



**For Immediate Release**

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## **Camden County Educator Named New Jersey State Teacher of the Year**

**Trenton, NJ** – The New Jersey Department of Education today announced that Angel Santiago, a fifth-grade teacher in the Gloucester Township School District, Camden County, has been named the 2020-2021 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year.

“New Jersey is known for having the best public school system in the nation, which is due in large part to the strength of our teaching workforce,” said **Governor Phil Murphy**. “Angel Santiago exemplifies the kind of commitment and professionalism that we see in classrooms throughout New Jersey. I want to congratulate Angel for all that he has done to prepare our children to succeed and thrive.”

“Angel’s story is one of dedication, character, and service to the community,” said **Interim Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer**. “I commend him for serving as a role model, not only for his students, but for all of New Jersey.”

Santiago grew up in Vineland, where his single mother worked long hours to support her children, instilling in him the importance of a strong work ethic. For Santiago, school became a place that opened new worlds, and it helped mold his commitment to community service.

One person who made a profound impact on Santiago’s life was his sixth-grade teacher, Mark Melamed, who taught his students about the importance of service and how it impacts a community. Mr. Melamed had established a nonprofit called The Gabriel Project to provide critically ill children from Africa, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti the medical services they need to survive. As a child, Santiago took part in a readathon to raise money for the charity. Today, The Gabriel Project lives on even after the passing of Mr. Melamed, and it has raised more than \$1 million over the years with help from people like Santiago, who has volunteered as vice president of the organization (2014-2016).

After earning an associate degree from Rowan University – taking evening classes while working full time – Santiago then went on to earn his bachelor’s degree and then a master’s in education from Fairleigh Dickinson University, where he was a member of both the Phi Theta Kappa and Kappa Delta Pi honor societies. Santiago began his teaching career in Lindenwold schools in 2012 before establishing his professional roots in the Gloucester Township School District the following year.

For the past two years, Santiago has facilitated a group of fourth and fifth-grade students called Young People of Character, or YPOC. YPOC brings together students from all walks of life to serve the communities in which they live. The YPOC members have participated in activities such as writing letters to veterans for Veterans Day, cleaning the school grounds for Earth Day, and volunteering during the Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service.

Santiago believes that one key to closing equity gaps in New Jersey is through promoting a diverse teaching workforce – a challenge in a state where 58 percent of the state’s students are children of color, but teachers of color represent only 16 percent of educators. Research has linked a diverse teaching workforce to greater academic achievement among students of color. A diverse workforce fosters positive perceptions among all children and helps prepare them for future success.

Santiago is often asked to provide professional development training for his colleagues on issues ranging from positive behavioral interventions for students to a curriculum institute for teachers of science and social studies.

“Congratulations to Angel Santiago for earning the designation of New Jersey State Teacher of the Year,” said **Kathy Goldenberg**, President of the State Board of Education. “His story serves as a true inspiration, and we’re fortunate to have him among our teaching workforce.”

“Considering the significant talent that exists within our state’s teacher workforce, for Angel Santiago to be selected as the 2020-2021 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year is a well-deserved honor,” said **John Bilodeau**, Superintendent of the Gloucester Township School District. “His selfless demeanor and humility are offset by an insatiable professional drive to develop and advance all students both academically and socially. I could not be prouder of Angel for this most deserved recognition.”

“Angel Santiago stands out because of his character,” said **Aaron J. Rose**, Principal of Loring Flemming Elementary School in Blackwood, where Santiago teaches. “He treats all students with mutual respect, celebrates their differences, and inspires students of varying backgrounds and abilities to succeed academically and socially. The impact of Angel Santiago’s work is so fulfilling and significant, as it is all focused on the most important person in the classroom, the student. He makes Gloucester Township schools proud and is truly deserving of the title, 2020-2021 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year.”

“I teach because I get to participate in cultivating the most precious resource this world has to offer: our future, our children,” said Santiago, who lives in Elmer with his wife Kourtney, a special education teacher in the Bridgeton Public School District, and their son.

“Teaching is my passion,” he said. “It is the reason why I get up every day with a positive outlook on life and the reason why I can fall asleep each night feeling fulfilled with my worldly duties.”

In his role as State Teacher of the Year, Santiago will work with the New Jersey state Department of Education, meet with fellow educators around the state, and take part in national conferences with other State Teachers of the Year.

The other four New Jersey State Teacher of the Year finalists will be recognized at a State Board of Education recognition ceremony in December. The finalists received the highest scores on their applications and their interviews with a distinguished panel of representatives from the state’s education associations and other stakeholder groups. The finalists are: Michael Dunlea, third-grade teacher at Tabernacle Elementary School, Tabernacle Township School District, Burlington County; Christina Gauss, Spanish teacher at Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School, Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School District, Monmouth County; Megan Graziano, Science Teacher at Clifton High School, Clifton School District, Passaic County; and Rachel Kremetz, 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> grade special education teacher at Ocean Academy, Cape May County Special Services District, Cape May.

Additional information can be found on the [Governor's Educator of the Year webpage](#).

