



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



**Finalists Named for Georgia's Pre-K Program
Teachers of the Year 2021-2022**

Finalists Represent High Quality Early Childhood Education Programs Across the State

ATLANTA, Ga., (May 13, 2021) – The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning has announced the six finalists for 2021-2022 Georgia's Pre-K Program Teachers of the Year representing high quality early childhood education programs in Austell, Cordele, Hoschton, Lilburn, Norcross, and Perry.

The 2021-2022 finalists are LaNita Carey from Jackson Creek Academy in Lilburn; Stephanie Curington from Kings Chapel Elementary School in Perry; Shelley Hoster from 1st Creative Learning Academy #2 in Norcross; Teresa Swaim from West Jackson Elementary School in Hoschton; Marie Thebaud from Kiddie Kottage Academy in Austell; and Lisa West from Crisp County Pre-K in Cordele.

Each finalist received a \$500 cash prize from the Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning after their applications were reviewed and scored by a panel of impartial judges. Next the six finalists will each receive a classroom observation by a Pre-K Specialist this fall, submit a small group video to be scored by outside judges, and face a panel for an in-office personal interview.

In September, DECAL will select a winner from a local public school system and a winner from a private child care center. They will receive a \$3,000 check for themselves, \$2,000 for a classroom makeover and supplies, and \$2,500 to cover out of the classroom costs while the teacher is away.

“All Georgians can be proud of Georgia’s Pre-K Program that helps lay a solid foundation on which the academic careers of the state’s four year olds can be built,” said Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. “Since the program was piloted in 1992, more than 1.6 million children have entered kindergarten better prepared to succeed. That preparation, however, would not have been possible without the dedicated Pre-K teachers and assistants who implement this program every day. Recognizing these committed professionals by choosing Pre-K Teachers of the Year is one small way to thank them for their efforts. We always enjoy meeting them and gleaning best practices from their classroom visits and observations.”

Among other requirements, candidates for Georgia’s Pre-K Teacher of the Year must have been employed as a Georgia’s Pre-K lead teacher during the 2020-2021 school year, taught as a lead teacher in a Georgia’s Pre-K classroom for a minimum of three years, and must be planning to continue as a lead teacher in a Georgia’s Pre-K classroom during the 2021-2022 school year. Winners will serve as ambassadors for Georgia’s Pre-K Program including public speaking, representing Georgia’s Pre-K at various meetings, and modeling effective classroom practices.

This school year approximately 66,000 four year olds attended Georgia’s Pre-K Program in-person, virtually, or through a hybrid model. The voluntary, lottery-funded Pre-K program has been recognized as one of the top programs in the nation, based on quality standards, teacher qualifications, and enrollment. Georgia’s Pre-K Program is universal – meaning that any age eligible child residing in Georgia may attend the program regardless of family income. Georgia’s model for providing the Pre-K program is unique in that it is offered through a public-private partnership in local school systems, in private child care centers, and in other facilities.

About DECAL

The 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 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.al.ga.gov.