



Nathan Deal
Governor

Amy M. Jacobs
Commissioner

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact: Reg Griffin
404-656-0239
reg.griffin@dec.al.ga.gov



**Georgia's First Lady Sandra Deal to Promote
Quality Early Childhood Education in Dalton**

Georgia's First Lady Will Visit Two Local Child Care Programs

ATLANTA, Ga., (February 1, 2016) – Georgia's First Lady Sandra Deal, a strong proponent of early childhood education, will visit Dalton on Thursday to promote Quality Rated, Georgia's system to assess, improve, and communicate to families and communities the level of quality provided by early education programs. Governor Nathan Deal and Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) formally launched Quality Rated in July 2013.

Similar to rating systems for other industries like restaurants and hotels, Quality Rated assigns a star rating (one star, two stars, or three stars) to child care programs that meet certain quality standards over and above the state licensing requirements for health and safety.

Mrs. Deal will speak at a Quality Rated breakfast at the Dalton Golf and Country Club. Following breakfast, she will visit the First Baptist Church of Dalton's Children's Learning Center, a two-star Quality Rated child care program, and Brighter Tomorrows Child Development Center, a one-star Quality Rated child care program in Calhoun.

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Dalton/Whitfield County are located in one of Georgia's four Early Education Empowerment Zones (E3Zs). The E3Zs are regions of the state that work with DECAL and other state agencies to pilot early education system reform initiatives and partnerships to support better outcomes for young children. The North Georgia E3Z is composed of Whitfield, Catoosa, Murray, Gilmer, and Gordon counties.

“Child care programs participating in Quality Rated receive free approved training, free technical assistance, and are eligible for a \$1,000 materials mini grant,” said Suzanne Harbin, Community Coordinator for DECAL’s North Georgia E3Z. “Quality Rated child care programs also receive generous bonus packages of classroom materials contributed by private philanthropic partners and are eligible to collect higher reimbursements from the state’s child care subsidy program.”

Currently, over 900 child care programs in Georgia are Quality Rated with close to 1,500 programs in the process of becoming Quality Rated.

Families looking for child care can learn more about the importance of selecting a Quality Rated child care program at www.qualityrated.org and can search for Quality Rated child care programs on the DECAL website at www.decals.gov.

About Bright from the Start

Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning 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, 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.decals.gov.