



GEORGIA DEPARTMENT
OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

AVERY D. NILES, COMMISSIONER

A MESSAGE FROM THE
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

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**DJJ FOCUS ON EDUCATION:
Lithonia Educator Voted Finalist for DJJ Teacher of the Year**

(SPECIAL to ATLANTA, GA) Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Commissioner Avery D. Niles is pleased to announce that Lithonia educator Damien DeCarlo Northern was a finalist for the Georgia Preparatory Academy's (GPA) 2016 Teacher of the Year. Northern was recognized for his service during a special presentation at the State of Georgia's Tift College campus in Forsyth.

Northern's personal education philosophy is driven by a duty to teach. Northern told a panel of his fellow educators that as a teacher and member of society he made a commitment to "meet students where they are academically and socially to enhance their trajectory in life."

Commissioner Avery Niles, who also serves as Superintendent of the DJJ School System, said, "It is one of my proudest moments at our commencement exercises each year to recognize the most inspiring and most committed teachers in the Georgia Preparatory Academy system. However, the task of narrowing down the field of finalists is often extremely difficult for our selection committee due to the number of truly talented educators we have are fortunate to have on staff," he commented.

Northern, who is a Social Studies teacher at the Metro Regional Youth Detention Center (RYDC) in Atlanta, was recognized as a Teacher of the Year finalist as part of winter graduation ceremonies for students from DJJ secure facilities throughout the state.

Northern said he truly believes it takes a village to raise a child. "And I am a villager at heart," he said, "who specializes in leading our young people to information." Northern has been an educator for 12 years, with nearly five of those years teaching with the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice.

Commissioner Niles said, "We are genuinely impressed with the progress our students are making and by the dedication of our principals and teachers like finalist Damien DeCarlo Northern." Commissioner Niles and GPA Associate Superintendent of Schools Dr. Richard Behrens congratulated all the finalists for their dedication and professionalism.

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Additional honors for Teacher of the Year finalists went to Mathematics teacher Joann Canady, who teaches at the Macon RYDC; Lead teacher Charlotte Hall at Claxton RYDC; and English-Language Arts teacher Janice Ziegler at the Macon Youth Development Campus (YDC). The Teacher of the Year award was presented to English-Language Arts instructor Arisha Dancy-Mattox, who teaches at the Aaron Cohn RYDC in Columbus.

Photos of DJJ's graduation and Teacher of the Year ceremonies are posted on the agency's "News & Views" webpage at <http://www.djjnewsandviews.org/2016gpadeceembergraduation/> .

(END RELEASE)

The Georgia Preparatory Academy is Georgia's 181st School District and is accredited by AdvancED/Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The mission of the Georgia Preparatory Academy is to provide a comprehensive educational program which will facilitate the successful reintegration of each student into the community and workplace.

GPA students are held to the same scholastic standards for earning their diplomas as pupils in Georgia's traditional state schools. Students receive 330 minutes of regular or special education inside DJJ's security barriers every school day. Every course taught at GPA schools throughout the state meets the same quality education standards prepared by the Georgia Department of Education.

ABOUT DJJ

The Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) is a multi-faceted agency that serves the needs of this state's young offenders up to the age of 21. The Department employs more than 4,000 men and women at 26 secure facilities and 97 community services offices throughout the state to effect justice and redirect the young lives in the agency's care.

Including those who are placed on probation, more than 50,000 youths are diverted each year to evidence-based community programs, sentenced to short-term incarceration or committed to the Department's long-term custody by the Juvenile Courts. It is the duty of DJJ's professional corrections staff to preserve public safety and safeguard the citizens of Georgia, as well as protect the victims of crimes so that they can rebuild their lives.

At the same time, DJJ holds juvenile offenders accountable for their delinquent conduct so that they can take responsibility for their actions through probation, supervision and secure detention. The youth are provided with medical and psychological treatment, as well as specialized education and programs designed to equip them with the social, intellectual and emotional tools needed to achieve their successful reentry and reintegration into community, workplace and neighborhood settings as more productive and law-abiding citizens.