

# LOUISIANA TEACHER & PRINCIPAL of the Year

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.

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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



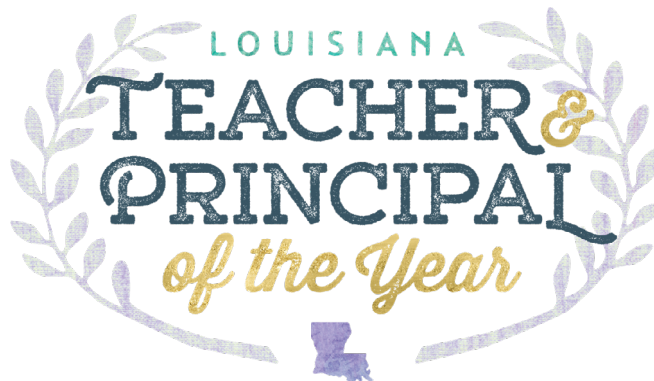
**Lois Carnline**  
Sabine Parish



**Caroline Miller**  
St. Bernard Parish



**Whitney Lamberth  
Myers**  
Vermilion Parish



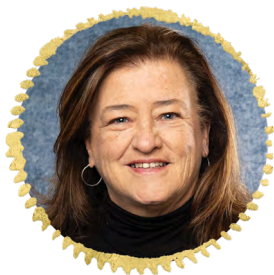
## 2026 PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR SEMIFINALISTS



**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

