



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Warren County Schools Announces 2025-2026 District Level Teachers of the Year

McMinnville, Tenn., December 16, 2024 — Warren County Schools is proud to recognize three exceptional educators as the 2025-2026 District Level Teachers of the Year. These honorees represent the dedication, passion, and professionalism that define excellence in education. After a rigorous selection process, one teacher from each grade band—PreK-4, 5-8, and 9-12—was chosen to represent the district in the Tennessee Teacher of the Year competition.

2025-2026 District Level Teachers of the Year

PreK-4: Mandy Blankenship, Second Grade, Eastside Elementary

Mandy Blankenship, a dedicated second-grade teacher at Eastside Elementary School, has been named District Teacher of the Year for PreK-4th grades. A veteran educator with 24 years of experience, she has consistently demonstrated exceptional teaching skills and a deep passion for fostering student learning.

“Mrs. Blankenship is a wonderful teacher who goes above and beyond for her students each and every day,” said Eastside Elementary Principal Rex Crabtree. “She is a true advocate for all of her students and her students all believe that they can achieve the goals they set at the beginning of the school year. Mrs. Blankenship works tirelessly with her class and they work hard for her. Not only is she a leader for her grade but she is also a leader for our school. We are extremely blessed to have Mrs. Blankenship teaching at Eastside and her students are blessed as well.”

In addition to her work in the classroom, Mrs. Blankenship has served as a mentor and instructional leader, contributing to the professional development of educators across Warren County Schools and the Upper Cumberland region. Her openness to innovative teaching strategies and unwavering commitment to student success make her a model educator.

5-8: Dorian Loeffler, 7th and 8th Grade Science, Dibrell Elementary

Warren County Schools is proud to announce that Dorian Loeffler, a 7th and 8th grade science teacher at Dibrell Elementary School, has been named District Teacher of the Year for grades 5-8. Known as “The Mad Scientist” for his engaging and dynamic teaching style, Mr. Loeffler’s passion for science and his innovative methods captivate students and foster a love for learning.

"I have had the privilege of working with Mr. Dorian Loeffler for the past 9 years," said Dibrell Elementary Principal Sheila Gann. "He exemplifies our school motto 'Expect Excellence' for every student he serves in class. He encourages and engages every student in living up to their potential academically, socially, and behaviorally. We have been blessed to have him educating students at Dibrell. Mr. Loeffler embodies all the qualities worthy of being named Teacher of the Year. We are so proud of him!"

Mr. Loeffler's ability to build a positive and collaborative classroom culture has led to significant student growth and achievement. His unique teaching approach and enthusiasm make him a standout educator and a role model within the district.

9-12: Russell Prater, Biology and Ecology, Warren County High School

Warren County Schools is proud to announce that Russell Prater, a Biology and Ecology teacher at Warren County High School, has been named District Teacher of the Year for grades 9-12. Mr. Prater's innovative teaching techniques, including the use of outdoor classrooms and real-world applications, have created an engaging and effective learning environment.

"I am incredibly proud to recognize Russell Prater as our Teacher of the Year," said Warren County High School Executive Principal Chris Hobbs. "Russell exemplifies the dedication, passion, and commitment to excellence that makes a true impact in the lives of our students. Through creative lesson planning, a genuine care for students' success, and an unwavering belief in their potential, he consistently goes above and beyond to foster a positive learning environment. This recognition is a testament to Russell's hard work, innovation, and ability to inspire those around him. We are lucky to have him as part of our school community, and I am excited to see all the continued success he will achieve in the future."

Under Mr. Prater's guidance, his students have achieved impressive results on End-of-Course Biology tests, underscoring the effectiveness of his teaching strategies. His ability to connect academic concepts to practical scenarios inspires students and colleagues alike.

Dr. Grant Swallows, Director of Schools, praised the honorees, "Mrs. Blankenship, Mr. Loeffler, and Mr. Prater represent the very best of Warren County Schools. Their dedication, creativity, and impact on student learning set a high standard for all educators. We are thrilled to celebrate their achievements and are proud to have them represent us in the Tennessee Teacher of the Year competition."

To be considered for the prestigious Tennessee Teacher of the Year award, educators must meet rigorous criteria. They must be full-time, certified teachers with at least three years of experience and a proven track record of student success. Furthermore, they must demonstrate:

- Exceptional instructional skills: Utilizing research-based and creative teaching strategies.
- A positive impact on student learning: Evidenced through formal and informal assessments.
- A well-defined and effective teaching philosophy.
- A deep understanding of current educational trends and issues.

- Strong leadership qualities within and beyond the classroom.
- A genuine passion for inspiring a love of learning in their students.
- The respect and admiration of students, parents, and colleagues.

“These teachers have consistently exceeded these high standards, demonstrating a profound impact on the lives of their students and the Warren County Community,” said Christie Allison, Warren County Schools Teacher of the Year Coordinator. “We are incredibly proud to have such dedicated and talented educators within our school district.”

Mrs. Blankenship, Mr. Loeffler, and Mr. Prater will now move on to compete at the Upper Cumberland level. Warren County Schools wishes them the very best of luck as they continue to represent the district with distinction.

Thank you to the following sponsors for their generous gift donations in celebration of our District Teachers of the Year: Begonias, Check Into Cash, Christie Allison, Citizens Tri-County Bank, Coffee Bank & Trust, First National Bank, Graves Family Pharmacy, Homeland Community Bank, Motlow State Community College, Pioneer Nutrition, Security Federal Savings Bank, Security Finance, Warren County Teacher Center. These contributions help honor the exceptional educators who make a difference every day in the lives of Warren County Schools students. The district extends its gratitude for their support in celebrating these outstanding teachers.

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