



Arkansas Department of Education

Johnny Key, Commissioner

Transforming Arkansas to lead the nation in student-focused education

November 3, 2016

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Van Buren Teacher Named 2017 Arkansas Teacher of the Year

LITTLE ROCK — Courtney Cochran, a Spanish teacher in the Van Buren School District, was named the 2017 Arkansas Teacher of the Year today during a surprise event at her school.

Cochran, who just began her 11th year of teaching, was named one of four State Semi-Finalists Sept. 28 at a ceremony at the Capitol. After site visits, which included interviews and classroom observations at each of the four State Semi-Finalists' schools, Cochran was selected as the 2017 ATOY. She is now eligible for the National Teacher of the Year honor, which will be announced in the spring.

"I am pleased to congratulate Ms. Courtney Cochran on being named the 2017 Arkansas Teacher of the Year," Gov. Asa Hutchinson said. "Her expertise, professionalism, and selfless service to her school and community have set Ms. Cochran apart as one of Arkansas' finest. As governor, I am proud of our state's educators who work hard to provide our students the best education in order to prepare them for the brightest future, and I am honored to applaud Ms. Courtney Cochran for so greatly influencing her community through her classroom."

"Ms. Cochran demonstrates teaching qualities that exemplify excellence in education," Arkansas Department of Education Commissioner Johnny Key said. "From her innovative practices in the classroom to her commitment to her students and community, Ms. Cochran is an exceptional teacher and deserving of this honor. I congratulate her and the Van Buren School District for their efforts to transform Arkansas to lead the nation in student-focused education."

Cochran has taught Spanish since 2008 at Van Buren High School, where she teaches six levels of Spanish, began the Pre-AP Spanish program, and wrote district curriculum for Spanish Heritage Learners I and II courses. She implemented the Organic World Language program at Van Buren High School.

Prior to teaching at the high school, Cochran taught for two years at the Van Buren Freshman Academy. At the academy, she piloted the ninth-grade Spanish program for the district and identified the need for more rigorous upper-level foreign language classes. As a result of the pilot, the district's

world language enrollment numbers increased by 150 students.

During the spring semester of 2006, Cochran also served as an English as a Second Language aide for the Benton School District, where she worked in two separate elementary schools.

In addition to providing numerous professional development trainings for teachers, Cochran serves as secretary of the Alpha Rho Chapter of the Delta Kappa Gamma Society International and was named director of the Arkansas Foreign Language Teachers Association District III. In 2013, Cochran established the Octavio Paz Chapter of the Sociedad Honoraria Hispánica, the national Spanish honor society. She served during the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years as the high school parent involvement facilitator and has been a mentor to new teachers. Cochran is a National Board Certified Teacher, a certified AP Spanish Language and Culture instructor, and a member of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese.

Cochran is actively involved in her community, where she taught a free summer Spanish camp at the local public library in July for English language learners, has taught free adult Spanish classes at the high school and is currently teaching free elementary Spanish lessons at the library. For three years she has packed “first night bags” for the local emergency children’s shelter. She also has been a registered Girl Scout volunteer, organized fundraisers and other activities to support needy families in the Van Buren community, and provided translation services for migrant families in her school district.

She has received numerous honors and grants, including being named a Van Buren School District Top 40 Teacher for five years. In the fall of 2015, the high school art students named Cochran one of five VBHS Best Teachers.

Cochran received a Bachelor of Science in Spanish with a minor in Secondary Education from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. She spent a summer studying abroad at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla in Puebla, Mexico. She is currently pursuing a Master of Science in Education in Educational Leadership from Arkansas State University at Jonesboro, with a projected graduation date of May 2017. She currently has a 4.00 grade point average.

As one of 14 Regional Finalists, Cochran received a \$1,000 award on behalf of the Walton Family Foundation, a long-time supporter of the ATOY program. As a result of continued support from the foundation, she received an additional \$14,000 award today.

Cochran will begin her one-year tenure as the Arkansas Teacher of the Year on July 1, 2017. Arkansas law provides the ATOY a year of paid administrative leave for professional development purposes. She also will serve as a non-voting member of the Arkansas State Board of Education during her tenure.

The selection process for the 2018 Arkansas Teacher of the Year will begin in the spring. For more information about the ATOY program, go to <http://www.arkansased.gov/divisions/communications/teacher-of-the-year>.

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