



STATE OF ALABAMA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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State Superintendent of Education

Alabama  
State Board  
of Education

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Governor Kay Ivey  
President

**STATE ANNOUNCES 2025 TEACHER OF THE YEAR FINAL FOUR**

*New Alabama Teacher of the Year and Alternate will be Announced on May 7th*

Jackie Zeigler  
District I

**Montgomery, Ala.** – The list of 16 outstanding finalists for Alabama Teacher of the Year (TOY) has been narrowed to the overall top *final four*.

Tracie West  
District II

Each of these educators is a true classroom ambassador. The Alabama TOY Program is one of the state’s oldest recognition programs for teachers. This year’s four finalists have been selected from a group of more than 150 highly skilled educators. The 2025-2026 finalists are:

Kelly Mooney  
District III

Elementary

***Katie H. Collins***

Hoover City School System  
Bluff Park Elementary School  
State School Board District III Elementary Teacher of the Year

Yvette M. Richardson, Ed.D.  
District IV

***Dr. Katherine Thomas***

Homewood City School System  
Edgewood Elementary School  
State School Board District IV Elementary Teacher of the Year

Tonya S. Chestnut, Ed.D.  
District V  
Vice President

Secondary

***Aubrey Bennett***

Birmingham City School System  
George Washington Carver High School  
State School Board District IV Secondary Teacher of the Year

Marie Manning  
District VI  
President Pro Tem

Allen Long, M.D.  
District VII

***Amanda J. Gudmundsson***

Athens City School System  
Athens High School  
State School Board District VIII Secondary Teacher of the Year

Wayne Reynolds, Ed.D.  
District VIII

Eric G. Mackey, Ed.D.  
Secretary and  
Executive Officer

**Additional Information**

The next step for the final four is an extensive interview with the state judging committee. The 2025-2026 Alabama Teacher of the Year will be announced on Wednesday, May 7, 2025, during a special event at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival.

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*2025-2026 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.

**Katie H. Collins** – Hoover City School System – Bluff Park Elementary School  
State School Board District III



Katie H. Collins is a lifelong learner. This year marks her 20<sup>th</sup> year teaching, and she still feels inspired. She has taught first grade, middle and high school French, English as a Second Language (ESL) in elementary, and adult courses.

Collins' strength is rooted in her faith, with a heart truly dedicated to serving others. She believes relationships are the foundation to student success and enjoys identifying and nurturing her students' lives and unique academic gifts. She is enthusiastic about modeling her passion for learning, designing innovative cross-curricular Project-Based Learning units, and facilitating student autonomy and leadership.

Collins' proudest professional accomplishment has been creating the Communities Family Literacy Program. She and two colleagues saw a need for parent and pre-school English language services among ESL families in the Hoover City School System. This grassroots program has transformed into a fully funded literacy initiative, employing adult and pre-school instructors. She believes in the transformative power of education and plans to continue advocating for students and working to advance the teaching profession.

**Dr. Katherine Thomas** – Homewood City School System – Edgewood Elementary School  
State School Board District IV



Dr. Katherine Thomas always dreamed of becoming a doctor. Medicine fascinated her, and she excelled in science throughout school. Halfway through completing a Biomedical Sciences major at Auburn University, she realized a career in the medical field was not for her.

Growing up, she had spent years volunteering at her church where she discovered a love of mentoring young students – helping them grasp new concepts and sharing in their excitement of learning. With this in mind, Thomas chose to follow what brought her the most joy, and she decided to pursue a career in teaching. Her curiosity for learning drove her to obtain a Ph.D., so she could research and understand how children learn, especially when it comes to literacy. She wanted to bring a vast array of knowledge to the classroom. Now, as a kindergarten teacher at Edgewood Elementary School, she uses research-based, data-driven instruction to support student achievement. She believes strong readers increase their success throughout life. Her passion is in delivering focused, systematic, and multi-sensory phonics instruction, based on the most recent reading research.

Dr. Thomas delivers valuable information and insight to her students and their families. In the end, she has realized her joy – she chose a K-12 classroom full of enthusiastic students instead of a medical clinic. Today, she also utilizes a life-changing syllabus lesson instead of medical scalpels – this is exactly the lifesaving work that she had always dreamed.

2025-2026 Alabama TOY Four Finalists Announcement

**Aubrey Bennett** – Birmingham City School System – George Washington Carver High School  
State School Board District IV



Growing up in a single-parent household truly shaped Aubrey Bennett into the teacher he is today. Without a father at home to guide him, he found himself in an inspiring social studies classroom while living in East Syracuse, New York, that ultimately changed his life forever. His fourth-grade teacher, Mr. Sampson, ignited a passion for social studies and a thirst for knowledge.

Mr. Sampson demonstrated the amazing ability to analyze history, explore the world, and fully understand that being different is really something of which to be proud. This set in motion the positive path that Aubrey Bennett would take in becoming a top educator. Today, he works to inspire young people, just like his teacher did for him.

Bennett knows his students see him as more than just a high school history teacher. He wants them to understand the world around them, to think critically, and to form their own opinions. He devotes his time to ensuring that all students are informed, socially aware, and open-minded. He returns to work each day excited to shape the next generation of leaders.

His greatest joy comes from his connections with students and their parents. His influence extends beyond the classroom. Former students often return and thank him personally for the great real-world lessons he taught them. They now carry these wise and inspiring lessons with them throughout their adulthood and successful careers.

**Amanda J. Gudmundsson** – Athens City School System – Athens High School  
State School Board District VIII



Amanda Gudmundsson is a dedicated educator at Athens High School. She also teaches dual enrollment U.S. History courses at Calhoun Community College, as well as honors economics and American government. As a fifth-generation educator, her path to the classroom was unexpected. Initially, she pursued a degree in higher education administration, but her career shifted following the tragic events of 9/11. She witnessed everything first-hand because at that time she was living right outside of New York City.

Experiencing the outpouring of selflessness and unity in the aftermath of the attacks, she was inspired to become a teacher. Through teaching, Amanda found a way to contribute to democracy and uphold the values of equality and civic responsibility. In her classroom, she encourages her students to embrace each other's differences, foster academic curiosity, and actively engage in shaping a better future for themselves and their families.

Gudmundsson holds a Bachelor of Arts from the College of Charleston, a Master of Secondary Education in History from the University of Montevallo, an Instructional Leadership Certificate from the University of North Alabama, and an Education Specialist degree from Liberty University. She believes that with the right support, all students can succeed and make truly meaningful and impactful contributions to society.

*2025-2026 Alabama TOY Four Finalists Announcement*

Her personal passion for education stems from a deep belief that it can promote change and inspire all students to have real leadership skills in this rapidly advancing world.

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