



Immediate Release

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Meet the Ewing Public Schools 2025-2026 Educators of the Year!

“If you have to put someone on a pedestal, put teachers. They are society’s heroes.” – Guy Kawasaki

The Ewing Public Schools is proud to introduce you to the district recipients of the 2025-2026 Governor’s Educator of the Year!

Each year, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) strives to recognize educators who have gone above and beyond their service to New Jersey students. Every school in every district is encouraged to participate in the Governor’s Educator of the Year program to honor hard-working teachers and educational services professionals for their dedication to their students and the profession.

Who is a hero in today’s society? Just Google it! A modern-day hero is an ordinary person who shows extraordinary courage, kindness, and selflessness, acting for others before themselves.

“Educators are the “unsung heroes” who shape the future by nurturing students, fostering community, and often working beyond the school day. They are mentors, innovators, and caregivers; they provide crucial emotional support and academic guidance, often sacrificing personal time for their students’ success.” – *Concord Family Counseling*

Educators are the foundation of society, shaping the minds of future leaders, inventors, and citizens.

Yes, the above is absolutely true.

What did AI miss? Not much, but the positive human interactions and connections that are created and nourished by dedicated educators whose sole purpose every day is to teach in a safe learning environment where students flourish and thrive is unmatched. These connections happen in our classrooms, hallways, cafeterias, and at extra-curricular activities. It is the smile, the kind gesture, the encouragement, the reinforcement, the accountability, and the compassion that set our educators apart from the rest. TRUE EVERY DAY HEROES!

In the Ewing Public Schools, our extraordinary educators go above and beyond for their students and their school community every day. Today, we recognize nine of our valued educators and congratulate them again on their selection as the Ewing Public Schools 2025-2026 Educators of the Year!

Please scroll down to meet our 2025-2026 Educators of the Year as they share a little about themselves and what encouraged them to choose this meaningful profession.



Ewing High School:

Sean Hammer – Ewing High School Teacher of the Year

What is your educational background?

I graduated from Princeton University in 2008 with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Molecular Biology and certificates in African American studies and teacher preparation. I also earned my Master of Public Health (MPH) degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 2013.



How many years have you worked for the district? How many years have you worked at the school you are currently working at, and what is your position?

I started at Ewing High as a maternity leave replacement teacher in January 2009 before switching over to a tenure-track position, so I am now beginning my 17th year at EHS. I have taught biology and AP Biology for the duration of my career, and for the past three years, I have been teaching a public health elective for juniors and seniors (an honors version of the course that will be eligible for dual credit via The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) will debut next year).

Outside of the classroom, I serve as Student Council advisor (2013-present), coordinate our Freshman Orientation and College Tour programs (2015-present), and volunteer as an assistant golf coach (2018-present).

What inspired you to become a teacher/education specialist?

I didn't go to Princeton to become a teacher; my plan was always to go to medical school. But during college, I spent three years volunteering weekly at various branches of the Trenton Public Library as part of an after-school tutoring/homework help program for elementary students. The work was challenging but rewarding — so much so that when Princeton's Teacher Prep Program landed on my radar, teaching seemed like a great way to fill a gap year. I figured that I'd teach for a few years, gain some real-world experience, and then eventually go back to school to pursue my "real" career. It was a solid plan on paper, but it fell apart pretty quickly once I realized how much I enjoyed being in the classroom! I did not expect to get hooked on teaching, but what started as a gap year plan has transformed into an incredibly fulfilling career.

What is your best or favorite teaching moment?

It's hard to choose just one, as there really are great moments every day when you work with amazing students and colleagues. Of course, it's always validating when a current or former student lets you know that what you're doing is making an impact on some level. That's why we get up in the morning — to help students become better versions of themselves and realize their potential. I also love it when we successfully launch a new event or initiative, and it opens students' eyes to new possibilities for their



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future. I'm incredibly fortunate to work in a school and district that is so supportive of the types of school-wide programming that we've implemented over the years.

“As an AP Biology teacher, Mr. Hammer delivers a rigorous and intellectually demanding curriculum that challenges students to think critically and pursue academic excellence. He works collaboratively within his department, actively engaging colleagues and advancing conversations around current pedagogy and best practices. His Master’s degree in public health has served as a catalyst for the development and expansion of Science Department course offerings. Through the implementation of a new elective, Mr. Hammer created an additional avenue for academic readiness—providing students with a vital framework for understanding contemporary issues while opening the door to potential career paths many were previously unaware of.

To say that Mr. Hammer is involved beyond the classroom would be a significant understatement. His work is driven by a deep commitment to service, and he consistently seeks opportunities to enhance the daily experiences of those around him. Both a tinkerer and a tailor, he is always looking for ways to improve how the school community functions and to address gaps in the student experience. Whether running Freshman Orientation, assisting as a golf coach, or supporting students from the stands and audience, Mr. Hammer is a constant presence. He has served on both the EHS Scholarship Committee and the School Safety Committee, and he is widely regarded as the go-to resource for questions regarding extracurricular programs and student involvement.

Under Mr. Hammer’s leadership, the EHS Student Council has experienced remarkable growth in participation, goal development, and organizational focus. What was once a small club with limited impact has evolved into a cornerstone organization that drives many of the activities defining the EHS experience. Now the largest extracurricular program at EHS, Student Council works collaboratively with other programs while continually initiating new opportunities for student engagement. While such rapid growth might overwhelm many advisors, Mr. Hammer responds with insight and adaptability, allowing the program to remain fluid, responsive, and inclusive of all areas of student life.” - *Lisa Sabo, Principal, Ewing High School*

Mya Grimes – Ewing High School Education Specialist of the Year

What is your educational background?

I have experience working as a Life Skills Special Education Aide, where I supported students in developing essential daily living and social skills. Currently, I am pursuing a degree in education to become a certified teacher. This combination of hands-on experience and formal education is helping me build a strong foundation for effectively supporting and teaching students in diverse learning environments.

How many years have you worked for the district?

I have worked for the district for three years at Ewing High School.

What inspired you to become a teacher/education specialist?



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What inspired me to become a teacher is the support and guidance I received during high school from a mentor who helped keep me on track. Having someone believe in me and guide me through challenges made a significant difference in my life. I want to be that positive influence for others, helping students stay focused and motivated to achieve better outcomes in their education and life.

What is your best or favorite teaching moment?

One of my favorite teaching moments is serving as a guide and support for my cheerleaders. Being able to motivate them and be a reliable source of encouragement makes me feel truly appreciated. The connection we share, where they show their gratitude simply because I'm there to support and uplift them, is incredibly rewarding and reminds me why I chose this path in education.

Motivational quote:

"Never be afraid to be your true self."

Embracing your authentic self is the foundation for confidence, growth, and genuine happiness. It encourages courage in the face of challenges and inspires others to do the same.

“Mya Grimes exemplifies professionalism, dedication, and compassion in every aspect of her role. She builds strong, trusting relationships with students and colleagues while consistently maintaining clear and appropriate professional boundaries. Mya has a natural ability to work with the Life Skills population, thoughtfully assessing individual needs and responding with empathy, determination, and care. She encourages students to recognize their strengths and persevere through challenges, fostering confidence, resilience, and growth.

Mya is intentional in ensuring that a student’s disability is never viewed as a limitation, but rather as one part of their identity—empowering students to meet and often exceed expectations. As an integral member of our special education program, she is deeply valued by students, staff, and administration alike. Collaborating teachers frequently describe her as “wonderful to have in class,” highlighting the positivity, professionalism, and mutual respect that define her work. Mya’s unwavering commitment to excellence makes her highly deserving of recognition as Support Staff of the Year.” – *Lisa Sabo, Principal, Ewing High School*



Fisher Middle School

Jesse Ambriz – Fisher Middle School Teacher of the Year

What is your educational background?

I studied at Loyola Marymount and California State University, Los Angeles where I earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Child Development, a Minor in Sociology, a Multiple Subject Teaching Credential, and a Master of Arts in Computer Education and Technology Leadership.

How many years have you worked for the district?

This is my 6th year teaching in this district and at Fisher Middle School, and I currently teach 7th-grade Inclusion and Resource Math.



What inspired you to become a teacher?

My late grandmother was a teacher's aide and was the first person to inspire me to become a teacher. I remember her bringing home 'dittos' that I always enjoyed working on. My 7th-grade teacher was also an inspiration and said that I had the qualities to become a great teacher. She is the one who 'planted the seed' that 'grew' into the teacher I am today.

What is your best or favorite teaching moment?

My favorite teaching moments often involve witnessing a scholar's "lightbulb moment," where a difficult Math concept finally clicks, or seeing a struggling scholar gain confidence and succeed.

Motivational quote:

"A good teacher doesn't just change a student's grade- they change their story."
and

"Believe you can, and you're halfway there." -Theodore Roosevelt

"Jesse Ambriz, a dedicated 23-year veteran teacher, has been nominated for Governor's Educator of the Year in recognition of his exceptional commitment to students and the broader community. Known for his outstanding instruction and tireless work ethic, Jesse consistently goes above and beyond to support every child's success. In addition to excelling in the classroom, he has coached multiple sports, building strong relationships and fostering teamwork and resilience in his student-athletes. His impact extends well beyond school walls—he created the "Wash and Learn" initiative in the Ewing community, placing books in laundromats so children in need could access literacy resources while their families washed clothes. He also secured funding to establish a Wellness Hub at Fisher Middle School, providing hygiene products and other essentials to support students' well-being. Jesse's leadership, compassion, and unwavering dedication make him truly deserving of this honor." – *Dr. Maggy Hanna, Principal, Fisher Middle School*



Antheil Elementary School:

Santina Winthrop – Antheil Elementary School Teacher of the Year

What is your educational background?

I grew up locally and attended Lawrence High School. I then went to Fairleigh Dickinson University in Madison, New Jersey. There, I majored in Psychology and Elementary Education. I received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Master of Arts in Teaching in Elementary Education. After several years, I went back and finished some literature requirements at Fairleigh Dickinson University to get certified in Middle School Language Arts. Recently, I attended Rutgers University to obtain my Special Education certification and earn my Master of Arts in Teaching in Special Education.



How many years have you worked for the district? How many years have you worked at the school you are currently working at, and what is your position?

I started working in the district in 2009 as a substitute teacher. I substituted on and off for several years until I was hired in 2013 as a Kindergarten Paraprofessional at Antheil Elementary School. The following year, I was promoted to full-time Special Education Paraprofessional. I worked as a paraprofessional for many years in several different self-contained classrooms. In 2020, I obtained a long-term substitute position in 3rd-grade special education. When the teacher retired in June that year, I became her permanent replacement at Antheil. Currently, I teach 3rd and 4th grade Language/Learning Disabilities (LLD) self-contained class at Antheil.

What inspired you to become a teacher?

I have known from a young age that I wanted to be a teacher due to the many amazing teachers I had when I was growing up. I particularly remember my Kindergarten teacher and my 8th-grade Language Arts teacher connecting with me and making me feel safe at school. Helping others is a passion of mine, and working with children has always come easily to me.

In addition to teaching, I also teach swim lessons and coach swimming to young children.

What is your best or favorite teaching moment?

One moment does not define my classroom, but all those little moments that add up to days of great gratitude. Seeing a student get an answer right when they have been struggling, seeing classmates sharing things, watching a shy student raise their hand to answer a question or tell a story, a student volunteering to read aloud for the first time, a student making a new friend, or even a student independently ordering their lunch in the cafeteria.



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Someone once asked a former student of mine, “Why is Miss Winthrop different?” She responded that I cared about her. I try my hardest to foster that kind of classroom environment so my students feel safe and supported, which leads to amazing teaching moments in and out of the classroom.

Motivational quote:

“Students may forget what we teach, but they never forget how we made them feel.”

I couldn't tell you what my favorite teachers actually taught me, but I know they made me feel worthy and supported.

"Ms. Winthrop is an exceptional educator whose deep commitment to her students' academic growth, confidence, and individual needs is evident every day. She consistently goes above and beyond, using creative, differentiated approaches to ensure every student succeeds, while maintaining strong, proactive partnerships with families. Beyond her classroom, her leadership and service to the Antheil community reflect a level of professionalism and dedication that truly exemplifies Teacher of the Year." – *Clifford 'Kip' Harrison, Principal, Antheil Elementary School*

Leah Rodriguez – Antheil Elementary School Education Specialist of the Year

What is your educational background?

I earned my undergraduate degree in English from Rutgers University and then my graduate degree in teaching when I began my career teaching middle school ELA in New York City. I later pursued my post-master's certificate (PMC) in Educational Leadership at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ).

How many years have you worked for the district? How many years have you worked at the school you are currently working at, and what is your position?

I am currently serving in my eighth year in the district. I started as a middle school English Language Arts (ELA) teacher at Fisher Middle School and am now in my second year at Antheil Elementary School, where I am the Dean of Students. Before joining the district, I worked for several years as a middle school ELA teacher in New York City.



What inspired you to become a teacher/education specialist?

I was inspired to enter education because I saw how transformative education can be. I wanted to create classrooms where students felt both challenged and supported, and where their identities and perspectives were valued. Over time, that passion expanded into leadership, where I could influence school-wide systems that ensure every student feels safe, seen, and capable of success.

What is your best or favorite teaching moment?

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My favorite part of being an educator is the opportunity to interact with, support, and engage so many students across different ages and stages of development. Whether in the classroom or in a leadership role, I value building meaningful relationships with students and their families. Seeing a student grow in confidence, navigate a challenge successfully, or feel truly known and supported is incredibly rewarding. Equally meaningful is partnering with families to ensure their children feel safe, valued, and capable of success. Those relationships built on trust, communication, and shared goals are what make this profession both impactful and fulfilling.

Motivational quote:

"It is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves." -Shakespeare

"Mrs. Rodriguez exemplifies outstanding leadership and unwavering dedication to student well-being in her role as Dean of Students and Anti-Bullying Specialist. Through her successful implementation of PBIS and her collaborative work with staff and families, she has helped create a more positive, consistent, and supportive school environment. Her empathy, professionalism, and steady presence make her an invaluable leader who positively impacts every corner of the Antheil community." – Clifford 'Kip' Harrison, Principal, Antheil Elementary School

Lore Elementary School:

Cynthia Campbell – Lore Elementary School Teacher of the Year

What is your educational background?

I began my journey at Towson State University in the fall of 1998 and then completed my Undergraduate education at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) in Spring of 2002, with a Bachelor's degree in Science, majoring in Early Childhood Education and Psychology. I enrolled in a Master's of Education, with a focus on Literacy Development at Walden University in 2004 and earned my Master's degree in the spring of 2006.

How many years have you worked for the district? How many years have you worked at the school you are currently working at, and what is your position?

I was hired by Francis Lore Elementary School in August of 2002, as a First Grade Teacher. The following year I was moved to Kindergarten and would hold that position for the next twenty-three years of my career. This year I made a jump to third grade. For the past 19 years, I have served as the inclusion teacher. I have participated in partial and total inclusion environments. Over the years at Lore School, I have worked before/after school programs and the summer achievement academy, in addition to tutoring homebound students. During COVID, I worked at home as a virtual kindergarten teacher.



What inspired you to become a teacher?



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Many teachers name a teacher from the past who influenced them to enter the teaching profession. I am not one of them. I was an incredibly shy child and suffered from separation anxiety. Education was a second choice for me after an internship in high school that placed me in a pediatric unit of a hospital in Trenton, New Jersey. I knew I wanted a career where I worked each day with children, but I desired to spend more time with my patients and make more of an impact on their lives that a career in the clinic would not afford. Teaching allowed me to inspire imagination, curiosity, and exploration. I love the magic of early childhood!

What is your best or favorite teaching moment?

As a kindergarten teacher, I incorporated my students' costumes and traditions into our *Holiday's Around the World* Unit. I invited families to share food, stories, clothing, and traditions with my classroom. Some families would join us in the classroom, while others would share videos for us to learn and grow. My students loved sharing their beliefs and traditions with their fellow classmates. These activities further enhanced our respect and appreciation of the diversity in our classroom and the greater Ewing Community. As a new third-grade teacher, I plan on continuing these activities with students. It is critical that my students learn about one another's differences in order to forge friendships and respect amongst one another.

Motivational quote:

"A dream is a wish your heart makes." So NEVER stop dreaming! - Disney's Cinderella

"Mrs. Campbell brings positivity, creativity, and heart into everything she does. Her classroom is a place where students feel safe, valued, and excited to learn. She goes above and beyond for her students, supports her colleagues, mentors future teachers, and builds strong connections with families. Her impact reaches far beyond her classroom and helps shape the culture of our entire school." – *Alicia Mackall, Principal, Lore Elementary School*

Christine Meekins – Lore Elementary School Education Specialist of the Year

What is your educational background?

Lafayette College

How many years have you worked for the district? How many years have you worked at the school you are currently working at, and what is your position?

I have worked for the Ewing Township Board of Education for 25 years. Fisher Middle School for 20 years as an ELA teacher and Literacy Coach. This is my sixth year as Dean of Students for Lore Elementary School.

What inspired you to become a teacher/education specialist?

I was inspired to be a teacher/education specialist because I wanted to have an impact on children in my community. I wanted children to know that they could believe, achieve, and accomplish their dreams and goals. I



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wanted to help provide children with the skills and confidence they would need to soar beyond their wildest expectations.

What is your best or favorite teaching moment?

My favorite teaching moments are the moments when I see former students as adults who still remember a book or a positive moment they experienced with me as one of their educators.

Motivational quote:

One of my favorite motivational quotes is... *"You must stand for something or you will fall for anything."*

"As our Dean of Students, Mrs. Meekins leads with heart, integrity, and an unwavering commitment to our students and staff. Her impact on the entire Ewing community for decades remains unmatched." – *Alicia Mackall, Principal, Lore Elementary School*

Parkway Elementary School

Amanda Fenderson – Parkway Elementary School Teacher of the Year

What is your educational background?

I hold a New Jersey Preschool through Grade 3 (P–3) and K–5 teaching certification with a Special Education endorsement for those grade levels from William Paterson University. I earned my Master’s Degree in Special Education from Rowan University and am currently pursuing my Supervisor/Principal certification from TCNJ. Continuing my education has always been important to me because I believe that to inspire lifelong learners, we must also model lifelong learning ourselves.



How many years have you worked for the district? How many years have you worked at the school you are currently working at, and what is your position?

This is my fifth year in the Ewing Township School District. For the past four years, I’ve had the privilege of teaching 4th grade in a Multiple Disabilities (MD) classroom, and this year, I am teaching 3rd-grade MD. Working with this group of students has truly become my passion. I love helping them grow academically, socially, and emotionally while celebrating every success, big or small.

What inspired you to become a teacher?

I became a teacher because I wanted to be the person I needed when I was younger. There were times in my own education when I felt unseen and misunderstood, and I promised myself that no child in my classroom would ever feel that way. Teaching in special education allows me to celebrate every child’s



unique strengths, meet them where they are, and show them that they are capable of more than they ever imagined.

What is your best or favorite teaching moment?

It's hard to choose just one, but my favorite moments are when a student accomplishes something they once thought was impossible. I'll never forget the day one of my students, who had struggled with reading all year, stood up and confidently read to the class. The look of pride on that student's face and the cheers from classmates was a reminder that growth doesn't always happen overnight, but when it does, it's worth every effort. Those are the moments that stay with you.

Motivational quote:

"In every student, there is a spark. A good teacher turns it into a flame" -Unknown

"Our Educator of the Year, Mrs. Amanda Fenderson, embodies the very best of teaching. She leads with purpose and integrity, believing that true inclusion means every child belongs. Through data-driven instruction, strong relationships with students and families, and commitment to equity, she turns challenges into opportunities for growth. Her impact extends beyond her classroom, strengthening our school climate, uplifting colleagues, and making sure every student feels valued and capable of success." – Michelle Conway, Principal, Parkway Elementary School

Tyler Moses – Parkway Elementary School Education Specialist of the Year

What is your educational background?

I started my Education career at Mercer County Community College. I then changed direction and attended school online. University of Phoenix is a great online program for anyone who works at a school and needs the flexibility. I am currently in their Early Childhood Education program.

How many years have you worked for the district? How many years have you worked at the school you are currently working at, and what is your position?

I have been working in the district for four years. I currently work at Parkway Elementary School, and it is year four for me.

What inspired you to become a teacher/education specialist?

Growing up, I always wanted to be a big brother and a great role model for younger children. When I attended Fisher Middle School, I had a science teacher who was not only a great educator but also created an environment that was fun and engaging. That's when I realized that I wanted to be an Educator. The students enjoyed themselves, and I wanted to have that same effect on students. So, I say to that teacher, thank you very much.





What is your best or favorite teaching moment?

Starting this year in Kindergarten, and having the opportunity and experience to teach them vital and necessary skills to succeed. That is such a great feeling, and I'm just getting started.

Do you have a motivational quote?

"No Stress! No Mess!"

“With strong management skills and an even stronger heart, our Educational Service Professional of the Year, Mr. Tyler Moses, builds meaningful relationships by listening to students. He demonstrates a passion for working with our youngest learners, meeting them with patience, creativity, and care. Whether he is teaching, offering support, or walking through the halls with a song to share, he brings joy and connection to every interaction, making students feel seen.” – *Michelle Conway, Principal, Parkway Elementary School*

“A good teacher can inspire hope, ignite the imagination, and instill a love of learning.” - Brad Henry