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NEWS RELEASE

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Alachua County Public Schools' food service director wins top national honor

Maria Eunice, Alachua County Public Schools' director of Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) Department, has won the highest national honor from the School Nutrition Association, sponsored by Basic American Foods.

Eunice has been named the winner of the prestigious Golden School Foodservice Director of the Year Award, the highest honor in the FAME (Food Service Achievement Management Excellence) Awards competition. According to the School Nutrition Association's website, the award "recognizes outstanding achievements in leadership, spirit/dedication, innovation, community involvement and the bettering of the lives of students across the country."

"We are so proud that Maria's been recognized," said Superintendent Karen Clarke. "She always goes above and beyond to support schools and children, and instills that same ethic in the people in her department."

Eunice has led the district's FNS department since 2006. She spearheaded the implementation of several major initiatives, including the Your Choice Fresh program, which uses student input to provide healthy meal options and promote attractive food presentation, serving lines, dining areas and a recycling initiative. During her tenure, participation in the district's summer meal program has jumped 264% for breakfast and 369% for lunch. Under her leadership, FNS also implemented supper service for students at high needs schools and a nationally recognized Farm to School program providing fresh, local produce to students at all schools along with education about the importance of eating healthy.

When the COVID pandemic hit, Eunice and her team requested federal authorization to provide free meals to all children ages 0-18 in the county. As a result, the district has now distributed more than 3.6 million meals to local children, including meals to get them through weekends and holidays. That program will continue through the end of the school year.

"This award would not be possible without the commitment, hard work, and dedication of the FNS management team and staff," said Eunice. "I am thrilled to receive this honor and to be classified in the same light as the directors that I have looked up to throughout my career."

Eunice will be formally recognized at the annual FAME Awards Ceremony on January 14, which will be held virtually.

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