

L. Gale Buckner, Commissioner

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**37 YOUTH CELEBRATED AT EASTMAN YDC AND MILAN YDCs**  
**– 5 earn high school diplomas, 17 earn G.E.D.s, 7 graduate from a technical college and another 10 earn Work Ready Certificates–**

(Atlanta, Ga.) – Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice Commissioner L. Gale Buckner today announced that 37 youth were honored at the Eastman Youth Development Campus (YDC) and Milan Youth Development Campus for their academic achievement – some graduated from high school, others earned G.E.D.s, Oconee Fall Line Technical College Degrees or Work Ready Certificates.

“These graduates worked hard for their achievements,” Commissioner Buckner said. “I encourage them to build on their success so that when they leave DJJ they continue to see there are opportunities available to them.”

Deputy Commissioner of Programs and Education Services Rick Harrison, the keynote speaker at Milan, told the youth, “You probably viewed commitment as a misfortune. I commend you for taking advantage of the opportunities DJJ has given you. You’ve changed a negative into a positive and are on the path to reshaping your life’s story. I hope you will use your education to take advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead, give great thought to your decisions because they matter, and remember that you don’t have to go this alone.”

Youth spoke at both commencements. At Eastman YDC, one youth sought to inspire his fellow graduates to work harder and amend relationships with those who have been disappointed.

“We should not allow our education and learning to end here,” said the youth, who is unidentified because juvenile records are sealed. “We should consider today an introduction to bigger and better things. We should allow today to serve as the prologue to our life stories. Today is the day we accept responsibility for all the good and bad decisions we have made and allow our destinies to be fulfilled. Instead of conforming to the life of jail, I challenge you to transform as leaders and positive role models. Let’s set examples for our peers and lead by our actions.”

A youth at Milan YDC said, “We are standing on the brink of our future and taking our first step on a lifelong journey of learning. We realize our future is not dictated to us but is up to us to create.”

DJJ is the state’s 181<sup>st</sup> school district and has dual accreditation from both the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and the Correctional Education Association (CEA). Last academic year, 51 youth graduated from DJJ high schools and 125 students earned GEDs.

Macon YDC will hold its graduation on Dec. 21. Earlier this week, nine students graduated from Augusta YDC. Last week, 40 youth received high school diplomas, General Equivalency Degrees (GED), and vocational certificates at Sumter YDC in Americus.

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