



Nathan Deal
Governor

Amy M. Jacobs
Commissioner

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact: Reg Griffin
404-656-0239
reg.griffin@dec.al.ga.gov



**DECAL and Naserian Foundation Name
Georgia's Pre-K Program 2017-2018 Teachers of the Year**

Teachers recognized from Public School System and Private Child Care Center

ATLANTA, Ga., (September 29, 2017) – Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) and the Naserian Foundation have named two outstanding educators as Georgia's Pre-K Program Teachers of the Year for 2017-2018. The winners are Jodi McNamara from Kids R Kids #49 in Lawrenceville and Nathan Leatherwood from Calhoun Pre-K.

DECAL names two teachers each year, one from a public school system and one from a private child care center, representing the public-private model through which the Pre-K program is delivered. McNamara and Leatherwood will serve as ambassadors for Georgia's Pre-K Program, making presentations, attending meetings, and modeling effective classroom practices.

"Georgia's Pre-K Program is only as successful and effective as the dedicated women and men who work with Georgia's four year olds every day," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs, "These awards are a small way for us to recognize their efforts. We congratulate Jodi and Nathan and look forward to working with them this school year. We also thank Connie Ellington of Bethlehem Elementary School in Barrow County and Channie Frazier of Kids World Learning Center in Bulloch County for their outstanding job serving as our very first Pre-K Teachers of the Year in 2016-2017."

Susan Adams, Assistant Commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K Program and Instructional Services said, "DECAL appreciates this opportunity to recognize the commitment of our Pre-K teachers who work every day all over the state to ensure that Georgia's children have a great Pre-K experience. The quality of the teacher in the classroom determines the quality of the classroom instruction."

Earlier this year, six finalists for Georgia's Pre-K Program Teachers of the Year were announced. This fall, all of them were interviewed and underwent a classroom evaluation. They were also visited by Commissioner Jacobs and Stephanie Blank, CEO of the Naserian Foundation, which is sponsoring the statewide program. Each February, DECAL invites any Georgia's Pre-K lead teacher who has taught for a minimum of three years to apply for Teacher of the Year. Applicants must also meet Georgia's Pre-K credential and Professional Development Registry requirements and plan to continue as a lead teacher for the coming year. Their school must be in good standing with all programs administered by DECAL (Pre-K, Child Care Services, Childcare and Parent Services [CAPS] and Nutrition Services).

This school year, while celebrating its 25th birthday, approximately 84,000 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. Georgia's Pre-K Program is universal – meaning that any age eligible child residing in Georgia may attend the program regardless of family income.

About Bright from the Start

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.