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**DECAL Announces Georgia's Pre-K Teachers of the Year
for 2021-2022 School Year**

Winners from Public School in Perry and Private Program in Lilburn

ATLANTA, Ga., (October 5, 2021) – The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) has named its Georgia's Pre-K Teachers of the Year for the 2021-2022 school year just in time for the annual Georgia's Pre-K Week October 4-8, 2021. The public school winner is Stephanie Curington from Kings Chapel Elementary School in Perry, and the private center winner is LaNita Carey from Jackson Creek Academy in Lilburn.

As Pre-K Teachers of the Year, Curington and Carey each receive \$3,000 for themselves, \$2,000 for a classroom makeover and supplies, and \$2,500 to cover costs while they are out of the classroom representing Georgia's Pre-K Program. Winners serve as ambassadors for Georgia's Pre-K Program by public speaking, representing the program 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, had a classroom observation, and faced a panel for an in-office personal interview.

“Since the beginning of Georgia’s Pre-K Program almost 30 years ago, more than 1.6 million children have entered Kindergarten better prepared to succeed in school,” said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. “That preparation has been possible only because of dedicated Pre-K professionals who work with their students every day. Honoring exemplary Pre-K teachers by recognizing Pre-K Teachers of the Year is one way to thank them for their hard work.”

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.

This school year more than 70,000 four year olds are attending Georgia’s Pre-K Program. 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.

It is appropriate that this year’s winners are being announced during Georgia’s Pre-K Week sponsored annually by DECAL and Voices for Georgia’s Children. This year’s celebration October 4-8, 2021, is the 11th year celebrating the quality early learning that occurs in Georgia’s Pre-K Program classrooms.

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.decal.ga.gov.