

MILESTONE MOMENTS

For the Georgia Foundation for Early Care + Learning



IN THIS ISSUE

A NOTE FROM
OUR EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR

WELCOMING OUR
NEWEST BOARD
MEMBERS

CELEBRATING
OUR 2023-2024
GEORGIA EARLY
CHILDHOOD
EDUCATORS AND
PRE-K TEACHERS
OF THE YEAR

RECRUITING
SUMMER FOOD
SERVICE
SPONSORS

Dear Friends of the Foundation,

In this issue of our regular newsletter, you will see that we have named two stellar new members of our Board of Directors: Malcolm Mitchell and Susannah Balish. We are grateful for their leadership and we are looking forward to the work we will achieve with them on our team!

You will also read below about the naming of our 2023-2024 Georgia Pre-K Teachers of the Year and Georgia Early Childhood Educators of the Year for three categories: Infant, Toddler, and Preschool. **Georgia is one of the few states across the nation to formally recognize expert ECE teachers in this way, and I continue to be proud that we do.**

In the coming months, we are looking forward to working with DECAL's Quality Innovations and Partnerships Division to engage stakeholders on the topic of Quality Rated revisions. Additionally, we will be supporting a new Nutrition and Physical Activity Endorsement pilot for Quality Rated, and child care programs that have received a Quality Rated Language and Literacy Endorsement will participate in a Professional Learning Communities training. We look forward to sharing our progress with you in the next quarter of 2024.

Gratefully,

Laura



Welcoming Our Newest Board Members

The Georgia Foundation for Early Care and Learning Board of Directors begins 2024 by welcoming two newest board members, Malcolm Mitchell and Susannah Balish.



Malcolm Mitchell is a Georgia native who graduated from the University of Georgia in 2015 and became a Super Bowl Champion in 2017 with the New England Patriots. Malcolm has been recognized for his work on and off the field. As an avid lover of reading, in 2015, he authored and published his first book, *"The Magician's Hat"*, and created a youth learning initiative named Read with Malcolm. In 2016, Malcolm established the Share the Magic Foundation that has donated more than 150,000 books and served more than 1,000,000 students.

"Teachers and child care providers play a crucial role in shaping the minds and hearts of our youngest learners, nurturing their curiosity and igniting a love for knowledge that will guide them throughout their lives. The impact of dedicated educators in these formative years resonates far beyond the classroom, shaping the future of individuals and society as a whole. It is my hope that we continue to strive to support them on their pursuit to creating a future that supports and empowers us all." - **Malcolm Mitchell**



Welcoming Our Newest Board Members



Susannah Balish is the Senior Director of Supply Chain Operations at Cox Communications. She received her Bachelor of Arts Degree from Miami University, and MBA from George Mason University. She has also studied at Miami University's John E. Dolibois European Center in Luxembourg. She is an award-winning leader with more than two decades of scaling bottom-line results for Fortune 500 business and non-profits. She is an active volunteer in the Atlanta community and has held board positions in several organizations, including the Junior League of Atlanta, Ferst Readers, Atlanta Children's Shelter, Trees Atlanta, and Voices for Georgia's Children. She is a member of the Leadership Atlanta Class of 2013.

*"Early childhood education is the key to unlocking future success for every child. I am grateful to serve alongside this wonderful team and am excited to join them in designing strategic investments for the youngest in our communities. Nothing else matches the dividends of an investment in securing the best beginning for our children" - **Susannah Balish***



Celebrating our 2023-2024 Georgia Pre-K Teachers of the Year



The Foundation is proud to announce the 2023-2024 Georgia Pre-K Teachers of the Year, Charlotte Richards and Merodie Brown!

Charlotte Richards is from Cussetta, Georgia. She graduated from Walden University with a bachelor's degree in early childhood development and obtained her master's degree in early childhood language and literacy. Charlotte has been a Georgia Pre-K teacher at Chattahoochee County Pre-K for 15 years. She and her husband have two children.

Merodie Brown is from Gwinnett, Georgia. Merodie is a University of Georgia graduate with a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in early childhood education. She has been a Georgia Pre-K teacher at New Odyssey for Children in Hoschton, Georgia for five years. Merodie and her husband have four children.

Since 2016, the Georgia Foundation for Early Care and Learning has recognized two Georgia Pre-K Teachers of the Year every year - one from a public school setting, and another from a private school setting. This is no popularity contest: our winners are selected through a rigorous process that includes interviews and classroom observations conducted by a trained team of evaluators. As a result, these teachers have shared expertise and best practices with us through various platforms.

The Foundation awards each teacher a check for their personal use and each school a check for a classroom makeover and travel stipends.

We look forward to continuing to recognize these talented and dedicated professionals.

Support our Mission!

<http://www.gaeearlyed.org/Give.aspx>



Celebrating our 2023-2024 Georgia's Early Childhood Educators of the Year



In 2021, the Foundation expanded the Georgia Pre-K Teacher of the Year program to recognize and celebrate Early Childhood Educators of the Year in three categories. Since that time, we have been able to recognize talented teachers from Child Care Learning Centers and Family Child Care Learning Homes. This year's winners are Noel Weimer, Bianca Brown, and Chantelle Hester!

The winner in the Infant Category is Noel Weimer. Noel is the teacher and owner of Water Oak Family Child Care Learning Home in Roswell, Georgia. She opened the facility in 2009 because a "good enough" child care center wasn't what she wanted for her children. In her care, children ages birth to 18 months experience The Creative Curriculum and experience outdoor adventures such as nature discovery, photography, and land sports. Noel describes her center as a place "where children truly feel at home."

The winner in the Toddler Category is Bianca Brown. Bianca is a teacher at the Greenbrier-Bradley School in Evans, Georgia. She teaches toddlers ages 15 to 36 months. She loves going to work every day and says "If I can change one mind, I did my job, and I can make a difference."

The winner in the Preschool Category is Chantelle Hester. Chantelle owns and directs Smart Starters Academy Family Child Care Learning Home in Savannah, Georgia. She opened Smart Starters Academy in 2014 and cherishes that her students and parents refer to her program as a "school, and not a daycare." Chantelle is a proud educator.

Winners were selected from six semi-finalists who each received a classroom observation and a personal interview by a panel of early childhood experts. Each winner will receive \$3,000 for their personal use, \$2,000 for a classroom makeover, and up to \$2,500 for their school to cover travel costs and stipends for substitute teachers as they fulfill their duties as Georgia's Early Childhood Educators of the Year.

Join us in celebrating our three 2023 winners!



Happy Helpings: Feed Kids Free Healthy Meals this Summer

**Feed kids free
healthy meals this
summer**



Georgia's Summer Food Service Program

This Institution is an Equal Opportunity Provider



Summer is quickly approaching, and for many kids across Georgia, summer break means fun & free time. But for some students, the summer can mean limited access to affordable, nutritious foods. Providing summer meals to children facing food insecurity is a year-round effort, and the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) needs your help.

Happy Helpings, Georgia's Summer Food Service Program, is a federally-funded, state-administered program that reimburses program operators who serve free healthy meals and snacks to children and teens in low-income areas when school is not in session. In the summer of 2022, 85 Georgia counties were served by Happy Helpings. Last summer, the program served more than 2.8 million meals in 100 counties.

If you operate a nonprofit organization, you may be eligible to participate in Happy Helpings to feed children free, healthy meals and get reimbursed for your efforts. If you're interested in becoming a Happy Helpings Sponsor, complete the online form here: <https://happyhelpingsga.com/sponsors/>.

Support our Mission!
<http://www.gaeearlyed.org/Give.aspx>

