

WINTER 2026

Dear Child Care Professionals of Georgia:

May I be among the first to wish you a happy and prosperous new year! DECAL regularly uses some of our federal funding to make community impact grants directly to community organizations to address local issues and improve the lives of children and families in their communities. I am writing today because I think you may be interested in reading about the projects we funded in 2025. I am pleased to report that we awarded at least one grant in every region of the state.

Last year we introduced a new grant category, 2Gen Community Literacy grants (Literacy), to support the state-wide emphasis on improving literacy rates in Georgia. We continued to make Community Transformation grants and 2Gen Innovation Grants for Student Parent Success (2Gen Innovation).

We made four grants in the greater Atlanta area, **Region 1 North West**. The APEC Learning Center, which serves many South Fulton communities, received a 2Gen Innovation grant to create a resource hub to connect families to high-quality child care and career skills training. Black Child Development Institute-Atlanta received a Community Transformation grant to support and advance the careers of adults working in early care and learning in 13 counties. Georgia State University received a Community Transformation grant for a project to improve access to behavioral health services for families with children from birth to age 5 in Athens-Clarke County in **Region 6 North East**. Quality Care for Children received a Community Transformation grant to pilot a farm-to-ECE program to improve nutrition security.

In **Region 2, Central West**, we made a 2Gen Innovation Grant for Student Parent Success to Kennesaw State to expand its Student Parent Ambassador program by increasing outreach and recruitment.

In **Region 3, Central East**, we awarded two Literacy grants, to Scottdale Early Learning to create a 2Gen literacy program that includes take-home home kits and family literacy nights, and to the International Rescue Committee for a project in Scottdale to teach English to refugee families.

In **Region 4, South West**, we made a 2Gen Innovation grant Columbus to Technical College to expand a program for student parents in the field of early care and learning. We also awarded Community Transformation grants to both Brooks County Family Connection and Cook County Family Connection for projects to strengthen community support systems.

In **Region 5, South East**, we awarded the Coastal Plain Area Economic Opportunity Authority (EOA) a Literacy grant for a program designed to break the cycle of low literacy and help parents get the education and training they need to become more employable. We awarded the Valdosta Commission for Children & Youth a 2Gen Innovation grant to establish on-campus resource hubs for student parents at local technical colleges. And we awarded the Bulloch County Board of Education a Community Transformation grant for a collaborative project to improve literacy by means of a Book Bus, storytelling events, and professional development for teachers of children from birth to 5; and to strengthen families by providing resources on stress management, financial literacy, and healthy living.

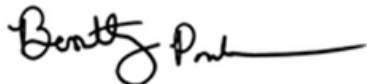


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In **Region 6, North East**, we made two grants to the Dalton Public Schools, a Literacy grant to furnish a mobile library and a 2Gen Innovation grant to establish a Parent Resource Center.

We received a lot of outstanding applications for these grant opportunities, and we had to make difficult choices. As always we used an objective scoring system, and each application was scored by multiple reviewers. I am very excited about all these projects, and I look forward to seeing the results.

Sincerely,



Bentley Ponder

Deputy Commissioner for Quality Innovations & Partnerships



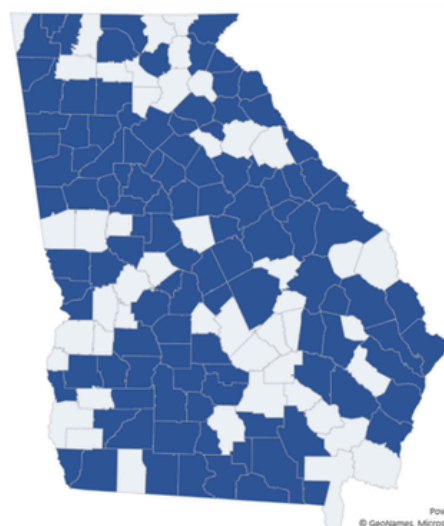
Happy Helpings Georgia



Happy Helpings is Georgia's Summer Food Service Program that provides free, nutritious meals to kids and teens all summer long. When school is out, Happy Helpings makes sure children 18 and under still have access to healthy breakfasts, lunches, and snacks at convenient community locations like parks, schools, and churches. It's a fun, safe way to fuel young minds and support families during the summer months.

Below is a list of the focus counties for 2026. If you would like to become a sponsor or a meal site, click on the [Happy Helpings](https://www.happyhelpings.org) website for more information.

Bacon	Dawson	Johnson	Pickens	Towns
Banks	Dodge	Jones	Pierce	Treutlen
Berrien	Early	Long	Pike	Troup
Brantley	Evans	Marion	Pulaski	Union
Calhoun	Forsyth	Meriwether	Quitman	Webster
Camden	Gordon	Miller	Schley	Wheeler
Charlton	Grady	Montgomery	Screven	White
Coffee	Hall	Murray	Stewart	Wilkes
Crawford	Jeff Davis	Oconee	Taylor	Wilkinson
Dade	Jenkins	Oglethorpe	Telfair	Worth



Blue: Counties where HH Meals were available in FY25

White: Counties where meals were NOT available in FY 25



Quality Rated Workforce Bonus

Eligible employees of programs that are Quality Rated at the 1-, 2-, or 3- star level can apply to receive a **\$500 annual bonus**.

Learn more and apply at the [DECAL QR Payments webpage](https://www.decal.ga.gov/QRPayments).

Professional Learning Opportunities



LEXIA LETRS

For Early Childhood Educators

Interactive, In-Person Professional Learning Workshops

2026 Dates	Location	GLRS Region	Contact Number
January 6 & May 12	Waycross	South Central	912-338-5994
January 12 & May 7	Cleveland	North	706-865-2141
January 13 & April 15	Metter	Southeast	912-685-7372
January 15 & May 6	Dearing	East	706-556-6225
January 16 & March 20	Warner Robbins	Middle GA	478-988-7174
January 20 & October 15	Douglasville	Metro West	770-432-2404
January 22 & May 6	Dublin	East Central	478-353-8693
January 22 & May 8	Jasper	North Central	678-877-4091
January 28 & April 21	Griffin	Metro South	770-229-3247
January 30 & March 19	Grantville	West Central	770-583-2528
May 6 & September 16	Tennille	Oconee	478-552-5178

Target Audience: Pre-K and Kindergarten Educators who work with students receiving IEP services. Participants must attend both dates. Spots are limited. Call today to reserve a seat.

Please contact the sponsoring GLRS directly via the phone number provided. Please note, this training is not yet approved for BFTS training hours.



Training & Events

Looking for training? You can always find a [calendar of our scheduled training](#) on our website.

You can also [contact us](#) if you have a request for a future training.

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Access links for other professional development opportunities by visiting [DECAL's Workforce Supports and Learning](#).





Congratulations to Central East Georgia's Recent Quality Rated Programs

A Mother's Love Learning Center	★★★★	Noemicia A Garcia	★★
ABC Learning Center	★★★	Tots Of Joy Daycare & Learning Center	★★★★
Big Blue Marble - Grovetown	★★★	Ivywood Academy Tucker	★★★
Kiddie Kingdom Early Learning Academy Inc.	★★★	Kiddie Academy of Dunwoody - Chamblee	★★★
Cassy's Little Angels Childcare Center	★★★	Candy Cane City Nursery School	★★★
Children's First Learning Academy	★★★	KidzBiz Childcare Center	★★★
Cozy West Childcare & Learning Center	★★★	Morah Carol's Place	★★★
Creative Image Learning Center	★★★★	New Life Early Learning Academy	★★★★
Ophelia R Datcher	★★★	Our House	★★★
Destiny Starr Academy	★★★★	Sharonda Smith	★★★★
Easter Seals Child Development Center - Walton	★★★	Imagination Zone Childcare & Early Learning Center	★★★★

Ratings from 10/01/25 – 12/22/25

Our office will be closed on January 19th in observance of MLK Day.

We will resume normal business operations on January 20th.

Looking to Recharge?

Early learning professionals wear many hats and go by many names – teacher, provider, caregiver, just to name a few. It's this last term - *caregiver* - that has our team at Leap asking how we can help care for our vital caregivers. How can we help them care for themselves? How can we work with them and other stakeholders to care for one another?

RECHARGE is our effort to identify and share tips, techniques, and tools to boost teacher well-being. We believe our early learning workforce is most effective when professionals are healthy and whole – doing the job they love, having the support they need, growing and sharpening their skills, and leaving a legacy of positive relationships and experiences in the lives of all of our children.

As we do with all of our professional development resources, we've combed through dozens of the best sources on the subject, and there is consistent agreement on what is needed to keep a workforce insulated from burnout and to help individuals who've been experiencing burnout, or overwhelming and persistent stress, make productive moves toward improved personal well-being.

Use the link above to take advantage of all the resources we have compiled on the subject and identify constructive ways to take care of yourself.



***You can't pour from an empty cup.
It's important to take care of yourself.***

AT A GLANCE



Subscribe to #DECALDownload wherever you stream podcasts.



Find this and other resources to support your work on the DECAL website.



Chop, Look, Listen

Caring for Georgia's children means keeping them safe in every moment – especially during meals and snacks. That's why the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) has launched Chop, Look, Listen, a new initiative designed to help early childhood educators prevent choking and promote safe eating habits. Click on the logo to the left for more information!

IMPORTANT NUMBERS, WEBSITES AND EMAILS

CAPS Provider Relations

833-4GACAPS (442-2277)

CAPSProviderSupport@dec.al.ga.gov
dec.al.ga.gov

BFTS Child Care Services

404-657-5562

Leap Early Learning Partners

706-922-7182

LeapCCRR@augusta.edu
leapccrr.org

Poison Control Center

800-222-1222



Visit our [website](#) to find resources on a variety of important topics and links to other websites that can help support the work you do.



Don't get our emails? You can [add your email](#) at any time (personal and/or business).



Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)! You can also send us suggestions for things you would like to see posted.



Visit our [Training & Events page](#) to see our current training calendar and how to contact us if you don't see what you need.

Hours of Operation:
Monday - Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

A full list of closure dates can be found [here on the Augusta University website](#).