

**ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF**  
**Education** 

**NEWS RELEASE**

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**ARKANSAS' TEACHER OF THE YEAR NAMED NATIONAL FINALIST**

Justin Minkel of Springdale, Arkansas' 2007 Teacher of the Year, was named as one of four finalists for the 57<sup>th</sup> National Teacher of the Year Award, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in Washington, D.C., announced today. Minkel teaches second grade at Harvey Jones Elementary School in Springdale.

"This is incredibly exciting news, but, honestly, it comes as no surprise," said Dr. Ken James, Arkansas Commissioner of Education. "Justin is an outstanding young man who brings exceptional skills, talent and compassion to his classroom, so it is no wonder that he stood out among a national group of peers. He will do the state proud in this competition, and I wish him the best."

Minkel is in his third year of teaching at Harvey Jones Elementary, where 93 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunches and 85 percent are minority. Previously, he taught at an elementary school in Harlem. Originally from Fayetteville, he holds a bachelor's degree from Cornell University in New York and a master's degree from the University of California at Berkeley.

"When I began teaching it struck me partway through the year that the debate among biologists between 'nature' and 'nurture' was incomplete," Minkel wrote in his national application. "Each child in my classroom had something kindled within them that could not be attributed to either their home environment or to genetics. I still do not know whether to call that essential quality 'soul,' 'spirit' or to

leave it unnamed, but I believe everything we do as teachers should honor that individual light within each child.”

Minkel was named Arkansas Teacher of the Year in December 2006 during a ceremony at the State Capitol.

The three other national finalists are Joshua M. Anderson, a high school speech, debate and language arts teacher in Olathe, Kansas; Tamra A. Tiong, a special education teacher for kindergarten through second grade in Dulce, New Mexico; and Andrea Peterson, an elementary school music teacher in Granite Falls, Washington.

A panel of educators, representing the 15 largest national education organizations, chose the finalists from the 2007 teachers of the year representing the U.S. states, four U.S. territories, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Education Activity and will select the National Teacher of the Year. Recognition by President George W. Bush of the national honoree and the state representatives will take place in Washington, D.C., during the week of April 23, 2007.

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***The Arkansas Department of Education strives to ensure that all children in the state have access to a quality education by providing educators, administrators and staff with leadership, resources and training.***