

# The 2024 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 5,200 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 2024 North Carolina Finalists for the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.

## In the area of Mathematics



### Brock Elgin

Coulwood STEM Academy  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

**Current role:** 6<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher

**Years of Education Experience:** 10

**Education:** BS / Special Education / University of North Carolina at Charlotte / 2013

**Lesson focus of the application:** Zero pairs - conceptualizing positives/negatives, negating.

### Krista Ricks

Beverly Woods Elementary  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

**Current role:** 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher

**Years of Education Experience:** 24

**Education:** BS / Elementary Education / Catawba College / 1999

MA / Educational Administration / University of Georgia / 2004

**Lesson focus of the application:** Exploring unit fractions and their relationship to the whole by creating visual models.



### Katharina Smith

South Academy of International Languages  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

**Current Role:** 5<sup>th</sup> grade German Immersion teacher

**Years of Education Experience:** 21

**Education:** BA / Elementary Education / University of North Carolina at Charlotte / 2003

**Lesson focus of the application:** Creating equivalent fractions using manipulatives to solve fraction addition problems.

*Katharina (left) receiving the awards letter from Dr. David Lynn, principal in the classroom.*

## In the area of Science

### Courtney Eller

Mountain View Elementary School  
Ashe County Schools

**Current role:** Elementary STEM Innovator

**Years of Education Experience:** 19

**Education:** BS / Elementary Education / Appalachian State University / 2004

MA / Reading Education / Appalachian State University / 2005

**Lesson focus of the application:** Exploring the concept that gravity pulls objects to the ground.

*Courtney (left) surprised by Superintendent Dr. Eisa Cox with the award letter.*



### Jean Pelezo

Vanstory Hills Elementary School  
Cumberland County Schools

**Current role:** Elementary STEM Lab teacher

**Years of Education Experience:** 35

**Education:** BA / Education / University of Texas El Paso / 1988

MA / Education / University of Texas El Paso / 1992

**Lesson focus of the application:** Heat transfer with a focus on radiation energy.

*Jean (center) receiving the award letter from Principal Rebecca McAlister (left) and Assistant Principal Carleen Evans (right).*

### Rebecca Walker

District 7 Elementary School  
Cumberland County Schools

**Current role:** 5<sup>th</sup> grade science, social studies, and ELA teacher

**Years of Education Experience:** 21

**Education:** BA / Elementary Education / John Carroll University / 2001

MA / Elementary Education / University of Phoenix / 2008

**Lesson focus of the application:** To design and build an insulator to review the different heat properties.

*Rebecca (right) presented with the award letter at a school assembly by Principal Dr. Kamal Watkin (left).*



The applications of the 2024 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 7 - 12 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

Rewarding & Inspiring Great Teaching Since 1983