to connect reading, music, movement, and imagination, helping children see themselves as creative learners with their own voices to share."

"This book beautifully captures what I've been striving for," said Bowles. "It brings the magic of reading and the power of music together in a delightful creative adventure for kids, teachers, and families. I truly believe we nailed it when you listen to the song and read the book together."

During Georgia's Pre-K Week, state and local civic leaders visited classrooms statewide to read this and other books to students and experience firsthand how the program provides high-quality early learning that prepares children for success.

Some stats from the week:

- 951 Pre-K sites registered to participate
- Sites in146 of 159 counties participated
- 106+ visits by 78+ Georgia legislators
- 5 congressional leaders participated
- 730 photo contest entries
- Between Woobox and IG alone, photos using the #GaPreKWeek hashtag received 19,515 views.

Scenes from Pre-K Week are shown below.

An evaluation conducted by the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government found that the initiative successfully increased the availability of nontraditional-hour care in participating communities. All grantees offered evening care, most provided early morning options, and many offered weekend care. Participating providers collectively delivered more than 13,000 hours of nontraditional care.

The evaluation also identified challenges that can guide future efforts. Recruiting families proved difficult, particularly early in the grant period, as many families relied on established arrangements with relatives or friends. Affordability was another significant barrier, especially for lower-income families working in industries such as retail and hospitality. Participating child care providers also faced staffing, scheduling, and regulatory challenges.

DECAL is currently reviewing these results and will determine the future of the program at a later date.



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

Board of Early Care and Learning

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First Congressional District

VACANT
Second Congressional District

Joyce Ann Freeman, Bowden
Third Congressional District

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

Karla Zisook, Ph.D., Decatur
Fifth Congressional District

Jen Bennecke, Atlanta
Sixth Congressional District

Kristin Morrissey, Cumming
Seventh Congressional District
(Vice Chair)

Georgia 2Gen Statewide Summit Held September 15-16

Several DECAL staff members attended the 2026 Georgia 2Gen Statewide Summit September 15–16 at Stone Mountain Park.

The Summit highlighted strategies that support children and their families simultaneously in a holistic, two-generation approach that blends supports and services for both groups together, rather than focusing on serving children or parents in isolation. The approach builds economic stability, social capital, health care access, quality education, and more for the whole family.

Approximately 250 leaders from Georgia and beyond, including policymakers, philanthropic organizations, community-based practitioners, parent leaders, and community representatives, attended the event.

"No single program or agency can meet the complex needs of families alone," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "The 2Gen approach recognizes that lasting success comes from supporting children and the adults who care for them. We are grateful to join our partners across Georgia to share ideas, strengthen collaborations, and advance strategies that help families achieve greater stability, opportunity, and success."

Generous contributions from *Transformational Sponsor,* the Liz Blake Giving Fund, and *Systems-Change Sponsors*, Deloitte and MTX Group, Inc. funded the event.

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

Cristina Washell, Ed.D., Cleveland
Ninth Congressional District
(Secretary)

Joanna Hill, Watkinsville
Tenth Congressional District

Maria Franklin, Adairsville
Eleventh Congressional District

VACANT
Twelfth Congressional District

VACANT
Thirteenth Congressional District

Sylvia Washington, M.D., Rome
Fourteenth Congressional District

Sign up for DECAL text messages by texting DECAL to 470-574-3300



Commissioner Jacobs is shown below moderating a panel discussion at The Summit.



Commissioner Jacobs Presents 2026 2Gen Champion Award

At the 2026 Georgia 2Gen Statewide Summit, Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs awarded the 2026 2Gen Champion Award to Commissioner Shawanda Reynolds-Cobb of the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ).

The award recognizes outstanding leaders who demonstrate leadership, collaboration, and measurable impact in advancing two-generation (2Gen) approaches across Georgia.

Appointed by Governor Brian P. Kemp in May 2023, Commissioner Reynolds-Cobb has championed policies and partnerships that strengthen opportunities for Georgia's children, families, and communities. Her leadership reflects the core principles of the 2Gen approach by recognizing that lasting outcomes for children are closely connected to the well-being and stability of their families.

"Commissioner Reynolds-Cobb has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to improving outcomes for children and families across Georgia," said Commissioner Jacobs, who chairs the Georgia Children's Cabinet and leads Georgia's 2Gen efforts. "Her collaborative leadership and dedication to building stronger systems of support embody the spirit of the 2Gen Champion Award."

Commissioner Jacobs and Commissioner Reynolds-Cobb are pictured below.



Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Arthur Barrow, Dylan Uhlir, April Christian, Dianna Aleman, and Jamie Patterson.

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