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**Finalists Named for Georgia's Pre-K Program  
Teachers of the Year 2022-2023**

*Finalists Demonstrate High Quality Early Childhood Education Across the State*

**ATLANTA, Ga., (May 18, 2022)** – The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) has announced six finalists for 2022-2023 Georgia's Pre-K Program Teachers of the Year representing high quality early childhood education programs in Thomasville, Warner Robins, Norcross, Baldwin, Cumming, and Newnan. The 2022-2023 finalists are Debbie Carraway from Hand in Hand Primary in Thomas County, Melissa Boswell from C.B Watson Elementary in Houston County, Shazia Ali from American Learning Center in Gwinnett County, Shannon Gibson from Baldwin Elementary in Habersham County, Alaina Jones from Akers Academy in Forsyth County, and Silina Hodges from Discovery Point #29 in Coweta County.

Each finalist received a \$500 cash prize from the Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning after their applications were reviewed and scored by a panel of impartial judges. This fall each of the finalists will be observed in their classroom by a Pre-K Specialist, will submit a small group video to be scored by outside judges, and will appear before a panel for a personal interview.

In September, DECAL will select a winner from a local public school system and a winner from a private child care center. They will receive a \$3,000 check for themselves, \$2,000 for a classroom makeover and supplies, and funds to cover out-of-the-classroom costs while the teacher is away.

“When Georgia’s Pre-K Program was piloted almost 30 years ago, perhaps no one imagined it would have the breadth and depth it has today,” said Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs. “Since 1992, more than 1.6 million children have entered kindergarten better prepared...clearly the result of the work of dedicated Pre-K teachers and assistants who implement this program across our state every day. DECAL is honored to recognize and thank these committed professionals by choosing Pre-K Teachers of the Year.”

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 2021-2022 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 2022-2023 school year. Winners will serve as ambassadors for Georgia’s Pre-K Program including public speaking, representing Georgia’s Pre-K at various meetings, and modeling effective classroom practices.

This school year approximately 76,000 four year olds attended Georgia’s Pre-K Program in-person, virtually, or through a hybrid model. 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 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 collaborates 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.decals.ga.gov](http://www.decals.ga.gov).