



NEWS RELEASE

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RUSSELLVILLE EDUCATOR NAMED ARKANSAS TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Paul T. Gray Jr. of Russellville was named the 2008 Teacher of the Year in a ceremony today at the State Capitol in Little Rock. Governor Mike Beebe and Education Commissioner Ken James presented Gray, a social studies teacher and department chairman at Russellville High School, with \$15,000 in addition to other prizes. Gray also will represent Arkansas in the national Teacher of the Year competition in Washington, D.C., this spring.

"Dedicated, innovative teachers are the backbone of our schools. Mr. Gray epitomizes the qualities that we should demand in all of our teachers," Governor Beebe said. "His ability to inspire students to reach levels of achievement they had not dreamed possible makes him very deserving of the 2008 Teacher of the Year Award."

Twelve teachers made it to the final stage of the state competition, with three being named runners-up:

- First runner-up Jennifer Ouzts, a second-grade teacher at Meadow Park Elementary School in North Little Rock.
- Second runner-up Darby Wallace, a United States History teacher at Newport High School.
- Third runner-up Sandra Eddleman, a first-grade teacher at Oak Grove Elementary School in Paragould.

The other eight finalists were

- Willie Andranette Anderson-Blackwell, a science teacher for seventh through 12th grades at First Ward Alternative School in Pine Bluff.

- Cindy Chadwick, a high school mathematics teacher at Valley View Public High School in Jonesboro.
- Shawna DeShea Gregory, a seventh- and eighth-grade language arts teacher at Mountain Pine High School.
- Christine Holzer, a fourth-grade teacher at Langston Aerospace and Environmental Studies Magnet School in Hot Springs.
- Tamra Lambert, an eighth-grade history teacher at Bryant Middle School.
- Clarissa M. Mays, a high school marketing education and internship teacher at Arkadelphia High School.
- Barbara Reng, a fifth-grade science teacher at Jonesboro Math and Science Magnet at Philadelphia Elementary School in Jonesboro.
- Stacie Thompson, a ninth and 12th grade English teacher at Hall University Studies High School in Little Rock.

All were recognized at today's ceremony, with the eleven finalists receiving \$1,000. The cash prizes were made possible through a grant from the Walton Family Foundation.

"All of these teachers are very deserving of this honor," said Dr. Ken James, Arkansas Commissioner of Education. "These individuals represent the best of the best, of course, but they also exemplify the quality work and the strong dedication that benefits students in classrooms across the state on a daily basis. That is why it is so important that we as a state take a few moments each year to honor the leaders of this profession."

Gray will be Arkansas' second Teacher of the Year to assume a more active role as prescribed by legislation passed during the special session of the 85th General Assembly. During the 2008-2009 school year, he will take a year's sabbatical from the Russellville School District to work in-residence at the Arkansas Department of Education. He will spend the year providing professional development and technical assistance to teachers around the state as well as serving as a non-voting member of the State Board of Education.

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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.