

**Avery D. Niles, Commissioner **Department of Juvenile Justice**

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**Atlanta Educator Voted Finalist for DJJ Teacher of the Year**

(Decatur, GA) – Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Commissioner Avery D. Niles is pleased to announce that Atlanta educator Sandra Marrongelli was a finalist for the Georgia Preparatory Academy’s (GPA) 2017 Teacher of the Year. Marrongelli was recognized for her service during a special presentation at the State of Georgia’s Tift College campus in Forsyth.

Regarding her educational philosophies, Marrongelli believes education should be relevant, cohesive, student-centered and student-directed. “We must consider our students’ individual needs, perspectives, learning styles and goals. We must offer our students options, give them the tools they need to navigate the world and become independent life-long learners,” she said.

Commissioner 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 are fortunate to have on staff,” he commented.

Marrongelli, who is an English-Language Arts teacher at the Atlanta Youth Development Campus (YDC), was recognized as a Teacher of the Year finalist as part of winter graduation ceremonies for students from DJJ secure facilities throughout the state.

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“It is also necessary to model acceptance, respect and understanding to our students; therefore opening the door for them to be open-minded, accepting and respectful of others who are different from them,” explained Marrongelli. “We can learn to pool our strengths to overcome our weaknesses. We can then build stronger classrooms, workspaces and neighborhoods.”

Commissioner Niles said, “We are genuinely impressed with the progress our students are making and by the dedication of our principals and teachers like Sandra Marrongelli.” Commissioner Niles and GPA Associate Superintendent of Schools Jean Lee congratulated all the finalists for their dedication and professionalism.

Other Teacher of the Year finalists were Tammie Waters Colson, English-Language Arts teacher at the Savannah Regional Youth Detention Center (RYDC); Sam Hicks Queener, Jr., science teacher at Macon YDC; and Betsy Stone, social studies teacher at Aaron Cohn RYDC. The Teacher of the Year Award was presented to social studies instructor Harold Farmer, who teaches at Rockdale RYDC in Conyers.

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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.*

*GPA students are held to the same scholastic standards to earn their diplomas as pupils in Georgia’s traditional state schools. Students receive 330 minutes of regular or special education inside DJJ’s security barriers each school day. Every course taught at GPA schools meets the quality education standards of 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 4,300 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, thousands of youth are diverted each year to evidence-based community programs, sentenced to short-term incarceration or committed to the Department`s long-term custody by 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 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.*