

# LOUISIANA NEW TEACHER *of the Year*

The Louisiana Department of Education is proud to announce the 2026 New Teacher of the Year. Annually, the Department honors the state's most exceptional educators through the Teacher and Principal of the Year programs. The New Teacher of the Year has been added to these current award programs to recognize the contributions of Louisiana's first year teachers. All nine of our New Teacher of the Year finalists will serve as New Teacher Advisors for The New Teacher Experience.

Congratulations to **Olivia Francois** who will also serve as the ambassador for new teachers across the state.

## 2026 NEW TEACHER OF THE YEAR



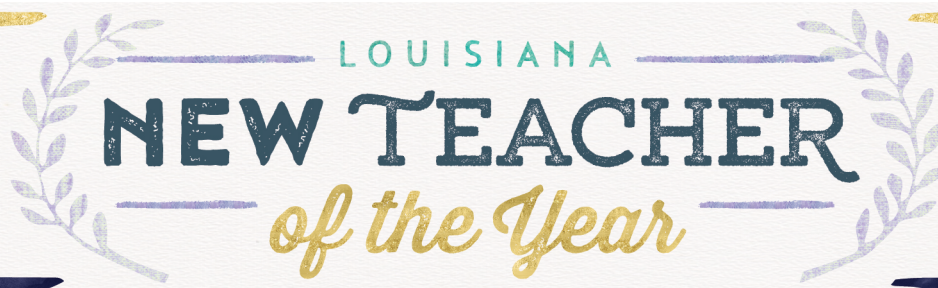
*Olivia Francois*

**Dutchtown High School  
Ascension Parish**

**Ms. Olivia Francois** is a 10th-grade civics teacher at Dutchtown High School in Geismar, LA. She earned a Bachelor's of Arts degree in Political Science from Columbia University and a Master's of Education degree in Learning and Design from Vanderbilt University.

While earning her master's degree, Francois was recognized with an Outstanding Professional Promise award for her leadership within her cohort and for her thoughtful, student-centered philosophy reflected in her academic work and capstone. Francois believes that all students have unique backgrounds and experiences that are vital to the learning environment and process; particularly, she believes in leveraging students' individual strengths with new knowledge, skills, and personal development to meet their full potential. Francois accomplishes this by promoting students' voices and choices through self-regulated learning and differentiated activities. As one of the Speech and Debate coaches, Francois implores students to dig deep in their interpretations for their performances to bring students the joy and satisfaction she experienced in high school as a competitor.

Additionally, as a former Dutchtown Griffin herself, Francois supports the "Every Griffin" mentality wholeheartedly! Francois encourages the Griffins she teaches to lean into school spirit and make the most out of their high school experiences while shooting for the stars with their future plans. After all, the encouragement from her own teachers at Dutchtown is what led to her accomplishments and return to being a Griffin once again!



## 2026 NEW TEACHER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS



**Michael Shelton**  
Bossier Parish



**Colin Hyatt**  
Calcasieu Parish



**Savannah Richards**  
Concordia Parish



**Anna Jackson**  
DeSoto Parish



**Alaina LeBlanc**  
Lafourche Parish



**Leah Maldonado**  
Ouachita Parish



**Kalyn Metcalfe**  
West Feliciana Parish



**Jacob Church**  
West Feliciana Parish