



## Nomination Process

Join the Illinois State Board of Education in recognizing the incredible work happening in and around Illinois schools and celebrating the exemplary educators who go above and beyond to make positive impacts in their school communities.

*Please see our eligibility guidelines for teachers and other educators.*

### Professional Categories

- **Teachers** - Teachers with five or more years of teaching experience (including the current school year)
- **Early Career Educators** - Teachers with less than five years of experience (including the current school year)
- **Administrators** - Superintendent, principal, assistant principal, etc.
- **Student Support Personnel** - School nurse, psychologist, social worker, school counselor, speech/language therapist, dean, librarian, instructional coaches, etc.
- **Educational Service Personnel** - Aides/paraprofessionals, cafeteria workers, custodians, administrative assistants, support professionals, bus drivers, resource officers, etc.
- **Community Volunteers** - Parent teacher association members, school board members, or any individuals not employed by the school/district, who positively contribute time and energy to their school/district

### Application Components

- **Candidate info**
- **Three scored categories**
  - Professional Biography and Resume
  - Letters of Recommendation
    - 1 letter from a colleague
    - 1 letter from a director supervisor
    - 1 letter from a student or family (only required for candidates applying for Teacher of the Year Cohort)
  - Essay Responses
    - 1 essay response from all applicants
    - 2 additional essay responses (only for candidates applying for Teacher of the Year Cohort)

### Nominate an outstanding colleague today!

Nominations are accepted in both the fall and the spring for Those Who Excel (TWE) & Teacher of the Year (TOY); however, nominations must be submitted by **October 1** for consideration in the 2026 award cycle. Candidates **must be nominated** before being invited to apply for an award.

Nominations for the 2026 TWE & TOY are due by **October 1, 2025**. Qualified nominees will be sent the application materials, which must be submitted by **November 15, 2025**.

See all important dates and access the nomination form at [isbe.net/TWETOY](https://isbe.net/TWETOY).

## Illinois Teacher of the Year Cohort

## Regional Teachers of the Year

- ## Specialized Teachers of the Year

- ### *Those Who Excel Awards*

Educators presented with the **Award of Meritorious Service** have gone above and beyond in service to their school communities. They are experienced educators who take on leadership opportunities and whose accomplishments uplift the culture of learning in their school. They stand as exemplars of their profession and have become integral members of their schools and districts.

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## Eligibility

Each section of the application -- biography and resume, letters of recommendation, essay response(s) -- is reviewed and evaluated for the following six key competencies. To qualify for Those Who Excel and Teacher of the Year awards, the candidate:

- Is an experienced educator and expert in their field.
- Is committed to equity and guides students of all backgrounds and abilities to achieve excellence.
- Collaborates with colleagues, students, and families to create a school culture of respect and success
- Deliberately connects the classroom and community to impact student growth and learning.
- Demonstrates leadership and innovation in and outside of the classroom walls that embodies lifelong learning.
- Expresses themselves in an engaging and professional way.

In addition to the above requirements, the Teacher of the Year also:

- Is currently employed as a full-time classroom teacher in an Illinois school.
- Intends to remain employed in current role for the following two academic years.
- Has as a minimum of five years of teaching experience (including current year).
- Has not been named to Teacher of the Year Cohort in the last five years.
- Must be willing and able to fulfill the Illinois Teacher of the Year duties throughout the year-long, paid sabbatical.
- Has verification of school district consent to participate in the year-long sabbatical during the following school year.

## Projected Timeline

*(Timeline is approximate and subject to change.)*

- Nominations may be submitted year round, but should be submitted by **October 1, 2025** for consideration in 2026 award cycle.
- **August 27, 2025:** Informational Webinar
- **October 1, 2025:** Nominations due
- **October 15, 2025:** Applications sent out to qualified nominees
- **November 15, 2025:** Applications close
- **December 2025:** Applications reviewed and scored
- **Late February 2026:** All awardees announced
- **March 2026:** Teacher of the Year Cohort Reception and finalist interviews
- **March 2026:** Spring nomination period begins
- **April 2026:** Illinois Teacher of the Year announced
- **May 2026:** 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual Those Who Excel & Teacher of the Year Banquet
- **July 1, 2026 - June 30, 2027:** State-funded sabbatical for 2026 Teacher of the Year



Scan to nominate  
an outstanding  
Illinois educator!