



CELEBRATING GEORGIA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS OF THE YEAR AND PRE-K TEACHERS OF THE YEAR

Foundation Celebrates Georgia's Early Childhood Educators of the Year and Pre-K Teachers of the Year at Chamber Event in Atlanta

Educators represent programs in Roswell, Evans, Savannah, Cussetta, and Hoschton

ATLANTA, Ga., (April 19, 2024) – The Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning today celebrated its Educators of the Year (EoTY) with a luncheon hosted by the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and sponsored by the Georgia Lottery Corporation. The event included a performance by Coy Bowles of the Grammy-winning Zac Brown Band; special recognition of Stephanie Blank, founding chair of GEEARS (Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students); and a lively panel discussion featuring the Educators.

“Today, we are proud to highlight some of our state's exemplary early childhood educators,” said DECAL Commissioner Amy Jacobs. “We celebrate their hard work, dedication, and passion. They are not babysitters. They are teachers, professionals with critically- important roles who inspire others in the early education community.”

“Early childhood educators are some of the most hardworking and talented individuals that you'll find anywhere,” commented Laura Wagner, executive director of the Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning. “These teachers shape the hearts and minds of the next generation. I am proud to know each of our winners, and I'm thankful for the privilege of honoring them through these very special awards.”

Mr. Bowles noted, “High quality early childhood education programs provide children with a safe and nurturing environment where they can explore, learn, and grow. These programs help children develop the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical skills that are essential for success in schools and later in life. Children who participate in high quality early education programs are more likely to perform better academically, have higher graduation rates and have better social emotional skills.”

Early Childhood EoTY and Georgia Pre-K ToTY Programs

The Georgia Early Childhood Education Educator of the Year recognizes outstanding early education teachers of children ages birth to preschool with an Infant Teacher of the Year (0-18 months), Toddler Teacher of the Year (15-36 months), and Preschool Teacher of the Year (36-48 months).

This year's Georgia Early Childhood Educators of the Year are:

- Noel Weimer, from Water Oak Family Child Care in Roswell (Infant)
- Bianca Brown from the Greenbrier School in Evans (Toddler)
- Chantelle Hester from Smart Starters Academy in Savannah (Preschool)

The Georgia Pre-K Teacher of the Year Program recognizes two teachers of Pre-K students, one from a public school and one from a private program.

Those winners are:

- Merodie Brown from New Odyssey for Children in Hoschton (Pre-K Private School)
- Charlotte Richards from Chattahoochee County Schools (Pre-K Public School)

Each winner received funds for their personal use and for a classroom makeover. Their schools also received an amount to cover travel costs and expenses for substitute teachers when our awardees fulfill their duties as Georgia's Educators and Teachers of the Year.

The winners serve as ambassadors for Georgia's EoTY program through activities related to modeling effective classroom practices and public speaking appearances – such as today's event.

Early Childhood Champion Award

Stephanie Blank was honored by receiving the first Early Childhood Champion Award. It was Ms. Blank's idea several years ago to create a program to honor Georgia Pre-K teachers in an objective and meaningful way. She also helped establish the Educator of the Year awards through the Foundation.

Ms. Blank also served as the founding chair of the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) and is co-founder of Mothers and Others for Clean Air. She chaired Governor Nathan Deal's Commission on Child Welfare Reform and his Child Mental Health Commission and served on First Lady Sandra Deal's Children's Cabinet.

About DECAL

The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) 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.decal.ga.gov.

About the Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning

Founded by Governor Nathan Deal and the Georgia General Assembly in 2017, the Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning is dedicated to making strategic investments aimed at enhancing and broadening high-quality early education in Georgia. Our mission is to ensure that every child in Georgia is equipped for success upon entering Kindergarten, irrespective of their family's income or geographic location. As a 501c3 organization, the Foundation is committed to fostering educational excellence through collaborative partnerships with families, communities, the early care and education industry, and stakeholders. For more information, please visit www.gaeearlyed.org.