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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DECAL Seeking Applications for Georgia's Pre-K Teachers of the Year

Winner from Public School and Private Center Will Be Chosen

ATLANTA, Ga., (February 16, 2026) – The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) is seeking applications for Georgia's Pre-K Program Teachers of the Year for the 2026-2027 school year. DECAL will select a winner from a local public-school system and a winner from a private child care center.

“Georgia’s nationally recognized Pre-K program has successfully helped prepare more than two million children for kindergarten,” said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. “The primary reason for the program’s success is, without question, the committed professionals who teach Georgia’s four-year-old students every day. Recognizing outstanding Pre-K Teachers of the Year provides an opportunity to thank them for their hard work and commitment.”

The application for Pre-K Teacher of the Year is available on the DECAL website home page at www.decal.ga.gov. Completed applications must be submitted no later than 5:00 PM on **March 9, 2026**. Finalists will be announced in May 2026, with the winners announced in Fall 2026.

To be considered for Georgia's Pre-K Program Teacher of the Year, the teacher must meet the following qualifications:

- Must be employed as a Georgia's Pre-K lead teacher during the 2025-2026 school year.
- Must have taught as a lead teacher in a Georgia's Pre-K classroom for a minimum of three years.
- Must meet Georgia's Pre-K credential and Professional Development System requirements.
- Must be planning to continue as a lead teacher in a Georgia's Pre-K classroom during the 2026-2027 school year.
- Must be employed by a Georgia's Pre-K Program provider in good standing with all programs administered by DECAL (Pre-K, Child Care Services, Childcare and Parent Services [CAPS] and Nutrition Services).
- Must be willing to serve as an ambassador for Georgia's Pre-K Program. Duties may include but are not limited to public speaking, representing Georgia's Pre-K at meetings, and modeling effective classroom practices.
- Must be able and willing to travel as needed – including some overnight stays.
- Must be willing to have a classroom evaluation and interview conducted if chosen as a finalist.

For more information, contact Devon Porter, Summer Transition Program and Outreach Coordinator, at Devon.Porter@decal.ga.gov or 404-591-0795.

This school year approximately 70,000 four-year-olds attend 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. Georgia's Pre-K Program is universal – meaning that any age eligible child residing in Georgia may attend the program regardless of family income. Georgia's model for providing the Pre-K program is unique in that it is offered through a public-private partnership in local school systems, in private child care centers, and in other facilities.

About Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning

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.