



**Brian P. Kemp**  
Governor

**Amy M. Jacobs**  
Commissioner

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Media Contact: Reg Griffin  
404-656-0239  
[reg.griffin@dec.al.ga.gov](mailto:reg.griffin@dec.al.ga.gov)

**Officials Launch New Child Care Initiative for Middle Georgia March 19**

*Will announce grant awarded to ATRIUM Health Navicent that funds child care during nontraditional hours at select facilities in Macon and Milledgeville. Enables parents to work, attend school at night.*

ATLANTA, Ga., (March 13, 2024) – Parents looking for child care during nontraditional hours now have more options in Middle Georgia. An Expanding Parents’ Access to Nontraditional Delivery (EXPAND) Grant awarded to Atrium Health Navicent and funded by The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), will enable local child care facilities to offer the additional service.

A launch event taking place **March 19 at 11:00 a.m. at Little Disciples Daycare, 3700 Lawrence Drive South, Macon, GA**, will feature **Joy Moten-Thomas, Assistant Vice President, Government Relations, Atrium Health Navicent** and **representatives from DECAL** who will discuss the initiative underway with eight child care facilities in Middle Georgia. Representatives from Senator Raphael Warnock’s office will also attend.

**Participating Facilities**

The child care facilities in Macon that will soon offer extended hours enabling parents to work or attend school during nontraditional hours are

- Higher Excellence Learning Center Too
- Houston Road Day Care and Learning Center
- Little Disciples Daycare
- Tiny Tots Learning Academy
- Riverside Children’s Center
- Care-A-Lot Learning Center 1

Milledgeville locations include

- Robin’s Nest Playschool
- Miller Plaza Learning Center

**What Are Nontraditional Hours?**

Facilities offering nontraditional care hours operate outside of the traditional hours of Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Participating centers are extending their care hours to midnight with two offering weekend hours.

### **Regional Employers Receiving Funding Through the Grant**

In addition to funding child care providers, Atrium Navicent Health is providing monies for child care tuition assistance to regional employers.

### **DECAL Quote**

“The EXPAND Grants reflect DECAL’s targeted focus on creating supports for families with young children, the child care industry, and other businesses that contribute to well-being and overall growth,” said DECAL Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations and Partnerships Bentley Ponder. “In order for Georgia to have a strong workforce and economy, working families must have access to quality child care during both traditional and nontraditional hours, and EXPAND grants are supporting that goal.”

### **Quote from Macon-Bibb County Industrial Authority**

"The EXPAND Grant enables us to better support and address the crucial needs of our industry partners," emphasized Eleyce Coleman, Existing Industry Manager at the Macon-Bibb County Industrial Authority (MBCIA). "Through collaboration with Atrium Health and DECAL, we have tackled the challenge of nontraditional-hour child care, ensuring more solutions for the local workforce to thrive. This initiative underscores MBCIA's commitment to supporting both our local businesses and our community, fostering a more inclusive and vibrant economy for all."

### **Quote from Macon-Bibb Chamber of Commerce**

As the Greater Macon Chamber focuses our strategic efforts on workforce attraction and retention, child care remains a consistent barrier to meaningful employment. This grant is a groundbreaking solution for our employers and workforce, bridging nontraditional work hours with quality child care options.

### **Quote from SitterTree**

“The EXPAND grant demonstrates Georgia’s commitment to supporting families and investing in children throughout the state. SitterTree is grateful for the opportunity to participate by supporting Macon parents with easy access to quality child care options. Through funding made possible by the grant, parents can download the SitterTree app to search for child care centers offering nontraditional child care hours in their area, as well as in-home options,” said Jody Stephenson, SitterTree Founder and CEO. “This free feature will be available to parents and child care centers throughout Georgia beginning in April 2024. In addition, SitterTree has extended its online marketplace service to connect child care centers in Macon with qualified substitutes and staff.”

### **Quote from Atrium Health Navicent**

Atrium Health Navicent is proud to join community partners in utilizing DECAL’s investment to support central Georgia working families in need of childcare after 6 p.m. Thanks to DECAL and our partners for collaborating to launch this pilot project.

### **Quote from JaJuandraula Green Taylor, Director of Higher Excellence Learning Center Too**

Being a part of this pilot program has been so delightful. We have connected with other amazing providers and community partners. We chose to be a part of this pilot program because we understand the hardships parents have in finding adequate care when they have to work or go to school late in the evenings when most centers are closed. Higher Excellence is delighted to provide a safe and nurturing environment for parents to bring their children to during traditional and nontraditional hours.

### **Explaining the Grant**

There are two types of EXPAND Grants: one for licensed child care providers to expand their operating

hours and a second for nonprofit organizations and government entities to form collaboratives to address the child care access challenges in their communities.

Atrium Navicent Health is one of the six nonprofit and government recipients of the Grant, receiving \$750,000.

Supported by research showing that the availability of high-quality child care and early education plays a key role in Georgia's workforce development and economic growth, DECAL created the EXPAND Grants. The awards serve an identified need shared by many families, employers, and communities for child care services outside of the traditional hours of Monday through Friday from 6:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

The EXPAND Grants, funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), can be used for a variety of initiatives. The grants for child care providers could cover staff pay and benefits, child transportation costs, or necessary health and safety improvements to support extended hours of operation. Grants to nonprofits and government agencies could help underwrite partnerships between local businesses and child care providers to serve parents working nontraditional hours.

### **Funding by DECAL**

The EXPAND Grants are just one component of more than the \$2 billion in supports DECAL has developed using federal financial relief funds to help the child care industry, families with young children, and communities surmount the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The agency has allocated more than \$100 million in one-time bonuses for early care and education teachers. It has distributed over \$1 billion in STABLE Awards to support child care providers and Awarding Child Care Education Scholarship Supplements (ACCESS) payments to support families with CAPS scholarships in paying for child care. DECAL has also made available tens of millions in Quality Rated Restoration Grants to help stabilize providers delivering high-quality care.

### **About DECAL**

The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) is responsible for meeting the child care and early education needs of Georgia's children and their families. It administers the nationally recognized Georgia's Pre-K Program, licenses child care centers and home-based child care, administers Georgia's Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program and federal nutrition programs, and manages Quality Rated, Georgia's community-powered child care rating system. The department also houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office, distributes federal funding to enhance the quality and availability of child care, and works collaboratively with Georgia child care resource and referral agencies and organizations throughout the state to enhance early care and education. For more information, go to [www.dec.ga.gov](http://www.dec.ga.gov).

### **About Atrium Health Navicent**

Atrium Health Navicent is the leading provider of health care in central and south Georgia and is committed to its mission of elevating health and wellbeing through compassionate care. Atrium Health Navicent is part of Advocate Health, which is headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina, and is the third-largest nonprofit health system in the United States, created from the combination of Atrium Health and Advocate Aurora Health. Atrium Health Navicent provides high-quality, personalized care in 53 specialties at more than 50 facilities throughout the region. As part of the largest, integrated, nonprofit health system in the Southeast, it is also able to tap into some of the nation's leading medical experts and specialists with Atrium Health, allowing it to provide the best care close to home – including advanced innovations in virtual medicine and care. Throughout its 125-year history in the community, Atrium Health Navicent has remained dedicated to enhancing health and wellness for individuals throughout the region through nationally recognized quality care, community health initiatives and collaborative

partnerships. It is also one of the leading teaching hospitals in the region, helping to ensure viability for rural health care for the next generation. For more information, please visit [www.NavicentHealth.org](http://www.NavicentHealth.org).