



OKLAHOMA TEACHER *of the* YEAR



2025 Finalist

Melissa Lytle

Special Ed Teacher

Grades 4-6

K-12 Special Ed Coach

Bixby North Intermediate

Bixby Public Schools



My Aunt Meg was a significant inspiration for my career as a special education teacher. Born with Down syndrome, she was the heart of our family and gave the world's best hugs. I have the privilege of teaching the bravest and funniest students while collaborating with incredible families. My goal is for every student to leave my classroom with greater confidence in themselves and their abilities. I am passionate about discovering what motivates each student and finding the key to making concepts click for them. I have been fortunate to serve as a Bixby Spartan for the entirety of my 27-year career, and it has been a gift to grow alongside a district filled with dedicated educators. One of my favorite quotes is from Temple Grandin: "The world needs all kinds of minds." My message to my students is this: The world needs YOU. Don't waste time trying to be like someone else—be the best version of yourself and use your kind words to lift up those around you.





OKLAHOMA TEACHER *of the* YEAR



2025 Finalist

G. Bruce Riggs
High School Biomedical Sciences
Grades 10-12

Claremore High School
Claremore Public Schools



As a young man in the United States Air Force (USAF), I never imagined Oklahoma's Troops to Teachers program would lead me to teach high school Biomedical Science years later. Initially, I served in the USAF and then pursued a career in healthcare technologies. These experiences shaped how I work with students today. I strive to create an engaging, inclusive, and supportive classroom environment that empowers students to become knowledgeable future scientists, healthcare professionals, and compassionate ethical leaders prepared to impact Oklahoma for generations.





OKLAHOMA TEACHER *of the* YEAR



2025 Finalist

Melissa Evon

Family and Consumer Sciences -
Principles of Human Services
Hospitality and Tourism
Interpersonal Studies Teacher
Grades 9-12

Elgin High School
Elgin Public Schools



Teaching is a profession where the most extraordinary moments occur in the unexpected connections, the collaborative discoveries, and the triumphs of students realizing their own potential. Each day, as I step into my Family and Consumer Sciences classroom, I'm grateful for the opportunity to be a part of my students' learning journeys. I see my role as similar to that of a silversmith, patiently refining, uncovering potential, and revealing the brilliance within each student. I believe in the lasting impact of acts of kindness and in fostering an environment where these bright young minds can thrive and discover their unique strengths.





OKLAHOMA TEACHER *of the* YEAR



2025 Finalist

Shelly Austin

English Language Arts Teacher
Grade 9

Cushing High School
Cushing Public Schools



I view teaching as a platform to nurture and equip the next generation as they embark on life's roller coaster. Our job is to get to know our students and then to meet them where they are. When we show that we truly care about them, they will care more about what we have to say. It is then that they will allow us to come alongside as their perseverance is fortified. The best part of this job is cheering them on as they make it to the end of the ride.





OKLAHOMA TEACHER *of the* YEAR



2025 Finalist

Shaunda Usry

Pre Kindergarten

**Robert E Lee Early Childhood Center
Durant Independent School District**



I really do have the best job in education, I get paid to find new ways for children to play while they learn! Laughter is said to be the best medicine and goodness do we laugh in Pre-K. How can I not find my job rewarding when four-year-olds tell me what they really think! Being positive, building relationships, growing my village and constantly learning allows me to be the best teacher to my Littles! Teaching is worth every tear, every hard day, every smile, and every a-ha moment! I adore creating magic to instill a love of learning in my students!





OKLAHOMA TEACHER *of the* YEAR



2025 Finalist

Stacey Barker
Grade 1

**Merritt Elementary
Merritt Public Schools**



Teaching is truly in my DNA. Growing up I was surrounded by well-respected educators in my own family. Those influential women helped me to realize at a very young age that I wanted to be an educator as well. I have achieved many of my goals throughout my career because someone mentored me and gave me the tools to become an effective teacher during my first years in the classroom. I am honored to now be considered as a mentor to other teachers.





OKLAHOMA TEACHER *of the* YEAR



2025 Finalist

Paula Caudill

Grade 5

**Collinsville Upper Elementary School
Collinsville Public Schools**



All glory and honor belong to my Lord and Savior. I wholeheartedly believe that we are all products of His workmanship, fearfully and wonderfully made. My prayer is that my students realize they matter and were created for a purpose, regardless of their status or situation. They know I don't give up on them, and if they work hard, we will find a way to make them successful. With guidance and encouragement, these precious souls can change the world. They have also been fearfully and wonderfully made, created for a purpose, and God gets all the glory.



OKLAHOMA TEACHER *of the* YEAR



2025 Finalist

Chrystal Reis

Grade 5

LW Westfall Elementary School
Choctaw-Nicoma Park Public Schools



In a 1969 Special Edition Life Magazine article, Neil Armstrong said, 'Learning is the salvation of the human race, and sloth by far is its greatest peril.' As a teacher, it is my belief that learning is a continuous, never-ending journey and to embrace that ideal requires a person to accept never being satisfied with 'good enough'. To be the best educator my students deserve, it requires me to constantly seek out opportunities to learn and evolve so that I can help foster a love for all learning, especially in the rapidly advancing world of science and math. This passion drives me to hopefully inspire my students and fellow educators by encouraging them to view challenges as opportunities and sparking a lifelong curiosity about the world around them.





OKLAHOMA TEACHER *of the* YEAR



2025 Finalist

Jennifer Meyer

Grade 1

**Grove Elementary School
Grove Public Schools**



Teaching is my passion! I love teaching my students and learning from other outstanding educators in Oklahoma. The most impactful teachers see the best in their students and set high attainable goals, make meaningful connections, and teach in a way all students can learn. My favorite days are when students learn new concepts and grow in confidence. As a lifelong learner, I try to make every day count and add a little sparkle to lessons to make them stick with my students for the rest of their life. Seeing former students succeed is its own reward and I can't wait to see how they all change the world!





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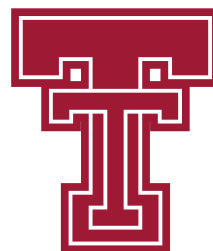


2025 Finalist

Lauren Draper

English Language Arts
Grades 7-8

Tuttle Middle School
Tuttle Public Schools



Teaching is a calling. It is not just a job but a deeply personal and meaningful career. I chose this career in the third grade; however, I know the path to becoming a teacher looks different for everyone. As a career educator, I have a duty to my colleagues and those new to the profession to be a resource and a positive influence. I am a lifelong learner who relies on my colleagues to collaborate with me while, at the same time, I strive to pour into those around me who need the help and guidance I was once shown. We must invest in public education and our profession because public education improves when we unite and advocate collectively.

