

# DR. DEFOREST B. SOARIES JR. HONORED WITH 2024 DISTINGUISHED LEADER IN EDUCATION AWARD

*RUTGERS GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION HONORS A LEADER, ADVOCATE AND NJ FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE*

NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY , USA , May 23, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Dr. DeForest B. Soaries Jr.](#), an esteemed leader and advocate for educational equity, has been awarded the Distinguished Leader in Education Award by Rutgers Graduate School of Education (GSE). This prestigious accolade recognizes Dr. Soaries' exceptional contributions to advancing educational opportunities and his unwavering commitment to social justice.



Dr. Soaries being presented with Distinguished Leader in Education Award by Dr. Wanda Blanchett

The Distinguished Leader in Education Award celebrates individuals who demonstrate excellence in educational leadership and a profound dedication to making education accessible and equitable for all. Each year the GSE faculty select an individual or individuals who demonstrate passion, dedication, and leadership in the field of education and in support of GSE's mission which is to support equity and excellence in education in NJ and beyond. Past award winners have included educators, leaders of industry, authors and more. Last year, the President of Rutgers University, Jonathan Hallowsay was honored.

**“** I am deeply honored to receive the Distinguished Leader in Education Award from such a venerable institution as Rutgers Graduate School of Education.”  
*Dr. DeForest B. Soaries Jr.*

Rutgers Graduate School of Education bestowed this honor upon Dr. Soaries in recognition of his outstanding achievements and enduring influence. "I am deeply honored to receive the Distinguished Leader in Education Award from such a venerable institution as Rutgers Graduate School of Education," said Dr. Soaries. "This recognition is also personal. My father was a

graduate of the Rutgers School of Education and he was the best educator I know. It's also a testament to the collaborative efforts of countless educators, leaders, and community members who strive to ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed." Dr. Soaries' innovative work includes the creation of [the dfree® Financial Freedom Movement](#), which educates individuals on financial literacy and empowers them to achieve economic stability. His commitment to education is further exemplified by [his advocacy for policies that address systemic inequities](#) and his mentorship of emerging leaders in the field.

From 1999 to 2002, Dr. Soaries served as secretary of state of New Jersey, making history as the first and only African American male to serve in that office. The former Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens has dedicated his career to transformative leadership in both education and community development. He also served as the former chairman of the United States Election Assistance Commission, which was established by Congress to implement the "Help America Vote Act" in 2002. His groundbreaking initiatives and visionary approach have significantly impacted educational policies and practices, fostering environments where all students can thrive. He studied under the late great Rev. Dr. Samuel DeWitt Proctor and considers him to be a formative mentor.

Dr. Wanda J. Blanchett, Dean of Rutgers Graduate School of Education and Distinguished Professor presented the honor to Dr. Soaries at the 2024 Convocation ceremony and said, "Dr. Soaries is a huge proponent of educational access and excellence, is a giant in NJ and beyond and an impassioned speaker. As Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens in Somerset, NJ for over three decades, he devoted himself to civil rights and social justice in all communities, with a specific focus on communities of color, helping children in foster care find "forever homes", encouraging economic development and creating equitable and just systems for all."

Desiree Peterkin Bell

DPBell & Associates

+1 646-489-1620

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