

7th Annual Cecil J. Picard
**EDUCATOR EXCELLENCE
SYMPOSIUM + CELEBRATION**
Raising Standards, Recognizing Excellence

2014 LOUISIANA TEACHER OF THE YEAR

LA'KEISHA MCKINNEY

R.J. Vial Elementary, St. Charles Parish



La'Keisha McKinney is a reading and math teacher for gifted students in third through sixth grades at R.J. Vial Elementary School with sixteen years of classroom experience. Mrs. McKinney is National Board Certified and was awarded Teacher of the Year for Mimosa Park Elementary in 2007.

"As a child, I spent countless hours in my room 'playing school' because I enjoyed learning. Over time, through many experiences helping others learn, I came to realize I loved to teach as much as I loved to learn. Because my experiences were consistently positive and intrinsically rewarding, I began formulating dreams and career aspirations of becoming a school teacher. As a product of St. Charles Parish Public Schools, it was my desire to have a positive impact on the community that positively impacted me."

Teaching Philosophy: It is my genuine aspiration to help students become autonomous learners. My first priority is to foster a classroom environment that enables students to become actively involved in the learning process as they take ownership of their own learning. I provide opportunities for students to tap into their curiosities while developing problem solving strategies that are transferable to other aspects of life. As a result, they become risk takers, cooperative learners, and creative problem solvers who are college and career ready. Likewise, I want my students to develop the necessary social skills to be able to effectively communicate with others because ongoing communication is a key component in developing a sense of belonging. That encompasses expressing their opinions about various topics and attempting new tasks by making choices.

Education: Mrs. McKinney received her Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education and Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction Early Childhood Education from the University of New Orleans. She has her certification in Educational Leadership and Gifted Programs. In 2005, Mrs. McKinney became a National Board certified teacher.

Leadership Activities: Mrs. McKinney currently serves on the College and Career Readiness Task Force where she works closely with her business and civic community to prepare students for the academic rigor of the Common Core State Standards. She also serves on the R.J. Vial School Improvement Team and as a district mentor where she works to promote exceptional instruction for gifted students in St. Charles Parish and assist new gifted teachers as they acclimate to their new career in education.

2014 LOUISIANA TEACHER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS



CASEY EBEBY

Central Middle
Central Community Schools
6th Grade Math



CONNIE HEBERT

Welsh Elementary
Jefferson Davis
4th Grade Reading & Language



JENNY TRAHAN

Oakshire Elementary
Terrebonne
6th Grade Math



COLLETTE WILLIAMS

Golden Meadow Middle School
Lafourche
8th Grade Reading

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2014 LOUISIANA PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR

AJIT PETHE

Luling Elementary, St. Charles Parish



Ajit "AJ" Pethe is the principal at Luling Elementary in St. Charles Parish, an elementary school serving students from Pre-K to 5th grade. Mr. Pethe has been an educator in St. Charles Parish for sixteen years and has served as principal at Luling Elementary for the past six years.

"In my six years as principal of Luling Elementary, two overarching goals have guided everything we do," said Mr. Pethe. "Increasing student achievement in reading and math is central to helping our students become successful, both in school and in life. In order to make these broad, major goals more relevant, our school sets annual long-range goals."

When Mr. Pethe began as principal at Luling Elementary, their growth school performance score (SPS) was 75.1, and our baseline SPS was 80.5. Significant changes had to be made to improve student performance, one of them being the implementation of their motto "Expect More... Achieve More Every Day." Although far from their ultimate goal, this past year, our growth SPS was 92.7, and our baseline SPS increased to 93.1.

Leadership Philosophy: As principal, all responsibility ultimately rests on my shoulders. I am responsible for creating an environment where my faculty and staff can fulfill their potential. I operate with moral purpose, the belief that educators have a higher purpose, making a difference for students. This idea permeates my vision for the school, the students, and every decision I make. We must expect as much of our students as we expect of our own children. At a high poverty school, the faculty must advocate for students, ensuring they receive the best education possible. My faculty knows that if the teaching I observe is not acceptable for my daughters, it's not acceptable for the 630 students at Luling Elementary.

Education: Mr. Pethe received his Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education and Master's degree in Education from the University of New Orleans.

Leadership Activities: In addition to supervising and supporting 117 faculty members, Mr. Pethe is a member of the Louisiana Association of Principals and the National Association of Elementary School Principals. He was recently published in the *The Leadership and Learning Center Magazine* with the article "Luling Elementary Uses Data Teams to 'Achieve Results'."

2014 LOUISIANA PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR FINALISTS



JULIE BERNER

J.C. Ellis Elementary
Jefferson
PK-5th



BUFFY FEGENBUSH, ED.D.

Berwick High
St. Mary
9-12th



LESLIE MARTIN

Marigny Elementary
St. Tammany
PK-1st



BEN NECAISE

West Feliciana Middle
West Feliciana
6-8th