



**Georgia Dept
of Early Care
and Learning**
BRIGHT FROM THE START

Brian P. Kemp
Governor

Amy M. Jacobs
Commissioner

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**DECAL Announces Georgia's Pre-K Teachers of the Year
for 2020-2021 School Year**

Winners Are from Public School in Rome and Private Center in Hiram

ATLANTA, Ga., (October 2, 2020) – The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) has named its Georgia's Pre-K Teachers of the Year for the 2020-2021 School Year and just in time for the agency's annual Georgia's Pre-K Week, observed October 5-9, 2020. The public school winner is Heather Melillo from West End Elementary School in Rome, and the private center winner is Alderine Healey from the YMCA Paulding Early Learning Center in Hiram.

The delivery may have been different, but the news was just as exciting today as the winners were announced. In past years, Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs and Deputy Commissioner of Georgia's Pre-K Program and Instructional Supports Susan Adams made surprise visits to the winners' schools. This year, due to COVID-19 and social distancing, the visits were made via online Zoom meetings.

As Pre-K Teachers of the Year, Melillo and Healey each receive a \$3,000 check for themselves, \$3,000 for a classroom makeover and supplies, and \$500 to cover out of the classroom costs while they are away. 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.

The winners were selected from six semi-finalists who each received a classroom observation by a DECAL Pre-K Specialist. Each finalist submitted a small group video scored by outside judges and faced a panel for a professional interview.

“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 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 way to thank them for their efforts.”

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 2019-2020 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 2020-2021 school year.

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. DECAL and Voices for Georgia’s Children will celebrate Georgia’s Pre-K Week October 5-9, 2020. It is the tenth anniversary of the annual celebration of quality early learning.

About Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

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.dec.al.ga.gov.