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DECAL Announces Georgia's Early Childhood Educators of the Year 2026–2027

Winners hail from Ellenwood, Kennesaw and Lawrenceville

ATLANTA, GA (November 23, 2026) — The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) and the Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning have named three winners — Tameka Surry Shearer, who works at Kreative Kids Family Daycare in Ellenwood; Jaidie Soto of Kiddie Academy of Kennesaw; and Rosmary Zabeta of Itty Bitties Academy Family Home Daycare in Lawrenceville — for Georgia's Early Childhood Educators of the Year for 2026–2027. The program recognizes outstanding early education teachers of children ages birth to preschool.

Shearer, Soto and Zabeta will serve as ambassadors for Georgia's Early Childhood Educators of the Year program through modeling effective classroom practices and public speaking appearances. They are also the recipients of $3,000 for personal use, $2,000 for a classroom makeover, and up to $2,500 for their school to cover travel costs and stipends for substitute teachers as the teacher fulfills their duties as Georgia's Early Childhood Educators of the Year.

“Early childhood educators are skilled professionals who play a crucial role in building a strong foundation for children’s academic, physical, and social growth,” said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. “These awards honor teachers who go above and beyond each day to educate, nurture, and support Georgia’s youngest learners. Our winners are truly strengthening the futures of our children, communities, and state.”

Among other requirements, candidates for Georgia’s Early Childhood Educators of the Year must have been employed as a lead teacher at a licensed 2- or 3-star Quality Rated child care program that is in good standing with all programs administered by DECAL. They also must have a minimum of three years of experience as a lead teacher and plan to continue as a lead teacher in the 2026–2027 school year.

“This is the sixth consecutive year we have presented these awards,” said Laura Wagner, Executive Director of the Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning. "The care young children receive in their early years is critical in shaping their brain development and laying the groundwork for their overall health and wellbeing. We are excited to recognize these competent, qualified, professional early childhood educators who are guiding children on a successful journey toward lifelong learning."

About Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)

The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning is the state agency supporting Georgia’s children and families by overseeing and promoting access to high-quality early care and education programs. These programs include Georgia’s Pre-K, child care licensing, CAPS, Quality Rated, nutrition programs, Head Start collaboration, and statewide quality improvement efforts. Get more information at www.decal.ga.gov.