

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

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**Monday, January 29 DJJ Communications**

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**Macon 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 Macon educator Sam Hicks Queener, Jr. was a finalist for the Georgia Preparatory Academy’s (GPA) 2017 Teacher of the Year. Queener was recognized for his service during a special presentation at the State of Georgia’s Tift College campus in Forsyth.

According to Queener, passion is instrumental in the students’ desire to understand and retain knowledge. “I always encourage my students to stay connected to the world. Every student has the ability to learn, but we have to find the key or spark to turn his or her mind on. I always encourage my students to ask questions about things they see and hear pertaining to science,” he said. “I am passionate about my work because for some of our students, teachers are their last hope of escaping the environment they may have come from.”

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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Queener, who is a science teacher at the Macon 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.

Queener also serves as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)/AdvancEd chairperson for the Macon GPA. He spends numerous hours making sure educational standards are met and updating documents and records to ensure that GPA maintains its accreditation status from SACS/AdvancED, the leading educational accreditation institution in the Southeast. “We do this for our students. We want to guarantee their work will be recognized by all colleges and technical schools in Georgia and throughout the country,” he explained. “I am honored to have this responsibility and for DJJ’s school district to be recognized by SACS/AdvancEd for meeting these standards of excellence.” Additionally, he serves as a Science Ambassador for the Georgia Department of Education, representing GPA.

Commissioner Niles said, “We are genuinely impressed with the progress our students are making and by the dedication of our principals and teachers like Sam Hicks Queener, Jr.” 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 Colson, English-Language Arts teacher at Savannah Regional Youth Detention Center (RYDC), Sandra Marrongelli, English-Language Arts teacher at the Atlanta 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*

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*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.*