

Rawlings Elementary teacher named Florida finalist for Presidential math and science award

Cynthia Tennell, a fifth-grade teacher at Rawlings Elementary School, has been named a Florida finalist for the prestigious Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST).

The awards, established in 1983, are the highest honored given by the federal government for K-12 STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) teaching. Each year, 110 teachers nationwide are chosen from among the finalists to receive the award, which includes \$10,000 from the National Science Foundation, an all-expenses paid trip to the recognition ceremony and a certificated signed by the President of the United States.



Tennell is one of just six finalists from the state of Florida. She was nominated in 2023 by her then-principal Laura Creamer. She was required to submit an extensive application that, according to the PAEMST website, provides “evidence of deep content knowledge, exemplary pedagogical skills, student assessment expertise, reflective teaching and leadership that results in improved student learning.”

All applications were then reviewed by a state selection committee made up of mathematicians, scientists, education researchers and others, who selected the finalists.

“While I have an amazing opportunity to represent our state, I’m also honored to represent our school district and Rawlings Elementary,” said Tennell. “I always wanted to represent Rawlings in some capacity, but I never thought it would be at this level or magnitude.”

Tennell has been teaching since 2006. She currently teaches 5th grade math and science at Rawlings Elementary School, where she’s been a member of the faculty since 2013.

Her current principal, Dr. Stella Arduser, says Tennell has been recognized by state officials for her excellent teaching and the progress she makes with students. She’s been classified as a “Highly Effective’ teacher based on her students’ test scores.

“Her lessons are full of energy, and she consistently finds ways to capture the attention of every student through her instructional delivery,” said Arduser.

“No matter the race of a child, or the level of income their family has, the amount of pain, trauma, fears or challenges they’ve been through, they deserve the opportunity to grow, develop, explore and learn,” said Tennell.

Later this spring, a national selection committee will review the applications of the finalists, including Tennell. A date for announcing the award winners has not yet been announced.

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