



Department of
Education

Educator Recognition Guidebook for Districts

Tennessee Department of Education | August 2021



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Introduction

Educators are critical for the success of our schools and students. Tennessee teachers work hard in their classrooms each day to ensure that Tennessee achieves our vision of setting all students on a path to success. Educator recognition programs play an important role in celebrating and elevating Tennessee teachers to receive the appreciation they deserve. However, each of these programs is not possible without the strong support of school and district partners who facilitate educator recognition at the local level.

This guidebook provides resources and best practices from across the state to support schools and districts in coordinating their own educator recognition processes at the local level.

Additionally, the appendix includes useful overview documents and sample materials that districts may use to jumpstart their recognition programs:

- [Appendix A](#) provides a brief overview of each educator and leader recognition program.
- [Appendix B](#) provides a master calendar of all deadlines associated with recognition programs as well as suggested start dates for local-level processes.
- [Appendix C](#) provides program policies and selection criteria for each program.
- Appendices [D](#), [E](#), [F](#), and [G](#) provide sample materials associated with each section of the guidebook.

With any questions regarding the information contained within this guidebook, please contact Janelle Brown, project manager for educator effectiveness, at Janelle.Brown@tn.gov.

Creating Your School- and District-Level Selection Processes

For each of Tennessee’s state-run educator recognition processes (Teacher, Principal, and Supervisor of the Year), identification of our state’s best teachers and leaders begins at the local level with districts and charter schools submitting nominees for award consideration. Because of this structure, the department relies heavily on our school and district partners to implement strong selection processes that result in applicant pools of the best candidates. However, there are many different options to consider when designing school- and district-level selection processes – and this can quickly become overwhelming!

This section of the guidebook will provide an overview of the most common selection process structures. Each structure prioritizes various values in selection, from teacher voice to merit, and it is important to identify a structure that best fits the context of your school and/or district. However, please note that these structures are not mutually exclusive, and many districts use a combination of these approaches to select their school- and district-level teachers and leaders of the year.

[Appendix D](#) includes sample materials that administrators may adapt to quickly put these selection processes into practice in their schools and districts.

Best Practices in Selecting School- and District-Level Awardees

Regardless of which selection process a school or district chooses to implement, it is critical that the process is implemented with integrity for recognition programs to achieve their intended purpose: celebrating and elevating exceptional educators. The following best practices should be employed whenever possible to strengthen the effectiveness of the structures described later in this section:

- Selection should be conducted by a representative committee that includes students, educators, leaders, and alumni award winners across numerous grade spans, content areas, and demographics.
- Selection committee members should receive advance preparation for their participation that includes training in identifying and confronting bias in the selection process.
- All nominees and applicants should be notified about their status after the selection process is complete.
- All district-level awardees should receive prompt critical feedback and support to edit their application in preparation for the state selection process.
- Applicants and nominees who are not selected as the school- and district-level nominees should receive feedback upon request.

Common Selection Process Structures

	Selection by Faculty Vote	Selection by Leadership and Administration	Selection by Application and/or Interview
Description	School-level or district-level teachers or leaders of the year are selected based on a vote by their peers, often conducted electronically or via paper votes.	School-level or district-level teachers or leaders of the year are hand-selected by principals or instructional supervisors.	School-level or district-level teachers or leaders of the year submit an application and/or complete an interview, which are reviewed to determine the nominees that will move forward.
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most strongly centers educator voice in the selection process • May identify exceptional educators who would not typically seek out recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely to involve a more complete picture of an educator’s excellence due to leader access to data • More likely to identify educators from across content and specialty areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most strongly centers merit in the selection process • Most closely aligned to the state-level selection process
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May unintentionally create a “popularity contest,” in which educators of the year are selected for their personality rather than excellence in instruction • May exclude truly exceptional educators in less visible specialty areas (i.e. ELL or SPED) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May introduce unconscious bias into the selection process if leaders do not use sufficient evidence to identify nominees • May delegitimize the selection process if educators perceive that the leader has not used a rigorous, objective process to identify nominees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires educators to self-select into recognition, which may result in limited diversity of the applicant pool • Most time-consuming of the described options
Questions to Consider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do educators in my school/district more highly value recognition from their peers or from administration? • How might I highlight less visible educators to ensure they are considered? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will I ensure that unconscious biases do not influence who leaders select? • What evidence might leaders need to ensure they select the most competitive nominee? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When will I begin selection to ensure there is sufficient time to identify nominees? • How will I ensure that my selection committees are representative of the educators in my system?
Best Practice	Generate a faculty vote ballot that includes all teachers or leaders in your school or district that are eligible for the nomination. This will ensure that the resulting nominee is eligible to continue in the selection process once nominated, as well as ensure that all eligible educators are considered.	Align recommendations with available evaluation data and identify educators that consistently demonstrate practices that exceed expectations during observations as well as high achievement and growth scores. This will help to establish an objective measure of effectiveness and avoid any potential unconscious bias.	Utilize state-level application materials to construct school- and district-level application and/or interview materials. This will help to ensure your school and district nominees are prepared to participate in the state-level process, as well as save nominees valuable time in completing the part 1 application.
Sample Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty Vote Selection Process Calendar • Faculty Vote Email • Faculty Vote Ballot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader Selection Process Calendar • School Leader Email 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application Selection Process Calendar • Application & Interview Protocols + Rubrics • Selection Committee Invitation

Celebrating Your School- and District-Level Awardees

Celebration is arguably the most exciting component of each of Tennessee's selection processes – the moment when, finally, a teacher or leader's hard work is recognized and affirmed. The celebration component, if planned strategically, is truly what transforms Tennessee's recognition programs into powerful recruitment and retention tools. By celebrating awardees, we not only show our local education champions our appreciation, but we also encourage respect and admiration for the teaching profession from students, families, and community members. And though celebration is a critical aspect of the selection process, it does not have to be overly complicated or expensive.

This section of the guidebook will provide best practices to guide schools and districts in their planning of celebrations. It also includes a list of ideas organized by cost, such that schools and districts can curate a unique celebration that fits the local context.

[Appendix E](#) includes sample materials that administrators may adapt to quickly implement celebrations in their schools and districts.

Best Practices in Celebrating School- and District-Level Awardees

- Treat your teachers – but get creative!
 - You know your teachers best! Do you rarely see your teachers without an iced coffee in hand? Do they love a particular local restaurant for lunches out? What might be a way to take a non-instructional task off their plate? Try to incorporate your teacher's unique interests and needs into your celebration and appreciation – whether it's a personalized gift basket, a special parking spot for the year, or a substitute for a day.
- Involve your students, families, and community members in the celebration.
 - Students and families are personal witnesses to the incredible passion and hard work educators bring to their classrooms each day. Additionally, educators play an integral role in not only their school, but their local community. Making sure to include a wealth of stakeholders in the celebration efforts can show educators how great of an impact they make – and start to build bridges with partners that can support your school's projects and initiatives year-round. Potential partners include local chambers of commerce, county commissions, Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, and other local organizations. Involvement can range from small tokens of appreciation, like a montage of short appreciation videos, to sponsoring a larger event, like an appreciation lunch.
- Share the news!
 - Sharing the good news of your school or district Teacher, Principal, or Supervisor of the Year announcement not only makes awardees feel like celebrities, but it also positively highlights the great things going on in your school or district to a much wider audience.

Social media and news media can be great tools for this! Appendix E contains sample materials that can be shared on social media, school and district websites, as well as with local news stations to ensure your awardees get the attention they deserve.

Ideas for School and District Level Awardee Celebrations

	Low Cost	Medium Cost	High Cost
<i>Limited Advanced Planning Required</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver a letter of congratulations from the PTA/PTO/PTSA president, school board, principal, or superintendent. Present a certificate from the Tennessee Department of Education. Request certificates here. Have a bulletin board display honoring your Teacher, Principal, or Supervisor of the Year. Feature your Teacher, Principal, or Supervisor of the Year in your newsletter, website, or social media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Send flowers, candy, a balloon bouquet, or congratulatory cards or banners to your Teacher, Principal, or Supervisor of the Year. Take your Teacher, Principal, or Supervisor of the Year out to lunch. Offer your Teacher, Principal, or Supervisor of the Year an additional day of paid time off. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer your Teacher, Principal, or Supervisor of the Year the opportunity to attend an all-expenses paid professional development conference of their choice. Offer your Teacher, Principal, or Supervisor of the Year a scholarship to continue their education at a local college or university.
<i>Advanced Planning Required</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have students, families, and community members send congratulatory notes or video messages. Provide special recognition at a faculty, PTA/PTO/PTSA, or school board meeting. Provide a special yearlong parking place. Have a special day for your Teacher, Principal, or Supervisor of the Year – perhaps someone could cover his/her class for a period or take his/her bus or lunch duty. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host a lunch celebration or special assembly for your Teacher, Principal, or Supervisor of the Year and invite family, friends, and colleagues to join the celebration. Present a plaque or trophy to your Teacher, Principal, or Supervisor of the Year. Present your Teacher, Principal, or Supervisor of the Year with school- or district-specific swag noting their accomplishment, such as coffee mugs, water bottles, or T-shirts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host a celebratory banquet or event for your Teacher, Principal, or Supervisor of the Year. Work with local sponsors to provide a cash award or grant to your Teacher, Principal, or Supervisor of the Year.

Supporting Your District-Level Awardees in State Selection

Moving from the district-level selection process to the region-level selection process can be stressful for many awardees, and awardees often need extra encouragement and support to enter the region-level application process. By supporting your district-level awardee, you not only better their chance of succeeding at the region level, but you also begin to build relationships with awardees who can be powerful advocates and champions for your district.

This section of the guidebook will provide best practices to guide schools and districts in supporting their district-level awardees through region- and state-level selection.

[Appendix F](#) includes sample communications that can be adapted to encourage district-level awardees to apply.

Best Practices in Supporting District-Level Awardees

- Empower awardees with clear communication about next steps.
 - Award-winning educators and leaders are champions of their schools, districts, and communities – which often means that they are juggling many different responsibilities that are competing for their attention and time. Consistently communicating deadlines and opportunities for support to awardees increases the likelihood that awardees will take the time to complete the application to move forward in the process.
- Provide prompt, critical feedback to awardees to help them improve their application.
 - Feedback is a gift, and even stellar awardees have aspects of the application on which they can improve. Sharing high-level notes from the review committee allows awardees to strengthen their applications before advancing to the region-level selection process, bettering the chance that they are recognized at the region and state level. Ensuring that feedback is shared in a timely manner allows awardees the opportunity to reflect on strengths and areas of opportunity in their applications, transforming the selection process into an opportunity for personal and professional development.
- Pair awardees with a mentor to support them in editing their application and preparing for region-level selection.
 - Exceptional educators are often humble and may need encouragement to truly share their wealth of accomplishments in the application responses. The outside perspective of a mentor can push educators to recognize the value of their own experience as well as strengthen the application overall through providing constructive feedback. Mentors may come from a variety of backgrounds: former awardees in your district, communications professionals in the district office, or even other colleagues with experience in storytelling (such as an English or journalism teacher).

Opportunities for Supporting School- and District-Level Awardees

- Host a writer’s workshop for all school- or district-level awardees, where awardees collaborate with one another and with mentors to improve their application.
- Conduct a practice interview for awardees and utilize questions from the associated department application guide.
- Provide awardees with a mentor or list of mentors who is willing to review their application and provide feedback prior to the application deadline. Be sure to identify a priority deadline by which to seek feedback such that mentors are not overwhelmed with last minute requests!

Engaging Your School- and District-Level Awardees

Your relationship with school- and district-level awardees should not end at the celebration! By developing and implementing a strong selection process, you have identified educators and leaders who can become powerful advocates, ambassadors, advisors, and champions for your school, district, and community. Further, engaging with awardees continues to demonstrate your appreciation and affirmation of their expertise far after the celebratory banquet concludes.

This section of the guidebook will provide best practices and sample opportunities to guide schools and districts in engaging their school- and district-level awardees.

[Appendix G](#) offers sample materials for implementing a school- or district-level Teacher Advisory Council.

Best Practices for Engaging School- and District-Level Awardees

- Ensure engagement opportunities allow for awardees to feel heard and valued.
 - School- and district-level awardees have been selected due to their excellence, and powerful engagement opportunities allow awardees to share their expertise in a way that positively impacts your school or district. Take care to ensure that you can meaningfully implement any feedback that you request from awardees, rather than requesting feedback on initiatives or policies that are already finalized and can undergo minimal change. Additionally, be sure to report back on the impact of any feedback awardees provide. As a result, awardees will feel that their voice is heard, and their perspective is valued.
- Set clear expectations and norms.
 - To gain the most useful feedback from local awardees, it is critical to create an environment where awardees feel safe and respected. Clear expectations and norms ensure that all parties involved – whether the Superintendent, School Board Chair, or District Teacher of the Year – understand their role in the engagement and how best to interact with one another. Some expectations and norms that you may wish to set include: discussing how feedback will be used to inform decision-making, whether topics discussed should be confidential or may be shared with colleagues to form a wider perspective, and how frequently engagement will occur.
- Provide sufficient advanced notice prior to any engagement opportunities.
 - As mentioned previously, many of our most exceptional educators and leaders are involved in a variety of activities inside and outside of our school communities. Providing sufficient notice in terms of both the timing and agenda of any engagement opportunities allows awardees to adequately prepare to give high-quality feedback. It

also demonstrates that you are being intentional in your planning and respectful of their time, which will continue to strengthen your relationship.

Opportunities for Engaging School- and District-Level Awardees

- Invite school- and district-level awardees to meet with the Director of Schools to discuss their advocacy interests, ideally on a routine basis as an advisory council.
- Provide an opportunity for the school- and district-level awardees to address the school board.
- Feature school- and district-level awardees in communications campaigns.
- Invite school- and district-level awardees to facilitate trainings and workshops for their school and district.
- Host an annual gathering for awardees or invite alumni to an existing annual event, such as the district-level Teacher of the Year announcement.
- Encourage former awardees to stay engaged in the selection process by serving as reviewers or mentors.

Appendix A: Educator Recognition Program Overview

Program Name	Description	Nomination Process	Application Process
<p style="text-align: center;">Tennessee Teacher of the Year (TOY)</p>	<p>The Tennessee Teacher of the Year program is Tennessee’s affiliate of the National Teacher of the Year program. Teachers of all subjects and grade bands are eligible to participate if they provide direct instruction to students a majority of the time and have at least 3 years of experience.</p>	<p>Each district and charter is eligible to submit up to three nominations – one in each grade band: PreK-4, 5-8, and 9-12.</p> <p>The nomination form is released annually in November via the Commissioner’s Update for Directors and the Tennessee Teacher of the Year website.</p> <p>Nominations are due in mid-December each year.</p>	<p>To participate, nominees must submit the part I application, which is located on the Teacher of the Year website and sent via email to nominees. Region-level scoring committees will then identify one semi-finalist in each grade band (PreK-4, 5-8, and 9-12) in each region for a total of 27 region-level semi-finalists.</p> <p>Region-level semi-finalists will then complete the part 2 application, which will be shared with semi-finalists via email. After scoring the part 2 application, a statewide scoring committee will identify one finalist in each region as the CORE region finalists.</p> <p>CORE region finalists will then complete a virtual interview with an interview panel. Interview scores will be combined with part 2 application scores to identify the three Grand Division Teachers of the Year and the Tennessee Teacher of the Year.</p>

<p>Presidential Awards for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching (PAEMST)</p>	<p>The PAEMST award is bestowed by the National Science Foundation and White House as the highest honor that can be received by a math or science teacher. Each year, eligibility alternates between K-6 educators and 7-12 educators.</p>	<p>Anyone may make a nomination beginning in the fall prior to the selection cycle at www.paemst.org. Educators may also nominate themselves. Nominations close on January 15 each year.</p>	<p>Applicants must apply via the PAEMST portal at www.paemst.org by January 30.</p>
<p>Tennessee Principal of the Year (POY)</p>	<p>The Tennessee Principal of the Year program recognizes principals with at least 3 years of professional experience and 1 year of experience as a principal.</p>	<p>Each district and charter is eligible to submit up to one nomination.</p> <p>The nomination form is released annually in November via the Commissioner's Update for Directors and the Tennessee Principal of the Year website.</p> <p>Nominations are due in mid-December each year.</p>	<p>To participate, nominees must submit the part I application, which is located on the Principal of the Year website and sent via email to nominees. Region-level scoring committees will then identify the top three scorers in each region for a total of 27 region-level semi-finalists.</p> <p>Region-level semi-finalists will then complete the part 2 application, which will be shared with semi-finalists via email. After scoring the part 2 application, a statewide scoring committee will identify one finalist in each region as the CORE region finalists.</p> <p>CORE region finalists will then complete a virtual interview with an interview panel. Interview scores will be combined with the application scores to identify the three Grand Division Principals of the Year and the Tennessee Principal of the Year.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Tennessee Supervisor of the Year (SOY)</p>	<p>The Tennessee Supervisor of the Year program recognizes supervisors with at least 5 years of professional experience and 1 year of experience as a supervisor.</p>	<p>Each district and charter is eligible to submit up to one nomination.</p> <p>The nomination form is released annually in November via the Commissioner's Update for Directors and the Tennessee Supervisor of the Year website.</p> <p>Nominations are due in mid-December each year.</p>	<p>To participate, nominees must submit the part I application, which is located on the Supervisor of the Year website and will also be sent via email. Region-level scoring committees will then identify the top three scorers in each region for a total of 27 region-level semi-finalists.</p> <p>Region-level semi-finalists will then complete the part 2 application, which will be shared with semi-finalists via email. After scoring the part 2 application, a statewide scoring committee will identify one finalist in each region as the CORE region finalists.</p> <p>CORE region finalists will then complete a virtual interview with an interview panel. Interview scores will be combined with the application scores to identify the three Grand Division Supervisors of the Year and the Tennessee Supervisor of the Year.</p>
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<p>Recognizing Inspirational School Employees Award (RISE)</p>	<p>The RISE award is bestowed by the US Department of Education. The award recognizes classified school employees, such as: paraprofessional, clerical and administrative services, transportation services, food and nutrition services, custodial and maintenance services, security services, health and student services, technical services, and skilled trades.</p>	<p>Anyone may make a nomination via the form sent out in the Commissioner's Update for Directors or on the Tennessee RISE website. Nominations are due by September 15.</p>	<p>There is no application process for the RISE Award.</p>
<p>Tennessee Educator Talent Pool</p>	<p>The Tennessee Educator Talent Pool is a bank of emerging classroom leaders, including teachers, principals, and specialists, that represent the best of the Tennessee teaching profession. These educators are often considered for membership on advisory boards and task forces, featured on department communication channels, and are potential candidates for state and national recognition programs.</p>	<p>Anyone may make a recommendation via the form sent out in the Commissioner's Update for Directors. Recommendations are reviewed on a rolling basis, but priority will be given to recommendations submitted by March 15.</p>	<p>There is no application process for the talent pool specifically. If an educator is identified for an additional opportunity, more details will be sent with specific application or nomination instructions.</p>

Appendix B: 2021-22 Educator Recognition Master Calendar

Date	Program	Action(s)
Aug. 15, 2021	RISE	<i>Suggested: Districts should begin district-level identification processes.</i>
Sept. 1, 2021	PAEMST	Nominations and applications open.
Sept. 1, 2021	TOY, POY, SOY	<i>Suggested: Districts should begin school-level selection processes.</i>
Sept. 15, 2021	RISE	Nominations due.
Oct. 15, 2021	TOY, POY, SOY	<i>Suggested: Districts should begin district-level selection processes.</i>
Nov. 1, 2021	RISE	RISE finalists notified.
Dec. 15, 2021	TOY	Directors of schools or designees submit names of district-level Teachers of the Year in up to three grade bands (pre-K-4, 5-8, 9-12) via the report form.
Dec. 15, 2021	POY, SOY	Directors of schools submit names of Principal and Supervisor of the Year nominee via the nomination form.
Jan. 7, 2022	PAEMST	Nominations close.
Feb. 6, 2022	PAEMST	Applications due.
Feb. 27, 2022	TOY	District-level Teacher of the Year nominees advance to the region-level selection process and submit the part I application.
March 13, 2022	POY, SOY	District-level Principal and Supervisor of the Year nominees advance to the region-level selection process and submit the part I application.
March 27, 2022	Educator Talent Pool	Talent pool recommendations due.
March 31, 2022	TOY	Region-level Teacher of the Year semi-finalists are notified.
April 29, 2022	POY, SOY	Region-level Principal and Supervisor of the Year semi-finalists are notified.
May 1, 2022	TOY	Region-level Teacher of the Year semi-finalists submit the part II application.
May 29, 2022	POY, SOY	Region-level Principal and Supervisor of the Year semi-finalists submit the part II application.
June 1, 2022	TOY	Region-level Teacher of the Year finalists are notified and begin interview process.
June 30, 2022	POY, SOY	Region-level Principal and Supervisor of the Year finalists are notified and begin interview process.

Sept. 2022	TOY, Milken, PAEMST	Excellence in Education Celebration: Recognizing Tennessee Teacher of the Year Finalists, Presidential Awardees for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching, and Milken Educators
Oct. 2022	POY, SOY, RISE	Excellence in Education Celebration: Recognizing Tennessee Principal of the Year Finalists, Tennessee Supervisor of the Year Finalists, and RISE Awardees

Appendix C: Program Policies & Criteria

Tennessee Teacher of the Year

Eligibility

To be considered for the state-level award, a Teacher of the Year candidate must:

- be a full-time, certified, in good standing, pre-K–12 teacher in a state-accredited public or charter school in Tennessee at each stage of the recognition process (school, district, region, grand division, state, and national levels).
- spend the majority of the school day in direct instruction to students.
- have a minimum of three years of experience as a teacher in Tennessee public or charter schools.
- have a track record of exceptional gains in student learning.
- have not received the Tennessee Teacher of the Year award in any previous selection cycle.

Selection Criteria

Additionally, a competitive Tennessee Teacher of the Year candidate will:

- be an expert in their field who guides students of all backgrounds and abilities to achieve excellence.
- be a facilitator of learning, skilled in implementing research-based and creative teaching strategies.
- demonstrate leadership and innovation in and outside of the classroom walls that embodies lifelong learning.
- show evidence of positive teacher effect over time related to student achievement and growth.
- be able to explain, discuss, and defend a personal philosophy of teaching.
- demonstrate collaboration with colleagues, students, and families to create a school culture of respect and success.
- have a broad understanding and current trends and issues in education.
- be able to show how they connect the classroom and key stakeholders to foster a strong community at large.
- show active involvement and leadership in professional development and extra-curricular activities.
- be poised, articulate, enthusiastic, engaging, and energetic.

Presidential Awards for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching (PAEMST)

Eligibility

Applicants must:

- teach science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and/or computer science as part of their contracted teaching responsibilities at the K-6/7-12 grade level in a public (including charter) or private school.
- hold at least a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution.
- be full-time employees of the school or school district as determined by state and district policies, with responsibilities for teaching students no less than 50% of the school's allotted instructional time.
- have at least five years of full-time employment as a K-12 teacher during which science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and/or computer science has been a part of the applicant's teaching duties each of the five years.
- teach in one of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Department of Defense Education Activity schools, or the U.S. territories as a group (American Samoa, Guam, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and U.S. Virgin Islands).
- be U.S. citizens or permanent residents.
- not have received the PAEMST award at the national level in any prior competition or category.

Selection Criteria

Each application will be evaluated using the following five Dimensions of Outstanding Teaching:

- Mastery of content appropriate to grade level taught
- Use of effective instructional methods and strategies that are appropriate for the students in the classroom and that support student learning
- Effective use of student assessments to evaluate, monitor, and improve student learning
- Reflective practice and life-long learning to improve teaching and student learning
- Leadership in education inside and outside the classroom

Tennessee Principal of the Year

Eligibility

To be considered for the state-level award, a Principal of the Year candidate must:

- have a minimum of three (3) years of professional experience in public schools.
- have a minimum of one (1) year of experience as a principal.
- at all levels of recognition, be employed as a principal in a Tennessee public school district or charter.
- have not received the Tennessee Principal of the Year award in any previous selection cycle.

Selection Criteria

Additionally, a competitive Tennessee Principal of the Year candidate will demonstrate superior abilities in:

- managing and motivating students and faculties.
- evoking high standards.
- demonstrating a commitment to excellence.
- implementing innovative programs.
- having a track record of exceptional gains in student learning.
- being poised, articulate, enthusiastic, engaging, and energetic.

Tennessee Supervisor of the Year

Eligibility

To be considered for the state-level award, a Supervisor of the Year candidate must:

- have a minimum of five (5) years of professional experience in public schools.
- have a minimum of one (1) year of experience as a district-level administrator.
- at all levels of recognition, be employed as a supervisor in a Tennessee public school district or charter.
- have not received the Tennessee Supervisor of the Year award in any previous selection cycle.

Selection Criteria

Additionally, a competitive Tennessee Supervisor of the Year candidate will demonstrate superior abilities in:

- managing and motivating students and faculties.
- evoking high standards.
- demonstrating a commitment to excellence.
- implementing innovative programs.
- having a track record of exceptional gains in student learning.
- being poised, articulate, enthusiastic, engaging, and energetic.

Recognizing Inspirational School Employees (RISE) Award

Eligibility

To be considered for the state-level award, a RISE Award candidate must:

- at all levels of recognition, be employed as a classified school employee.
 - A [classified school employee](#) is defined as an employee of a state or any political subdivision of a state, or an employee of a nonprofit entity, who works in any grade from pre-kindergarten through high school in any of the following occupational specialties: paraprofessional, clerical and administrative services, transportation services, food and nutrition services, custodial and maintenance services, security services, health and student services, technical services, and skilled trades.
- have not received the RISE Award in any previous selection cycle.

Selection Criteria

Additionally, a competitive RISE Award candidate will demonstrate excellence in:

- work performance.
- school and community involvement.
- leadership and commitment.
- garnering local support.
- enhancing the image of classified school employees in the community and schools.

Appendix D: Sample Selection Materials

Faculty Vote Selection Process Suggested Annual Calendar

Date	Action
October 1	Compile list of all educators within school/district who are eligible. If the school will select nominees by grade band, separate the list by grade band.
October 8	Send out survey (if conducting selection electronically) or provide educators with list of eligible nominees (if conducting selection via paper vote). Provide a clear deadline by which votes should be submitted.
October 29	Collect and count all submitted votes.
November 1-5	Notify school-level nominees of their selection.
November 5-30	Conduct district-level selection. Ensure that all district-level nominees have the approval of the director of schools.
December 1-15	Notify district-level nominees of their selection.
December 15	Submit names of nominees via Tennessee Teacher of the Year District-Level Report Form.

Faculty Vote Sample Email

Subject: Voting is now open for the 2022-23 [School Name] Teacher of the Year!

Dear [School Name] Faculty,

I hope this message finds each of you well!

I am excited to announce that voting is now open for the 2022-23 [School Name] Teacher of the Year!

Attached, you will find a list of all educators who are eligible for selection this year. This list has already been reviewed to ensure all included educators meet the experience and assignment requirements of the Tennessee Teacher of the Year program. Please review this list carefully and select an educator who demonstrates excellence and leadership in our school community. We will identify our school

Teacher of the Year via paper vote at our staff meeting on [date], so please identify who you would like to nominate in advance of this meeting.

or

Please complete this survey to indicate your selection for our school-level Teacher of the Year. The list of educators provided in the survey has already been reviewed to ensure all included educators meet the experience and assignment requirements of the Tennessee Teacher of the Year program. Please review this list carefully and select an educator who demonstrates excellence and leadership in our school community. Please complete this survey by [date] to ensure your voice is heard.

Thank you for all that you do each day, and please know that each of you are an integral part of the [School Name] team!

Best,

(signature)

Faculty Vote Sample Ballot

Please note: A similar format can be inputted into the survey software of your choosing, such as Google Forms, Microsoft Forms, SurveyMonkey, or Formstack.

2022-23 [School Name] School Teacher of the Year Ballot

Name: _____

**This will be kept anonymous and will only be used to ensure that everyone votes once.*

Instructions: Please select one educator per grade band.

PreK-4 Selections	5-8 Selections	9-12 Selections
<input type="radio"/> Teacher A	<input type="radio"/> Teacher A	<input type="radio"/> Teacher A
<input type="radio"/> Teacher B	<input type="radio"/> Teacher B	<input type="radio"/> Teacher B
<input type="radio"/> Teacher C	<input type="radio"/> Teacher C	<input type="radio"/> Teacher C

Leadership Selection Process Suggested Annual Calendar

Date	Action
October 8	Send out email requesting nominations to school leaders or supervisors (depending on context). Provide a clear deadline by which votes should be submitted.
October 29	Collect all school-level nominees and follow up with any schools that have not submitted a nomination.
November 1-5	Notify school-level nominees of their selection.
November 5-30	Conduct district-level selection. Ensure that all district-level nominees have the approval of the director of schools.
December 1-15	Notify district-level nominees of their selection.
December 15	Submit names of nominees via Tennessee Teacher of the Year District-Level Report Form.

Leadership Selection Sample Email

Subject: Nominations are now being accepted for the 2022-23 [District Name] Teacher of the Year!

Dear [District Name] Principals,

I hope this message finds each of you well!

I am excited to announce that nominations are now being accepted for the 2022-23 [District Name] Teacher of the Year!

Please nominate **one educator** from your building by replying to this email with their name, grade, subject, school, and email address **no later than [date]**.

Please ensure that your school's nominee adheres to the Tennessee Teacher of the Year selection criteria. To be considered for the state-level award, a Teacher of the Year candidate must:

- be a full-time, certified, in good standing, pre-K-12 teacher in a state-accredited public or charter school in Tennessee at each stage of the recognition process (school, district, region, grand division, state, and national levels).
- spend the majority of the school day in direct instruction to students.

- have a minimum of three years of experience as a teacher in Tennessee public or charter schools.
- have a track record of exceptional gains in student learning.
- have not received the Tennessee Teacher of the Year award in any previous selection cycle.

Additionally, a competitive Tennessee Teacher of the Year candidate will:

- be an expert in their field who guides students of all backgrounds and abilities to achieve excellence.
- be a facilitator of learning, skilled in implementing research-based and creative teaching strategies.
- demonstrate leadership and innovation in and outside of the classroom walls that embodies lifelong learning.
- show evidence of positive teacher effect over time related to student achievement and growth.
- be able to explain, discuss, and defend a personal philosophy of teaching.
- demonstrate collaboration with colleagues, students, and families to create a school culture of respect and success.
- have a broad understanding and current trends and issues in education.
- be able to show how they connect the classroom and key stakeholders to foster a strong community at large.
- show active involvement and leadership in professional development and extra-curricular activities.
- be poised, articulate, enthusiastic, engaging, and energetic.

It is recommended that you utilize growth, achievement, and observation data to identify a nominee that consistently shows evidence of gains in student learning as well as level 5 practices in their content or specialty area. Additionally, please be sure to consider educators in non-tested or non-traditional teaching assignments, such as ELL, special education, early childhood, fine arts, and world languages.

Thank you for all that you do each day, and please know that each of you are an integral part of the [District Name] team!

Best,

(signature)

Application/Interview Selection Process Suggested Annual Calendar

Date	Action
September 6	Send out email to all teachers with application or interview information.
September 20	Send invitation to all school-level scoring committee members.
September 27	Confirm all school-level scoring committee members. Share any guidance and training with committee members in advance of beginning scoring.
September 29	Collect all school-level applications or complete all interviews. If the school will select nominees by grade band, separate the applications by grade band.
October 15	Ensure all applications or interviews have been scored and school-level nominees have been identified.
October 18-22	Notify school-level nominees of their selection.
October 25	Send out email to all school-level nominees with application or interview information.
November 1	Send invitation to all district-level scoring committee members.
November 10	Confirm all district-level scoring committee members. Share any guidance and training with committee members in advance of beginning scoring.
November 12	Collect all school-level applications or complete all interviews. Separate the applications or interviews by grade band.
November 30	Ensure all applications or interviews have been scored and district-level nominees have been identified. Ensure that all district-level nominees have the approval of the director of schools.
December 1-15	Notify district-level nominees of their selection.
December 15	Submit names of nominees via Tennessee Teacher of the Year District-Level Report Form.

Application/Interview Sample Email for Teachers

Subject: [Applications or Interviews] are now being accepted for the 2022-23 [School Name] Teacher of the Year!

Dear [School Name] Faculty,

I hope this message finds each of you well!

I am excited to announce that [applications or interviews] are now being accepted for the 2022-23 [School Name] Teacher of the Year!

Attached, you will find the 2022-23 [School Name] Teacher of the Year application. Please complete this application and submit to [email address or via this electronic submission form] by **no later than [date]**. Before applying, please ensure you meet the following eligibility criteria:

- be a full-time, certified, in good standing, pre-K–12 teacher in a state-accredited public or charter school in Tennessee at each stage of the recognition process (school, district, region, grand division, state, and national levels),
- spend the majority of the school day in direct instruction to students,
- have a minimum of three years of experience as a teacher in Tennessee public or charter schools,
- have a track record of exceptional gains in student learning; and
- have not received the Tennessee Teacher of the Year award in any previous selection cycle.

or

If you are interested in participating this year, please [email email address or complete this electronic submission form] to indicate your availability by [date]. Interviews will be scheduled between [dates].

Thank you for all that you do each day, and please know that each of you are an integral part of the [School Name] team!

Best,
(signature)

Application/Interview Sample Reminder Email for Teachers

Subject: Teacher of the Year Application Reminder

Dear educators,

This is a reminder that [applications are or interview scheduling availability is] due [via email or electronically] in **one week on Sept. 29, 2021** by 5 p.m. CT.

Thank you for your hard work and dedication to our students! We look forward to receiving your application.

Best,

(signature)

Application/Interview Sample Email for Scoring Committee Members

Subject: Invitation to Serve on the [School Name] Teacher of the Year Scoring Committee

Dear [Name],

I hope this message finds you well!

You are invited to serve on the 2022-23 [School Name] Teacher of the Year scoring committee. The [School Name] Teacher of the Year program is aligned to the Tennessee Teacher of the Year program and honors outstanding teachers in Tennessee.

You have been selected as a reviewer due to your expertise and dedication to the education profession, and I hope you will consider sharing your unique knowledge and experience as a member of the scoring committee. As a scoring committee member, you will aid in the review of the Teacher of the Year [application or interview] materials to identify [School Name]'s Teacher of the Year nominees.

[This year, the committee will utilize a virtual format, so no travel will be required. Instead, all scoring materials will be provided to scoring committee members via a shared online folder **by [date]**. Then, scoring committee members will have until **[date]** to upload all scoring sheets for assigned applications.

or

The committee will meet in person from [time] on [date] at [location] to score applications. Lunch will be provided.]

Please confirm your ability to serve by contacting me at [email] by [date]. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [phone number] or via email. I look forward to working with you!

Sincerely,

(signature)

Sample Application with Scoring Rubric

School/District Teacher of the Year Application

School-level finalists must complete this application to progress to the district-level selection process.

Applicants should email this application as a PDF to **[contact] by [time] on [date].**

1. How do you know that your students are successful in your content area specialty as a result of your instruction? Include evidence to support your response. *Do not exceed 500 words.*
2. Describe a project or initiative you helped create which contributed to the improvement of overall school culture. What was your role, and what is the status of this project today? Please include evidence of student impact. *Do not exceed 500 words.*
3. How do you ensure that education transcends the classroom? Describe specific ways in which you deliberately connect your students with the community. How did you collaborate with others (e.g. colleagues, students, families) in this work? Please include evidence of student impact. *Do not exceed 500 words.*

School/District Teacher of the Year Application Rubric

Criteria	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points	Points
Is an expert in their field who guides students of all backgrounds and abilities to achieve excellence.	Candidate's application provides limited evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides moderate evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides ample evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides exemplary evidence of this criteria such that the candidate could be the Tennessee Teacher of the Year.	
Collaborates with colleagues, students, and families to create a school culture of respect and success.	Candidate's application provides limited evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides moderate evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides ample evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides exemplary evidence of this criteria such that the candidate could be the Tennessee Teacher of the Year.	
Deliberately connects the classroom and key stakeholders to foster a strong community at large.	Candidate's application provides limited evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides moderate evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides ample evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides exemplary evidence of this criteria such that the candidate could be the Tennessee Teacher of the Year.	
Demonstrates leadership and innovation in and outside of the classroom walls that embodies lifelong learning.	Candidate's application provides limited evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides moderate evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides ample evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides exemplary evidence of this criteria such that the candidate could be the Tennessee Teacher of the Year.	
Expresses themselves in an engaging and articulate way	Candidate's application provides limited evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides moderate evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides ample evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides exemplary evidence of this criteria such that the candidate could be the Tennessee Teacher of the Year.	
TOTAL					/20

Sample Interview Protocol with Scoring Rubric

1. Describe a content lesson or unit that defines you as a teacher. How did you engage students of all backgrounds and abilities in the learning? How did that learning and your teaching influence your students? How are your beliefs and teaching demonstrated in this lesson or unit?

You will have up to 10 minutes to respond to this question. If you would like, you may take 1-2 minutes to gather your thoughts and prepare your response. You may begin speaking whenever you are ready.

2. What do you consider to be a major public education issue today? Describe how you demonstrate being a lifelong learner, teacher, and innovator about this issue, both in and outside of the classroom walls.

You will have up to 10 minutes to respond to this question. If you would like, you may take 1-2 minutes to gather your thoughts and prepare your response. You may begin speaking whenever you are ready.

3. How have your previous experiences prepared you to be the school- or district-level Teacher of the Year?

You will have up to 10 minutes to respond to this question. If you would like, you may take 1-2 minutes to gather your thoughts and prepare your response. You may begin speaking whenever you are ready.

School/District Teacher of the Year Interview Rubric

Criteria	<i>1 point</i>	<i>2 points</i>	<i>3 points</i>	<i>4 points</i>	<i>Points</i>
Is an expert in their field who guides students of all backgrounds and abilities to achieve excellence.	Candidate's application provides limited evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides moderate evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides ample evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides exemplary evidence of this criteria such that the candidate could be the Tennessee Teacher of the Year.	
Demonstrates leadership and innovation in and outside of the classroom walls that embodies lifelong learning.	Candidate's application provides limited evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides moderate evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides ample evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides exemplary evidence of this criteria such that the candidate could be the Tennessee Teacher of the Year.	
Expresses themselves in an engaging and articulate way	Candidate's application provides limited evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides moderate evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides ample evidence of this criteria.	Candidate's application provides exemplary evidence of this criteria such that the candidate could be the Tennessee Teacher of the Year.	
TOTAL					/12

Appendix E: Sample Celebration Materials

Sample Letter of Congratulations Template

[Date of Letter]

Dear [Name of Awardee]:

Congratulations on your selection as a [School or District Name] Teacher of the Year. This prestigious award recognizes your contributions as a teacher in our [school/district] community.

(The following paragraph is a sample and may be altered according to your needs.)

The outstanding accomplishments you have achieved in the classroom make this award a well-deserved honor. Your colleagues speak highly of your tenacious work ethic and passion for ensuring that all of your students succeed. Your ability to ensure exceptional growth as evidenced by your strong TVAAS scores in addition to high proficiency rates for your students is a model for excellence in the teaching that we want in [School Name/District Name]. It is exciting to think about the impact you have had on your students and the impact that you will continue to have in the classroom.

Congratulations once again on being named a [School or District Name] Teacher of the Year! Thank you for all that you do for [School or District Name] students!

Sincerely,

[Your Name and Title]

Sample Press Release Template

[NAME] CHOSEN AS [SCHOOL OR DISTRICT NAME] TEACHER OF THE YEAR

[Teacher Name], a [grade/subject] teacher at [school] in [town] has been selected as the Teacher of the Year for [School or District Name].

[Insert a short biography of the teacher. How long have they been teaching? How long have they been in their current role?]

"Insert quote," says [Teacher]. As a [School or District Name] Teacher of the Year, he/she will be recognized by [describe when and how the educator was or will be celebrated].

"Insert quote," says [Principal Name], principal at [School Name].

[School Name or District Name] Teachers of the Year are identified by [describe how Teachers of the Year are selected]. [Teacher Name] will now move on to the region-level selection process, where one educator in the PreK-4, 5-8, and 9-12 grade bands will be named for the [Region Name] region. Ultimately, one educator will be identified to represent the entire state as the Tennessee Teacher of the Year.

Sample Press Release Example

LUNSFORD CHOSEN AS KNOX COUNTY TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Kami Lunsford, music teacher at Karns Middle School in Knoxville, has been selected as the Teacher of the Year for Knox County Schools.

Kami has been sharing her love of learning and music with students, teachers, and future educators in all three regions of Tennessee for her entire 14-year career. As choir director of Karns Middle School, she uses singing, guitar, ukulele, and percussion to help students find their place in middle school and promote personal and academic success. She operates before and after school programs, including theater and advanced ensembles, that seek to expose students to disciplines, careers, and opportunities in the arts.

"Using music and the arts to help kids build a better life is truly the best job in the world, and I am so honored to receive this recognition," says Lunsford. As a Knox County Teacher of the Year, she was recognized via a surprise in-person visit from the Superintendent.

"Karns Middle and Knox County are so lucky to have Ms. Lunsford in our teaching ranks," says Brent Glenn, principal at Karns Middle.

Knox County Teachers of the Year are identified by a district-level application and interview process. Lunsford will now move on to the region-level selection process, where one educator in the PreK-4, 5-8, and 9-12 grade bands will be named for the East region. Ultimately, one educator will be identified to represent the entire state as the Tennessee Teacher of the Year.

Appendix F: Sample Support Materials

Encouragement Communication to Send Awardees

Dear [Awardee Name]:

Congratulations on being named a [District Name] Teacher of the Year!

The Tennessee Teacher of the Year process is an exciting professional learning opportunity. Region-level finalists receive leadership and communications training, and they also serve as advisors to statewide leaders. To advance to the next phase of selection for this prestigious award, you must submit the part 1 application by [date].

If you would like to receive support in completing your application, please contact [Mentor Name] at [Mentor Email]. To ensure there is sufficient time to receive feedback on your application, please contact your mentor no later than [date].

We will also host a writer's workshop for all district-level Teachers of the Year on [date] at [time] at [location]. If you would like to participate, please bring a draft of your application.

Lastly, we will host a practice interview session for all district-level Teachers of the Year on [date] at [time] at [location]. Please RSVP to [Contact Name] at [Contact Email] by [date] if you would like to attend.

Again, congratulations on this prestigious award and thank you for all that you do! If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Best,

(signature)

Encouragement Communication to Send Awardees' Supervisors

Dear [Supervisor Name]:

[Awardee Name] has been named a [District Name] Teacher of the Year.

The Tennessee Teacher of the Year process is an exciting professional learning opportunity. Region-level finalists receive leadership and communications training, and they also serve as advisors to statewide leaders. Having award-winning educators on your team benefits your whole school, and award-winners have a unique opportunity to tell the story of your community at the state level.

[Awardee Name] needs your support and encouragement to continue forward in selection. If you are able, please consider:

- reviewing [Awardee Name]'s application to provide feedback
- writing a recommendation letter
- checking in on [Awardee Name] periodically throughout the application period to provide words of encouragement

Thank you for supporting [Awardee Name] in the Tennessee Teacher of the Year process! If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Best,

(signature)

Appendix G: Sample Engagement Materials

Sample Advisory Council Invitation

Dear [Name],

First, congratulations once again on being named a [District Name] Teacher of the Year! We are thrilled to honor the outstanding work you do to prepare your students for bright futures.

I am also excited to announce that, as an awardee, you are invited to join the [District Name] Advisory Council for a one-year term. The [District Name] Advisory Council is comprised of excellent educators and leaders from across the district. As an advisory council member, you will have the opportunity to share your experiences and perspective with [Director Name] and other education leaders to provide input on district policies, programs, and resources.

In this process, you'll be asked to:

- Attend monthly meetings throughout the school year
- Engage in additional advocacy opportunities, such as providing quotes for press releases or amplifying district messaging on social media
- Join periodic phone and email feedback loops

Please let me know by [date] if you would like to accept this invitation. You may accept the invitation and reach out to me with any questions by email at [email address] or by phone at [phone number].

Thank you for your dedication to students, and congratulations on your well-deserved honor. I can't wait to meet you and work with you throughout this year!

Best,

(signature)

Sample Advisory Council Overview and Expectations

[District Name] Advisory Council

The purpose of the [District Name] advisory council is to provide an important voice for educators and leaders in the district's decision-making process, and to provide the Superintendent with educator insights, suggestions, and perspectives on critical educational issues. The advisory council will enable better educational and administrative decisions, and, ultimately, lead to greater student learning and success.

Composition

[Insert number of teachers, leaders, and other staff]

Participation ideally will include representation from classroom teachers in early elementary, upper elementary, middle school and high school, as well as representation from the arts, library, special education, Career and Technical Education, and, if possible, a school counselor.

Term

Members will be selected to serve one-year terms.

Meeting

The [District Name] Advisory Council generally meets monthly during the school year. Typically, a rough agenda will be developed and disseminated in advance. Agendas may be modified to address topics as they arise, or to adjust for time constraints. The Superintendent or his/her designee will serve as facilitator of the discussion.

Expectations

- Members will attend and actively participate in all advisory council meetings.
- Members are expected to be candid and forthright, but also professional, courteous, and solution oriented.
- Members are expected to solicit input and feedback from colleagues to inform and enrich the dialogue.
- Notes from the meetings will be taken and posted online, generally within two weeks of the meeting.

Sample Advisory Council Agenda Template

[District Name] Advisory Council Agenda

[Date] at [Time]

Location

1. Welcome
2. Updates on Previous Feedback Sessions
3. Feedback Session #1
4. Feedback Session #2
5. Closing and Next Steps

Sample Advisory Council Agenda

Tennessee Teacher Advisory Council Agenda

June 7 from 3-4 p.m. CST

Virtual Meeting

1. Welcome – Scott Meltzer
2. Updates on Previous Feedback Sessions – Scott Meltzer
 - a. ESSER Funding Priorities
3. AP Access for All – Janelle Brown
 - a. Materials attached to calendar invite.
4. Reading 360 – Janelle Brown
 - a. Materials attached to calendar invite.
5. Closing and Next Steps – Scott Meltzer

Sample Engagement Opportunity Invitation

Dear [Name],

I hope this message finds you well!

I am reaching out to ask if you might like to attend [Event Name] on [date] at [time]. During this event, you will be asked to share your perspective as a [District Name] Teacher of the Year on [list topic(s)]. The goal of this session is to [describe how feedback from the Teacher of the Year will be used]. Other individuals in attendance will include: [list names of other attendees].

The agenda and additional materials for this meeting are attached. If you choose to attend this meeting, please [describe expectations and norms, such as: bring constructive feedback on the attached documents, solicit feedback from your colleagues, keep these materials confidential, etc.].

Please let me know by [date] if you would like to accept this invitation. You may accept the invitation and reach out to me with any questions by email at [email address] or by phone at [phone number].

Thank you for your leadership and dedication to students!

Best,

(signature)