

The 2023 North Carolina Finalists for the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching Announcement



The Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST) are the highest honors bestowed by the United States government specifically for K–12 science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and/or computer science teaching. Awardees serve as models for their colleagues, inspiration to their communities, and leaders in the improvement of STEM education. Since 1983, more than 4,800 teachers have been recognized for their contributions to STEM education. Up to 108 teachers are recognized each year.

The following teachers are being named as the 2023 North Carolina Finalists for the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.

In the area of Mathematics



Austin James

Millbrook High School
Wake County Public Schools

Current role: Math teacher (Precalculus, AP Statistics)

Years of Education Experience: 15

Education: BS / Mathematics Education / North Carolina State University / 2007

BS / Political Science / North Carolina State University / 2007

M.Ed. / Mathematics Education / Wake Forest University / 2008

Lesson focus of the application: An introduction to confidence intervals and the beginning of inferential statistics.

Austin (left) is pictured with Brian Saunders, principal, receiving finalists' letter.

Leigha Jordan

Valley Springs Middle School
Buncombe County Schools

Current role: 8th grade math and NC Math 1 teacher

Years of Education Experience: 18

Education: BS / Elementary Education / University of North Carolina at Greensboro / 2002

Lesson focus of the application: Exploration of equations with infinite or no solutions, analyze structure, and create conjectures.

Leigha (middle) receiving the finalists' letter from Principal William Thrasher, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Jennifer Reed, Math Specialist Stefanie Hill, and Director of Secondary Education Tonya Robinson



Shannon Patton

Davie County High School
Davie County Schools

Current Role: Math Teacher (NC Math 1 STEM and NC Math 2 Honors STEM)

Years of Education Experience: 24

Education: BS / Middle Grades Math and Science / NC State University / 1998

BS / Secondary Mathematics / NC State University / 1998

M.Ed. / Secondary Mathematics Education / University of Georgia / 2001

Ed.S. / Secondary Mathematics Education / University of Georgia / 2002

Lesson focus of the application: Representations of arithmetic sequences as a lead into linear functions.

Shannon (left) is pictured with Michael Pruitt, principal.



In the area of Science

Brandon Dillman

White Oak High School
Onslow County Schools

Current role: Science teacher (Earth and Environmental Science, AP Environmental Science)

Years of Education Experience: 14

Education: BS / Biology / Central Michigan University / 2006

Lesson focus of the application: The health of honeybee colonies in relation to invasive species, eco-tolerance, and resource availability.

Principal Joycelyn Cassidy surprising Brandon with the award letter.



Kristy Ontko

Flat Rock Middle School
Henderson County Public Schools

Current role: 8th grade science

Years of Education Experience: 22

Education: BA/ Zoology / Miami University / 2000

BS/ Secondary Education, Biological Science / Miami University / 2000

Lesson focus of the application: Chemical changes result in the formation of new substances and a transfer of energy.



Sara-Elizabeth Senseney

Mountain Heritage High School
Yancey County Schools

Current role: Science teacher (Biology and AP Biology) and Instructional Coach

Years of Education Experience: 12

Education: BA / Biology / UNC Chapel Hill / 2010

MS / Biological Sciences / Clemson University / 2017

Lesson focus of the application: Temperature, pH, substrate concentration, and enzyme concentration affect reaction rates.

Sara-Elizabeth (right) with Principal Daron Williams after the surprise announcement.



The applications of the 2023 North Carolina Finalists have been sent to the national selection committee, under the direction of the National Science Foundation. The national selection committee will choose up to two awardees, typically selecting one awardee in mathematics and one awardee in science.

The next application cycle will open next school year for K - 6 science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and computer science teachers. For more information about the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching, please visit <https://paemst.nsf.gov>.



Presidential Awards for Excellence
in Mathematics and Science Teaching

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