

# DECAL Accomplishments

## Department Background

In 2004, Georgia's leaders made a significant investment in the state's most valuable commodity, its children. That year, the Georgia General Assembly created Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) by merging and aligning several state programs that served young children and their families. This new department was one of the first in the nation solely dedicated to meeting both the early childhood education and the child care needs of the state's youngest citizens. Georgia remains one of only three states with a department like DECAL and the state has received national recognition for creating a department that aligns resources and prioritizes the early education needs of children and families.

Today, in 2018, DECAL is responsible for meeting a myriad of child care and early education needs for the state. The Department administers the nationally recognized Georgia's Pre-K Program, now in its 25th year, licenses and regulates child care learning centers and family child care learning homes, and manages Quality Rated, Georgia's child care rating system. DECAL is also responsible for administering federally funded nutrition and childcare subsidy programs and houses the Head Start State Collaboration Office.

Early education is valuable and important because a child's most significant brain development occurs in the first five years. Early education forms the basis for future learning. DECAL's goal is to lay a solid foundation on which the academic success of Georgia's future leaders and workforce can be built. Investing in Georgia's children and families will pay in dividends for decades to come by supporting the state's long-term economic growth and producing citizens equipped to deal with the challenges of the 21st century.

## Accomplishments

Over the past eight years, the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning has successfully transformed the state's early education system. Working with other state agencies and external partners, DECAL has created an early education system that firmly places early education as part of Georgia's educational pipeline.





## Health & Safety

### Child Care Services

- DECAL licenses and monitors nearly 4,700 child care programs in Georgia to ensure that they provide safe, healthy, and nurturing environments. On average, Child Care Services consultants make 12,000 annual visits (minimum of two visits each year) to inspect and support licensed child care programs.
- In 2010, the Department implemented a licensing fee system based on the size and type of the child care facility. The licensing fee structure ensures child care programs are regulated similarly to other industries and services. The division has also created a self-service system that allows providers to have easier access to DECAL services and their own program information.
- In 2014, DECAL Commissioned a study on infant and child injuries in Georgia that found injuries are at least 10 times more likely in the general population than in child care.
- In 2016, the Department, in partnership with the state's child care industry and early childhood advocates, developed a new licensing enforcement and compliance structure.

### Criminal Background Checks

- DECAL's Legal Unit worked with the State Legislature to pass laws to strengthen background check requirements for those interested in working in the childcare industry.
- Nearly 160,000 childcare workers have passed this rigorous screening, with the division completing reviews within two business days.

### Nutrition Services

- In 2017, over 78 million meals and snacks were served to children through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).
- Since 2012, over 28 million meals and snacks have been served to children through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP).
- In FY2017 157 counties were served through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and 154, in conjunction with the Georgia Department of Education's Seamless Summer Option, were served through the Summer Food Service Program.
- Nutrition Services has partnered with the Georgia Public Library Service (GPLS) and increased the number of libraries serving as summer meal sites in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) from 12 to 62.





## Access to Quality Early Learning

### Georgia's Pre-K Program

- In 2017, the nationally renowned Georgia's Pre-K program celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Since its inception, the program has served over 1.6 million children in a high-quality learning environment. The program continues to serve over 80,000 children each year.
- In 2011, DECAL commissioned a longitudinal study and the results demonstrate the strong impact of the program. Children in Georgia's Pre-K make significant gains, more than would be expected for typical growth. Gains made in Pre-K continue to hold through kindergarten and first grade.
- In 2016, the Governor's Education Reform Commission created a new salary scale for Pre-K Lead Teachers based on credentials and experience and established salary parity with K-12 teachers.
- In addition to the longitudinal study, the Department conducted an analysis of third grade test scores. This analysis found a small, but significant relationship between attending Pre-K and being classified as proficient or higher on all four of the third-grade milestones assessments.

### Childcare & Parent Services (CAPS) Program

- The state's child care subsidy program has served Georgia's children and families since 1972.
- The program is federally funded through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), also known as the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF).
- Beginning in July 2012, and completed in December 2017, this program transitioned from the Division of Family and Children Services to DECAL.
- The transition places all early child care and education programs under one roof, providing a more comprehensive approach to early child care and education in Georgia.
- This opportunity allows the state to shift the focus of CAPS from public assistance to an integral component of early childhood education.
- This transition allows DECAL to increase the scope of service delivery to more holistically include families. Using existing resources, DECAL accomplished this by forming a new Family Support division. This division will help families in the CAPS program navigate their children's early years and attain self-sufficiency using two generational strategies that support both the child and the parent.



## Access to Quality Early Learning

### Quality Rated, Georgia's Tier Quality Rating & Improvement System

- In 2012, DECAL launched Quality Rated, a one, two, and three-star rating system for child care programs, to improve the quality of existing child care and early learning programs. The program helps support parents and families in making more informed choices about child care.
- At no cost, DECAL also contracts statewide to provide intensive technical assistance, training, and support to all child care programs pursuing a Quality Rated star rating. The purpose is to help child care programs before they are rated; help them improve their star rating; and maintain the highest levels of quality.
- The Quality Rated website includes easy to use resources for parents and families to find quality child care, Pre-K and early learning options with an online search feature ([www.qualityrated.org](http://www.qualityrated.org)) and free hotline (1-877-ALLGAKIDS); to help families looking for child care find high quality options.
- Over 20,000 consumers a month visited [www.qualityrated.org](http://www.qualityrated.org) to search and learn more about the 5,000 childcare programs, including over 1,500 that have a Quality Rated star rating.

### Summer Transition Programs

- In 2010, DECAL created a Summer Transition Program for rising kindergartners who did not attend Georgia's Pre-K or Head Start; or attended but needed additional support to be ready for kindergarten in the fall. Evaluation results show significant gains over the six-week program
- In 2013, a separate Rising Pre-K Summer Transition Program for children entering Pre-K was created. This program specifically targets Dual Language Learners and was created in response to results from the Pre-K Longitudinal Study.
- Both Summer Transition Programs utilize state and federal dollars and target children whose families are eligible for subsidized child care through CAPS.

### Georgia Early Learning & Development Standards (GELDS)

- Working with various state partners, DECAL created an aligned set of learning standards for children from birth to age five. These standards address skills across all domains of learning (communication, language and literacy, social emotional development, physical development and motor skills, cognitive development and general knowledge, and approaches to play and learning).
- The GELDS are aligned with Kindergarten Georgia Standards of Excellence thereby creating a seamless set of standards from birth through 12th grade.
- In addition to developing the GELDS, DECAL also developed and disseminated training and resources to early education professionals statewide.



## Access to Quality Early Learning

### Social Emotional & Mental Health to Support Children in Early Education Programs

- DECAL has expanded the network of coaches statewide to support early learning programs and launched Georgia SEEDS for Success (Social Emotional Early Development Strategies for Success). SEEDS provides strategies to early educators to increase social emotional skills and prevent challenging behavior.
- DECAL launched a State Leadership Team to support the implementation of the Pyramid Model for Promoting the Social Emotional Development of Infants and Young Children, which is aligned with the K-12 PBIS model.
- DECAL has also partnered with the Georgia Department of Education to create the position of Early Childhood Climate Specialist to ensure seamless system of social emotional supports in programs serving children birth to grade 12.



### Georgia's Early Education Workforce Initiatives

- Utilizing federal Child Care Development funds, over \$19.7 million has supported approximately 25,000 early education professionals. They have been supported through the following programs:
  - Scholarships: 10,754 scholarships, \$7.4 million
  - Incentives: 11,260 incentive payments, \$7.9 million
  - Awards (ELC funding): 2,500 payments for increasing credential level, \$4.4 million
- DECAL has developed a model for relationship-based professional development expanding opportunities for high quality professional learning. This includes expanding coaching opportunities, providing technical assistance, and creating professional learning communities.
- In partnership with the Georgia Professional Standards Commission, DECAL Launched the Professional Development System. This supports the professionalization of the early education workforce by verifying credentials, training, and work experience.



## Access to Quality Early Learning

### Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Grant

- In 2014, DECAL was awarded a five-year grant to provide \$22.1 million to deliver comprehensive Early Head Start services to infants, toddlers, and their families through partnerships with existing child care learning centers and family child care homes.
- DECAL is one of only six state agencies in the country to receive the grant.
- As an Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership grantee, DECAL delivers comprehensive services to approximately 200 children under three years of age. These services include health, early education, nutrition, mental health, and family support services.
- DECAL revised state-level subsidy policies and implemented new procedures. This approach allowed DECAL to maximize resources to build an integrated service-delivery model using Early Head Start, subsidies, Early Learning Challenge, and the philanthropic funding for Quality Rated. Together, the partnerships served 1,350 Georgia infants, toddlers, and their families in 2016-2017.

### Infant/Toddler Specialist Workforce and Infant/Toddler Initiatives

- Utilizing research showing that, despite the tremendous growth that takes place during the infant and toddler years, quality in these classrooms is among the lowest in early education, DECAL has a cadre of infant and toddler specialists that support programs statewide.
- In 2017, utilizing state funds from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, DECAL created the Early Language Literacy Project for infants and toddlers that focuses on critical early language skills. This project funded approximately 50 classrooms.



### Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge Grant

- DECAL staff submitted Georgia's Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant that brought in \$51 million to the state.
- The grant funded Quality Rated expansion, development of the birth to five longitudinal data system, created the Early Education Empowerment Zones, developed, in conjunction with the DOE, the Kindergarten Readiness Check, and funded professional development initiatives that increased training and credentials for state's birth to five teachers.



## Other Achievements

### Second Economic Impact Study

- In 2014, DECAL commissioned a second Economic Impact Study. The results show that the economic activity of the child care industry in Georgia generates \$4.7 billion dollars annually and \$535.7 million in federal, state, and local taxes annually.
- The study also found that Georgia's early care and education system provides 67,507 jobs in the industry itself and generates an additional 17,454 jobs in other market segments. Additionally, parents' annual earnings supported by the availability of child care total \$24 billion.
- The study is used by stakeholders and advocacy groups to demonstrate the short-term economic value that the early education brings to the state. Both Economic Impact Studies have served as a national model for other states and communities to conduct similar research.

### Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning

- In 2017, the General Assembly passed legislation authorizing the Foundation for Early Care + Learning, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that supports educational excellence for Georgia's youngest learners and their families. Researchers have found that for every \$1 raised and spent on high-quality, early education receives a \$13 return on investment per year due to lower crime and healthcare costs; more effective public schools; and a more educated, skilled workforce. To ensure that our children continue to receive a high-quality education and Georgia citizens enjoy a long-term return on investment, the Foundation has partnered with the business community and charities around the state in its fundraising efforts.
- In March, the Foundation supported DECAL as it celebrated 25 years of Georgia's Pre-K Program. During the celebration, over 300 teachers, students, providers, state and local officials, and sponsors celebrated the renowned program created in 1992 by the late Governor Zell Miller.
- The Foundation will sponsor the 2019 Georgia Pre-K Teachers of the Year. This program annually spotlights the Pre-K teaching profession and recognizes outstanding teachers at public and private Georgia Pre-K centers. The Georgia Pre-K Teachers of the Year serve as educational ambassadors that work with DECAL to conduct staff development activities for other Pre-K teachers around the state.