

2026-27 Tennessee Teacher of the Year

Eligibility and Application Guidelines

The Tennessee Teacher of the Year (TOY) program recognizes and honors outstanding teachers in Tennessee. We applaud teachers who devote their professional lives to enriching the lives of Tennessee children. The goals of the program are to:

- Promote effective teaching practices by recognizing and rewarding outstanding teachers.
- Encourage participation by every school in the state so that all Tennessee teachers may be recognized and rewarded.
- Build a network of local and state corporate sponsors.
- Provide a network for teachers to share effective practices.
- Encourage a sense of professionalism in teaching.
- Encourage greater participation in building strong community-school partnerships.

Eligibility

A Tennessee Teacher of the Year candidate must:

- Be a full-time, certified, in good standing, pre-K–12 teacher in a state-accredited Tennessee public school at each stage of the recognition process (local, regional, grand division, state, and national levels).
- Spend the majority of the school day in direct instruction to students.
- Have a minimum of three years of experience as a teacher in Tennessee public schools.
- Have a track record of exceptional gains in student achievement.

Teachers of the Year at all levels must:

- Be a facilitator of learning, skilled in implementing research-based and creative teaching strategies.
- Show evidence of positive teacher effect over time related to student achievement through formal and informal documentation.
- Be able to explain, discuss, and defend a personal philosophy of teaching.
- Have a broad understanding and current trends and issues in education.
- Be poised, articulate, enthusiastic, and energetic.
- Be exceptionally dedicated to the teaching profession
- Have a superior ability to instill in students a love of learning.
- Be recognized as leaders in the community as well as in the school.
- Show active involvement and leadership in professional development and extra-curricular activities.
- Have the respect and admiration of students, parents, and colleagues.

Part I Application Guidelines

District-level finalists must complete the part I application to progress to the region-level selection process. Applicants should complete the online application form by **11:59 p.m. CST on Feb. 9, 2026**.

Below is a summary of the application components and guidelines for completing each section. Criteria used to score each section is also noted.

Basic Information

Complete this section in its entirety. Information denoted with an asterisk is **not required**. Please check for accuracy prior to submission. This section is not scored for content.

Response Questions

Review the response questions listed and submit your responses in the spaces provided on the online form.

Spell check and other word processing features are not available in the online application.

Applicants are encouraged to use a word processing application to draft written responses, then copy and paste the text into the online application. Please limit your answers to the number of words requested in each question. In order to provide all applicants with an equal opportunity, only the number of words requested will be considered.

This section will be scored based on the degree to which each response:

- adheres to standard grammar, spelling, and punctuation conventions;
- answers the question clearly and concisely; and
- provides a compelling narrative that speaks to the applicant's ability to serve as the Tennessee Teacher of the Year.

Supporting Documentation

Supporting documentation is permitted to provide additional evidence for references made in the extended responses. Some examples of supporting documentation include student work, teacher effectiveness data, lesson plans, parent or community communications materials, etc. Please ensure all supporting documentation adheres to school and/or district's privacy policies (i.e. media releases).

Supporting documentation is completely optional and choosing not to submit supporting documentation will not penalize the applicant in any way.

If the applicant chooses to submit supporting documentation, documentation is limited to **3 pages** maximum for the part I application. Any documentation over this maximum will not be provided to reviewers. In **Part I**, photos may NOT include any identifying information either for the applicant

themselves or the applicant's school.

To submit supporting documentation, upload one single PDF file in the space provided on the online form. It is important to ensure that all supporting documentation is clear and legible to facilitate a smooth review process. To meet this requirement:

- **Font Size:** Ensure that the font size used in any textual documentation is at least 10 points or larger. Smaller fonts can be difficult to read, especially in printed documents.
- **Image Clarity:** When including images, photos, or scans, make sure they are of high quality and resolution. Blurry or pixelated images can make it difficult for reviewers to interpret the content.
- **Image Placement:** Avoid overcrowding a page with too many images. Limit the number of images on one page to no more than three. Properly space and arrange images for clarity.
- **File Format:** Supporting Documents must be in PDF format.
- **Contrast and Readability:** Ensure there is sufficient contrast between text and background colors to make text easily readable. Avoid using light text on a light background or dark text on a dark background.
- **Margins and Spacing:** Maintain adequate margins and spacing between text and images to avoid clutter. This can improve overall document readability.
- **Organized Layout:** Arrange your documentation in a logical and organized manner.

These guidelines ensure that all supporting documentation is clear, legible, and well-organized, making it easier for reviewers to assess and understand the content.

The online application submission deadline is 11:59 p.m. CT on Feb. 9, 2026. Applications received after the deadline will be considered ineligible.

Tennessee Teacher of the Year 2026-27 Application – Part I

Basic Information

Applicant Information	
Applicant Name:	
Home Address:	
Work Email Address:	Personal Email Address:
Mobile Phone:	TN Educator License Number:
Active License Type:	Active License Expiration Date:
Active Endorsement Area(s):	
Professional Association Memberships:	
Years of Experience in Present Position:	
Years of Total Teaching Experience:	
Years of Experience in TN Public Schools:	

School Information	
School Name:	Principal:
School Address:	
School Phone:	
Grade Level and Subject (currently teaching):	
School Profile (circle one):	Rural Urban Suburban
School Size (# of students):	

District Information	
District:	Director of Schools:
District Address:	
District Size (# of students):	
CORE Region:	

Response Questions

Respond to the questions below. Be sure to include evidence when required.

1. How do you know that your students are successful in your content area specialty as a result of your instruction? Include evidence, such as data, stories, or anecdotes, to support your response. *Do not exceed 500 words.*
2. Describe a project or initiative you helped create which contributed to the improvement of overall school culture. What was your role, and what is the status of this project today? Please include evidence of student impact in your response. *Do not exceed 500 words.*
3. How do you ensure that education transcends the classroom? Describe specific ways in which you deliberately connect your students with the community. How do you collaborate with others (e.g. colleagues, students, families) in this work? Please include evidence of student impact. *Do not exceed 500 words.*

Supporting Documentation

Supporting documentation is **optional**. You will **not** be penalized for choosing not to upload supporting documentation. If you choose to submit supporting documentation, documentation is limited to **3 pages maximum**. Any documentation over this maximum will not be provided to reviewers.