



STATE OF ALABAMA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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**ALABAMA OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCES
2026 TEACHER OF THE YEAR FINAL FOUR**

*“Top Educators Committed to Academic Excellence –
New Alabama Teacher of the Year and Alternate will be Announced on May 13th”*

Montgomery, Ala. – The list of 16 outstanding finalists for Alabama Teacher of the Year (TOY) has been narrowed to the overall top final four. Exemplary teachers inspire students to reach their full potential and are a foundation of excellence in our state and nation.

The Alabama Teacher of the Year program is one of our state’s oldest and most esteemed awards. This year’s 16 finalists rose into consideration for this award from a highly skilled group of over 155 top educators who submitted official applications for this year’s state honor.

The 2026-2027 finalists are:

Elementary

Elizabeth Eubanks Von Hofe

Baldwin County School System – Spanish Fort Elementary School
District I Elementary Teacher of the Year

Lindy Vizzinia

Fort Payne City School System – Wills Valley Elementary School
District VIII Elementary Teacher of the Year

Secondary

Hannah Peterson

Vestavia Hills City School System – Vestavia Hills High School
District III Secondary Teacher of the Year

Eshwaa Godfrey

Selma City School System – Selma High School
District V Secondary Teacher of the Year

Additional Information

The next step for the final four is an extensive interview with the state judging committee. The 2026-2027 Alabama Teacher of the Year will be announced Wednesday, May 13, 2026, during a special event at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, in Montgomery, Alabama.

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2026-2027 Alabama TOY Four Finalists Announcement

The Teacher of the Year spends the school year serving as an official spokesperson for the teaching profession and represents our state for the National Teacher of the Year Award.

Elizabeth Eubanks Von Hofe – Baldwin County School System –
Spanish Fort Elementary School - District I Elementary Teacher of the Year

Elizabeth Eubanks Von Hofe is an exceptional educator. She is the proud daughter of two outstanding Limestone County educators. She earned dual bachelor degrees in both Business and Church Vocations from Martin Methodist College. She then earned a Master of Business Administration from The University of Alabama. She worked for more than a decade as a successful licensed administrator in the nursing home industry.



Elizabeth Eubanks Von Hofe, discovered she wanted to impact students through education and mentorship. She stepped away from her successful healthcare career to focus on service to her local community. She accepted a teaching position and taught a diverse group of wonderful students. She balanced her time between her active career and parenting her own amazing children.

She was determined to ensure that all students had an opportunity to receive a great education experience. She earned a masters degree in Collaborative Education and also became National Board Certified during her third year of teaching. Today, she is a well-rounded educator, IEP Chair, and mentor teacher.

“One of the most meaningful initiatives is serving as my school’s Project Outreach Gulf Coast chapter sponsor,” said Von Hofe. “This initiative is a dynamic school and community partnership designed to foster inclusion, empathy, and belonging for students with significant disabilities. As a special education teacher at Spanish Fort Elementary School, I recognize the need to create truly authentic opportunities for all students.”

One local parent recently said, “Mrs. Von Hofe is such a supportive presence for families and an advocate for inclusive practices for all students. Her dedication extends well beyond her classroom, and she consistently models leadership through service.”

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2026-2027 Alabama TOY Four Finalists Announcement

Lindy Vizzinia – Fort Payne City School System –
Wills Valley Elementary School - District VIII Elementary Teacher of the Year

Lindy Vizzinia grew up in a vibrant family of artists led by her mother who was a highly



respected arts educator. Her mother taught for 35 years and truly modeled joy in helping students discover their personal creative voices.

Art education was also a strong healing outlet for her family when they grieved the passing of her father. It provided a safe emotional space for creativity. Her mother’s colleagues, who were outstanding school teachers showed compassion and real support for her family.

Lindy Vizzinia was so inspired that she decided to dedicate her life to helping students just like her mother’s co-workers had done for her family and siblings. Today, top Alabama educator Lindy Vizzinia uses her life experiences to help local children who may be living in challenging situations, experiencing the

absence of a parent, or needing guidance. She facilitates a successful after-school arts program and various mentor-centered initiatives.

“As an art teacher, my classroom philosophy strives to create an atmosphere that empowers every student to express themselves,” says Vizzinia. “There is no wrong way to create and I express this motto in my classroom. My lessons provide opportunities for student connection. Using discovery-based teaching, students successfully learn through collaboration. Education is about building positive relationships, developing character, and nurturing a student’s academic achievement.”

When asked to describe her amazing efforts one local school administrator said, “Mrs. Vizzinia is a master teacher, using her personal experience in her delivery of quality instruction that makes every day a highly anticipated adventure. Mrs. Vizzinia possesses a characteristic that all teachers should have. She makes every single child feel that their work is outstanding.”

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2026-2027 Alabama TOY Four Finalists Announcement

Hannah Peterson – Vestavia Hills City School System –
Vestavia Hills High School - District III Secondary Teacher of the Year

Hannah Peterson is a dynamic educator and clinician who serves as both Sports Medicine Instructor and Head Athletic Trainer at Vestavia Hills High School. With a decade of combined classroom and clinical experience, she is passionate about empowering students through a career-focused sports medicine program that emphasizes leadership, real-world application, and hands-on learning.



She earned a Bachelor of Science in Athletic Training from Troy University and a Master of Arts in Teaching from Columbus State University. In addition to teaching, top Alabama educator Hannah Peterson is also a Certified Athletic Trainer and CPR Instructor.

Her professional career began as the Head Athletic Trainer for the Columbus Cottonmouths, a minor league hockey team. While working for this team she discovered that she genuinely enjoyed teaching and helping others develop their talents and purpose.

She began teaching health science education at Jefferson Davis High School located in Montgomery. She then went on to teach and establish the innovative Sports Medicine Pathway and HOSA Future Medical Professionals chapter at Vestavia Hills High School.

“I believe the most effective medical education is rooted in learning and authentic engagement,” says Peterson. “These moments foster a student’s essential skills. I aim to cultivate humility, student integrity, emotional intelligence, and adaptability.”

She is committed to turning every school day into a high-energy immersive experience. Guided by her core values - live with curiosity and purpose, lead with energy and integrity, and embrace lifelong learning - you will often find top Alabama educator Hannah Peterson mentoring youth and uplifting local families.

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2026-2027 Alabama TOY Four Finalists Announcement

Eshwaa Godfrey – Selma City School System – Selma High School
District V Secondary Teacher of the Year

Eshwaa Godfrey is an exceptional teacher in the Selma City School System. He teaches Anatomy and Physiology and is widely recognized for his dedication, authenticity, and genuine commitment to student success.



Born in Syracuse, New York, he moved to Alabama and graduated from Georgiana High School. He grew up in a single parent household. His mother did not have an opportunity to complete her high school education. Despite hardships, he went on to earn a college degree. This was a great example of perseverance for his family.

As a student at Georgiana High School, top Alabama educator Eshwaa Godfrey was mentored by a group of exceptional teachers. Their positive influence sparked his aspirations to become a teacher. This profession has allowed him the same opportunity to guide, mentor, and encourage young people. Today, he dedicates his time to creating an engaging classroom environment where all students feel supported and empowered.

He works intentionally to build strong relationships and cultivate a space where academic growth and personal confidence can thrive. He believes deeply in the ability of education to transform lives. “I ensure students are connected to the world around them by helping them recognize their personal value and the possibilities that education can open,” said Godfrey.

A current Selma High School student recently said, “I can personally say that my leadership journey has been transformed because of Mr. Godfrey. He is a teacher who sees potential in every student and helps bring it to life. His influence will continue to shape student leaders at Selma High School for years to come. I can think of no one more deserving of the title, Teacher of the Year!”

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