

For Immediate Release:
August 21, 2026

For media inquiries only, contact:
Haley Lacuesta
Director of Media and Public Relations
(706) 951-2674

Five finalists named for 2027 Richmond County School System Teacher of the Year

(AUGUSTA, GA.) — Five Richmond County School System (RCSS) teachers received a surprise during the school day on Thursday, Aug. 20, when they were named finalists for the 2027 Teacher of the Year award. Superintendent Dr. Malinda Cobb, 2026 RCSS Teacher of the Year Chef Kaneshia Roberts and members of the Teacher of the Year planning committee visited each school to make the announcements.

The 2027 RCSS Teacher of the Year finalists are Debra Crockett of the Performance Learning Center, Dr. Lt. Col. Kurt Barry of T.W. Josey Comprehensive High School, Thomas Gonzales of Richmond County Technical Career Magnet School (RCTCM), Courtney Lawrence of Cross Creek Comprehensive High School and Tameika Stokeling of Freedom Park K-8 School.

"Each of these finalists represents the extraordinary talent, experience and heart our educators bring to their classrooms every day," said Superintendent Dr. Malinda Cobb. "Their paths to teaching may look different, but they share a commitment to helping students recognize their potential, discover new opportunities and succeed. We are proud to celebrate them and the impact they are making across our school system."

Debra Crockett teaches social studies at the Performance Learning Center and has 29 years of teaching experience, including 27 years with RCSS. Crockett previously taught at Jamestown Elementary School and spent 19 years at Hephzibah High School before joining the Performance Learning Center. Throughout her career, she has served in several leadership roles, including social studies department chair, Multi-Tiered System of Supports lead and new teacher mentor. She earned her undergraduate degree from Augusta University and has completed advanced graduate coursework at several universities.

Dr. Lt. Col. Kurt Barry is the senior aerospace science instructor for the Air Force Junior ROTC program at T.W. Josey Comprehensive High School. Barry has 13 years of teaching experience, all with RCSS, and serves as the AFJROTC department chair and a member of the school leadership team. Under his leadership, graduating AFJROTC seniors have

maintained a 100% graduation rate, and the program has earned three Outstanding Organization Awards and two Distinguished Unit Awards. Barry holds degrees from San Jose State University, Georgia College & State University and Liberty University.

Thomas Gonzales teaches STEM electronics, energy and power, and foundations of secure information systems at RCTCM. A retired U.S. Army first sergeant, Gonzales has five years of teaching experience, all with RCSS. He began his career teaching fifth grade and computer science at Meadowbrook Elementary School before transitioning to RCTCM. Outside of the classroom he is an assistant coach of the cross country and track and field teams and serves as a Chick-fil-A Leadership Academy advisor, student mentor and CTAE outreach educator. Gonzales holds degrees in technical studies, information technology and cybersecurity from Excelsior University and teaching certifications in engineering and technology, computer science, and cybersecurity.

Courtney Lawrence is an interrelated special education teacher at Cross Creek Comprehensive High School with eight years of teaching experience. A Cross Creek alumna, Lawrence began her teaching career at Lucy C. Laney Comprehensive High School in 2018, where she later served as special education department chair, before returning to her alma mater as an educator in 2024. Lawrence also serves as Cross Creek's cheerleading coach and is an active member of several community organizations including Ronald McDonald House Charities. She holds degrees from Paine College, Armstrong Atlantic State University, and Grand Canyon University.

Tameika Stokeling is an Augment Early Intervention Program teacher at Freedom Park K-8 School with 10 years of teaching experience, all with RCSS. She began her career as a kindergarten teacher at Freedom Park before spending five years teaching first grade at Diamond Lakes Elementary School and returning to Freedom Park in 2023. Stokeling now provides targeted literacy and math interventions and has served on her school's leadership team and as a first-grade chair. She holds three degrees from Augusta University and is pursuing a Doctor of Education at Brenau University.

All school-level Teachers of the Year for the Richmond County School System will be honored at the annual Teacher of the Year Banquet on Thursday, Oct. 15 at the Augusta Marriott Convention Center, where the 2027 Richmond County School System Teacher of the Year will be announced.

###

MEDIA ADVISORY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS



Media Note: Photos courtesy of the Richmond County School System.



Pictured: Dr. Lt. Col. Kurt Barry



Pictured: Tameika Sterling

864 Broad Street, Augusta, GA 30901
rcboe.org

MISSION STATEMENT:
Empowering Every Learner Every Day.

VISION STATEMENT:
To prepare every student to thrive, adapt,
and lead in an ever-changing world.

MEDIA ADVISORY

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS



Pictured: Debra Crockett



Pictured: Thomas Gonzalez



Pictured: Courtney Lawrence

864 Broad Street, Augusta, GA 30901
rcboe.org

MISSION STATEMENT:
Empowering Every Learner Every Day.

VISION STATEMENT:
To prepare every student to thrive, adapt,
and lead in an ever-changing world.