

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

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**Conyers Educator Named DJJ Teacher of the Year**

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

Farmer has spent his entire 15-year teaching career with GPA. When asked about his teaching philosophies he stated, “As educators, we must understand what is needed to pull the best out of our students. Activities should be real-world and practical so students can stay engaged and enjoy what they are learning. I want my students to make connections to what is going on now and what took place in history.”

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.

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Farmer, who is a social studies teacher at the Rockdale Regional Youth Detention Center (RYDC), was recognized as Teacher of the Year as part of winter graduation ceremonies for students from DJJ secure facilities throughout the state.

He is also credited for starting the “Man Cave,” a parental engagement program that aims to strengthen the bonds between youths and the male figures in their lives. “Through planned activities, the Man Cave creates the perfect environment for the students’ fatherly figures to share their experiences with the students, stress the importance of education and teach them what it means to act like a man,” explained Farmer. “The Man Cave is one of our favorite programs. We want to show the students that we care about them as people, and not just academically.”

“Furthermore, education is the key to a brighter future and we as educators are the ones that hand over those keys. To my fellow educators who take on the task of being superheroes in the classrooms and their communities, I say ‘stay encouraged’ and know the work you do does not go unnoticed,” said Farmer. “Be encouraged that you help shape the world. Our students will be among the leaders of the next generation. Be encouraged that what you are doing in the classroom will influence the young people you serve throughout their lives.”

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

Teacher of the Year finalists were Tammie Waters Colson, English-Language Arts teacher at Savannah RYDC; Sandra Marrongelli, English-Language Arts teacher at the Atlanta Youth Development Campus (YDC); Sam Hicks Queener, Jr., science teacher at Macon YDC and Betsy Stone, social studies teacher at Aaron Cohn RYDC.

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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.*

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*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.*