



STATE OF ALABAMA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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State Superintendent of Education

Alabama
State Board
of Education

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 1, 2024

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Governor Kay Ivey
President

STATE ANNOUNCES 2024 TEACHER OF THE YEAR FINAL FOUR

New Alabama Teacher of the Year and Alternate will be Officially Announced on May 8th

Jackie Zeigler
District I

Montgomery, Ala. – The list of 16 finalists has been narrowed to four of Alabama’s most outstanding educators. Each of these educators is described as a true classroom ambassador.

Tracie West
District II
Vice President

The Alabama Teacher of the Year (TOY) Program is one of our state’s oldest recognition programs. This year’s four finalists have been selected from a group of more than 150 highly skilled educators. The 2024-2025 finalists are:

Elementary

Stephanie Bell
District III

Deana Schnuelle Hooks

Auburn City School System
Pick Elementary School
State School Board District II Elementary Teacher of the Year

Yvette M. Richardson, Ed.D.
District IV

Deborah Stringfellow

Elmore County School System
Airport Road Intermediate School
State School Board District III Elementary Teacher of the Year

Tonya S. Chestnut, Ed.D.
District V
President Pro Tem

Secondary

Marie Manning
District VI

Kira Ledbetter Aaron

Vestavia Hills City School System
Vestavia Hills High School Freshman Campus
State School Board District III Secondary Teacher of the Year

Belinda McRae
District VII

Kristen Brown

Madison City School System
Liberty Middle School
State School Board District VIII Secondary Teacher of the Year

Wayne Reynolds, Ed.D.
District VIII

Additional Information

The next step for the final four is an extensive interview with the state judging committee.

The 2024-2025 Alabama Teacher of the Year will be announced on Wednesday, May 8, 2024, at 6:00PM during a special event at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival.

The Teacher of the Year spends the school year serving as an official spokesperson for Alabama education and the teaching profession. Also, they represent our state for the National Teacher of the Year Award.

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

2024-2025 Alabama TOY Final Four Announcement

Deana Schnuelle Hooks – *Auburn City Schools* – Pick Elementary School
(State School Board District II)

Initially a Physical Education Teacher and now an Elementary School Librarian, *Alabama educator Deana Schnuelle Hooks* has transitioned the valuable lessons of gymnastics into a magical learning space where students are not just consumers of information but active participants in the rewarding and joyful experience of learning.

As a student, Hooks dreamed of becoming a world-class gymnast. Through hard work, countless hours of training and competition, she earned a college scholarship and ultimately won a NCAA Gymnastics Championship.

The rigors of gymnastics instilled within her valuable insights on both teaching and the student learning process. Instead of mats, balance beams, and bars, she now guides students in exploring shelves of books, learning about amazing authors, investigating personal ideas, and creating spectacular learning projects. Every day at her school and in the local community, she works to inspire student engagement and learning curiosity. She facilitates growth by actively guiding every student toward achieving their academic goals.

A colleague from the Auburn City School System said, “Mrs. Deana Hooks would be an outstanding representative as the Alabama Teacher of the Year. I have been richly blessed to have the opportunity to work with her, learn from her, and be inspired by her! She is a change agent in our school and a model of what teaching should be.”

Deborah Stringfellow – *Elmore County Schools* – Airport Road Intermediate School
(State School Board District III)

Alabama educator Deborah Stringfellow is a fourth-grade teacher at Airport Road Intermediate School in Elmore County. She is a first-generation high school and college graduate. Because of economic needs, her parents were forced to abandon their own personal educational dreams.

Stringfellow found early on in her childhood that school and learning were a refuge – a personal source of joy. She embraced every opportunity to teach others. She even helped her parents to earn their GEDs and taught her brothers to read.

Stringfellow believes education is a life-long journey, not a destination. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and Master of Science in Special Education from Troy University. Later, Stringfellow earned a specialist’s degree from Lincoln Memorial University in Administration. During her amazing career, while teaching first grade, she became the first person in her school system to complete National Board Certification.

A highly respected school administrator said, “In short, Mrs. Stringfellow is an excellent teacher. Not only is she able to plan instruction that is engaging and appropriate, but she also uses a variety of assessment strategies to monitor and evaluate student learning, masterfully orchestrate classroom discussions, and effectively manage classroom routines and student behavior. She is thoughtful, reflective, and committed to life-long learning.”

Kira Ledbetter Aaron – *Vestavia Hills City Schools* – Vestavia High School Freshman Campus
(State School Board District III)

The daughter of teachers, *Alabama educator Kira Ledbetter Aaron* always knew she wanted to enter the “family business.” She believes everyone is made to have rewarding personal relationships throughout life. She appreciates participating in great conversations regarding literature and the self-expression brought through the English Language Arts classroom.

2024-2025 Alabama TOY Final Four Announcement

A graduate of Dadeville High School, *Alabama educator Kira Ledbetter Aaron* earned a Secondary English Language Arts degree from Auburn University, a Master of Science from Troy University, and an Education Specialist degree in Leadership from The University of Alabama. She earned National Board Certification and is currently a doctoral candidate.

She has had the great pleasure to teach school in Smith Station, Elba, Troy, and Vestavia Hills communities. Since book talks are one of her favorite methods to build creativity and positive relationships with students, she started a monthly reading enrichment program to promote personal outside of the classroom reading among students in her area.

A top administrator in her local school system said, “I am thankful for Mrs. Aaron’s leadership. She works tirelessly to make sure our school provides the best experience for students in our community, and this commitment does not end at her classroom door. Every student in our school is a beneficiary of her leadership and that is why I personally believe she would be a great Alabama Teacher of the Year.”

Kristen Brown – *Madison City Schools* – Liberty Middle School
(State School Board District VIII)

From a struggling learner, teen mom, and high school dropout, *Alabama educator Kristen Brown* has transformed into an inspiring educator, dedicating her career to improving children’s lives. Her deep commitment to empowering students facing adversity stems from her own life experiences. She started working with children after volunteering as a nurse for domestic and international medical missions. She began recognizing the same needs in her local community as she saw on these mission outreach efforts.

Alabama educator Kristen Brown and her husband Dawson have assisted disadvantage families, the Department of Human Resources, and local foster children programs. They have adopted four wonderful children. Brown believes lack of education is a common denominator shared in many negative situations. Critical thinking skills and an ability to survive difficult circumstances are key.

Brown has published two academic journal articles, designed a popular literacy program aimed at improving scientific literacy using Greek and Latin roots, and is currently writing an instructional textbook for middle school teachers.

“Outside of her classroom, Mrs. Brown started an initiative to help struggling students after school,” said a local school administrator. “The Academic and Curriculum Enrichment Support (ACES) program is an after-school effort that assist students in organizing and prioritizing. It focuses on helping students catch up on class assignments and builds communication between students and teachers. Mrs. Brown also provides meals during these sessions to ensure students are growing academically without hunger being a barrier. She has had a huge impact on the positive academic progress of our students.”

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