



GEORGIA DEPARTMENT
OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

AVERY D. NILES, COMMISSIONER

A MESSAGE FROM THE OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

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FOCUS ON EDUCATION: DJJ Graduates Senior Class of 2015 Commissioner Encourages More Grads in 2016

(ATLANTA – GA) Commissioner Avery D. Niles is proud to announce the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice closed out the 2015 school year with an inspiring education benchmark for the agency as combined senior class grads from DJJ secure facilities across the state gathered in Atlanta. The department's *fifth consolidated high school commencement ceremony* was one of the largest DJJ graduation classes to date.

Forty-two Georgia Preparatory Academy graduates celebrated this latest landmark education event at the Atlanta Youth Development Campus in College Park in mid-December. Families, friends, and loved ones were there to witness this community recognition for youth who have distinguished themselves with hard work, perseverance and academic accomplishments.

Commissioner Niles personally awarded 34 GEDs, 4 high school diplomas & 1 transitional diploma, and 6 vocational Technical Certificates of Credit. Two resourceful students earned both a GED and a Technical Certificate of Credit, while another enterprising student earned two Technical Certificates of Credit.

"We want these young people to experience the exhilaration of personal success and accomplishment," said DJJ Commissioner Niles. "It's rewarding to witness the excitement of our students grow each year we conduct these commencement exercises for the Georgia Preparatory Academy," the Commissioner said.

Georgia Preparatory Academy Associate Superintendent Dr. Audrey Armistad praised the success of the graduates: "We are so proud of their accomplishments," Dr. Armistad said. "And our teachers support their academic achievement."

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AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

(PAGE TWO TWO TWO)

Young men and women attended from six Georgia Youth Development Campuses (YDCs) in Atlanta, Augusta, Eastman, Macon, Muscogee, and Sumter; the Regional Youth Detention Center (RYDCs) in Gainesville; and the Intensive Treatment Unit (ITU) in Milledgeville. The combined group of graduating seniors filed into the auditorium to cross the Atlanta YDC stage together in their caps and gowns, then marched back to their seats transformed as the Georgia Preparatory Academy's Graduating Class of 2015.

To earn their diplomas, these students are held to the same high standards as pupils in Georgia's traditional state schools. The Georgia Preparatory Academy is a dually accredited state school district. Students receive 330 minutes of regular or special education inside DJJ's security barriers every school day. Each curriculum taught here meets the same quality education standards prepared by the Georgia Department of Education.

"You should look at today's graduation as a starting place for the next important goals you will accomplish in life," said Dr. Armistad. The Associate Superintendent reminded students this ceremony was a unique opportunity for a celebration of their hard work, dedication and commitment in a juvenile justice setting. "You have managed to overcome many personal, family and social adversities that have challenged you," Dr. Armistad said.

The Georgia Preparatory Academy was proud to have Bishop Wiley Jackson of the Gospel Tabernacle Cathedral as distinguished guest speaker to deliver a powerful message that a strong education can lead to both a calling and a bright future.

Commissioner Avery Niles told the graduates about his personal pride in the Class of 2015. "Every one of you here has the chance to start over and make the best of your life. At this point your success depends on realizing this is the time for you to make positive changes," Niles said.

Commissioner Niles explained to parents that his goal is for each youth who leaves DJJ custody to climb a grade level or above where they ranked in school at the time they entered the Georgia juvenile justice system.

"Governor Deal and the First Lady say it takes a special kind of person to be a teacher," Niles said. "Like the Governor, we have been impressed with the progress our students are making and by the dedication of their teachers, principals and staff." The Commissioner said he looks forward to celebrating the next Georgia Preparatory Academy commencement in spring of 2016.

In a special presentation, Daniel Sovereign of the Milledgeville ITU was named 2016 Teacher of the Year with additional honors going to Syntria Holmes-Jackson of the Macon YDC and Dr. Vera Giddens of the Crisp RYDC. Special graduation guests included Department of Corrections Commissioner Homer Bryson, Technical College System Assistant Commissioner Dr. Kathryn R. Hornsby, and DJJ Board Member Dr. Thomas L. Coleman. The Department of Juvenile Justice SMRT Team delivered the Presentation of Colors and singer Tina Thames performed the National Anthem.

Photos of DJJ's graduation ceremonies are posted on the agency's "News & Views" webpage at <http://www.djjnewsandviews.org/2015gpawintergraduation/>

The Georgia Preparatory Academy is Georgia's 181st School District and has dual accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and from the Correctional Educational Association (CEA). The mission of the Georgia Preparatory Academy is to provide a comprehensive educational program which will facilitate the successful integration of each student into the community and workplace.

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