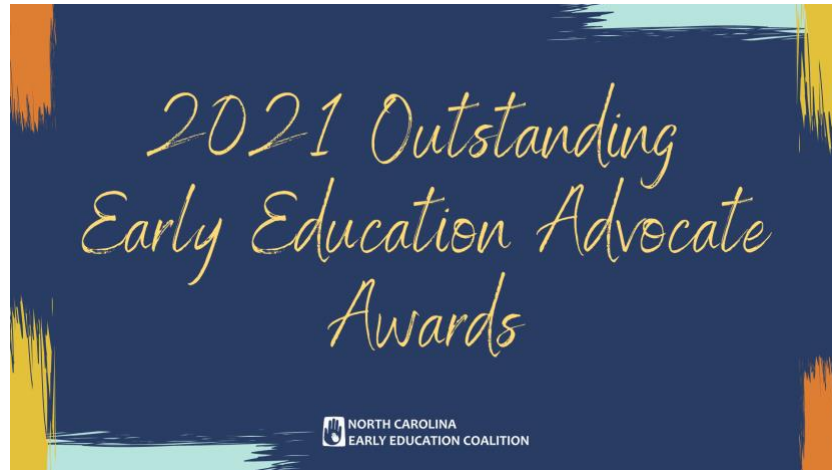


Announcing the 2021 Outstanding Early Education Advocate Award Winners!



At the Celebrating Child Care Heroes event on June 24, 2021, the NC Early Education Coalition recognized some of North Carolina's child care heroes with the presentation of the 2021 Outstanding Early Education Advocate Awards! The Coalition created this award to honor and recognize individuals who have gone above and beyond in their advocacy efforts for young children, their families, their educators, and the early childhood system.

The awards were presented to individuals in each of the following categories: an early education teacher, an early education center director, a family child care program, and a community leader. The 2021 award recipients are:

Early Education Teacher: Essence Walker

Essence is an infant teacher at LeafSpring School in Charlotte who received this award for her willingness to speak up, share her story, and help motivate and inspire others. Essence has participated in several statewide public awareness campaigns, including videos, webinars and trainings, and media interviews. This past January, she shared her testimony as an infant teacher at an Early Education Legislative Briefing that was attended by nearly 50 legislators. She has also played a critical role in the Worthy Wages Campaign, helping to organize her colleagues and teachers, contributing to message and campaign development, and helping with state and national media outreach.

Honorable mention: *Sheha Waters, an early educator from Wayne County, who is recognized for her efforts to raise awareness about workforce compensation and advocate for early childhood professionals.*

Early Education Center Director: Davina Boldin-Woods

Davina is the director at Excel Christian Academy in Burlington. She not only "talks the talk" through advocacy, but she also "walks the walk." Even with the responsibility of running her own child care program, she has long championed the educational pursuits of her teaching staff, and she recently graduated with her Master's Degree. Davina has participated in advocacy efforts and leadership opportunities with the Governor's Office, North Carolina's team for Moving the Needle on Early Childhood Workforce Issues, and the Coalition's Worthy Wages Campaign, where she has helped to lead and organize

child care providers and teachers around the issue of workforce compensation. Her efforts have also been recognized at the national level, and her work and words have been featured by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment and in national and state media.

Honorable mention: *Courtney Alexander, a child care director from Charlotte and a child care fellow with the National Domestic Workers Alliance, who is recognized for her efforts to advocate for early education with state policymakers.*

Family Child Care Home Provider: Danielle Caldwell

Danielle is a family child care provider in Durham who has been a powerful advocate for family child care homes in her community and across the state. She has played a critical role in the development of the Durham County Early Childhood Action Plan by facilitating focus groups with other family child care providers, and she serves on state-level groups considering the intersections of racial equity and early childhood education. She is also a member of the Think Babies NC Family Child Care Home Advisory Team, where she is helping to shape policy recommendations to support family child care providers and the children and families they serve.

Community Leader: Donna White

Donna is a leader for early childhood at the local and state level, having most recently served as the interim president at the North Carolina Partnership for Children. She now owns a consulting firm to support ongoing efforts to build and strengthen our early childhood system, consistently advocating for a comprehensive approach to services and programs that improve the lives of young children and their families. Her determination to ensure that the needs of the whole child remain the focus, always viewed in the context of their family, has driven new investments impacting local communities throughout North Carolina, including the development of the North Carolina Home Visiting and Parenting Education System Plan. Donna has also been a voice at the state level, working directly with policymakers to advocate on behalf of the needs of early educators, child care programs, young children, and families. Her passion for these issues were instrumental in driving action by the General Assembly, the administration, and other policymakers.

Honorable Mentions:

Daphne Alsiyao from the Rockingham County Partnership for Children for her work to strengthen the early childhood system by centering and amplifying family voice to advance equity.

June Locklear from the Robeson County Partnership for Children for her decades-long career advocating for young children at the local, state, and federal level.

Tara Fish from the Harnett County Partnership for Children, for her leadership in advocating for children and families in her community and for communicating with policymakers to support policy changes that make an impact.

Hunter Varipapa from the Children's Council of Watauga County for her efforts to support child care quality and the early childhood workforce.