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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**DECAL and Naserian Foundation Name
Georgia's Pre-K Program 2016-2017 Teachers of the Year**

Teachers from Public School System and Private Child Care Center recognized representing the public-private partnership through which Pre-K Program is offered

ATLANTA, Ga., (September 27, 2016) – For the first time in the 24-year history of Georgia's Pre-K Program, the 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 2016-2017. The winners are Connie Ellington of Bethlehem Elementary School in Barrow County and Channie Frazier of Kids World Learning Center in Statesboro/Bulloch County.

DECAL named two teachers, one from a public school system and one from a private child care center, representing the public-private partnership through which the Pre-K program is offered. Ellington and Frazier will serve as ambassadors for Georgia's Pre-K Program, making presentations, attending meetings, and modeling effective classroom practices.

"Georgia's Pre-K Program's reputation as an exemplary early childhood education program for four year olds," said DECAL Commissioner Amy M. Jacobs, "can be attributed directly to the outstanding Pre-K teachers and assistants who implement this program daily. These awards are a small way for us to recognize their efforts. We congratulate Connie and Channie and look forward to working with them this school year."

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.

This school year 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.state.ga.us.