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## **DECAL Announces 2025-2026 Georgia's Pre-K Teachers of the Year**

### ***Winners from Private School in Marietta and Public School in Hoschton***

ATLANTA, Ga., (September 30, 2025) – The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) has named its Georgia's Pre-K Teachers of the Year for the 2025-2026 school year just in time for the 15th annual Georgia's Pre-K Week, which will be observed October 6-10, 2025. The private-school winner is Autumn Hart of Bundle of Joy Academy in Marietta and the public-school winner is Teresa Swaim of West Jackson Elementary School in Hoschton.

As Pre-K Teachers of the Year, Hart and Swaim each receive \$3,000 for themselves and \$4,500 for classroom and program use. 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. Each finalist submitted a video of small group instruction scored by outside judges, had a CLASS observation, and faced a panel for a personal interview.

“Georgia’s Pre-K Program owes its success and effectiveness to the dedicated individuals working with our four-year-olds every day,” said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. “These awards are a small token of our appreciation for their professionalism and commitment to Georgia’s children and families. Thanks to the outstanding efforts of our Pre-K teachers, our children are entering Kindergarten better prepared to thrive.”

“Over the past 32 years, Georgia’s Pre-K Program has helped over 2 million children start Kindergarten well-prepared,” said Susan Adams, Deputy Commissioner. “Teachers like Autumn and Teresa exemplify how effective teaching sparks lifelong learning and educational success. We appreciate their dedication to excellence in Georgia’s Pre-K Program.”

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 2024-2025 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 2025-2026 school year.

This school year more than 71,000 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.

### **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](http://www.dec.al.ga.gov).