



## Indiana Department of Education

Dr. Katie Jenner, Secretary of Education

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**INDIANAPOLIS** --The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) today announced that Jason Beer of Southwest Allen County Schools, Tara Cocanower of Bluffton-Harrison Metropolitan School District and Joshua DeBard of Lebanon Community Schools are the top three finalists for Indiana Teacher of the Year.

“This year’s top three Teacher of the Year finalists serve as incredible examples of the hard work and dedication students benefit from in classrooms throughout Indiana every day,” said Dr. Katie Jenner, Indiana Secretary of Education. “Great teachers change lives, and we are thankful that these educators are leading the way in their communities to ensure our students have the knowledge and skills needed to enjoy lifelong success.”

Indiana’s top three Teacher of the Year finalists are:

**Jason Beer** is an English teacher at Homestead High School in Fort Wayne. A Fort Wayne native, Beer has been teaching for 14 years after beginning his career as a Teach for America corps member in 2008. In addition to teaching English, Beer is the Poetry Out Loud lead teacher for his school, where he actively works to help his students learn to love poetry and build public speaking skills. Beer has taught a wide variety of classes during his seven years at Homestead, ranging from Advanced Placement (AP) and honors English to credit recovery English courses, helping students cross the finish line to graduation. Beer is currently teaching travel writing and novel and screenwriting.

**Tara Cocanower** is a world history and AP U.S. history teacher at Bluffton High School in Bluffton. Now in her 11th year of teaching, Cocanower’s students achieved an 85% pass rate on the 2022 AP U.S. History exam, where the state average is 45%. Having served two years in the Peace Corps, Cocanower believes in living a life of service inside and outside of the classroom. She provides opportunities for her students, who she regularly refers to as “world changers,” to actively serve in their community.

**Joshua DeBard** is a social studies teacher at Lebanon High School in Lebanon. Beginning his teaching career in 2015, DeBard is in his eighth year of teaching. DeBard spends his days inspiring students to learn about U.S history, while also finding time to be the varsity



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defensive coordinator for the football program at Lebanon High. DeBard strives to help raise the next generation of leaders prepared for the challenges of the future by encouraging his students to be creative, independent learners.

The Indiana Teacher of the Year, who will be announced in October, will work to help elevate the teaching profession in Indiana, as well as represent Hoosier teachers at the national level.

For over 60 years, the [Indiana Teacher of the Year Program](#) has worked to inspire, rejuvenate, and celebrate the teaching profession by recognizing outstanding teachers from across the state. The program encourages schools to nominate their local Teachers of the Year for this statewide honor. Finalists are selected from these applicants by a committee made up of former Teachers of the Year, IDOE staff, educational organization leaders, business and community leaders and representatives from higher education.

Photos of each teacher are available to download [here](#). More information about the Indiana Teacher of the Year program is available [here](#).