



NEWS RELEASE

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2018-19 Teacher of the Year:

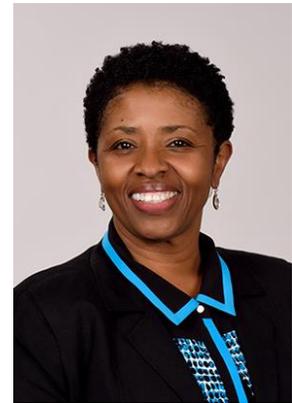
Gwinnett search committee narrows field to six finalists

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 2018-19 honor are **Juah Nyemadé Baker-Marsh** of **Lovin Elementary School**, **Kelly Specht** of **Riverside Elementary School**, **Chandra Brandel** of **Coleman Middle School**, **Lindsey Saa** of **Couch Middle School**, **Heidi Campbell** of **Parkview High School**, and **Meredith White** of **Peachtree Ridge High School**.

A selection committee, comprised of GCPS educators, narrowed the field from 25 semifinalists who had been selected from an impressive list of 137 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 2018-19 Teacher of the Year. That announcement will be made at a banquet on Thursday, **November 8, 2018**, at the Infinite Energy Center, located at **6400 Sugarloaf Parkway** in **Duluth**. The program begins at **6:30 p.m.** All 137 local school Teachers of the Year will be recognized that evening.

THE 2018-19 FINALISTS

**Juah Nyemadé Baker-Marsh, Special Education –
Early Childhood Program (Pre-Kindergarten),
Lovin Elementary School**
(35 years in education, 15 with GCPS)



More than three decades into her education career, **Nyemadé Baker-Marsh’s** passion for teaching young children with special needs remains strong. She says “I defy the odds my students face and empower them. I can truly make a difference in teaching our students how to solve everyday problems and become lifelong learners.” Ms. Baker-Marsh says her most significant contribution to education has been her ability to restore families and help other teachers do the same. “I have an insatiable desire to influence as many students as I can, beyond the walls of my classroom. I have had the opportunity to train more than 200 of Gwinnett County’s finest teachers,” she said.

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Ms. Baker-Marsh began her GCPS teaching career in 2003 at Annistown Elementary as a Pre-Kindergarten Special Education Teacher. From 2006 until 2008, she held the same position at Brookwood Elementary before moving to Lovin Elementary in 2008.

Ms. Baker-Marsh has a bachelor's degree in Psychology from Curry College and a master's degree in Education from Northeastern University.

Kelly Specht, Reading Recovery and Early Intervention Program Teacher (Grades 1 and 2), Riverside Elementary School

(29 years in education, 22 with GCPS)



Kelly Specht says she's fortunate to have taught at the same school for 17 years. She says "Although Riverside Elementary has undergone many changes, it remains a wonderful place to work. Loving the environment where you work makes it easy to stay committed to your school." Mrs. Specht is proud to be defined by her role as a Reading Recovery Teacher. She explains, "Bringing the joy of reading and writing to striving students is definitely the most fulfilling and significant part of my job as a teacher. Every time I meet with students, I ask myself, 'What can I do to help this child, on this day, at this moment, to be a better learner?'"

Mrs. Specht started her GCPS teaching career in 1996 when she taught Special Education to students in grades 2-4 at Walnut Grove Elementary School and Suwanee Elementary School. From 1997 to 1999, she taught Special Education students at Walnut Grove Elementary. In 1999 she left the school to teach in California, returning to Walnut Grove Elementary in 2000 to become a Student Support Team Coordinator. In 2001, she transferred to Riverside Elementary to serve as a Special Education Teacher until moving to her current role in 2015.

Mrs. Specht has a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood K-8/Special Education and a master's degree in Special Education, both from Michigan State University. She also has a specialist's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Piedmont College.

**Chandra Brandel, Mathematics and Accelerated
Mathematics Teacher (Grade 6),
Coleman Middle School**
(16 years in education, 13 with GCPS)



Mentoring educators is something Chandra Brandel enjoys and takes pride in. She has trained and mentored numerous teachers and paraprofessionals, and an instructional video of her teaching is available online for teachers around the state and country. Ms. Brandel is a firm believer in Project-Based Learning. She says, “I want my students to see how what they are learning is relevant to the real world in which they will someday work, even if we don’t know what types of jobs they will hold.”

Ms. Brandel began her GCPS teaching career in 2005 as a substitute teacher at Sugar Hill Elementary. A year later, she was hired as a Special Education Teacher at the school. In 2010, she accepted a Special Education Teacher position at Hull Middle School before leaving in 2013 to accept the same position at Duluth Middle School. In 2016, Ms. Brandel moved to Coleman Middle School to become a 6th grade Mathematics and Accelerated Mathematics Teacher.

Ms. Brandel has a bachelor’s degree in Banking and Finance from Mississippi State University and a master’s degree in Secondary Education from Grand Canyon University.

**Lindsey Saa, Social Studies Teacher (Grades 8),
Couch Middle School**
(14 years in education, 12 with GCPS)



Lindsey Saa attended Parkview High School and she credits her teachers and coaches there with encouraging her to go after her dreams with passion. The 8th Grade Social Studies Teacher at Couch Middle School says her passion and love of teaching still fuels her today. She adds, “The biggest piece of the puzzle for building lifelong success stories with students is not being passionate just about a subject that you teach, but being passionate about every student.” Ms. Saa believes her greatest contribution to education was developing the new 8th grade Social Studies Curriculum Guide for the school district’s 8th grade Social Studies team.

Ms. Saa started her GCPS career in 2007 as an 8th Grade Social Studies and Language Arts Teacher at Snellville Middle School. In 2012, she moved to Couch Middle School where she taught Social Studies and Language Arts to both 6th and 8th grade students.

Ms. Saa has a bachelor's degree in Secondary Education from Valdosta State University and a master's degree in Integration of Technology from Walden University. She also has a specialist's degree in Curriculum Instruction from Capella University.

**Heidi Campbell, Journalism Teacher (Grades 9-12) and
British Literature Teacher (Grade 12),
Parkview High School**

(23.5 years in education, 18 with GCPS)



Heidi Campbell recognizes that even simple things like meeting her students at the door with a smile, asking about what they are reading, and responding to their interactive notebooks through written comments makes positive connections. She says, "I believe all teachers should strive to be that special teacher every single day for all students." In her three years at Parkview High School, Mrs. Campbell has overseen a journalism program that has grown from 14 students to nearly 60 and a student newspaper that progressed from floundering to award-winning.

Mrs. Campbell began her GCPS teaching career in 2000 as a Journalism and Language Arts Teacher at Brookwood High School. In 2015, she moved to Parkview High School to teach in those same areas.

Mrs. Campbell has a bachelor's degree in English from Oglethorpe University and a master's degree in Administration and Policy from the University of Georgia.

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**Meredith White, Spanish I and II Teacher (Grades 9-12),
Peachtree Ridge High School**

(12 years in education, 3.5 with GCPS)

Meredith White is a fourth-generation public school teacher whose “mission is to engage every day, with all students, in culturally responsive teaching.” Mrs. White uses the technology tools embraced by her Spanish I and II students to teach them— collaborating in shared Google documents, taking virtual shopping trips with vloggers in Spain via YouTube, and using authentic resources like daily news articles.



Mrs. White started her GCPS career in 2009 as a Spanish Teacher at Grayson High School. She moved to other school districts over the next several years as her spouse was relocated by the military. In 2016, Mrs. White returned to Gwinnett as a Spanish I and II Teacher at Peachtree Ridge High School.

Mrs. White has bachelor’s degrees in Foreign Language Education and Spanish as well as a master’s degree in Foreign Language Education, all from the University of Georgia. She is pursuing her Ph.D. at 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. Committee members will look for original teaching methods, study 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. They also will review 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 8. One of the three level winners will be named Gwinnett’s 2019 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.*