



**Georgia Association of Colleges  
for Teacher Education**

**Fall 2025  
Mentor Teacher Awards Dinner**



**Thursday, November 13, 2025  
Hilton Peachtree City Atlanta  
Peachtree City, GA, 30269**



# PROGRAM AGENDA



*Buffet Opens at 6:30pm*

*Musical Selections: Woodland High School Band*

Welcome ..... Sheri Hardee

Recognition of Performer ..... Monica Willingham

Musical Performer ..... Woodland High School Band

Recognitions ..... Sharon Hixon & Loleta Sartin

Recognition of Georgia P-20s ..... Carla Tanguay and Michelle Thompson

Introduction of Awards ..... Sharon Hixon & Loleta Sartin

GACTE ..... Cindi Chance

GaNTEP ..... Penney McRoy

GAE ..... Craig Carter

PAGE ..... Craig Harper

GAEL ..... Ben Wiggins

Closing Remarks ..... Sharon Hixon & Loleta Sartin

# Congrats!

## Georgia Outstanding Mentor Teacher 2025 Awardees

**Congratulations on this well-deserved award. Mentor teachers like you have been instrumental in helping to develop a commitment to lifelong learning. You have made a significant impact on the lives of young people in your school community, in your professional community and in the broader community.**



**GACTE provides leadership on issues related to professional education, promotes effective public policy, and enhances and improves professional education programs at member institutions.**

# Abby Bishop

## ATHENS P-20 REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE

Special Educator, Malcolm Bridge Elementary School  
Oconee County Schools  
Nominated by Dr. Sara Kajder, University of Georgia



Abby Bishop is a phenomenal teacher and mentor who has devoted her professional work to serving students with profound disabilities and medical needs. She doesn't just welcome pre-service teachers into her classroom; her model and mentorship leads them to take up this same pedagogy. Not only is Abby an outstanding mentor to UGA teacher candidates in their practicum and student teaching experiences, but she leads a regional consortium of special educators who are refining their pedagogies and craft to better serve students. Abby holds a master's degree in Special Education, and she was recognized as the district-wide teacher of the year for Oconee County in 2022.



# Ashley Farmer

## **EAST GEORGIA P-20 REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE**

First Grade Teacher, Brookwood Elementary School

Columbia County Schools

Nominated by Dr. Carey Ann Cushman, Augusta University



Ashley Farmer has been an incredible support to student teachers, offering guidance, encouragement, and real-world insight throughout every step of a teacher candidate's journey. She creates a welcoming environment where new educators feel safe to learn, ask questions, and grow. Ashley's patience, positivity, and willingness to share her experiences with teacher candidates make her a trusted mentor and role model. Thanks to her dedication, student teachers leave her classroom feeling confident and well-prepared for their own classroom. Ashley holds a Specialist in Teaching and Learning, and she was selected as the Teacher of the Year for Brookwood Elementary School in 2015.

# Jane Kim

## **METRO ATLANTA P-20 REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE**

**First Grade Teacher, Suwanee Elementary School**

**Gwinnett County Schools**

**Nominated by Dr. Carla Tanguay, Georgia State University**



Jane Kim has demonstrated her dedication to mentoring by modeling, facilitating, and using a strengths-based approach with teacher candidates. Jane became a Master Teacher Fellow in 2020 through a National Science Foundation grant-funded project titled, “Preparing, Supporting, and Retaining Elementary Mathematics Specialists.” As a part of that project, she completed the K-5 Mathematics Endorsement and the Teacher Support and Coaching Endorsement where she learned how to be an elementary mathematics specialist and an effective mentor teacher. Jane’s goals include “learning and growing as a teacher leader that can positively influence my colleagues’ instruction and, in turn, positively impact student achievement at my school.” Jane is currently working on a Specialist degree in Education.

# Priscilla Brown

## **MIDDLE GEORGIA P-20 REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE**

**Instructional Coach, Ballard Hudson Middle School**

**Bibb County Schools**

**Nominated by Dr. Loleta Sartin, Mercer University**



Priscilla Brown has over 40 years of experience as an educator, and she has mentored countless individuals. Her principal stated, “Throughout her career, Ms. Brown has consistently demonstrated wisdom and resilience, helping our school navigate through challenges with grace and insight. Her mentorship has left an indelible mark not only on individual teachers but on the culture of our school as a whole. Her ability to guide, support, and inspire has truly shaped the professional lives of many within our district.” Although she recently retired, Priscilla serves as a part-time instructional coach and provides timely, strengths-based feedback to teachers so that recommended strategies translate into daily practice.

# Juliane Cassara

## MIDDLE GEORGIA P-20 REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE

First Grade Teacher, Springdale Elementary School

Bibb County Schools

Nominated by Dr. Sharon Augustine, Mercer University



Juliane Cassara has taught at Springdale Elementary School for ten years: one year in Kindergarten and nine years in first grade. While her primary role has been classroom teacher, Juliane has also contributed meaningfully to educator preparation, maintaining a balance between her duties at her school and her responsibilities as a mentor for Mercer University, where she has effectively mentored six student teachers. In addition, Juliane is a member and previous leader of the Lighthouse Team for her school, which has achieved “Leader in Me” Lighthouse Status. Juliane holds a Master of Education in Early Childhood Education, and she was selected as the Teacher of the Year for Springdale Elementary for 2025.



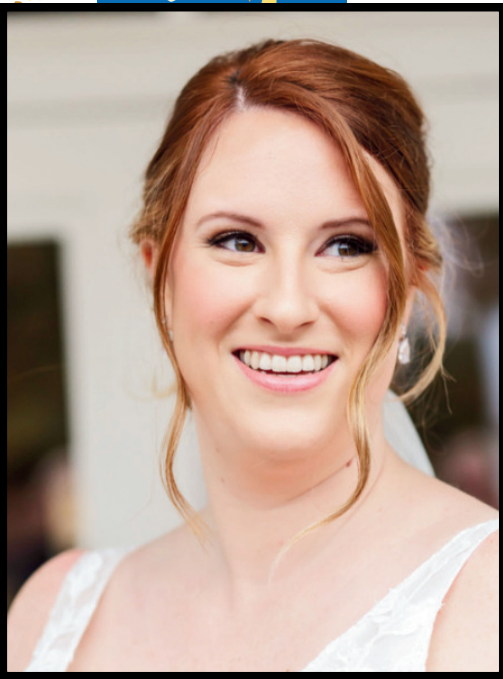
# Katie Strickland

## **NORTHEAST GEORGIA P-20 REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE**

**Kindergarten Teacher, Duncan Creek Elementary School**

**Gwinnett County Public Schools**

**Nominated by Dr. Sheri Hardee, University of North Georgia**



Katie Strickland has been described by her Assistant Principal as a trusted advisor who is sought out by her student teacher for her thoughtful counsel, deep understanding of educational best practices, and steady, compassionate classroom management. Katie is a fierce advocate for the teaching profession, and she has an innate ability to listen intently, ask insightful questions, and offer guidance that not only resolves immediate challenges but also nurtures long-term growth. One colleague indicated that she leads by example and encourages teamwork, reflective practice, and continuous growth. Her dedication to both her craft and the future of education makes her an invaluable asset to any mentee.



# Dawn Shirley

## **NORTHWEST GEORGIA P-20 REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE**

**Kindergarten Teacher, Stone Creek Elementary School  
Walker County Public Schools  
Nominated by Dr. Elaine Tinholt, Covenant College**



Dawn Shirley is a successful veteran teacher with 29 years of experience in education. She models best educational practices in relation to teaching content while also showing deep care for her students. Her classroom creates a welcoming feel for all who enter, whether student, teacher candidate, or college supervisor, and she consistently demonstrates how to establish strong relationships with both students and colleagues. Dawn is particularly passionate about teaching reading. She is Orton-Gillingham trained, and she effectively utilizes children's literature to teach and reinforce reading, writing, grammar, and phonics. Dawn holds a Master's Degree in Educational Administration and Supervision.

# Jessica Autry

## **SOUTHEAST GEORGIA P-20 REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE**

**First Grade Teacher, Portal Elementary School**

**Bulloch County Public Schools**

**Nominated by Dr. Alisa Leckie, Georgia Southern University**



Jessica Autry has more than 14 years of successful experience as a classroom teacher, and she has a proven track record of guiding novice teachers to success. Jessica supports teacher candidates through all of the various field experiences in college. In addition, she works with high school students in the Early Childhood Education/Teaching as a Profession Pathway programs. Jessica is truly dedicated to inspiring and supporting future educators. In the classroom, she is dedicated to early childhood development and fostering a love of learning through creative, age-appropriate instruction. Jessica holds a Master of Teaching and Learning in Elementary Education, and she was selected as the Teacher of the Year for Portal Elementary School in 2014.

# Nadia Ryce

## **SOUTHWEST GEORGIA P-20 REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE**

**Fourth Grade Teacher, Live Oak Elementary School  
Dougherty County Public Schools  
Nominated by Dr. Dorene Medlin, Albany State University**



Nadia Ryce has more than 20 years of experience in education. Although she has many personal and professional accomplishments, she served as a guide and mentor for a student teacher who was particularly struggling. Nadia's exceptional support helped the student teacher overcome many obstacles, and that young lady became a successful teacher. Nadia lives by the quote, "If you are always trying to be normal, you will never know how amazing you can be." That quote is one she has continually used to develop and support many student teachers. Nadia holds a Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction in Accomplished Teaching.

# Yasuko Kobayashi

**WEST GEORGIA P-20 REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE**

**ESOL Teacher, Hollis Hand Elementary School**

**Troup County Public Schools**

**Nominated by Dr. Susan Ryan, Point University**



Yasuko Kobayashi is a trusted advisor who has served as a cooperating teacher for candidates in field placement and student teaching experiences since 2023. The teacher candidates speak highly of her for various reasons. First, she is knowledgeable and demonstrates the best practices needed to teach ESOL students. She provides candidates with a wealth of practical and useful strategies to implement, and she coaches them through the learning process. Yasuko also demonstrates exceptional relationship-building with students and their families.



# **CINDI CHANCE AWARD**

## **Dr. Sharon Hixon**

### **Dean, School of Education, Dalton State**

As Dean of the School of Education at Dalton State College, Dr. Sharon Hixon has become a driving force in teacher preparation across Georgia. Her leadership reflects a lifelong commitment to excellence, innovation, and service, shaping programs that prepare educators to meet the evolving needs of schools and communities across the state. With more than thirty-five years of experience, Dr. Hixon has transformed teacher education through her dedication to developing confident, capable, and compassionate educators. She has forged strong partnerships with school districts, higher education institutions, and national organizations, including BranchEd and Shaw Industries.



An educational innovator, Dr. Hixon is leading the development of the Learning Academy of Northwest Georgia, the region's first charter school, scheduled to open in 2027. This initiative demonstrates her ability to translate vision into action through university and community partnerships that expand access to quality education and strengthen teacher pipelines. Her influence extends beyond Dalton State as she has chaired the Regents Advisory Committee on Education and served as president of the Georgia Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, where she continues to serve on the Board and External Relations Committee. Her leadership has elevated the annual GACTE Conference and Mentor Teacher Recognition Ceremony as meaningful celebrations of the teaching profession.

As Principal Investigator or Co-Principal Investigator on numerous federal, state, and local grants, including the National Science Foundation's Robert Noyce Scholarship award and a U.S. Department of Education SEED grant, Dr. Hixon has demonstrated success in securing and managing competitive funding. She has secured more than \$11 million in external funding to advance teacher preparation and strengthen community partnerships. Her service as a reviewer for the National Science Foundation's Noyce Scholarship Program further reflects her expertise and the respect she has earned in educator preparation.

Before assuming administrative roles, Dr. Hixon taught developmental reading, English for Speakers of Other Languages, and reading methods at the college level, following twelve years as an elementary teacher in Baltimore City Schools and a Maryland private school. These experiences ground her leadership in a deep understanding of classroom practice. Colleagues describe Dr. Hixon as a humble, collaborative, and data-driven leader who empowers others to thrive. She unites faculty, students, and partners around shared goals and cultivates a culture of inclusion, continuous improvement, and student success. Her career stands as a testament to what visionary leadership can achieve. Through her innovation, advocacy, and dedication to excellence, she has strengthened teacher preparation across Georgia and inspired educators at every stage of their journey. Dr. Hixon's commitment to empowering others and advancing the profession makes her a most deserving recipient of the Cindi Chance Award.

# CINDI CHANCE AWARD

## Dr. Loleta Sartin

### Associate Dean for Strategic Initiatives, Mercer University

Dr. Loleta D. Sartin serves as Associate Dean for Strategic Initiatives and Professor of Organizational Leadership in Mercer University's College of Professional Advancement (COPA). A transformative and servant leader, she has spent more than twenty-five years advancing educator preparation, institutional effectiveness, and lifelong learning across public and private higher education institutions. Her leadership is defined by collaboration, innovation, and a belief that education transforms both individuals and communities. Having secured more than ten million dollars in federal, state, and foundation funding, Dr. Sartin has strengthened teacher and leader preparation, expanded workforce-aligned academic pathways, and driven a forty-nine percent enrollment increase in targeted programs through strategic district partnerships. Her work has produced measurable gains in literacy achievement and student stability through collaborations with schools in Missouri and Georgia. Serving as Director of the Developmental School Program at Drury University in partnership with the Yale University Child Study Center, Dr. Sartin has long championed experiential and community-engaged learning as a cornerstone of teacher preparation.



Prior to her role in COPA, Dr. Sartin served as Associate Dean for Strategic Initiatives in Mercer's Tift College of Education. Before Mercer, she served as Associate Dean of the School of Education and Behavioral Sciences and Chair of the Department of Teacher Education and Social Work at Middle Georgia State University. As a founding faculty member, she helped design and launch the institution's educator preparation programs, emphasizing community partnerships and access. Colleagues describe Dr. Sartin as a trusted mentor and visionary collaborator who leads with empathy, integrity, and purpose. Admired for uniting diverse teams, empowering others to succeed, and transforming shared vision into sustainable impact, her leadership embodies authenticity, courage, and a steadfast commitment to educational excellence.

Dr. Sartin's influence extends through her service on the Executive Committee and Board of Directors of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, where she contributes to national policy and innovation in educator preparation. She brings this rich knowledge back to the Georgia Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (GACTE), where she previously served as president and now actively serves on the Board and External Relations Committee. She remains dedicated to ensuring each GACTE conference is engaging and impactful while advancing advocacy for teacher and leader preparation across Georgia. Those fortunate to work with her say she is an inspiring, highly innovative, courageous, and unparalleled leader in higher education.

A former fourth-grade teacher in New Orleans Public Schools, Dr. Sartin brings a holistic perspective linking research, practice, and community to strengthen institutions and improve student success. Her vision and record of transformative leadership make her a most deserving recipient of the Cindi Chance Award.

# Congratulations!

## Georgia's Most Trusted Educator Association Celebrates You!

PAGE congratulates all mentor teacher awardees.

As excellent educators, you're positively influencing the lives of your students.

As exceptional mentors, you're ensuring the success of Georgia's students and teachers for generations to come.

*From All of Us to Each of You, Thank You for All You Do.*

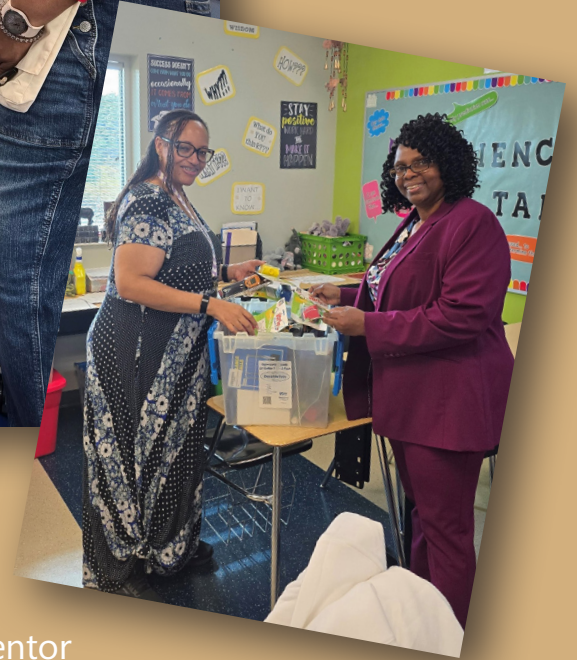
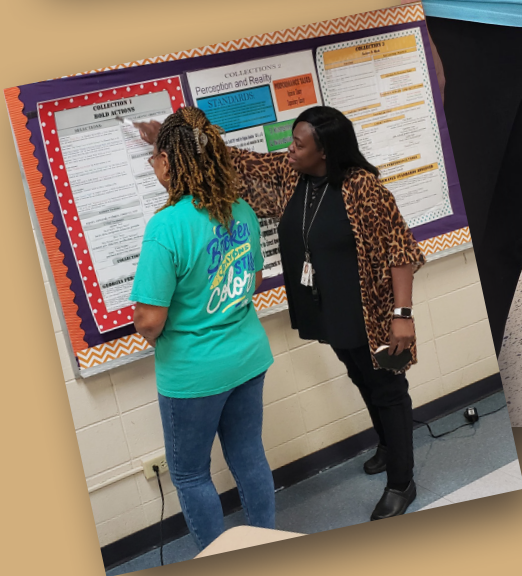
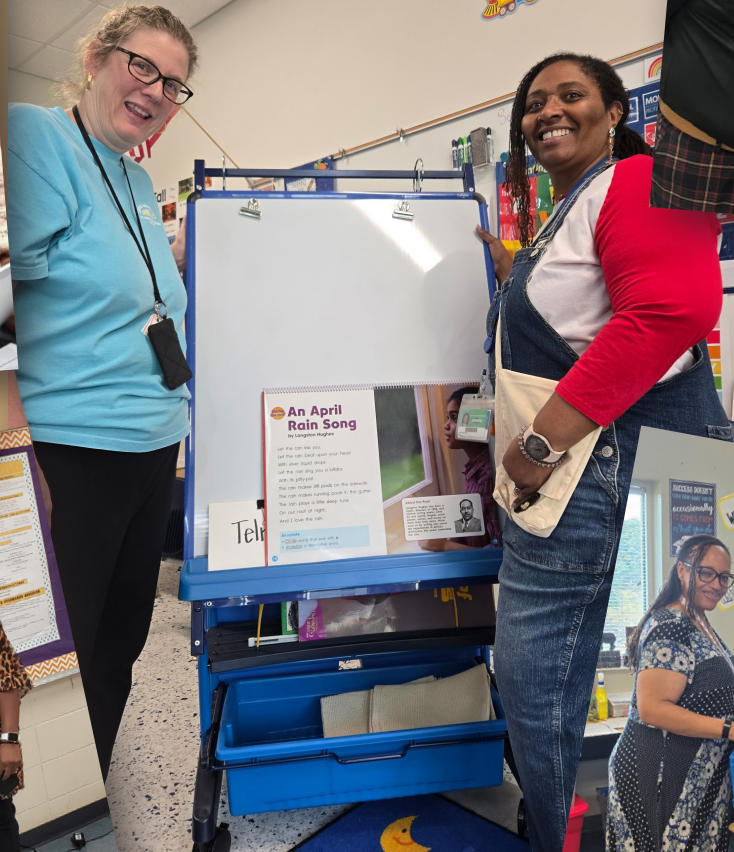
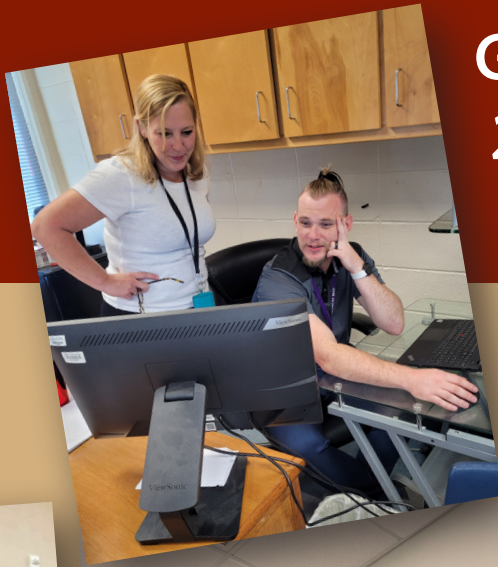


Now celebrating 50 years of service, PAGE supports Georgia educators throughout all stages of their careers by providing unparalleled legal coverage, one-on-one coaching, legislative advocacy, and professional learning. And, through programs such as PAGE STAR (Student and Teacher Achievement Recognition), PAGE GAD (Georgia Academic Decathlon), PAGE Academic Bowl for Middle Grades, and PAGE FGE (Future Georgia Educators), we recognize and encourage excellence in education.

[www.pageinc.org](http://www.pageinc.org) | 770-216-8555 | 800-334-6861



# GAE Congratulates the 2025 GA Mentor Teacher Award Winners



GAE is proud to be a sponsor of the 2025 GA Mentor Teacher Awards. The recipients of this award epitomize the collaborative and professional educators whose work will help create the next generation of great teachers and great public schools for all of Georgia's students.

***Congratulations to all of this year's awardees.***

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[WWW.JOINGAE.ORG](http://WWW.JOINGAE.ORG)



# CONGRATULATIONS 2025 GACTE AWARD WINNERS!

Thank you for dedicating your careers to  
serving Georgia's children!



**PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**



**ADVOCACY**



**NETWORKING**

## ABOUT US

### GAEL'S MISSION

The mission of GAEL is to improve public education in Georgia through high quality leadership development, advocacy, and a resource network for educational leaders.

## CONNECT WITH US

**SCAN TO JOIN & FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL!**



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### 2026 GAEL WINTER CONFERENCE

Feb. 1-3, 2026  
The Classic Center  
Athens, GA

### 2026 GAEL SUMMER CONFERENCE

July 12-15, 2026  
Jekyll Island Convention Center  
Jekyll Island, GA



# CONGRATULATIONS 2025 Mentor Teacher Award Winners!



Thank you for your commitment to the teaching profession. Your mentoring and support of pre-service educators helps ensure Georgia teachers are ready on day one to positively impact student learning!



Georgia Professional Standards Commission

[www.gapsc.com](http://www.gapsc.com)

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**Thank you to our sponsors who  
made this awards dinner a success.**



*Cindi Chance*