

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



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Commissioner's Corner

by Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs

Dear DECAL Staff,

One of my favorite quotations is by a man named William Pollard, who, interestingly enough, was a physicist and a theologian. He said, "Learning and innovation go hand in hand. The arrogance of success is to think that what you did yesterday will be sufficient for tomorrow."

In my experience as your commissioner, I believe it is safe to say that DECAL does not operate with the "arrogance of success." Without question, we have been...and are...successful at developing, implementing, operating innovative programs, initiatives, grants, etc. to enhance the well-being of Georgia's children and families. BUT, I also see us continually working to learn from what we do, so we can do it even better, more efficiently, more effectively.

Georgia began piloting Pre-K in 1992. I dare say that Georgia's Pre-K Program 2016-2017 looks very little like the program initiated by the Georgia Department of Education in the early 1990s for 750 "at risk" students. That's because every year, those responsible for Georgia's Pre-K Program then...and we now...haven't been afraid to honestly scrutinize our work and ask, "How can we improve what we're doing?"

The roots of DECAL stretch back to 1996 when Governor Zell Miller and the Georgia General Assembly created the Office of School Readiness (OSR) to administer the lottery funded Pre-K program. At that time OSR administered Pre-K, licensed only the private child care centers that offered Pre-K, and administered the CACFP. Telephone numbers for the entire staff fit on one side of one page.



DECAL By the Numbers

4,989 - Licensed child care programs in Georgia

187 - Pending applications for licensed child care programs in Georgia

3,875 - Funded Georgia's Pre-K Program classrooms

63,018,831 - Meals served during FY16 by Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

1,150 - Quality Rated child care programs in Georgia
2,738 - Child care programs participating in Quality Rated
7,196 - LIKES for DECAL Facebook Page
1,920 - FOLLOWERS on DECAL Twitter

Quick Links

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Decidedly DECAL CALi Quiz Winner



Georgia's Pre-K Program Assessment Analyst Susan Breheny was the winner of our first Decidedly DECAL CALi Quiz. She won a pair of tickets to Zoo Atlanta. Susan's name was drawn from all employees who took the online quiz and scored 100. Read this issue of Decidedly DECAL and watch for the next quiz and your chance to win some fun prizes donated by local businesses!

September

Today the department looks very little like the office created in 1996. That's because through the past 20 years OSR's/DECAL's leaders and Georgia's executive and legislative leaders haven't fallen prey to the "arrogance of success." We've studied national research; we've solicited feedback from families, from early care and education providers, from early childhood advocates and experts; we've collaborated with stakeholders; we've commissioned studies and evaluations of our work. And we've used all that we've learned to make informed decisions to improve what we do and how we do it.

Thank you for your patience, your flexibility, and your willingness to acknowledge that what we did yesterday for Georgia's children and families may not be sufficient for tomorrow's children and families. Those are the qualities that will keep us relevant, on the cutting edge, and effective in serving the next generations of Georgia's youngest citizens.

Gratefully,

GUEST COLUMN:

Closing the Word Gap: Georgia's Talk With Me Baby Initiative

*by Brenda Fitzgerald, M.D., Commissioner and State Health Officer
Georgia Department of Public Health*



We all know that growing babies need food to sustain them and help them grow healthy and strong. Just as food nourishes a growing child's body, language interactions nourish a child's brain. That's language nutrition.

The best predictor of a baby's future academic achievements is the number of words spoken to the baby and the amount of time spent in active engagement from birth to three years of age.

Children from low-income families hear approximately 600 words every hour, whereas children from higher-income families hear 2,000 words an hour. Over the course of three years, it adds up to a 30 million word gap between low-income children and children from higher-income families.

This 30 million word gap contributes to critical disparities in academic performance and is influenced by a generational lack of access to education and language nutrition.

According to a study done by University of Kansas researchers Betty Hart and Todd Risley, both quantity and quality of language are essential for vocabulary development, which is a predictor of third grade reading proficiency. Up to third grade, children learn to read. After third grade, children read to learn. Children who cannot read by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school. In Georgia, two-thirds of our children are not achieving third grade reading proficiency.

Birthdays



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

- 1 - Richard Bartlett
- 2 - Cassa Andrews
- 4 - Emily Smith
- 5 - Tanya Astin
- 5 - Peggy Kosater
- 6 - Dana Bond
- 7 - Roslyn Williams
- 8 - Laura Davis
- 8 - Angelita Ramanou
- 8 - Tiffany Whigham
- 13 - Jill West
- 14 - Sonia Ladd
- 14 - Jeannie Lippy
- 14 - Donna Marks
- 17 - Amy Hill
- 17 - Shenetta McNair
- 19 - John Gardner
- 20 - Quatavius Copeland
- 21 - Micca Burris
- 22 - Glecia Carter
- 22 - Takisha Golden
- 22 - April Rogers
- 24 - Luetricia Billingsley
- 26 - Krystal McCants
- 26 - Barbara Sanders
- 27 - George Dagenhart
- 27 - Sherry Smith
- 30 - Rhianna Clark

Day in the Life of Sylvia Boykin



It's been said that the only way to do great work is to love what you do. Such is the case for Sylvia Boykin, whose passion and job responsibilities are perfectly aligned.

"I really love what I do and have come to realize that training is my passion," said Boykin, Nutrition Training

Coordinator for DECAL.

Guided collectively by a team of leaders from the Georgia Department of Public Health, the Georgia Department of Education, Emory University's School of Nursing and Department of Pediatrics, the Marcus Autism Center at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, the Atlanta Speech School's Rollins Center for Language and Literacy, and Get Georgia Reading - the state's campaign for grade level reading - Georgia's Talk With Me Baby (TWMB) is dedicated to making sure every child born in Georgia receives essential language nutrition as a strong foundation for cognitive ability, social-emotional competency, school readiness, third grade reading proficiency and high school graduation, and ultimately lifelong success.

The good news is that the 30 million word gap can be bridged. TWMB helps build that bridge by introducing language nutrition in early childhood settings by training staff in health care, public health and WIC clinics, and early learning centers. Staff can then transfer that knowledge to parents and caregivers, teaching them about the importance of early language exposure and talking to their babies.

For more information about language nutrition and TWMB, visit talkwithmebaby.org.

Teachers of the Year to be Named this Month

For the first time in its 24-year history, Georgia's Pre-K Program has a Teacher of the Year recognition program and will announce winners from a public school and private school on September 27. In August, Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs and Naserian Foundation CEO Stephanie Blank visited five finalists. The sixth finalist visit was scheduled for today. Blank's foundation is sponsoring the statewide recognition.

The finalists are Connie Ellington of Bethlehem Elementary School in Bethlehem/Barrow County; Stacy Tidwell of Duncan Creek Academy in Dacula/Gwinnett County; Tonya Freeman of Green Acres Preschool in Douglasville/Douglas County; Kelly Harris of Crescent Elementary School in Griffin/Spalding County; Rondrikus Fletcher of Lamar County Primary School in Barnesville/Lamar County; and Channie Frazier of Kids World in Statesboro/Bulloch County.

"Now in its 24th year, Georgia's Pre-K Program is nationally recognized as an exemplary early childhood education program for four year olds that significantly impacts school readiness skills in language, literacy, and math," said Commissioner Jacobs. "The program's success can be attributed directly to the outstanding Pre-K teachers and assistants who implement this program daily. This is a small way for us to recognize their efforts."

Her primary responsibilities include designing, developing, and facilitating training related to program compliance and requirements for both the Child and Adult Care Food Program and the Summer Food Service Program.

Her favorite part of her job is providing technical assistance to program participants and internal staff.

"I love 'aha' learning moments," said Boykin, a DECAL employee for two years.

If appointed DECAL Commissioner for a day, Boykin said she would host an "Employee Swap Day."

"This would allow employees to work in another unit to gain a big picture view of the agency and how various areas function," she said.

Outside of work, Boykin volunteers time to various community service projects, serves as a mentor and enjoys consignment shopping.

Her favorite quote is by Eldridge Cleaver: "You either have to be part of the solution, or you're going to be part of the problem."

Wellness Committee Brings Healthy Snacks to You

You know the feeling. It hits you around mid-afternoon when you need a snack for a quick pick-me-up. Thanks to DECAL's Wellness Committee, a selection of healthy and nutritious snacks -- all free from any partially hydrogenated oils -- is always within reach for



Pictured above are Teachers of the Year Finalists (clockwise starting at top left) Kelly Harris, Rondrikus Fletcher, Connie Ellington, Channie Frazier, and Stacy Tidwell. Finalist not pictured is Tonya Freeman, who will be visited today by DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs and Naserian Foundation CEO Stephanie Blank.

DECAL and Zoo Atlanta Host Educator Appreciation Day

DECAL is partnering again this year with Zoo Atlanta to host Educator Appreciation Day on Saturday, September 17, 2016 from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM. Early care and education professionals throughout the state, including DECAL employees, are encouraged to bring their guests 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>.

employees working at or visiting the Twin Towers. Don't even think about going downstairs.

For four years now, the Wellness Committee has offered a wide variety of healthy snacks in baskets conveniently placed in breakrooms on the sixth and seventh floors, and the Nutrition area on the eighth floor.

Employees can find everything from veggie chips and trail mix to fresh fruit and granola bars, and every item is priced at 50 cents. All items are 200 calories or less...250 calories for nuts and trail mix. You won't find candy bars, pastries, or anything fried in these baskets.

DECAL Business Analyst Barbara Sanders, who chairs the Wellness Committee, says the baskets have been popular. "We have been told the snacks come in handy when you need something to tide you over until dinner at home," said Sanders. "We're glad DECAL employees are taking advantage of the wellness snacks and making healthy choices when snacking."

Members of her committee keep an eye peeled for great deals while shopping at Publix, Kroger, Trader Joe's and Costco. They are reimbursed for their purchases and any profits help support wellness activities for the agency.

Sanders says recent additions have included fresh peaches and apples, boiled eggs, and honey sticks from a local farmer's market. The free office delivery service Nature's Garden Express will soon be adding organic fruits and vegetables.

"We follow nutritional guidelines in managing our healthy snacks and stay within a reasonable cost," Sanders explained.



Training Coordinator Gary Amos and Business Analyst Barbara Sanders of the DECAL Wellness Committee

"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 Tent to personally encounter exotic animals and to talk with the Zoo's education staff."

In addition, guests will receive a coupon for 10 percent off purchases in the gift shop and food outlets (coupon valid on September 17 only). For more information on Zoo Atlanta's Educator Appreciation Day, call 404-624-5822 or e-mail education@zooatlanta.org.



Educator Appreciation Day on September 17, 2016 gives educators and their guests an opportunity to visit Zoo Atlanta, home to orangutans Madu and Keju (pictured below) and giant panda twins Mei Lun and Mei Huan (at left) among many other animals.



Inclusive Early Learning Week is September 19-24

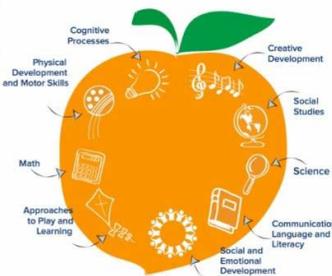
DECAL has announced that Inclusive Early Learning Week will be celebrated September 19-24, 2016. The week includes increasing community awareness of and advocacy for inclusion, celebrating

And most importantly, the snacks never contain any partially hydrogenated oils.

Introducing PEACH!

NOW AVAILABLE!

PEACH



An interactive website that puts thousands of high-quality, developmentally appropriate activities at your fingertips. These activities are designed for children age birth to five-years-old and are directly linked to the GELDS.

www.peach.dec.al.ga.gov



[Visit PEACH Now!](#)

Let Us Hear From You!

the successes of child care programs, and strengthening supports that promote inclusive practices in all early learning environments across Georgia.

"Georgia is leading the nation in our work on behalf of young children with disabilities and their families," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. "This is an exciting week where we engage providers in advocacy, celebration, information, and reflection in our continued partnership to strengthen the supports needed to ensure that all of Georgia's children can benefit from high quality learning experiences."

As part of the celebration, Commissioner Jacobs and DECAL's official mascot, CALi, will visit Quality Rated child care programs in Georgia that have earned the QR Inclusion Endorsement. Visits will take place on Monday, September 19, 2016, at 10:00 AM at Central Georgia Technical College Child Development Center in Warner Robins; Tuesday, September 20, 2016 at 9:30AM at Appletree-ABC Preschool in Alpharetta; and Wednesday, September 21, 2016 at 9:30 AM at D. Scott Hudgens, Jr. Early Learning Center in Lawrenceville, and 11:30 AM at Lifespan Montessori in Athens.

During each visit, Commissioner Jacobs will read "CALi is a Super Friend," a social story that describes ways children can be a Super Friend to one another.



DECAL Inclusion Specialists Michelle Clark (L) and Lindsey Urry making plans for Inclusive Early Learning Week.

Inclusive Early Learning Week concludes Friday and Saturday, September 23-24, 2016 at the annual conference of the Georgia Association on Young Children (GAYC) being held at Gwinnett Technical College in Lawrenceville. Providers will be invited to take the "Person First" Pledge, have a photo taken with CALi in the photo booth, and attend several sessions on inclusion and a featured session with Special Guest Speaker Stacey Ramirez, Georgia Executive Director for The Arc, the largest national organization of and for people with intellectual and related developmental disabilities and their families.

In addition, during Inclusive Early Learning Week, all Georgia child care programs will receive an electronic Provider Celebration Kit linked to the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) that provides examples of ways providers can engage children, staff, and families throughout the week. The kit will be e-mailed to child care providers and posted at www.dec.al.ga.gov.

Clarification on Cut-Off Birthday for Kindergarten

House Bill 100 (HB 100), originally introduced in the 2015 session of the Georgia General Assembly, proposed to adjust the age requirements (cut-off birthdate) for enrolling in kindergarten. Adjusting the cut-off birthdate for kindergarten would have affected the cut-off birthdate for Georgia's Pre-K Program. HB 100 was NOT passed by the General Assembly in 2015.

During the 2016 session, another bill titled HB 100 (that had nothing to do with Kindergarten entry

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:

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

dates) was proposed. The General Assembly passed that version of HB 100.

While HB 100 has ultimately become law, it was not the version of the bill that affected Kindergarten (or Pre-K) entry dates. Consequently, the cut-off birthdate for Kindergarten (and Pre-K) remains September 1.

Lactation Room Assists New Moms Returning to Work

To assist our DECAL nursing mothers transition back to the workforce, we offer a convenient benefit at the Twin Towers office site -- a new lactation room. Renovated specifically for this purpose, the room is designed to provide a relaxing atmosphere for our valued employees and is situated close to a breakroom.

Lisa Rambhajan, DECAL Facilities Coordinator, said the lactation room is available to any nursing mother working on-site in the Atlanta office and field-based personnel who may be attending meetings at the Twin Towers location. This special room is located on the eighth floor of the East Tower between the Cypress and Willow conference rooms and is equipped with a rocking chair and electrical outlets.

Employees will need a key to access the room and are asked to change the signage on the door before and after each use. To gain entry and reserve a specific time to use the room, send an email to workrequest@dec.al.ga.gov. The door should be locked and the key returned. To enhance the comfort, appeal, and suitability of the lactation room for our moms, Rambhajan asks employees to consider donating tissues, hand sanitizer, and discarded magazines from home.

For more information on DECAL's lactation room, contact Rambhajan via e-mail at Lisa.Rambhajan@dec.al.ga.gov or by phone at 404-463-0277.

The Faces of DECAL

DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue are (L-R) Ashely Dorsey, Dana Bond, Susan Simpson, Christi Moore, Mark Dock, Stanley Cooper, and Kimberly Mitchell.

Dawn Henderson, Marietta
Sixth Congressional District

Vacant
Seventh Congressional District

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

Sheri Hooper, Gainesville
Ninth Congressional District

Janice Gallimore, Greensboro
Tenth Congressional District

Victor Morgan, Cartersville
Eleventh Congressional District
(Chair)

Jerri Kropp, Statesboro
Twelfth Congressional District

Vacant
Thirteenth Congressional District

Tangela Johnson, Cohutta
Fourteenth Congressional District