

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



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DECAL By the Numbers

14,000 - Visits per year by Child Care Services

5,250 - Licensed child care programs in Georgia

65-95 - Average workload for CCS Consultants

111,584 - Children served by Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) FY 2014

Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs

Dear DECALers:

I have a question I'd like you all to be thinking about:

What does it mean to you that "All work units (i.e., CCS, Quality, Pre-K, System Reform, Federal Programs, IT, Audits, Legal, Nutrition, Research, etc.) work together to ensure that DECAL functions like one department."

For the past few years we've been asked on our employee satisfaction survey to indicate our level of agreement with the above statement. For the past years our level of agreement has been low...the lowest, in fact, of all other statements on the survey.

As your Commissioner, I want to work on raising the level of agreement, but to do so, we need to ensure that we're interpreting that statement in the same way. Does "work together" and "functions like one department" mean that we all understand the jobs of everyone in the department? Does it mean that every day we know where our peers in other units are going to be...what visits they'll be conducting? Is the answer cross training or better communication? What do you think would make us function better as one department?

As I said in the All Staff webinar last month, I don't think this "challenge" is unique to DECAL. Employees in other organizations for which I've worked have expressed similar issues of silos and "the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing." Is it realistically possible to eradicate this problem completely? If not, what do you think we can do to, at least, make it



4,934 - Child care programs receiving CAPS funding FY2014
84,000 - Budgeted slots for students in Georgia's Pre-K Program
21,355 - Enrollment in Georgia Head Start
3,108 - Enrollment in Georgia Early Head Start
6.5 - Instructional hours daily in Georgia's Pre-K Program



Quick Links

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September Birthdays



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

- 1 - Richard Bartlett
- 2 - Cassa Andrews
- 5 - Tanya Astin
- 5 - Peggy Kosater
- 6 - Dana Bond
- 7 - Roslyn Williams

better? I really want/need to hear your ideas.

When I look across DECAL on any given day, I see our various units...Child Care Services, CAPS, Nutrition, Georgia's Pre-K Program and Instructional Supports, Quality Rated, Head Start Collaboration, ELC Administration, Legal, CCR&Rs, IT, Research, Finance, Human Resources, and Audits and Compliance... working together to serve Georgia's children and their families AND each other.

Audits and Compliance working with Pre-K to ensure that lottery funds are spent according to program guidelines...Child Care Services working with System Reform to recruit child care programs to participate in Quality Rated...Nutrition Services working with CAPS and Child Care Services on compliance issues that impact a program's participation in the CACFP...Finance working with all divisions to secure goods and services needed and ensuring that staff space and facility needs are met.

As I said in last month's webinar, DECAL is not perfect...and we can always improve the way we do things...but I honestly believe that every day we demonstrate examples of where our units DO work together successfully on behalf of children, families, and child care providers.

So PLEASE think about the question with which I began this letter, and we'll discuss it (and other topics of interest to you) in October at the 20/20 Roundtable Discussions in Atlanta and Macon. You will hear from me about my goals for the department for the coming years, and I want to hear directly from you about ways DECAL can continue to be the "gold standard" of state agencies.

As always, thanks for everything you do! I look forward to seeing you all very soon.

Sincerely,

DECAL Priority:

Ensure Health & Safety

Child Care Services Division Scores High in Customer Survey

DECAL's Child Care Services (CCS) Division received high marks in a recent customer survey. Over 950 licensed child care providers across Georgia participated in the survey, giving CCS high marks in most aspects of the customer experience. At least 75 percent of all respondents rated CCS with a 4 or 5 on 84 percent of the questions. The division received its

8 - Laura Davis
8 - Angie Ramanou
8 - Tiffany Whigham
13 - Jill West
14 - Sonia Ladd
14 - Jeannie Lippy
14 - Donna Marks
16 - Sarah Beck
17 - Amy Hill
17 - Shenetta McNair
18 - Secanda Jewell
19 - John Gardner
20 - Quatavius Copeland
21 - Micca Burris
22 - Takisha Aragoness
22 - Glecia Carter
22 - April Rogers
24 - Luetricia Billingsley
26 - Krystal McCants
27 - Pam Bojo
27 - Alex Dagenhart
27 - Jennifer Dixon
27 - Sherry Smith

Union City Pre-K Teacher Receives Award for Educational Excellence

DECAL was joined by First Lady Sandra Deal, Fulton County Schools, Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) and others recently in surprising CH Gullatt Elementary School Pre-K Teacher Richele Stamper with the Atlanta Families' Awards for Excellence in Education. The \$7,500 award includes \$1,500 for professional development of her choice, \$3,500 for a classroom project, and \$2,500 for personal use. Mrs. Stamper was applauded for her Young Readers' Book Club and increasing gains in student achievement while positively impacting students' self-esteem. She is the first Pre-K teacher to receive the annual award.

highest marks in supporting programs through health and safety regulations and the staff always being polite and courteous. Areas for improvement included accessing information on the DECAL website and perceptions of consistency and fairness in enforcing regulations.

"It would be hard for any regulatory unit to score perfectly in these areas and still be doing its job," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "These are things that CCS has actively worked on in years past, and we are pleased with the progress indicated by these scores."

DECAL Assistant Commissioner for Child Care Services Kristie Lewis agrees. "I am so thankful to work with such a great team in CCS. We have the responsibility of regulating providers while also educating them to improve their services to children and families. This role of regulation can come with unique challenges as well as opportunities. This survey validates that the providers see the role of the CCS consultant in a positive light and benefit from the visits that we make. Many thanks to the CCS team!"



Kristie Lewis

Currently, there are close to 5,200 licensed child care programs in Georgia. CCS inspects each center unannounced at least twice a year or more based on complaints. DECAL recently launched a new website designed to give Georgia child care providers more control and easier access to their online information. Named DECAL KOALA, for Kids Online Administrative Licensing Application, the new system allows providers to create their own profiles, update contact information, add e-mail addresses, pay license fees online, review inspection reports, and more.

DECAL Priority:

Increase Quality & Access

Georgia Head Start Promotes Regular Attendance in the Early Years

By Janice Haker, Director, Head Start Collaboration Office



Preschoolers who are chronically absent are more likely to have poor attendance as they transition into grade school, increasing the likelihood that they will drop out of school before graduation. The Georgia Head Start Association is taking a leadership role in stemming the tide of chronic absenteeism - missing more than 10 percent of school days in a year - in Georgia's Head Start and Early Head Start sites and has declared increasing attendance to be a strategic goal for the association and our grantees.

But, before we can improve attendance, we need to understand how many children in Head Start and Early Head Start programs are missing too many days of school. Beginning in 2013-2014, we have encouraged our grantees to track attendance, with 61 percent of sites reporting in the first year. Levels of chronic absenteeism varied widely across the sites. One Head Start site reported that less than 1 percent of children were chronically absent while at another site, 84 percent of students were chronically absent.



GELDS Teacher Toolboxes Are Now Available

The GELDS Teacher Toolboxes are now available. These toolboxes provide teachers with hundreds of developmentally appropriate activities linked to the GELDS for children from birth to five along with tips for transitions, embedding technology, and adapting activities for children with disabilities. The toolboxes are available at custompoint.rrd.com/DECAL. They're free; you just pay for shipping!



Pictured below packing the toolboxes are (L-R) Inclusion Specialist Supervisor Brandy Locchetta, Pre-K Regional Manager Amy Browder, and Pre-K Regional Manager Judy Carter.

While we are still collecting data from year two of this effort, we have already seen promising results. Ninth District Opportunity, which operates 26 licensed centers in 20 northeast Georgia counties, decreased chronic absenteeism in its sites by 8 percent by stressing the importance of attendance in staff's conversations with parents, tracking student attendance, and providing transportation to families when possible.

Easter Seals of North Georgia, which operates Head Start and Early Head Start programs in five north Georgia counties, decreased chronic absenteeism by 1 percent and made attendance a part of its five-year strategic plan. Easter Seals sites posted Attendance Thermometers, providing a visual reminder to both parents and staff about the importance of regular attendance. The sites also created Quality Improvement Attendance Teams and tasked them with reviewing attendance data regularly and providing annual recommendations for strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism.

A growing body of research is showing that school climate - how safe, supportive, and engaging a school or early learning program is - has a powerful influence on attendance. The Georgia Departments of Education (DOE) and Early Care and Learning (DECAL) have been actively promoting the use of evidence-based frameworks to improve learning climates in Georgia's public schools and early learning programs, respectively. And, recently, they have been working together to implement a prototype for aligning the two frameworks to more effectively support children's social-emotional and cognitive development across the first eight years of children's lives. We will work with these two agencies and the implementing partner, the Metro Regional Educational Service Agency, to share what they are learning with our grantees to help them strengthen their attendance efforts. With Georgia data showing that absences in excess of five days have a measurable impact on student achievement, we also plan to begin tracking the number of children in our programs that miss this many days.

Other activities that Georgia's Head Start and Early Head Start sites employed include:

- Providing transportation to parents when possible
- Emphasizing the importance of coming to school every day and sending home flyers about attendance
- Emphasizing the importance of early learning programs in ensuring children are fully prepared and ready to succeed in school when they transition into kindergarten
- Inviting representatives from the local education agencies to attend the monthly parent center committee meetings to reinforce the importance of attendance
- Having family service workers and teachers follow up with families when a child has missed two or three consecutive days
- Conducting home visits when a child has missed three consecutive days



A Day in the Life of Emily Grosoff

If there is one thing that Emily Grosoff never tires of, it is spending time in a Georgia's Pre-K classroom.

"I love seeing the children because I really love the Pre-K year," said Grosoff, a former teacher.



Add to that her passion for supporting teachers, and her current position as a Pre-K consultant for DECAL appears to be a perfect fit.

Grosoff is the liason between DECAL and 135 Pre-K classrooms and 80 schools in DeKalb County. Her goal is to visit each of those classrooms and Pre-K providers at least twice a year, conducting quality reviews, offering technical assistance to teachers and administrators, and ensuring regulatory compliance.

On a typical workday, she will leave her home at 7 a.m. so that she can arrive at her first school visit when the doors open. There, she will spend several hours evaluating the learning environment, observing interactions between teachers and students, and providing any support the teachers need to effectively conduct their classes on a daily basis.

"I'll spend time talking to the teachers, seeing how I can

- Promoting nutritious meals and regular exercise as a way of keeping children healthy enough to attend school

Georgia's Pre-K Program Begins Its 23rd Year

Approximately 84,000 four year olds all across the state are attending Georgia's Pre-K Program this school year. 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. Georgia's Pre-K Program, considered universal - meaning that any age eligible child residing in Georgia may attend the program regardless of family income, is beginning its 23rd year. During the 2014-2015 school year, 66 percent of all four year olds in Georgia were served by state Pre-K and Head Start, with a statewide Pre-K enrollment of nearly 82,000.

support them, checking that their grant requirement checklists are in order, checking lesson plans to make sure they are using our prototype, and checking the learning environment itself," said Grosoff.

At the end of the visit, Grosoff will write a report and review it with the Pre-K provider's director or principal before heading off to visit another school. After that, she'll either go to her home office or head directly home to her husband and two children before repeating the routine early the next morning; it's a routine for which she is thankful.

Grosoff, who celebrated her one year anniversary as a Pre-K consultant on August 1st of this year, said she is especially grateful to be "so incredibly supported and surrounded by really good people."

"I feel blessed every single day," she said.

DECAL Represented at Zoo Atlanta's Educator Appreciation Day



Great #PreKFirstDayat Blue Ridge



Child Care Facilities Win Money for Promoting College Savings DECAL and Path2College Announce Phase II of Sweepstakes

On August 27, DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs joined Tricia Chastain, president of the Georgia Student Finance Commission and Mitch Seabaugh, executive director of the Path2College 529 Plan, to present six Savannah-area child care facilities with prizes for winning the We Care, Child Care Sweepstakes Challenge and to launch the second phase of the sweepstakes in which Georgia children can win a \$1,529 contribution to a Path2College 529 College Savings Plan account.

Phase I of the sweepstakes was held during July to encourage child care facilities throughout



DECAL's Judy Carter and Jennifer McCreary represented Georgia's Pre-K Program Saturday at Zoo Atlanta's annual Educator Appreciation Day.

**Let Us Hear
From You!**



DECAL joined Georgia Student Finance Commissioner and Path2College 529 Plan to present prizes to winners of the We Care, Child Care Sweepstakes Challenge and to launch the second phase of the sweepstakes.

Georgia to share information with parents about saving for college. Three child care facilities were randomly selected from across the state as the statewide winners, and six additional facilities in each region (North Georgia, South Georgia, and Metro Atlanta) were also selected as winners of the sweepstakes.

"On behalf of the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, I congratulate the child care facilities that won the We Care, Child Care sweepstakes by informing the families of the children in their care about the importance of saving now for their children's college education," said Jacobs. "DECAL's goal is to lay a solid academic foundation on which a child's

education can be built. We Care, Child Care's goal is to lay a solid financial foundation that will allow Georgia's children to pursue the postsecondary education of their dreams."

On August 1, the second phase of the We Care, Child Care Sweepstakes kicked-off, targeting parents and grandparents of child care-age children across the state. Parents, grandparents and legal guardians (who are 21 years of age or older) have until October 31, 2015 to enter children born in 2002 or after for a chance to win a \$1,529 Path2College 529 Plan contribution. Six winners across the state will be randomly selected to win.

To enter, parents, grandparents and legal guardians should visit www.Path2College529.com and click on the We Care, Child Care Sweepstakes button. No purchase necessary. Void where prohibited. Sponsored by the Path2College 529 Plan and the Department of Early Care & Learning (DECAL).

The Path2College 529 Plan is also currently holding its 2015 Newborn Sweepstakes, which will award one child born in Georgia in 2015 with \$5,529 for his/her Path2College 529 Plan, and the hospital where the child is born will win \$1,529. For entry deadlines, prize details and official rules for each sweepstakes, visit www.path2college529.com. No purchase necessary. Void where prohibited. Sponsored by the Path2College 529 Plan.

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

We cannot ready 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:*

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

Congratulations to the newest QUALITY RATED child care programs!

- | | |
|--|--|
| Kathy Alexander, Lilburn ★ | ★★★ Future Leaders Christian |
| A Peace of Mind Prep Academy, Acworth ★ | Academy Jonesboro, Jonesboro |
| A.A.I.M.S. Montessori School, Suwanee ★ | ★★★ Heritage Hills Early Learning Center, Conyers |
| ABC Childcare and Learning Center, LLC, Covington ★ | ★ Imagination Station Too, Columbus |
| Amodestri Childcare & Academy, Lovejoy ★ | ★ Jones Hall Head Start/Early |
| Jamie G. Anderson, Marietta ★★ | Head Start Center, Savannah |
| Ileana S. Barrios-Zermeno, Marietta ★★ | ★ Kids World Learning Center #1, Rome |
| BeeKids Academy, Calhoun ★ | ★ Kids World Learning Center #2, Rome |
| Dianne M. Blue, Stockbridge ★★ | ★ Lifeline Academy, Mableton |
| Bright Horizons Little One Center, Savannah ★ | ★★★ Merline D. Lindsay, Lithonia |
| Brooklet United Methodist Church Preschool
and Learning Center, Brooklet ★★ | ★★★ Little Folks Farm & Childcare, Lyons |
| Brookwood Center, Rex ★★ | ★★★ Love In Action Preschool/Daycare, Hazelhurst |
| Brookwood Child Care II, Dallas ★★ | ★★★ Mattie F. Matthews, Jonesboro |
| Burke County Public Schools | ★★★ McGraw Child Development Center, Fort Benning |
| Early Head Start, Waynesboro ★ | ★★★ Northwoods Montessori, Inc, Atlanta |
| Camelot Christian Academy, Rex ★★ | ★★★ Park View Montessori School, Woodstock |
| Candy Cane City Nursery School, Decatur ★ | ★★★ Rabun County PreK, Clayton |
| Mariela Carmenaty, Lawrenceville ★★ | ★★★ Brenda K. Robinson, Mableton |
| Carol's Daughter Learning Center, Atlanta ★★ | ★ Falisha L. Scott, Lithonia |
| Kerri L. Cason, Lavonia ★ | ★★★ Smiles, Giggles, and Hugs Child Development
Center, LLC, Statesboro |
| Childcare Network #107, LaGrange ★★ | ★★★ Southeastern Tech Child
Development Center, Swainsboro |
| Childcare Network #137, Statesboro ★ | ★ SuperKids Early Learning Center, Rome |
| Christ Chapel Learning Center, Zebulon ★ | ★★★ The Learning Academy of
College Park, College Park |
| Danielle Dabel, Acworth ★ | ★★★ The Learning Depot, Blue Ridge |
| Dalton High Early Head Start, Dalton ★★ | ★★★ The Learning Depot, Blue Ridge |
| Dawson County Pre-K, Dawsonville ★★ | ★★★ Towns County Head Start/Pre-K, Hiawassee- |
| Discovery World Learning Center, Macon ★★ | ★★★ Walton Creative Learning, Monroe |
| Effingham County YMCA, Rincon ★★ | ★★★ Charlotte A. White, Jenkinsburg |
| Fayette Early Learning Academy, Fayetteville ★ | |

Dawn 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

The Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Taijha Harden, Rian Ringsrud, Maria Reznik, Margie Cook, Lauris Cooper, Titus Dyson, and Jennifer Dixon.

DECAL Priority:

Foster Organizational Excellence

Roadshow for Economic Impact Results

The results of a recent economic impact study commissioned by DECAL will be discussed at four public policy forums across the state beginning this month. DECAL commissioned the University of Georgia and Georgia State University to study the impact of the child care industry on the economy of Georgia. The most recent study in 2007 showed that child care programs in Georgia created over \$4.1 billion in revenues annually, while creating over 61,000 jobs.

The Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education (GPEE) will join UGA, GSU, and DECAL in presenting the results from the study on September 29 in Valdosta, October 14 in Macon, October 21 in Atlanta, and October 23 in Athens. At each location, registration will be held from 7:45 to 8:15 AM followed by a study briefing from 8:15 to 10:00 AM and a Public Policy Impact Forum from 10:15 to 11:30 AM.

"It's been eight years since our last economic impact study, and we know conditions have changed since then," said Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "The previous study revealed the significant impact the child care industry has on Georgia's economy. This study will gauge the impact of the Great Recession on the industry. As Governor Deal continues to emphasize job creation in our state, it is important to understand the economic impact of the child care industry in Georgia and to recognize that it is a viable economic engine across the state."

Researchers from the University of Georgia designed, conducted, and compiled the results from the survey. Researchers from Georgia State University analyzed and interpreted the results. The universities are working collaboratively to draft the final report.

For more information, e-mail bftsresearch@decalfga.gov.