



**Georgia Dept
of Early Care
and Learning**
BRIGHT FROM THE START

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Governor

Amy M. Jacobs
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Finalists Named for Georgia's Early Childhood Educators of the Year

*New Program Celebrates Outstanding Early Education Teachers
of children Birth to Preschool*

ATLANTA, Ga., (October 25, 2021) – The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) and the Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning have announced their six finalists for the inaugural 2021-2022 Georgia's Early Childhood Educators of the Year Program. The new initiative recognizes outstanding early education teachers of children 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).

Infant Teacher of the Year Finalists are Diana Black from Pookie Bear Learning Center in Savannah and Sharon Floyd from Sheltering Arms in Norcross. Toddler Teacher of the Year Finalists are Kayla Anderson from The Greenbrier Preschool in Evans and Maria Claudia Ortega from My Little Geniuses in Marietta. The Preschool Teacher of the Year Finalists are Whitney Carder from Cleveland Academy in Cleveland and Hannah Beth Reeves from Academy for Little People in Chickamauga. Teachers are nominated by their school program directors.

Each of the top six finalists will receive \$500 for their personal use. The top three winners (one from each category) will be named in December and receive an additional \$3,000 for their 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 Educator of the Year.

“Early child development helps build a foundation for lifelong learning, behavior, and health,” said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. “The experiences children have in early care and education programs help shape the brain and the child’s capacity to learn, develop important social skills, and respond to daily stresses and challenges in a healthy manner. This new program gives Georgia the opportunity to celebrate those teachers who are helping to build that foundation for lifelong learning and healthy development.”

“The experiences children have in their classrooms help shape the brain and the child’s capacity to learn and to get along with others,” said Carrie Ashbee, Executive Director for the Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning. “We can’t say enough about the role these earliest teachers play in the life of a child, placing them on a successful path to lifelong learning.”

The Georgia’s Early Childhood Educator of the Year program follows in the footsteps of the highly successful Georgia’s Pre-K Program Teachers of the Year program, which began in the 2016-2017 school year.

About DECAL

The 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 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.