

Decidedly DECAL

Highlighting the Events That Shape Who We Are



July 2014 - In This Issue

[By the Numbers](#)

[Important Links](#)

[State Bar Committee Appointment](#)

[Look Again Campaign](#)

[July Birthdays](#)

[Board of Early Care and Learning](#)

[Commissioner's Corner](#)

[Leadership Through the Years](#)

[New Technical Assistance Unit](#)

[Summer Meals Program](#)

[Farm to Georgia Preschool Grants](#)

[Early Education Workforce Support](#)

[Walking Challenge Success](#)

DECAL By the Numbers

12 - Emergency closures in FY 2014

14 - Emergency closures in FY 2013

4 - Emergency closures in FY 2012

97.09 % - Fill rate in Georgia's Pre-K

60 - Classes in this year's Summer Transition Program

389 - Quality Rated Programs

1,566 - Sites in Georgia serving summer meals to eligible children and adults

13,488 - Inspections of child care programs in FY 2014



Quick Links

[DECAL on Facebook](#)

[DECAL on Twitter](#)



Commissioner's Corner

by Interim Commissioner Amy Jacobs

Dear DECAL Co-workers,

As I mentioned in my introductory e-mail to you last week, I was familiar with the work of DECAL through my former position at OPB. I've watched the evolution of this department...from the Office of School Readiness when I joined OPB to the creation of Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning in 2004 to one of the most respected state agencies serving children and families today.



But after being here for a week, I'm learning and experiencing the scope, the breadth and depth, of ALL the work we do, and I reiterate how excited I am to be a part of DECAL. I look forward to learning much more from all of you.

In my first week I attended a reception at the Governor's Mansion with prospective funders for our work in Quality Rated and witnessed the commitment of DECAL staff and the potential power of public-private partnerships. I attended a meeting of the Alliance of Education Agency Heads that clearly demonstrated how the state now views early care and education as part of a developmental continuum from birth to postsecondary education and the workplace.

I participated in a meeting to determine Pre-K funding where I recognized the delicate balance we must achieve and maintain in determining where to award Pre-K classes and how much funding to provide to ensure that as many children as possible can benefit from our amazing program.

I attended the Walking Challenge Celebration where I met many of you and sensed the competitive camaraderie you enjoy as a staff.

And sadly...but necessarily...I signed my first emergency closure documents in response to a tragic incident in which a child was badly burned in a child care facility. Having young children of my own, I know how important it is for families to have child care they can trust, so I appreciate the department's strategic commitment to ensure the health and safety of Georgia's children in out-of-home child care.

We still have a lot of work to do, but I am convinced that if we continue equipping and supporting those of you "on the front lines" and those of us in administrative support positions...and if we continue engaging and supporting the ever-important early care and education professionals who care for and feed our children every day, we can positively impact the lives of Georgia's children and their families.

Let me know how we can help.

Sincerely,

[DECAL on Instagram](#)
[DECAL on Pinterest](#)
[DECAL Website](#)



State Bar Committee Appointment



Kimberly Alexander

DECAL's Legal Services Officer Kimberly Alexander was recently selected to serve on a standing committee with the State Bar of Georgia. She will be serving on the Children and the Courts Committee, which considers the interests of

children in the judicial system and makes proposals for reform of the law governing juveniles. The committee provides advice and expertise to the Executive Committee and the Board of Governors.

"Look Again" Campaign Gaining Momentum

"Look Again," DECAL's campaign alerting parents and caregivers to the dangers of leaving children unattended in vehicles, has been well accepted by the press and the public. Governor Nathan Deal and First Lady Sandra Deal helped launch the campaign May 27 at the State Capitol. Since that time, the campaign has been covered by NBC's "Today Show," The Weather Channel, HLN, and local media nationwide. [Click here](#) to view "Look Again" coverage on Fox News.

Officials hope a new YouTube video titled "Look Again," featuring Georgia parents who have lost children to vehicular heat stroke accidents, will help raise awareness and prevent similar incidents in the future.

"During Georgia's hot summer months, there is a higher risk of serious injury or death as a result of a child being left alone inside a vehicle," said Governor Deal. "Since 2010, eight children in Georgia have died due to vehicular heat stroke. I ask that all Georgians join me in preventing future loss of life by being aware of your surroundings and never taking the chance of leaving a child in a car, even for just a minute. Lives can be saved if we take the time to Look Again."

In addition to DECAL's efforts, other groups have taken up the cause. Shown below are examples from the Gwinnett Family Child Care Association, Towne Square Academy Child Care Center in McDonough, and First Steps Child Care Center in Atlanta.

Amy

Leadership Through the Years

- Michael F. Vollmer, Executive Director, Office of School Readiness, 1996-1997
- Celeste G. Osborn, Executive Director, Office of School Readiness, 1997-2001
- Marsha H. Moore, Executive Director, Office of School Readiness, 2001-2004/Commissioner, DECAL, 2004-2007
- Holly A. Robinson, Commissioner, DECAL, 2007-2011
- Bobby D. Cagle, Commissioner, DECAL, 2011-2014
- Amy M. Jacobs, Interim Commissioner, DECAL, 2014-Present

DECAL Priority:

Ensure Health & Safety

New Technical Assistance Unit Offers Free Training on Core Rules

DECAL's new Technical Assistance Unit in the Child Care Services Division is getting rave reviews for its free Saturday Core Rules Training, held recently in Marietta, Morrow and Macon. The group, led by Manager Melissa Davis, helps non-compliant child care programs regain and maintain compliance with licensing rules and regulations.

Upcoming sessions will be held July 12 in Albany, July 26 in Savannah, and August 9 in Athens. All of the upcoming trainings are filled to capacity; however, a waiting list is being compiled. Additional trainings are also being planned.

For more information, contact the TA unit at ccs.ta@decals.ga.gov.

In the photo below are (L-R) Jana Albertson, Mari Springs, Danna Foster, Nikki McCray, Melissa Davis, Linda Barge, and Mary Jerrell. Not pictured is LaTonya Bonner.





July Birthdays



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

- 7 - Zara Handsford
- 7 - Georgia Thomas

First Lady Sandra Deal Joins DECAL for Summer Food Kickoff



Georgia's First Lady Sandra Deal at 2014 Summer Food Kickoff

DECAL joined the Georgia Food Bank Association, the Georgia Department of Education, and others June 10 at Gwinnett County's Lucky Shoals Park to officially kick off the 2014 Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). Georgia's First Lady Sandra Deal was our special guest. Free meals are available throughout the state for eligible children age 18 and under (and some eligible adults).

The SFSP provides free meals in low-income areas during the summer months when students are out of school.

Over 60% of Georgia's school-aged children are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Through the SFSP, these children can receive free meals during the summer when they may not have daily access to well-balanced meals. The Summer Food Service Program is funded by the U.S. Department of Agricultural and administered in Georgia by DECAL.

Parents and children can find sites in their area where meals will be served by visiting DECAL's website at <http://decal.ga.gov/Nutrition/Search.aspx>. Additionally, sites can be located by calling 1-855-550-SFSP (7377) or by texting "FOODGA" to 877-877 (standard messaging and data rates apply).

According to Falita Flowers, DECAL's Nutrition Services Director, "When school is out, too many families across the state worry about how their children will receive nutritious meals on a daily basis. The SFSP helps fill that gap and contributes to the overall health and well-being of children."

On June 19, the SFSP was featured prominently on Fox 5's "Good Day Atlanta" program. [View the story here.](#)

DECAL Priority:

Increase Quality & Access

Farm to Georgia Preschool Grants Available to 11 Georgia Counties

DECAL is offering Farm to Georgia Preschool grants to child care learning centers located in Barrow, Clarke, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, Gwinnett, Jackson, Newton, Rockdale, and Walton counties that participate in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and have not previously participated in Caregivers Promoting Healthy Habits. The program, made possible from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service, will include activities and training on local food procurement, field trips to area farms and farmer's markets, edible gardens, cooking with kids, taste tests, and nutrition education. Grants include up to \$2,000 to support Farm to Georgia Preschool activities, in addition to technical assistance, training, and other resources.

"We are honored and excited to receive this funding to continue our efforts to promote better nutrition in child care programs across Georgia," said DECAL Interim Commissioner Amy Jacobs. "Children spend a significant amount of time in child care settings and teaching them to try to enjoy fresh, healthy foods can set them up for a lifetime of healthy behaviors."

- 8 - Haley Carwile
- 8 - Stacey Schaff
- 9 - Nakilia McCray
- 9 - Darlene Sims
- 9 - Robin Stevens
- 9 - James White
- 11 - Wakisha Carswell
- 13 - Ronnae Williams
- 14 - Marsha Ruiz-Crosby
- 16 - Adrienne Hamlin
- 19 - Jennie Couture
- 20 - Jackie Shivers
- 21 - Laura Evans
- 21 - Jacquice Jones
- 23 - Carol Hartman
- 23 - Bridgette Merrett
- 25 - Pam Stevens
- 28 - Christie Bearden
- 28 - Glenda Davis-Canteen
- 28 - Rhonda Gunn
- 30 - Dee Bolden
- 31 - Judy Carter
- 31 - Bentley Ponder

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, Savannah
First Congressional District

Susan Harper, Albany
Second Congressional District
(Secretary)

Kathy Howell, Carrollton
Third Congressional District

Phil Davis, Stone Mountain
Fourth Congressional District

Carlene Talton, Decatur
Fifth Congressional District

Dawn Henderson, Marietta
Sixth Congressional District

Sherron Murphy, Lawrenceville
Seventh Congressional District

Luann Purcell, Ed.D., Warner Robins
Eighth Congressional District
(Vice Chair)

Tammy Lenkeit, Hoschton
Ninth Congressional District

Janice Gallimore, Greensboro
Tenth Congressional District

Victor Morgan, Cartersville
Eleventh Congressional District
(Chair)

Jerri Kropp, Statesboro

Jennifer Popadiuk, Nutrition Project Manager, said the grants allow DECAL to expand its innovative campaign to introduce fresh, local fruits and vegetables to children during their most formative years.



Jennifer Popadiuk

"We would like to see more fresh and local produce served in in early child care settings because this enables us to teach children to enjoy fruits and vegetables while their dietary preferences are still forming," said Popadiuk.

Grant applications will be available beginning July 1, 2014, at: <http://dec.al.ga.gov/Nutrition/NutritionServicesMain.aspx>

Interested child care centers may attend one of two Farm to Preschool Workshops on Wednesday, July 2, 2014, at Georgia Piedmont Technical College in Clarkston, or Tuesday, July 8, 2014, at the City of Winder Community Center. Registration is required. For more information call 404-463-4093 or e-mail jennifer.popadiuk@dec.al.ga.gov.

New Support for Early Childhood Education Workforce

Today marks the launch of additional support for Georgia's early childhood educators to enhance their credentials through three new programs, 1st Level, 2nd Level, and 3rd Level. For the next three years, early childhood education program administrators and teaching personnel can receive financial awards for furthering their education and earning higher credentials in the field. This program will award a single bonus at each level to eligible applicants who earn the following early childhood education credentials or degrees from eligible institutions from January 1, 2014 through July 1, 2017:

1st Level: Single Payment of \$1,200 for completion of a CDA Credential or a Technical Certificate of Credit

2nd Level: Single payment of \$1,500 for completion of a Technical College Diploma or Associate of Applied Arts or Science Degree

3rd Level: Single payment of \$2,500 for completion of Bachelor's or Master's Degree

Funding for this effort comes from the federal Early Learning Challenge grant (ELC) that DECAL was awarded in December 2013. In addition, DECAL will continue to provide tuition assistance through its scholarship program to eligible early educators in licensed child care settings who enroll and attend any of Georgia's SACS-accredited, HOPE-eligible institutions to earn an early childhood education credential.

"We are excited about the additional support the state can offer early childhood educators thanks to the Early Learning Challenge Grant," said DECAL Interim Commissioner Amy Jacobs. "Achieving a higher credential will be more affordable than ever for early childhood professionals because of Georgia's HOPE Grant and HOPE Scholarship, DECAL's supplementary scholarship program, and additional funding through the ELC. And ultimately, the children of Georgia will benefit."

Eligibility information and applications are available through Care Solutions, Inc. at 800-227-3410 or online at www.DECALscholars.com

DECAL Priority:

Foster Organizational Excellence

DECAL Employees Step It Up in Walking Challenge

In May, DECAL employees were challenged to step up their game in the Witness to Fitness: DECAL Walking Challenge to increase daily steps and improve health. Chief Information Officer Craig Detweiler and the Wellness Program Committee kicked off the challenge on Thursday, May 1, 2014, at the All Staff Meeting, providing free

Twelfth Congressional District

Judy Neal, Stockbridge
Thirteenth Congressional District

Tangela Johnson, Cohutta
Fourteenth Congressional District

You know that **great idea** you
have for our department?
We cannot read your
MIND.
That is why **DECAL** has



Kristin Bernhard
Deputy Commissioner for System Reform

EMPLOYEE
SUGGESTION
PROGRAM

[Visit the Virtual Suggestion Box Now!](#)

*We are committed to nurturing
Georgia's youngest children, keeping
them safe and healthy, and to enriching
their lives.*

The Faces of DECAL

*DECAL faces featured in the banner of this issue
are (L-R) Susan Adams, James White, Allison
Carwile, Karen Mobley, Brandi Swain, Leslie
Truman, and Sabrina Henry.*

pedometers for everyone.

Over the next 30 days, employees proved they were up to the challenge logging close to 40 million steps in only one month. The top individual walkers were Employment and Benefits Specialist Rhonda Gunn with an average of 35,223 steps per day; Database Administrator Crystal Hoffman with an average of 32,298 steps per day; and Nutrition Services Administrative Assistant Tammie Baldwin with an average of 29,634 steps per day. Top teams were HR/Research with an average of 10,180 steps per person, per day; Pre-K/Twin Towers with an average of 9,758 steps per person, per day; and Financial Services with an average of 9,242 steps per person, per day.

"This event really got employees thinking about how they can be more active and then inspired them to actually do it," said Jennifer Popadiuk, Nutrition Project Manager and a member of the Wellness Program Committee. "I heard stories of weight loss and inspiration to run races. This is a great accomplishment that we should be extremely proud of as an agency."

For Gunn, an avid fan of daily walking, gym workouts, and yard work, the challenge was a great way to encourage others to be more conscious about their health and life. "I walked during break and at lunch," she explained. "After work I went to the gym and took spinning, walked on the treadmill, and exercised on an elliptical. I used a push mower for cutting my grass."

At the office, Gunn skips the elevator and uses the stairs each day and has this advice for co-workers: "Make it a lifestyle change and it will be just another day." But she admits she's glad to be free from the pedometer.

In the photo below are (L-R) Nutrition Project Manager Jennifer Popadiuk, Database Administrator Crystal Hoffman, Employment and Benefits Specialist Rhonda Gunn, Nutrition Services Administrative Assistant Tammie Baldwin, DECAL Interim Commissioner Amy Jacobs, and Chief Information Officer Craig Detweiler.

