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SGTC PRESIDENT DR. JOHN WATFORD IS SHOWN ABOVE PRESENTING KEYARA WILLIAMS WITH THE GOAL AWARD FOR BEING THE SGTC 2026 GOAL STUDENT OF THE YEAR.

Keyara Williams, an Early Childhood Care and Education student from Americus, has been selected as South Georgia Technical College's (SGTC) Georgia Occupational Award of Leadership (GOAL) winner for 2026. Williams will represent SGTC in the regional and state-level competitions, competing for the prestigious title of Georgia's Student of the Year and the opportunity to serve as the statewide ambassador for technical education.

SGTC President Dr. John Watford announced Williams selection during a luncheon held on the Americus campus. The event honored the 2026 GOAL finalists, including Williams and Jamyron Clayton, a practical nursing student from Americus; as well as other nominees:

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Michelle Sims of Arabi (Practical Nursing), Mary Ann Reiselbara of Plains (Barbering), and Aleia Bush of Americus (Criminal Justice).

SGTC Early Childhood Care and Education Instructor Jaye Cripe described Williams as a very dedicated student who is also a hard worker. “Keyara Williams is a wonderful student. She first enrolled in South Georgia Tech in 2019 but then backed up and worked in the child care industry for four years. She came back in 2025 and returned with a purpose. She is a natural teacher, enthusiastic, and I believe she will go as high as you can go in early childhood. All of us would be blessed to have a child or grandchild taught by her,” said Cripe.

Williams shared that she is from a family of seven and that she is the oldest of five children. “I never really thought I would be able to go to college because of medical problems I had when I was younger. I had no direction when I graduated from high school but after I worked for four years in the childcare industry, my mom started talking to me about going to Technical College.

“She told me about the low cost, flexible class hours, and hands on learning and that there were 22 different colleges in the Technical College System of Georgia, so I couldn’t tell her there were no options,” laughed Williams.

The Early Childhood Care and Education student shared she had been told all her life that she was going to be a teacher and now she is very glad she chose the education field. “My grandmother, my aunt, and several other close friends and relatives were teachers so I feel like I am continuing their legacy. I chose education and found my passion and now I hope to apply that passion to the rest of my life.”

The selection process began with five nominees, which were narrowed to three finalists by an internal screening committee composed of SGTC employees: Jennifer Gilmore, Financial Aid Technician; Calvin Hodge Jr., Campus Police Chief; Sandhya Muljibhai, WIOA Coordinator; Tylene Pepito, Admissions Counselor-Recruiter; Jennifer Robinson, Special Populations Coordinator; and Suzanne Singletary, Human Resources Director.

An external committee consisting of community leaders then interviewed the finalists to determine who would represent South Georgia Technical College at the regional and state levels. The selection committee members for 2026 were: Richard McCorkle, (RESA Director), Heidi Goodin (RESA STEM Specialist), Ervin Anderson, (retired GSW instructor) and SGTC Board members Michael Coley and Alton Ford.

During the luncheon, SGTC Assistant Vice President of Student Affairs Josh Curtin presented certificates of recognition to each nominee, and trophies were awarded to the finalists and their nominating instructors. Williams received an additional trophy and gifts in celebration of her achievement.

SGTC 2026 Instructor of the Year, Dorothea Lusane-McKenzie (Cosmetology) delivered the invocation at the luncheon and Williams was presented with monetary gifts from SGTC President Emeritus Sparky Reeves’ wife, Allene; Kathryn Fowler Moore representing the Americus Rotary Club, and Amber Batechelor, CEO and President of Batchelor & Bradley Insights Group, LLC.

Williams will now advance to regional judging later this month. In April, nine regional finalists—three from each of the state’s three regions—will be announced during the Technical College System of Georgia’s state-level competition in Atlanta. A panel of leaders from business, industry, and government will then select the 2026 State GOAL Winner, who will serve as Georgia’s Student of the Year, earning the title of statewide spokesperson for technical education. The winner will also receive the GOAL medallion and a new car from Kia Motors.

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