



Arkansas Department of Education

Division of Elementary and Secondary Education

Jacob Oliva, Secretary

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Benton Educator Named 2026 Arkansas Teacher of the Year

BENTON – Stephanie Williams, a music teacher at Mountain View Elementary School in the Benton School District, was named the 2026 Arkansas Teacher of the Year today. Williams was surprised during a schoolwide assembly when Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders and Arkansas Department of Education Secretary Jacob Oliva made the announcement.

“Behind every successful student is an exceptional teacher who goes above and beyond in the classroom - and this year’s Arkansas Teacher of the Year, Stephanie Williams, is a great example of that ideal,” said Governor Sanders. “She doesn’t just want her students to succeed; she strives to make learning fun and expand their curiosity, so they never stop growing. Arkansas is better because of educators like her who put our students first. Congratulations, Stephanie!”

“We are excited to have Ms. Williams represent Arkansas as our 2026 Teacher of the Year,” said Oliva. “It is clear her creativity and ingenuity create an environment where her students thrive. While she teaches music, she weaves in problem-solving skills and concepts that help students build real-world connections. She is proven to be a high-caliber educator and will make a great ambassador for education in our state.”

Williams has been in education for 16 years, teaching music at both elementary and secondary levels. She began as a middle school band director, but transitioned to her current role as an elementary music teacher in 2023. She is known for designing cross-curricular lessons, integrating subjects like science and social studies into the arts. Her intentional use of music as an intervention tool ensures students receive extra support while having fun. Williams’ instructional methods are shaped by her academic background, including a bachelor’s degree in music education from Arkansas Tech University and master’s degree in special education from Arkansas State University.

Beyond the classroom, Williams strives to enhance student experiences through community engagement. Most notably, she leads the annual S.T.E.A.M. night for families at Mountain View Elementary, creating opportunities for students to incorporate technology into the arts. Students in Williams’ classes also have many opportunities to perform for their community, which she uses to teach etiquette, memorization, collaboration, and public speaking.

Williams is a Master Professional Educator, having earned her National Board Certification. She has presented for the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), the Arkansas School Band and Orchestra Association (ASBOA), the Arkansas Bandmaster Association (ABA), and other educational forums. She was also published in the Arkansas Music Education Association Journal.

She was named 2025 Teacher of the Year for the Benton School District and is a member of the Arkansas Music Education Association (ArkMEA), NAfME, ASBOA, and ABA. When she's not teaching, Williams is a piano player at her church, a blog creator, and a website developer for her school.

Prior to being selected as the ATOY, Williams was named an ATOY Top 15 Finalist, receiving a \$1,000 prize, and an ATOY State Semi-Finalist, which included an additional \$1,000. Today she received an additional \$14,000 award sponsored by the Walton Family Foundation and is eligible to apply for the National Teacher of the Year program. She will also receive the Dr. Mary B. Gunter Arkansas Teacher of the Year Scholarship from Arkansas Tech University.

Williams' one-year tenure as ATOY will begin on July 1, 2026, during which time she will travel the state promoting the teaching profession and serving as a non-voting member on the State Board of Education.

To learn more about the ATOY program, visit <https://dese.link/ATOY>.

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