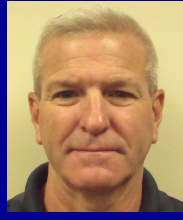


# Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



## DECAL By the Numbers

**6** - Finalists named for DECAL inaugural Early Childhood Educator of the Year Program  
**\$871 million** - Amount in STABLE 4WARD that began October 18, 2021

**10,000** - Additional Georgia children that will be added to CAPS Program beginning on November 1, 2021

**\$34 million** - Awarded in \$1,000 POWER payments to Georgia's early learning professionals and staff

**72,868** - Four year olds enrolled in this year's Georgia's Pre-K Program

**3,099** - Licensed child care learning centers in Georgia

**1,266** - Licensed family child care learning homes in Georgia

**2,702** - Quality Rated child care programs in Georgia

## Follow DECAL on Social Media



## Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs



Dear DECAL Co-workers,

I recently read something that challenged me to think about my perspective in a new and unusual way: ***Do I spend more time looking in the rearview mirror than I do looking out the windshield???*** As I thought about the answer to that question, it dawned on me that for the

past 22 months, I've been looking back – reeling from and focused on all we've been through. Moving forward, however, I want to turn my perspective to what's in front of me...of us.

Looking back is important. I/we can learn valuable lessons by looking back. But as we move into the holiday season ... and as 2021 turns into 2022 ... I encourage us all to focus on and attend to the good, the positive, the beneficial opportunities we as individuals, as professionals, and as a department can look forward to.

We've been entrusted with an unprecedented amount of funding to help stabilize the early care and education industry in our state; to help families access quality child care; and to help improve the quality of child care provided to Georgia's youngest citizens.

We have the exciting, amazing opportunity to change and stabilize the way we do business ... the way we continue to serve the early care and education and nutritional needs of children and families. By looking back, we know **WHY** we've had to change our business operations; now looking forward we can concentrate on **WHAT** we can do differently and **HOW** we can refine our services to make them even more efficient and effective.

As we look ahead "through the windshield" moving into the last quarter of 2021, I believe we have a lot to be thankful for, to be

encouraged by, and to look forward to. I hope you feel the same.

And I hope you and your family have special, safe, healthy, peaceful, fun times together in whatever way you choose to celebrate the upcoming season.

Warmly,



**New Episodes  
Every Wednesday**

## **Another DECAL Team Member Has Authored a Book**

We've learned that another member of our DECAL team has authored a book!

CAPS Quality Assurance and Training Consultant Sha-de Thomas is a published author, writing a book about a seven-year-old boy who suffers from a short attention span, lack of impulse control, and hyperactivity but is able to overcome these challenges with help from teachers and parents.

*Today at School* is Thomas's first book based on her experiences as a parent and her interest in children's mental health.

"Brandon is the main character, and he walks us through his day at school, and in the end there are behavioral techniques and modifications that ultimately assist him with better days," Thomas explained. She said Brandon is loosely based on her now 16-year-old son who was once called a "busy body" and benefited from some of the same resources highlighted in the

## **Gov. Kemp: Georgia to Serve 10,000 Additional Children Through the Child and Parent Services (CAPS) Program**

To provide additional support to Georgia's families and child care providers and ensure more children have access to quality early educational opportunities, Governor Brian P. Kemp and DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs recently announced that Georgia will expand its Child and Parent Services (CAPS) child care program by 10,000 children, beginning November 1, 2021. The CAPS Program serves 50,000 children from families with no to low income and helps them with the cost of child care.

"Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, we have made child care a top priority in Georgia for assisting first responders, essential workers, and other hardworking families who could not stop their important work or work from home during this challenging time," said Governor Kemp. "CAPS is a great example of a public initiative that helps families, their children, and providers alike. This expansion will allow us to serve more Georgians, while also helping more providers become Quality Rated."

This increase in the number of children also includes expanding CAPS eligibility limits, making more children and families eligible for the program. New guidelines will increase the entry income threshold from 50% of the State Median Income (SMI) to 85% of SMI. The expansion, which continues through October 1, 2024, utilizes funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

To support providers in raising their quality, CAPS is increasing its tiered bonus payments to Quality Rated providers by 15%, based on their star level. Programs that are one-star will increase from 10% to 25%; two-star programs will increase from 20% to 35%; and three-star programs will increase from 40% to 55%. Child care providers working to achieve a rating, including those in a probationary or provisional status, will receive a 15% increase from current CAPS base rates "to help in their efforts to increase

their quality and successfully achieve a star rating" said

resources highlighted in the book.

The DeKalb County resident started at DECAL as a temp in 2018 and became fulltime with the CAPS Program a year later. She previously worked with local school systems and in early childhood education.

Thomas's supervisor, CAPS Quality Assurance Training Manager Emily Loukaka, says it comes as no surprise that Sha-de' has reached this exciting milestone. "She is talented, delightful, and driven," said Loukaka. "We see this in her work, and now she will share her talents with the world. Congratulations Sha-de', I cannot wait to see what you do next."

Laura Lucas, DECAL's Director of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health, says the topic is important.

"Young children have mental health or social emotional issues too, just like adults. Children may communicate these issues through their behavior, which can be challenging and often misinterpreted especially in a classroom setting," Lucas explains. "It's important to build strong, trusting relationships with children and explore resources and interventions that can better support children struggling with these issues. Home to school communication is essential to determine what interventions can be most effective and to provide that consistency and structure that all children need to thrive."

You can order *Today at School* on [Amazon](#).

their quality and successfully achieve a star rating," said Commissioner Jacobs.

To receive a CAPS scholarship a family must qualify for at least one priority group. For the "Very Low-Income Priority Group," CAPS will increase the percentage of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) Guidelines that determines eligibility from 50% FPL to 150% FPL, increasing the number of Georgia families eligible for subsidized child care.

In May, DECAL announced a special initiative called ACCESS - Awarding Child Care Education Scholarship Supplements. ACCESS temporarily eases the financial burden of child care for families in the CAPS program. As part of this funding, CAPS family fees -- the portion of child care paid for by families -- are waived through October 2, 2022. Families will not pay their provider any tuition related fees or co-payments for child care services. CAPS will pay child care providers their full published rate for the type of care provided, including the family fee.

According to Childcare Aware of America, the average annual cost for full-time infant care in a child care center in Georgia is approximately \$8,729 or \$168/week.

Since March 2020, DECAL has waived certain CAPS policies to support families and child care providers impacted by COVID-19. For more information, call 1-833-4GA-CAPS (1-833-442-2277). To learn more about CAPS Policies and Procedures, visit [DECAL's website](#).

## Breaking News:

- Governor Brian P. Kemp and Commissioner Jacobs have awarded the inaugural Quality Rated Language and Literacy Endorsement to the following eight child care centers that demonstrated a commitment to providing high-quality, language-rich environments to Georgia's youngest learners: ABC, Another Bright Creation Early Learning and Daycare Center (Palmetto); Discovery Point #61 (Conyers); Giselle Learning Academy (Clarkston); Kid's World Learning Center (Statesboro); Minnie Howell Child Development Center (Atlanta); Rising Star Learning Center (Mableton); The Learning Station (Ellenwood); and Whitfield-Dalton Day Care Center (Dalton).
- DECAL and the Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning have announced the six finalists for the inaugural 2021-2022 Georgia's Early Childhood Educators of the Year Program.



Thomas is pictured below with her newly published book.



*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

Kathy Howell, Carrollton  
Third Congressional District  
(Secretary)

Karla Zisook, Decatur  
Fourth Congressional District

VACANT  
Fifth Congressional District

Kristy Beam, Atlanta  
Sixth Congressional District

Kristin Morrissey, Cumming  
Seventh Congressional District

Luann Purcell, Ed.D.,



**Diana Black**  
Pookie Bear Learning Center  
Savannah, Ga



**Sharon Floyd**  
Sheltering Arms  
Norcross, Ga



**Maria Claudia Ortega**  
My Little Geniuses  
Marietta, Ga



**Kayla Anderson**  
The Greenbrier Preschool  
Evans, Ga



**Hannah Beth Reeves**  
Academy for Little People  
Chickamauga, Ga



**Whitney Carder**  
Cleveland Academy  
Cleveland, Ga

***Winners Announced This December!***

## STABLE 4WARD Opened October 18 for Licensed Georgia Child Care Providers

All licensed Georgia child care providers are encouraged to apply for a fourth round of STABLE (Short-Term Assistance Benefit for Licensed Entities) from DECAL.

Funding for STABLE 4WARD comes from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) passed by Congress earlier this year and will help child care providers and families with workforce support, child care tuition relief, costs of facilities, supplies, materials, and food.

According to DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs, approximately \$871 million will be paid to licensed child care programs, providers with temporary licenses and at least one initial licensing visit, and partners for Early Head Start grantees. DECAL has developed a fair and equitable formula for determining the amount of each STABLE 4WARD payment.

To date, DECAL has distributed more than \$144 million in emergency funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and more than \$107 million in emergency funding from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CCRRSA) Act to help provide child care assistance to frontline workers and help stabilize the child care market.

This includes \$165 million in three rounds of STABLE payments; \$34 million in POWER payments, \$26 million in ACCESS payments, \$19

Warner Robins  
Eighth Congressional District

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

Joanna Hill, Watkinsville  
Tenth Congressional District

Jen Bennecke, Atlanta  
Eleventh Congressional District

VACANT  
Twelfth Congressional District

Melissa Boekhaus, M.D.,  
Smyrna  
Thirteenth Congressional  
District

Debra Brock, Calhoun  
Fourteenth Congressional  
District  
(Vice Chair)

million in CAPS emergency policy payments, \$4 million in SHARE grants, and \$3 million for the CAPS essential services workforce priority group.

Questions about STABLE 4WARD can be e-mailed to [stable@dec.al.ga.gov](mailto:stable@dec.al.ga.gov).

## Nutrition Services Introduces New Brand Identity for the Summer Food Service Program



The Nutrition Services Division is excited to announce that Georgia's Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) has a new name and logo. Happy Helpings is the new brand identity for SFSP that ensures all Georgia's children continue to receive nutritious meals throughout their summer vacation.

Although Happy Helpings is the program's new name, it will continue to operate in the same way as the Summer Food Service Program, which is funded by USDA and administered by DECAL.

"We believe the new look is fun, kid-friendly, and a better match for connecting with our intended audiences," said Tamika Boone, Director of Nutrition Services. "In the upcoming months, you'll start to see the new Happy Helpings name and logo used in all our promotions including online, video, social media, and statewide advertising," she added.

In addition to the new name and logo, the Nutrition Division is launching a new Happy Helpings website. The site offers potential sponsoring organizations access to information and eligibility requirements for participation in the program. Site users will be able to complete an online form to indicate their interest in the program and pre-qualify their organization.

The site will also be marketed to help Georgia families locate meal sites in their area as well as access kid-friendly nutrition education and activities for well-balanced meals.

To learn more about Helping Helpings and how nonprofit organizations can feed Georgia's kids, visit [www.happyhelpingsga.com](http://www.happyhelpingsga.com).

## Employee Suggestion Program

ideas?



Visit the Virtual  
Suggestion Box now!

## Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Jessica Guaneros, James Keith, Dwayne Ward, David Ginsburg,

## DECAL Has Announced Georgia's Pre-K Teachers of the Year for 2021-2022 School Year

DECAL has named its Georgia's Pre-K Teachers of the Year for the

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474747**

2021-2022 school year during the annual Georgia's Pre-K Week October 4-8, 2021. The public school winner is Stephanie Curington from Kings Chapel Elementary School in Perry, and the private center winner is LaNita Carey from Jackson Creek Academy in Lilburn.

As Pre-K Teachers of the Year, Curington and Carey each receive \$3,000 for themselves, \$2,000 for a classroom makeover and supplies, and \$2,500 to cover costs while they are out of the classroom representing Georgia's Pre-K Program. Winners serve as ambassadors for Georgia's Pre-K Program by public speaking, representing the program at various meetings, and modeling effective classroom practices.

The winners were selected from six semi-finalists who each received a classroom observation by a DECAL Pre-K Specialist. Each finalist submitted a small group video scored by outside judges, had a classroom observation, and faced a panel for an in-office personal interview.

"Since the beginning of Georgia's Pre-K Program almost 30 years ago, more than 1.6 million children have entered Kindergarten better prepared to succeed in school," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "That preparation has been possible only because of dedicated Pre-K professionals who work with their students every day. Honoring exemplary Pre-K teachers by recognizing Pre-K Teachers of the Year is one way to thank them for their hard work."

Among other requirements, candidates for Georgia's Pre-K Teacher of the Year must have been employed as a Georgia's Pre-K lead teacher during the 2020-2021 school year, taught as a lead teacher in a Georgia's Pre-K classroom for a minimum of three years, and must be planning to continue as a lead teacher in a Georgia's Pre-K classroom during the 2021-2022 school year.

This school year more than 70,000 four year olds are attending Georgia's Pre-K Program. The voluntary, lottery-funded Pre-K program has been recognized as one of the top programs in the nation, based on quality standards, teacher qualifications, and enrollment.

It is appropriate that this year's winners were announced during Georgia's Pre-K Week, sponsored annually by DECAL and Voices for Georgia's Children. This was the 11th year celebrating the quality early learning that occurs in Georgia's Pre-K Program classrooms.







Stephanie Curington



LaNita Carey

## New Board Members Appointed

Governor Brian Kemp recently appointed three new members to the Board of Early Care and Learning: Kristy Beam is Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning for City Schools of Decatur; Joanna Hill is the former owner and operator of Bright Promises Children's Center; and Karla Zisook is Instructional Coach for College Heights Early Childhood Learning Center in Decatur.

Beam previously served on the DECAL Board representing the Fifth Congressional District but moved and now represents the Sixth Congressional District. Throughout her twenty-three years in education, she has worked as a principal, assistant principal, and teacher in Gwinnett, Rockdale, and Valencia, Spain.

Before opening her child care business in 1994, Hill taught in the Madison County School System. She has served on the board of the Georgia Childcare Association and is a current member of the Georgia Children's Cabinet. Hill recently sold her business to begin retirement. Hill represents Georgia's Tenth Congressional District.

Dr. Zisook has nearly two decades of experience in teaching. She has taught 1st-5th grades in charter, private, and public schools. Before joining College Heights, Zisook taught fourth and fifth grade gifted students. She has taught in Brooklyn, Phoenix, Atlanta, and Decatur. Zisook serves the Fourth Congressional District.

The next meeting of the Board of Early Care and Learning is Thursday, November 18, 2021, beginning at 9:00 AM. The board continues to meet virtually due to COVID-19 and the delta variant.





Kristie Beam



Joanna Hill



Karla Zisook

## Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

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[Contact Us](#)



## Georgia Dept of Early Care and Learning

BRIGHT FROM THE START

