



NEWS RELEASE

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

2020 Teacher of the Year:

Rebecca Carlisle named Gwinnett County's top teacher

A veteran high school teacher fueled by a passion to mentor students and her peers has been named the 2020 Gwinnett County Teacher of the Year (TOTY). During the annual Gwinnett County Teacher of the Year banquet, **Gwinnett County Public Schools CEO/Superintendent J. Alvin Wilbanks** announced **Rebecca Carlisle** of **North Gwinnett High School** as the recipient of the school system's highest teaching honor.

The announcement took place during the annual celebration on Thursday, November 14, 2019, at the Infinite Energy Forum in Duluth. In all, the school district recognized 139 local school Teachers of the Year at the event where they were honored by loved ones, local school and central office administrators, and the Gwinnett County Board of Education.



Prior to earning the school system's top honor, Carlisle was first named the 2020 Gwinnett County High School Teacher of the Year. She was selected as Gwinnett's top teacher from a group of six finalists which had been narrowed to three level winners. **Vivarine Argilagos** of **Lovin Elementary School** is Gwinnett's 2020 Elementary School Teacher of the Year and **Brad Zickefoose** of **Radloff Middle School** is Gwinnett's 2020 Middle School Teacher of the Year.

The TOTY selection process began at the start of the school year when thousands of teachers from throughout the district nominated and selected 139 teachers to represent their local schools. A selection committee later narrowed the group to 25 semifinalists, and finally to the six finalists. In addition to the three level winners (Carlisle, Argilagos, and Zickefoose), the other three finalists were **Amber M. Simmons** of **Brookwood High School**, **Ellen Hill** of **Dyer Elementary School**, and **Anthony Dramis** of **Hull Middle School**.

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437 Old Peachtree Road, NW
Suwanee, GA 30024-2978
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GWINNETT COUNTY TEACHER OF THE YEAR AND
HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER OF THE YEAR



Rebecca Carlisle believes it's her calling and duty to help students break the cycle and monotony of "memorize and recite" and then "move to the next class." She is passionate about helping students recognize the benefits of "discovering" answers rather than being told them. She says, "It's really hard work to help students recognize the benefits, but it is worth it to help them realize they are full of promise and valued perspective."

Carlisle has been an educator for ten years, all of them with Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS). Before becoming an Advanced Placement (AP) World History teacher at North Gwinnett High School in 2014, Carlisle taught Georgia and World History at Pinckneyville Middle School.

As a teacher, Carlisle believes that knowing your "why" behind your "what" is the key to a teacher's ultimate success in and out of the classroom. When she encounters challenges she gains perspective by seeking out someone who she can invest in and help find success. She says, "Thankfully, as teachers, we don't have to look far for someone to invest in as we have 25 to 155 students that we lock eyes with every day who are yearning for that investment, and who, frankly, are worth it. When I spend more time with a student working through an AP concept or when I work with a new teacher to develop a lesson plan, my personal feelings of being overwhelmed with stress quickly transform to being overwhelmed with gratitude and revived passion, because I am anchored in my purpose, or my "why", which is to always invest in others, to truly see others, and to help others be successful, as so many have done for me."

Carlisle's commitment to investing in others and impacting their lives extends beyond the classroom. Over the years, she has helped sponsor clubs, been a cheerleading coach and served as the academic coach for her school's basketball team. "I work with many of my students in Beta Club as I guide and empower them to lead, design and implement community-wide events like our annual Trunk or Treat event and International Night. It is incredibly rewarding to work with these students as they learn to collaborate with various personalities, time tables, expectations, creativity, and logistics to problem solve and complete these adult-sized tasks with extraordinary results," Carlisle said.

That investment extends to her peers, as well. Although she is an experienced teacher, and no stranger to North Gwinnett High, Carlisle felt there was a need for a more enhanced and structured New Teacher Program at her school. She went to school leaders who paired her with another teacher to address those needs. She explains, “We worked to create a program that does more than just help teachers know their way around the building, it’s a program that supports new teachers in implementing best instructional practices by meeting with them once per month to discuss specific evaluation areas (Positive Learning Environment, Academically Challenging Environment, Differentiation, Assessment Uses and Strategies, etc.) with Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies.” The success of the program is a point of pride for Carlisle. She says, “I am very proud of this work and the impact it has had on new teachers, not just at my school but at others, as statistics say that the success and retention of a new teacher greatly depends on the support they receive and it is my deep passion to ensure that each new teacher receives the best support possible. I look forward to being a part of the continued impact as more equipped and supported new teachers leads directly to increased student achievement.”

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Vivarine Argilagos, 1st Grade Teacher at Lovin Elementary School

Vivarine Argilagos is committed to bringing learning to life. She says she wants her students to see what they can learn in class as valuable and necessary to be a productive part of society. Argilagos adds, “I want all my students to view themselves as capable of making an impact on the world right now as opposed to waiting for adulthood.”



Argilagos has been an educator for two decades, spending the first four years of her career in New York City teaching 4th and 5th grades. She has spent the last 16 years with GCPS. She started her GCPS career in 2004 at Cooper Elementary School where she taught 4th and 5th grades. In 2007, Argilagos moved to Lovin Elementary School where she has spent the last dozen years teaching 1st, 4th and 5th grades. Argilagos has a bachelor’s degree in Education and Psychology from Hunter College, a master’s degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Walden University and a specialist certificate in Teaching and Learning from Piedmont College.

Argilagos creates and nurtures an environment in her classroom where success and excellence are contagious, and failure is growth. “I instill in my students very early

on, action equals results,” Argilagos said. “I set very high expectations for my students primarily because I believe they can achieve it. My personal philosophy is set the bar high, equip students with the ladders of support, and students will reach and surpass the bar. My expectation is that every one of my students will accomplish something more today, than they did yesterday.” Argilagos says evidence that her philosophy works can be found on Amazon where you can buy a novel that she helped her students create and get published. She adds, “This accomplishment has served as a motivator for my students to continue to grow as learners as well.”

MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Brad Zickefoose, 6th Grade Science Teacher at Radloff Middle School

Brad Zickefoose may be a science teacher at Radloff Middle School, but to many outside his classroom, he and his students are music artists. Zickefoose has used his musical talents to help spark an interest and love of science in his classroom and beyond. Over the course of 10 years, Zickefoose and his students have created 13 songs and 8 music videos that have attracted more than 325,000 views. “I feel like my songs have not only helped turn my own students into lifelong science learners, but they’ve made an impact on a global scale thanks to the reach of YouTube,” Zickefoose said. “While I am the first to concede that the rigor of a GCPS science classroom can’t be met by simply singing my science songs, my songs have been an integral tool for maximizing student engagement in the topics they cover.”



Zickefoose has been an educator for more than a decade. He started his GCPS career in 2009 at Radloff Middle School where he’s taught science and math ever since. Zickefoose holds a bachelor’s degree in Marketing and a master’s degree in Middle Grades Math and Science from Georgia State University.

Zickefoose’s philosophy is that “School Should Be Fun. Learning Should Be Fun.” He adds, “When you set the bar any lower than that, regardless of your content or your standard or your class size, or your comfort level, you are doing the students a disservice. There is a point in almost every kid’s life when they go from enjoying school to dreading school. My vision of excellence starts with my students coming into my 6th grade science classroom thinking they’ll be counting down the days until summer and ends with my students not wanting to say goodbye in May.”

As Gwinnett County's 2020 Teacher of the Year, Carlisle will now compete for the Georgia title. She will receive an annual award of \$1,000 and the other two level winners will each receive \$750 each year, for as long as they are employed with GCPS. The finalists will receive a one-time award of \$500. The five finalists who did not win the county honor also will receive a \$250 grocery store gift card and gift basket. Each local school winner will receive a one-time award of \$200, a plaque, and a TOTY cup.

As the overall winner, Carlisle also will receive a crystal peach, a \$500 grocery store gift card and gift basket, a commemorative ring, a laptop computer, and the use of a new car for one year. GCPS would like to thank this year's sponsors, including the presenting sponsor Peach State Federal Credit Union, for their support of great teachers and for making this celebration of outstanding teaching possible. Sponsors include:

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