



Students of the Year Guidelines

2026-2027

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I. Program Information

Overview

The Louisiana Department of Education recognizes that exceptional students are enrolled in public, nonpublic, and charter schools throughout the state. To celebrate their accomplishments, the Department and the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education annually honor one fifth-grade, one eighth-grade, and one twelfth-grade student whose leadership, academic performance, achievements, citizenship, and service exemplify excellence. The overall honorees of the three categories are selected by a state selection committee.

The Students of the Year program provides an opportunity to highlight the achievements, accomplishments, and positive impact of students from public, nonpublic, and charter school systems across Louisiana.

Overall Honorees

- Elementary School Student of the Year- One fifth-grade student
- Middle School Student of the Year- One eighth-grade student
- High School Student of the Year- One twelfth-grade student

Note: Only students who are enrolled in fifth-, eighth-, and twelfth-grade levels are eligible to participate.

Award Ceremony

Twenty-four (24) finalists are recognized and three (3) overall State Students of the Year are named at a formal ceremony traditionally held in Baton Rouge. Invited guests include:

- Finalists and a designated number of guests
- School system leaders and principals
- State Superintendent of Education and the Louisiana Department of Education Executive Team members
- BESE members
- Legislative Education Committee members
- Media representatives

Note: If circumstances prevent an in-person event, the LDOE may hold a virtual ceremony.

Student Eligibility for Participation

At a minimum, Students of the Year nominees should have a cumulative grade point average of **3.1 on a four-point scale** based on the grade levels listed below. The grade point average is calculated using semester grades:

- Grade 5 nominees: GPA in grades 3, 4, and the first grading period or semester of grade 5
- Grade 8 nominees: GPA in grades 6, 7, and the first grading period or semester of grade 8

Grade 12 nominees: GPA in grades 9, 10, 11, and the first grading period or semester of grade 12

School System-Level Coordinator Responsibilities

School systems should designate two Students of the Year Coordinators who are responsible for:

- Receiving all state communications and materials
- Sharing information with school-level coordinators
- Coordinating school and school system selection processes
- Ensuring the required application materials are collected for the school system's selected honorees
- Uploading state-level submissions by established deadlines

Timeline

The [2026–2027 Students of the Year Timeline](#) identifies the state-level deadlines, milestones, and recognition events that school systems should reference throughout the program year.

II. Selection Process

Selection Process Overview

The Students of the Year program follows a multi-phase selection process. Schools nominate students to their school system, school systems select one nominee per grade level to advance to the state, and state review committees evaluate portfolios, essays, and interviews to identify the overall State Students of the Year.

- Each **public school, nonpublic, and charter school site** selects one nominee per grade level to submit to the school system.
- Each **public, nonpublic, and charter school system** selects one nominee per grade level to submit to the state.
- The **State Selection Committee** identifies semifinalists, composed of four public school students, two nonpublic students, and two charter school students per BESE region, for each grade level.
- The **Semifinalists Review Committee** identifies finalists, composed of one student from each grade level for each BESE region.
- The **Finalists Review Committee** identifies the overall honorees for each grade level.

Selection Process Guidelines

• School and School System-Level Selection Guidelines

- School systems must establish and communicate a consistent nomination and selection process for all participating schools and families. Families should also be informed of:
 - Process for submitting materials to the school and school system
 - Procedures for resolving disputes and ties
- School-Level coordinators and school leaders will follow the school system's process and select honorees using the established criteria and rubrics. After nominees are selected, each school will submit one fifth-, eighth-, and/or twelfth-grade student to the school system for consideration.
- The School System-Level coordinator(s) appoint members to the school system selection committee(s) to select the School System-Level honorees using the established criteria and rubrics. The School System-Level coordinator(s) will submit the portfolio(s) and required materials for the selected school system honoree(s) in grades 5, 8, and/or 12 to an online portal for state-level review.
- **Note: School systems may choose to incorporate additional components into their school- and School System-Level selection processes, including a writing prompt and/or interviews with nominees.**

• State-Level Selection Process Guidelines

- **Semifinalists Selection Process Guidelines**
 - All application materials submitted to the online portal will be reviewed by a selection committee.
 - Using the established rubric and criteria, four public, two nonpublic, and two charter students will be selected per grade level and per BESE region as semifinalists.
- **Finalists Selection Process Guidelines**
 - Semifinalists will respond to a writing prompt provided by the state coordinator.
 - The essays will be reviewed anonymously, and the application portfolios will be re-evaluated by a selection committee.
 - Using the established criteria and rubric, eight students per grade level — one representing each BESE region — will be selected as finalists.
- **Overall Honoree Selection Process Guidelines**
 - Using the established criteria and rubric, each grade-level selection committee re-evaluates the application portfolios and conducts finalist interviews. Semifinalist essays are reviewed again through an independent blind review process.
 - The State-Level Selection Committee identifies the overall honoree for each grade level.

Selection Committees

- It is recommended that each selection committee include at least three members per grade level. Committee membership may include any combination of the following:
 - Teacher
 - Counselor
 - School or central office administrator
 - Community member
 - Career and technical education instructor or supervisor (Grade 12 only)
 - Postsecondary representative

III. Application Portfolio

Student Application Portfolio Requirements

- Maximum length: 50 pages
- Format: PDF
- Minimum font size: 11-point font
- Video submissions and zipped folders are not permitted.

Student Application Portfolio Overview

The nominee's [application portfolio](#) serves as the primary basis for the selection process throughout all levels. As such, the School System-Level Selection Committee should ensure that the nominee's portfolios include all required application materials **and do not exceed 50 electronic pages**. A copy of all supporting documents should be retained at the local level. The portfolio requirements include the following:

- LDOE application form
- Academic records and state assessments
- Autobiographical sketch
- Leadership, service, citizenship, and awards forms
- Additional artifacts
- [Student Media Consent Form](#)
- Student photo ([Suggested Photo Guidelines](#))
 - **Student photos must be submitted as JPG or GIF. Do not submit a PDF.**

Note: Nominees should use the [Portfolio Checklist](#) to assist with preparing the materials needed for the portfolio.

Application Portfolio Guidance

- **Identification and Preliminary Information**
 - The basic data sheet must be completed and attached to the application portfolio. **Parents must sign an authorization for the release of pertinent information relative to the program and the [Student Media Consent form](#).** School system coordinators will enter/upload application information into the online portal.
- **Autobiographical Sketch**
 - Nominees must submit information about themselves in narrative form. This autobiographical sketch provides additional information about the nominee, but it is not scored. The autobiographical sketch should include information such as family history, interests, and career aspirations. The students should be encouraged to address at least three issues that are important to them and have influenced their lives.

- **Academic Records**

- A copy of the student's academic and attendance records, report cards, and/or high school or college transcripts must be included in the application portfolio. These records should reflect academic performance for the required years and include first-semester grades for the student's current grade level.
- Include the following:
 - Grade 5: Academic records and scores from all statewide or nonpublic school annual assessments for grades 3–5.
 - Grade 8: Academic records and scores from all statewide or nonpublic school annual assessments for grades 6–8.
 - Grade 12: Transcripts reflecting grades 9–12, including Carnegie units earned before grade 9.
 - Include scores from all statewide or nonpublic school annual assessments completed in grades 9–12.
 - Include any applicable academic achievements and credentials, such as:
 - AP, CLEP, ACT, PSAT, SAT, and WorkKeys scores
 - Jump Start certifications
 - TOPS-aligned dual enrollment coursework
 - TOPS or TOPS Tech eligibility status
 - Documentation of work-based learning or employer-verified work experience
 - Associate degree coursework or degree status
 - Other relevant academic assessments, certifications, or achievements
- **If any required grades, transcripts, or assessment scores are unavailable, include a brief explanation describing why they cannot be provided.**

Note: It is recommended that pertinent academic records and assessment scoring information be clearly visible and highlighted to assist selection committees during their reviews.

- **Leadership, Activities, Recognitions, Service/Citizenship**

- Forms provided in the application are to be completed listing specific evidence of the student's leadership ability, participation in school and community activities, citizenship and service involvement, high school pathways accomplishments, work-based learning experiences/honors and recognitions and awards.
- The tables in the form may have rows inserted or deleted as needed to complete the information.
- Grade 5 portfolios should include grades 3–5. Grade 8 should include grades 6–8. Grade 12 should include grades 9–12.

Note: Notable statewide and national leadership, service, citizenship, and/or awards may also be included for earlier grades.

- **Additional Artifacts**

- Additional artifacts should be selective and should provide meaningful evidence aligned to the selection criteria.
- These items may include letters of recommendation, newspaper clippings, and/or photos.
 - However, submitted photos may show the nominee only if the nominee has submitted a [state media consent form](#). Identifying features of other students in pictures must be covered/obscured as they have not submitted a [state media consent form](#).

Portfolio Submission Process

- **School and School System-Level**

- Schools will communicate their local application submission process and deadlines to nominees.
- School-Level [application portfolio submissions](#) may be completed electronically or in print. Once a school-level honoree is selected, the School-Level Coordinator must provide an electronic copy of the honoree's portfolio to the School System-Level Coordinator.
- School System-Level Coordinators are responsible for verifying that all [required documents](#) are complete and uploading the school system honoree's portfolio and supporting documents to the online portal by the established state deadlines.
- **State Level- Semifinalists and Finalists**
 - School systems should assist with uploading information to the online portal by the specified deadlines.

IV. Essay and Interview

- **Essay**
 - The semifinalists will write a short essay that will be reviewed again at the finalist level.
 - The state coordinator will issue the writing topics to the school systems with semifinalists.
 - **School System-Level coordinators will ensure all IEP and 504 accommodations are followed.**
 - School-system-level coordinators will submit an electronic version of the essay to the portal in accordance with the provided guidelines.
- **Interviews**
 - It is recommended that school systems give nominees the opportunity to interview with a selection committee before submitting their applications to the state.
 - Finalists will take part in virtual interviews with a selection committee.
 - These interviews are structured around questions and topics appropriate to the students' academic level.

V. Scoring Rubrics

The selection process consists of three evaluation components: the application portfolio, the writing sample, and the interview. All nominees are evaluated on the application portfolio; semifinalists and finalists are reviewed for writing samples, and finalists participate in a state-level interview. Schools and school systems may also choose to include writing samples and interviews as part of their local selection process. When these components are used, the same evaluation criteria and rubric competencies should be applied to ensure a fair and consistent review of all nominees throughout the selection process. The rubrics below identify the competencies and performance expectations used by reviewers during each phase of the selection process:

- Portfolio Rubrics
 - [Grade 5](#)
 - [Grade 8](#)
 - [Grade 12](#)
- [Interview Rubric \(All Grades\)](#)
- [Essay Rubric \(All Grades\)](#)

VI. Resources

BESE Region Assignment Guidance

All BESE Region assignments are based on the nominee's public, nonpublic, or charter [school site](#).

- **Region 1-District 1- Joseph Cao**
 - Jefferson, Orleans, St. Tammany, Tangipahoa
- **Region 2-District 2- Dr. Sharon Latten Clark**
 - Assumption, Jefferson, Orleans, St. Charles, St. James, St. John the Baptist
- **Region 3-District 3- Sandy Holloway**
 - Assumption, Iberia, Iberville, Jefferson, Lafourche, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, Terrebonne
- **Region 4-District 4- Stacey Melerine**
 - Allen, Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, DeSoto, Louisiana School for Math, Science and the Arts, Natchitoches, Red River, Sabine, Vernon, Webster, Winn
- **Region 5-District 5- Lance Harris**
 - Avoyelles, Caldwell, Catahoula, City of Monroe, Claiborne, Concordia, East Carroll, Franklin, Grant, Jackson, LaSalle, Lincoln, Madison, Morehouse, Ouachita, Rapides, Richland, Tensas, Union, West Carroll
- **Region 6-District 6- Ronnie Morris**
 - Ascension, Central Community Schools, East Baton Rouge, LSU University Laboratory School, Livingston, Tangipahoa, Zachary Community School District
- **Region 7-District 7- Kevin Berken**
 - Acadia, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron, Iberia, Jefferson Davis, Lafayette, St. Landry, Vermilion
- **Region 8-District 8- Preston Castille**
 - Ascension, City of Baker, City of Bogalusa, East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Evangeline, Iberville, Lafayette, Pointe Coupee, Southern University Laboratory School, St. Helena, St. Landry, St. Martin, Tangipahoa, Washington, West Baton Rouge, West Feliciana

Questions

For questions regarding Students of the Year, please contact exemplaryeducator@la.gov.