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Contact: Jennifer C. Jones, Director of Community & School Affairs, (478) 988-6390, Jennifer.C.Jones@hcbe.net

Annette Pender Receives Statewide Award for Exemplary Service

Also Named as a National RISE Award Finalist

HOUSTON COUNTY, GA – Annette Pender, School Nutrition Area Manager for the Houston County School District, was recently selected as one of two statewide winners of the Georgia Recognizing Inspiring School Employees (RISE) Award. Each year, two outstanding classified employees are chosen for this award recognizing their exemplary service to students in Pre-K through grade 12. Classified employees are those who work in technical services, school nutrition, transportation, custodial services, health services, and other critical roles who support student learning each day.



“Annette has been working with us for 19 years, serving in a variety of roles,” shared Meredith Potter, Director of School Nutrition for the Houston County School District. “She has a heart for students and wants to ensure everyone feels valued and included. Annette will go to any lengths to make students smile. She shows us every day the incredible difference that classified staff can make in the lives of our students. We are so incredibly grateful to have her as a member of our team.”

In addition to receiving Georgia's highest recognition for classified school employees, she was named a national finalist for the U.S. Department of Education's RISE Award, placing her among a select group of five classified school professionals nationwide whose service and leadership exemplify excellence in public education.

“Classified school employees are essential to the success of Georgia’s public schools, and their impact reaches far beyond what is often visible,” said Richard Woods, State Superintendent of Schools. “Mrs. Pender exemplifies the dedication, professionalism, and servant leadership that supports students, empowers educators, and strengthens school communities every day. Annette’s recognition as a national RISE Award finalist is a powerful reminder that the extraordinary work happening in Georgia’s schools is being recognized on the national stage – and it speaks volumes about the caliber of professionals serving our students.”

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In 2024, Annette was selected as the Houston County School District's Support Person of the Year. She began her career in school nutrition as an assistant manager and rose through the ranks to become Houston County School District's School Nutrition Area Manager and Culinary Specialist. Known for her tireless work ethic and inclusive leadership, she oversees operations across 39 schools while mentoring staff and modeling excellence at every level. She has championed innovative partnerships with the District's Transition Academy, creating meaningful employment opportunities for students with special needs and expanding training programs that prepare students for careers in school nutrition. Her commitment to service, leadership, and community involvement has elevated both her department and the profession statewide.

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478-988-6200



1100 Main Street | Perry, Georgia 31069



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