

The Louisiana Department of Education is proud to announce the 2023 Early Childhood Teacher and Leader of the Year. These 10 teachers and leaders represent early childhood care and education sites across the state. This is the second year the LDOE has presented these awards, which are designed to honor the early education teachers and administrators who care for and educate infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

All Early Childhood Teacher and Leader of the Year finalists and semifinalists will be honored at the 17th Annual Cecil. J. Picard Educator Excellence Gala Celebration, which will be held at the World War II Museum in New Orleans. This exciting event is co-sponsored by [Dream Teachers](#).

Congratulations to these outstanding educators and leaders!

2023 EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER OF THE YEAR



Annie Richardson

Cane View Elementary Head Start,
West Baton Rouge Parish

Mrs. Annie Richardson teaches at Cane View Elementary Head Start in West Baton Rouge. Annie demonstrated all of the qualities anyone would want in a teacher for their own children: compassion, enthusiasm, creativity, and love. Annie is passionate about serving all children, and ensuring that children with disabilities in her classroom are served with the same high-quality education of their peers without disabilities. Annie told the Early Childhood team stories of children in her classroom facing emotional and physical challenges that lead to her making numerous adjustments to the setting, including rearranging furniture and materials so that the child could safely, and happily engage in lessons. Through this teaching experience, and others, Annie has become a tenacious advocate for social-emotional support for children in early learning settings, and beyond the walls of the classroom. Annie has a passion for building and strengthening the parent-teacher-school relationship. She sees a future for her children and their families where all parents in a community are deeply aware of the opportunities for early childhood education, and are fully invested in the incredible value of that education to the development of their child. Annie feels strongly about meeting families where they are, whether it's going out into the community to demonstrate learning that can happen in a classroom, or leading activities in the classroom that bring families in to see first-hand what benefits come from enrolling their children. Finally, this educator demonstrated to the Early Childhood team exactly how she engages the children who are so lucky to be in her classroom. One of her most impactful lessons demonstrated the life cycle of living organisms through one simple pumpkin, that became a year-long, and soon to be multi-year long journey for her and her children. This educator walked us through mentally, and literally walked us through the garden where her lesson is growing day by day. One small activity - having a pumpkin for festive fall-themed lessons, has turned into a school-wide project with an upcoming community garden, where children will learn myriad lessons about life, communication, responsibility, and community through caring for the earth - a profession common in her West Baton Rouge community.

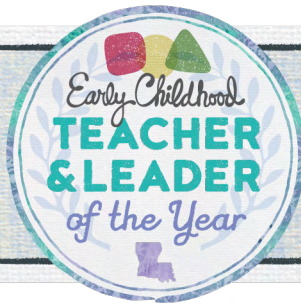
2023 EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADER OF THE YEAR



Rochelle Wilcox

Wilcox Academy, Orleans Parish

Rochelle Wilcox has nearly twenty years of experience in early childhood leadership alone, and many more working with our youngest learners. Rochelle has served over 1,200 children in her centers over the years and maintains relationships with these children and families long beyond their time in her care, as many of the first children she served are now in college and still checking in with her today. As part of her commitment to developing the leadership of others as well, she has developed and implemented a leadership track within her own centers, priming her teachers to become instructional leaders and preparing them for a long-term career in early childhood education. Rochelle leads the charge of an organization called For Providers By Providers (4PXP), whose mission is to champion Louisiana child care centers by enhancing the quality of early childhood care and education through policy advocacy, professional development, and networking. For Providers by Providers (4PXP) has built a collective, independent policy voice for Directors and staff of early learning centers serving Louisiana's low-income children of color. Through this work, Rochelle has contributed greatly to the passing of a millage in New Orleans that will contribute to funding nearly 1,000 new early childhood education seats for low-income children. One of Rochelle's leader's favorite quotes that fuels her passion for this work is by Alice Walker, who wrote, "The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any." Because of Rochelle's leadership, her teachers have power. Her community has power. The children in her center have power. And every day when she wakes up, she re-dedicates herself to ensuring each of them has the tools they need to use that power to improve their future and the world around them. This is what a leader does, and we are proud to announce that the inaugural Early Childhood Leader of the Year is Rochelle Wilcox of Wilcox Academy in New Orleans.



2023 EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS



Janie Clement
Assumption Parish



Kayla Joseph
St. James Parish



Melissa Loucks
Pointe Coupee Parish



Natalie Sullivan
Lafourche Parish

2023 EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS



Charli Beall
Caddo Parish



Cindy Beatty
Pointe Coupee Parish



Jennifer Kelsay
Washington Parish



Leeann Price
Rapides Parish