



GEORGIA DEPARTMENT
OF **JUVENILE JUSTICE**

AVERY D. NILES, COMMISSIONER

A MESSAGE FROM THE

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Avery D. Niles, Commissioner

Scott Mall
Office of Communications



DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

3408 Covington Highway ▪ Decatur, Georgia ▪ 30032-1513
Telephone: (404) 508-7147 ▪ Fax: (404) 508-7341

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CONTACT:

Jim Shuler

DJJ Communications

(404) 508-7147

JimShuler@djj.state.ga.us

DJJ FOCUS ON EDUCATION: Columbus Educator Named DJJ Teacher of the Year

(Atlanta, GA) – Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Commissioner Avery D. Niles is pleased to announce DJJ’s Teacher of the Year for 2016. In a special presentation at the Tift College campus in Forsyth last month, Arisha Dancy-Mattox from the Columbus area was announced as the Georgia Preparatory Academy’s (GPA) educator of the year.

Dancy-Mattox told presenters about her personal teaching philosophy that “the best teachers teach from the heart, not from the book.” She said as a teacher she made a commitment, “to myself and to my students to be the best academic, personal and ethical role model I can be.”

Commissioner Niles (who also serves as the Superintendent of the DJJ School System) said, “It’s one of my favorite parts of our commencement exercises each year – the opportunity to recognize the most inspiring, most effective and most committed teacher at work 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 on staff,” said Niles.

Dancy-Mattox, who is an English Language Arts teacher at the Aaron Cohn Regional Youth Detention Center (RYDC) in Columbus, was presented with the award as part of the winter graduation ceremonies for students from DJJ secure facilities around the state.

Commissioner Niles was also excited to present 14 high school diplomas, 26 GEDs and 18 vocational Technical Certificates of Credit to the students attending. Niles said, “We are genuinely impressed with the progress our students are making and by the dedication of our principals and teachers like Arisha Dancy-Mattox.”

Dancy-Mattox has been an educator for 11 years. She said her personal teaching style is to provide a learning environment that fosters trust, care and compassion through mutual respect. “I have a love for learning and teaching,” she said. “I want to boost student self-esteem and confidence in the classroom.”

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AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

In addition to Dancy-Mattox, other Teacher of the Year finalists recognized at the event were Damien Northern, Social Studies teacher at Metro Youth Development Campus (YDC); Janice Zeigler, English Language Arts teacher at Macon YDC; Joann Canady, Math teacher at Macon RYDC; and Charlotte Hall, Lead teacher at Claxton RYDC. Commissioner Niles and GPA Associate Superintendent of Schools Dr. Richard Behrens congratulated all the finalists for their dedication and professionalism.

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.

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

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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.

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.