



*Supporting stakeholders in preparing all learners for tomorrow's opportunities*

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## ***PRESS RELEASE***

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### **Castleberry, Aledo ISD Teachers Named Regional Teachers of the Year**

(White Settlement, TX). A Castleberry ISD elementary teacher and an Aledo ISD secondary teacher have been selected to represent the North Texas region in this year's state Teacher of the Year competition hosted by the Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA). Ms. Brandy Kaminski, a fifth-grade Science teacher at AV Cato Elementary School in Castleberry ISD, and Elisha Woodson, a freshman biology teacher at Aledo High School in Aledo ISD, were named the 2024 Region 11 Teachers of the Year during a special awards ceremony on August 6, 2024. The event, hosted by the Education Service Center Region 11 and generously funded by the EECU credit union, recognizes all of the teachers of the year from school districts in the north Texas region. The Teacher of the Year Program, sponsored by the Texas Association of School Administrators, allows districts to submit one elementary and one secondary candidate to compete at the regional and state levels. Ninety teachers, representing 46 school districts in Region 11, participated in this year's competition.

District winners who competed for the regional award were required to submit their resumes describing their educational history and professional development. In addition, they were asked to write their own professional biography as well as five essays detailing:

- a defining lesson they have developed,
- a special project or initiative they have participated in that creates school culture,
- an example of how they connect students to the community,
- how they have grown as a leader and learner as a result of being an advocate, and
- their message/platform should they be selected as the National Teacher of the Year.

The regional selection panel, comprised of teachers, past regional winners, central office staff, and a superintendent from school districts within Region 11, reviewed and scored all of the essays before selecting Kaminski and Woodson as the regional winners. In addition to the two regional winners, ten teachers (five elementary candidates and five secondary candidates) were recognized as finalists due to their exceptional essay submissions.

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## **Brandy Kaminski**

Brandy Kaminski has been an educator for four years, serving the Castleberry ISD since 2020. She graduated from Western Governors University in 2020, with a bachelor's degree in General Education. She went on to earn a Masters of Science in Curriculum instruction in 2022. Mrs. Kaminski is currently pursuing a Doctorate of Education from the American College of Education with an estimated completion in 2025. Prior to joining the teaching staff at Castleberry ISD, she served as an instructional paraprofessional in Burleson ISD since 2012.

In 2024, Mrs. Kaminski was honored to be named the Castleberry Independent School District Elementary Teacher of the Year. Kaminski's teaching philosophy centers around building strong relationships with both students and parents, creating a safe and inclusive classroom environment. She is known for her hands-on, project-based learning activities that engage students in critical thinking and scientific exploration. Her whole-student approach ensures that all learners feel valued and empowered to succeed.

One of her standout initiatives is the "Ecosystems Unit," which embodies her teaching philosophy. Kaminski emphasizes inquiry-based learning, hands-on exploration, and the use of multimedia resources to accommodate diverse learning styles. This unit encourages students to investigate different ecosystems, fostering their curiosity, critical thinking skills, and scientific inquiry abilities.

Mrs. Kaminski's commitment to inclusivity is evident in her differentiated instruction strategies, which cater to students' varying abilities and backgrounds. She provides a range of assignments and projects, allowing students to express their interests and strengths, thus taking ownership of their learning.

Her passion for creating a sense of community extends beyond the classroom. Through the "Cultivating Community: Lions GO Green – A Community Garden Project," Kaminski has fostered a sense of belonging, collaboration, and environmental stewardship among students. This project not only teaches students about the environment but also helps them understand the importance of community and responsibility.

The judges were highly impressed with Kaminski's work, describing her lessons as strong and differentiated. They praised her submissions as well-written and thorough, noting the great impact of her efforts. The judges collectively agreed that her work was well done, encouraging, and a testament to her dedication to education.

Brandy Kaminski's dedication to education, her innovative teaching methods, and her commitment to her students and the community make her a truly deserving recipient of the Teacher of the Year award. Her work inspires her colleagues and sets a high standard for excellence in education.

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## **Elisha Woodson**

Elisha Woodson has been an educator for 14 years, serving the Aledo ISD since 2018. Ms. Woodson earned her Master of Science in Instructional Technology from Western Governors University in 2019 and a Bachelor of Arts in Science from the same institution in 2013. Ms. Woodson has taught 9th-grade biology and Pre-Advanced Placement biology at Aledo High School since 2018. Prior to joining the teaching staff at Aledo ISD, Ms. Woodson served as a classroom teacher and coach in Maypearl ISD and Lake Worth ISD. Her innovative teaching methods and commitment to student engagement have earned her numerous accolades, including the Marva Collins Teaching Excellence Award in 2024.

In 2024, Ms. Woodson was honored to be named the Aledo Independent School District Secondary Teacher of the Year. Through hands-on activities like logical puzzles and performance assessments, Ms. Woodson ensures that all students, regardless of background or ability, can connect with and understand the material. In addition to her innovative classroom practices, Ms. Woodson initiated two significant projects that have had a lasting impact on the school culture: the use of phenomenon-based learning and the "Positive Impact Project." These initiatives have fostered a sense of curiosity, ownership, and community among students, promoting an inclusive and supportive environment.

Ms. Woodson's advocacy extends beyond the classroom through her sponsorship of the Speak Up Speak Out (SUSO) program, guiding students to compete at the state level and achieve notable successes. Her efforts to connect classroom learning with real-world issues have empowered students to become active, engaged members of their community. "We are so incredibly proud of Ms. Woodson being named the Region 11 Secondary Teacher of the Year," Aledo ISD Superintendent Dr. Susan Bohn said. "She is so kid-focused in all that she does - in how she teaches her students to mastery, how she empowers them to help other students, and how she's committed to her students having authentic experiences. Ms. Woodson doesn't hesitate to provide extra time, support and intervention to make sure her students really learn the material she's teaching. We are fortunate that she's helping us grow greatness in Aledo ISD each and every day!"

Reflecting on her journey, Woodson credits her growth to continuous professional development and the adoption of student-centered teaching approaches. Her commitment to lifelong learning and her ability to adapt and innovate has made a profound impact on her students' academic and personal growth.

Judges for the Teacher of the Year award praised Ms. Woodson for her student-led inquiry and explorations, highlighting her ability to prioritize engagement and relevance in her teaching. They were particularly impressed with her Positive Impact Project, which fosters a supportive classroom culture, and her sponsorship of the Speak Up, Speak Out program, which empowers students to engage in civic issues. Furthermore, the judges commended her proactive approach in addressing campus-wide failure concerns, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed.

Elisha Woodson's recognition as Teacher of the Year is a testament to her dedication, passion, and innovative spirit. Her contributions to education serve as an inspiration to her colleagues and a beacon of excellence for the entire community.

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Kaminski and Woodson will now compete at the state level for the Texas Teacher of the Year award. The Texas Association of School Administrators' selection committee will meet to review the applications of the 40 regional winners and then name three elementary teachers and three secondary teachers as state semifinalists in the competition on September 4. These six semifinalists will then participate in an interview with the selection committee on October 24. The elementary and secondary state winners will be announced on October 25.

The ten essay finalist award winners recognized at the ceremony are:

**Defining Lesson/Unit Essay**

Elementary – Jennifer Rogers, Lewisville ISD

Secondary – Holli Grant, Lake Worth ISD

**Project/Initiative Essay**

Elementary – Dr. ZseTaun Washington, Mansfield ISD

Secondary – Tiel Jenkins, Weatherford ISD

**Connecting Students to the Community Essay**

Elementary – Tia Gourrier Fuentes, HEB ISD

Secondary – Derrick Corbett, Alvarado ISD

**Growing through Advocacy Essay**

Elementary – Hattie Roberts, Joshua ISD

Secondary – Danielle Carey, Stephenville ISD

**National Teacher of the Year Platform Essay**

Elementary – Tonya Martin, Weatherford ISD

Secondary – Thomasine Dearing, Mansfield ISD

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