

The Louisiana Department of Education is proud to announce the 2026 Teacher and Principal of the Year state-level honorees. These educators are making exceptional gains with students, guiding them to achieve at the highest levels in the state. Their commitment to student success exemplifies Louisiana's teaching profession.

All Teacher and Principal of the Year finalists and semifinalists were honored at the 19th Annual Cecil J. Picard Educator Excellence Gala, which was held at the World War II Museum in New Orleans. This exciting event was co-sponsored by [Dream Teachers](#).

Congratulations to these outstanding educators!

2026 OVERALL TEACHER OF THE YEAR



Regena Hartley Beard
Zachary Community School District

Regena Hartley Beard is a dedicated educator specializing in 5th-grade science and 6th-grade robotics/STEM at Copper Mill Elementary in Zachary, Louisiana. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Education from Southeastern Louisiana University and a Master of Science degree in Curriculum and Instruction with a STEM concentration from Louisiana State University - Shreveport. Recognized for her innovative approach to science education, she received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST) and has been recognized as the Outstanding Science Teacher of the Year by the Louisiana Science Teachers Association. She is a certified teacher mentor, founded a robotics and coding club at Copper Mill Elementary, and serves on the Teacher Advisory Councils for her school system and the state.

In addition to her classroom work, Beard has made significant contributions to the broader educational community. Her commitment to advancing computer science education includes serving on the Computer Science Advisory Council and is a Computer Science Teacher Leader Advisor. Beard shared her journey into teaching robotics and coding as a contributing writer for Edutopia's article, "Incorporating Coding into STEM Classes." She was also a member of the Let Teachers Teach workgroup, helping to make the teaching profession more sustainable.

Passionate about fostering real-world connections in her classroom, Beard emphasizes the integration of computer science in elementary education, helping students understand the relevance of STEM in everyday life. Her approach aims to empower young learners by connecting classroom concepts to practical applications, nurturing problem-solving skills, and inspiring lifelong curiosity in science and technology.

2026 OVERALL PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR



Justin Wax
Livingston Parish

Justin Wax is currently serving his fourth year as principal at Denham Springs Junior High in Denham Springs, Louisiana. Under Wax's leadership, the school is recognized for excellence, including a 2024 Top Gains Honoree and U.S. News and World Report's Best Middle Schools for 2024 and 2025.

Wax earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, minoring in Leadership Development from Louisiana State University, pursued his passion for education via alternative certification, and obtained a Master of Education in Educational Leadership from Southeastern Louisiana University.

A leader in student advocacy, Wax has taken innovative steps to address teen vaping through offering vaping education alternatives to suspension and facilitating the installation of campus vape detection technology. His efforts include legislative involvement, speaking before the Louisiana House Judiciary, and effectively advocating to raise the minimum age to purchase vaping products.

Dedicated to STEM education, Wax pioneers an aquaponics lab, providing hands-on opportunities to conserve endangered Louisiana plant species and teaching sustainable produce cultivation.

Wax is a member of the Louisiana Association of Principals, and Vice President of the Livingston Parish Principals Association. He also served four years as President of Mighty Moms, a nonprofit that "nurtures hungry students to success." Wax is a church deacon and married father of three.

Committed to addressing students' needs, Wax partners with community leaders to eliminate student fees, ensuring access for his economically disadvantaged students. Wax currently supports a rapidly growing English learner population. His educational philosophy centers around #ThreeYearsOfAwesome, fostering innovation and community collaboration to prepare students for lifelong success.

2026 TEACHER DIVISION-LEVEL HONOREES



Ali Romero Angelle

Elementary School – St. Martin Parish



Tante Poché

Middle School – Ascension Parish



Aaron Riffe Beaubouef

High School - Jefferson Davis Parish

2026 PRINCIPAL DIVISION-LEVEL HONOREES



Brandon Singleton

Elementary School – St. Landry Parish



Jennifer Burris

Middle School – Bossier Parish



Dr. Anna Faye Caminita

High School – Tangipahoa Parish

2026 TEACHER OF THE YEAR FINALISTS



**Katherine "Kaki"
Willrich**
City of Monroe
School District



Carla Bringier-Mason
Hynes Charter School
Corporation



Brittany Hebert
Lafayette Parish



Erin Cossé
Plaquemines Parish



Delanea Crochet
Buffalo
West Feliciana Parish

2026 PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR FINALISTS



Anesha Ross
DeSoto Parish



Kyle Fontenette
East Baton Rouge Parish



Hollie Folse
St. James Parish



Christian Monson
St. Tammany Parish



Tonia Cook
Terrebonne Parish

2026 TEACHER OF THE YEAR SEMIFINALISTS



Heather Cross
Allen Parish



Rebecca Snead
Beauregard Parish



Leslie Mauthe
Bienville Parish



Jahnice Johnson
Central Community
School District



Chad Achilles Harry
City of Bogalusa School
District



Christopher Frazier
East Baton Rouge Parish



Melanie Soileau
Evangeline Parish



Donna Michelet
Iberville Parish



Pamela Breaux
Lafayette Charter
Foundation



Bianca Gabriell King
Lake Charles Charter
Academy Foundation



Toni Rodgers
Red River Parish



Kelli White
Richland Parish



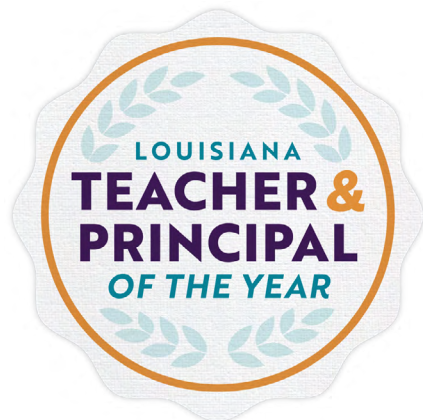
Lois Carnline
Sabine Parish



Caroline Miller
St. Bernard Parish



**Whitney Lamberth
Myers**
Vermilion Parish



2026 PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR SEMIFINALISTS



Dr. Corey Crochet
Assumption Parish



Nicolas Cunningham
Caddo Parish



Denise Johnston Whitley
Calcasieu Parish



Dr. Alexandria Cooper
Claiborne Parish



Kimberly Jelks Glascock
East Feliciana Parish



Michael Young
Franklin Parish



Jodi Romero
Iberia Parish



Lisa Boudreaux
Lafourche Parish



Christopher Jones
Lincoln Parish



Armetrice Williams
Natchitoches Parish



Rusty Farrar
Ouachita Parish



Pam Walker
Rapides Parish



Rebecca Matherne
St. Charles Parish



Lisa Haymon
Vernon Parish



Walt Lemoine
West Baton Rouge Parish

