



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 15, 2019

News Media Contact: Communication and Media Relations, 678-301-6020

2019-20 Teacher of the Year:

Gwinnett search committee narrows field to six finalists

Six Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) teachers have been announced as this year's finalists for the Gwinnett County Teacher of the Year (TOTY) title. The finalists for the 2019-20 honor are **Vivarine Argilagos of Lovin Elementary School, Ellen Hill of Dyer Elementary School, Anthony Dramis of Hull Middle School, Brad Zickefoose of Radloff Middle School, Rebecca Carlisle of North Gwinnett High School and Amber Simmons of Brookwood High School.**

A selection committee, comprised of GCPS educators, narrowed the field from 25 semifinalists who had been selected from an impressive list of 139 local school TOTYs. The committee, which includes former teachers of the year, local school administrators, and central office support staff, now has the difficult task of selecting the 2019-20 Teacher of the Year. That announcement will be made at a banquet on Thursday, **November 14, 2019**, at the Infinite Energy Center, located at **6400 Sugarloaf Parkway in Duluth**. The program begins at **6:30 p.m.** All 139 local school Teachers of the Year will be recognized that evening.

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THE 2019-20 FINALISTS

**Vivarine Argilagos, 1st Grade Teacher,
Lovin Elementary School**
(20 years in education, 16 with GCPS)

Vivarine Argilagos has accomplished a lot during her 20 years in education, but she says one of the highlights of her career has been the work she has done to help her students become published authors. She says, "I had the privilege of instructing and facilitating my students writing and publishing a historical fiction text, *A Travel Through Time*. This text is available on Amazon and it has served as a motivator to my students to continue growing as learners."



A teacher since 2000, **Mrs. Argilagos** began her GCPS teaching career in 2004 at Cooper Elementary as a 4th grade teacher and later taught 5th grade at the school. She moved to Lovin Elementary in 2007 where she has taught 1st, 4th, and 5th grades.

Mrs. Argilagos holds a bachelor's degree in Education and Psychology from Hunter College and a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Walden University. She also earned a specialist's degree in Teaching and Learning from Piedmont College.

**Ellen Hill, 5th Grade Teacher,
Dyer Elementary School**
(15 years in education, 10 with GCPS)

Ellen Hill teaches in a blended learning environment. She is a firm believer in the use of technology as a way to provide students with convenient access to educational lessons on demand. She says, "I became so passionate about this vision that I began to create and upload lessons for students to access at any time and for any reason. I realized how technology could help the needs of my diverse learners."



Mrs. Hill started her GCPS teaching career in 2010 at Dyer Elementary School where she has taught both 4th and 5th grades. Prior to coming to Gwinnett, she taught for five years at Sand Pine Elementary.

Mrs. Hill earned her bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from Kent State University. She completed her master's degree in Education and a specialist's degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Piedmont College.

**Anthony Dramis, 8th Grade Mathematics Teacher,
Hull Middle School**
(6 years in education, all with GCPS)

A two-time Teacher of the Year at Hull Middle School, **Anthony Dramis** gives his peers credit for his success. He says, "I work with the most talented educators in the world and I am the product of their coaching, leadership, and passion for teaching." **Mr. Dramis** is committed to reaching each child in his classroom. He explains, "I arrive at school every day with open arms and a huge smile on my face and willingly give every ounce of energy I have to the children and faculty in my school."



Mr. Dramis joined GCPS in 2014 as an 8th Grade Mathematics teacher at Hull Middle School.

He has a bachelor's degree in Business Management from Franklin Pierce College and a master's degree in Teaching from Western Governors University. He also earned a specialist's degree in Instructional Technology from Valdosta State University. **Mr. Dramis** is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Teacher Leader In Digital Transformation at Capella University.

**Brad Zickefoose, 6th Grade Science Teacher,
Radloff Middle School**
(11 years in education, all with GCPS)

A science teacher, Brad Zickefoose uses his musical skills to reach students. During his career as an educator, Mr. Zickefoose and his students have created 13 songs and eight music videos related to science that have been viewed more than 325,000 times. He says, "I feel like my songs have not only helped turn my own students into lifelong learners but they've made an impact on a global scale thanks to the reach of YouTube."



Mr. Zickefoose, who has taught at Radloff Middle School his entire career, holds two degrees from Georgia State University— a bachelor's degree in Marketing and a master's degree in Middle Grades Math and Science.

**Rebecca Carlisle, Advanced Placement (AP) World
History Teacher (10th Grade),
North Gwinnett High School**
(10 years in education, all with GCPS)

Rebecca Carlisle believes all educators should be life-long learners and should inspire and cultivate that love of learning in their peers and students. The 10-year veteran says her most significant contribution to education so far has been designing and developing the New Teacher program at North Gwinnett High. She says, "Statistics say the success and retention of a new teacher greatly depends on the support they receive and it is my deep passion to ensure that new teachers receive the best support possible. Supported new teachers lead directly to increased student achievement."



Mrs. Carlisle began her GCPS teaching career in 2010 as a social studies teacher at Pinckneyville Middle School. She transferred to North Gwinnett High in 2014. Beginning this year, she joined North Gwinnett's CHARGENorth (STEM) program

where she teaches AP World History as part of a teaching team in a blended humanities class environment.

Mrs. Carlisle earned her bachelor's degree in History from the University of West Georgia. She completed her master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Georgia Southern University and is currently working toward a Teacher Leadership specialist's degree from Georgia College and State University.

Dr. Amber Simmons, Language Arts, AP Language and Composition, and AP Capstone (Grades 11 and 12), Brookwood High School
(13 years in education, all with GCPS)



As a graduate of Brookwood High School, **Dr. Amber Simmons** has a special connection to her working environment and the students she teaches. She says, “I cannot stress enough how invested I am in providing a positive school culture that supports the social and emotional well-being of all students. I want each graduate to remember their school days at GCPS fondly just like I do.” **Dr. Simmons** also encourages her students to engage their community, helping them organize book collections for elementary school children and donating more \$4,500 worth of books to the GCPS Book Mobile.

Dr. Simmons began her GCPS teaching career in 2006 at her alma mater Brookwood High School. She earned her bachelor's degree in English from Brenau Women's College, a master's degree in English Education from Georgia State University, and a specialist's degree and Doctorate in Language and Literacy from the University of Georgia.

As the final element of the judging process, the selection committee will complete classroom observations and conduct interviews with the six finalists. During the classroom observations and interviews, committee members will look for high levels of engagement, a positive and academically challenging learning environment, and learning experiences aligned to the Academic Knowledge and Skills curriculum. They also will look for original teaching methods, evaluate the teacher's teaching philosophy, review special class projects the teacher has initiated, and consider the influence the teacher has had on the teaching practices of her colleagues, in addition to reviewing each teacher's educational degrees and civic activities.

Based on their findings, committee members will select an elementary, a middle, and a high school Teacher of the Year. The level winners will be announced during the TOTY banquet on November 14. One of the three level winners will be named Gwinnett's 2020 Teacher of the Year and will go on to represent GCPS in the Georgia TOTY competition.

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**Pictures of the six Gwinnett County Teacher of the Year finalists are available upon request.*