



# Arkansas Department of Education

*Division of Elementary and Secondary Education*

Jacob Oliva, Secretary

July 11, 2025

## **Arkansas Teacher of the Year Top 15 Finalists Named**

**LITTLE ROCK** — The Arkansas Department of Education is pleased to announce the names of the educators named 2026 Arkansas Teacher of the Year Top 15 Finalists. These educators will be recognized July 28 at an event at the Governor's Mansion.

"I am proud of the finalists for their dedication to the profession and student learning," ADE Secretary Jacob Oliva said. "Those selected represent some of the best of the best in the teaching profession, and I look forward to learning from them."

The finalists listed below will each receive a certificate and a \$1,000 prize provided by the Walton Family Foundation.

**Alana Ashworth**

Science – Grade 5

Prairie Grove Middle School

Prairie Grove School District

**Brad Beatty**

Math and Science – Grade 5

Russellville Intermediate School

Russellville School District

**Chenel Dale**

Kindergarten

Asbell Elementary School

Fayetteville School District

**Heidi Faught-Strong**

Math/Science – Grade 5

Main Street Visual and Performing Arts Magnet School

Hot Springs School District

**Susan Ford**

Instrumental Music – Grades 7-8

Cabot Junior High North and Cabot Junior High South

Cabot School District

**Gretchen Freyaldenhoven**

Science and Social Studies – Grade 5  
Greenbrier Wooster Elementary School  
Greenbrier School District

**Victoria Golden**

English Language Arts – Grade 3  
Dr. Marian G. Lacey K-8 Academy  
Little Rock School District

**Danny Hobson**

Theatre & Technical Theatre – Grades 9-12  
Alma High School  
Alma School District

**Tarji Russell-Chaffin**

Biomedical Science – Grades 9-12  
Dumas High School  
Dumas School District

**Kevin Sherman**

Instrumental Music – Grades 7-12  
Stuttgart High School  
Stuttgart School District

**Kaitlin Smith**

Science and English as a Second Language – Grades 10-12  
Conway High School  
Conway School District

**Misty Smith**

Science – Grade 6  
Goza Middle School  
Arkadelphia School District

**Jessie Walls**

Second Grade  
Jim D. Rollins School of Innovation  
Springdale School District

**Elaina Weaver**

Math – Grade 6  
Bethel Middle School  
Bryant School District

**Stephanie Williams**

Music – Grades K-4

Mountain View Elementary School

Benton School District

The department's ATOY program recognizes Arkansas educators for their outstanding teaching and leadership skills. During the recognition event at the mansion later this month, the state semi-finalists will be announced. The 2026 ATOY will be announced later this fall and will apply to become the National Teacher of the Year.

To learn more about the program, visit [dese.link/ATOY](https://dese.link/ATOY).

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