



2020
Indiana Teacher of the Year
Top - Ten Finalists

Amanda Dillon, Carmel Clay Schools

Ms. Dillon is a kindergarten teacher at Prairie Trace Elementary. This year will mark her 28th year as a Carmel educator. She received her bachelor's degree from Purdue University in elementary education and master's from Indiana Wesleyan in curriculum and instruction. In addition to teaching, she serves on her school leadership team, school improvement team, Boot Camp co-chair, supervises student and cadet teachers, and is the kindergarten team leader. She has received an IPALCO Golden Apple Award, the Outstanding Professional Award from Indiana Wesleyan, and is a graduate of the CIESC Teacher Leadership Academy. She is honored to represent her district and grateful for this opportunity to be an ambassador for teachers.



B.A. – Purdue University
M.Ed. – Indiana Wesleyan University



Linda Gomes, MSD of Wayne Township

Ms. Gomes has taught music to students ranging from pre-kindergarten to University level for 38 years. She received her Bachelor's in Music Education from Eastern Nazarene College, and her Master's in Music Education from Central Connecticut State University. Gomes is an accomplished musician; she has performed as a first violinist in symphony orchestras, and was the concertmaster at Central Connecticut State. Ms. Gomes is the recipient of several teaching awards such as: Who's Who Among American Teachers, Outstanding Teacher Award, Hartford Public High School Teacher of the Year Nominee, and Senior's Choice Awards. Ms. Gomes is the published author of "Wise Sayings My Mother Taught Me," a mentor to her students, teaches music, and also teaches values in her classroom.



B.S. – Eastern Nazarene College
M.Ed. – Central Connecticut State
University



Maria Kussy, Hamilton Southeastern School Corporation

Ms. Kussy is the teacher-librarian serving preschool through fourth grade at Brooks School Elementary. She has been in education for 19 years, with the last two years as the teacher-librarian. She strives to build relationships with all students and colleagues through literacy, collaboration, and inquiry. Her goal is to build instructional partnerships with educators to develop learning opportunities of critical thinking, information literacy, creativity, and innovation. At the same time, she empowers learners to create using digital tools, and to develop into responsive readers. Her passion includes bringing stories to life, getting children excited about reading and writing in all its forms, and working towards equity and inclusivity. She is married to Michael Kussy, is a mother to five handsome boys, and is a foster mother.



B.A. – Marian University



Annie Lorek, Crown Point School Corporation

Ms. Lorek is a ninth-grade English teacher at Crown Point High School. Ms. Lorek serves as the School Improvement chairperson and leader of the English 9 PLC. She has had the honor of providing professional development within the corporation in the areas of curriculum development and relationship building. Ms. Lorek strives to provide her students with a skills-based educational experience in a strong learning community which focuses on fostering positive and meaningful relationships. Ms. Lorek lives in Crown Point with her husband Branden and their three young sons, Eli, Jonah, and Isaac.



B.A. – Saint Joseph’s College
M.Ed. – Indiana Wesleyan University



Jim McFall, Brown County Schools

Mr. McFall is a teacher of biomedical science at Brown County High School. He has been an instructor at Brown County Schools for the past 16 years, spending the majority of that time teaching junior high school and coaching athletics. He recently established the biomedical science program at BCHS through attending PLTW trainings, designing a 21st Century lab space, and working to oversee the implementation of the program. Mr. McFall earned his Bachelor's in Education from Indiana University and Master's from Indiana Wesleyan University. He enjoys connecting students who are interested in biomedical careers with experiences and opportunity to explore those professions. When not in the classroom, he enjoys running and traveling with his wife and three children.



B.S. – Indiana University

M.Ed. – Indiana Wesleyan University



Jeanie Mitchell, Penn-Harris-Madison School Corporation

Ms. Mitchell has taught French at Penn High School for 11 years. She was recently named Freshman Academy Leader and she has worked to create a Tier 3 RtI program to pair up at-risk freshman students with staff. Through her French classes, she brings the world to her students providing learning based projects in her classroom, and field trips to Chicago and France. Ms. Mitchell frequently leads staff professional development on topics such as technology, literacy strategies, social media strategies, and effective parent communication. Ms. Mitchell and her husband Ryan have a son and daughter.



B.A. – St. Mary’s College
M.Ed. – Bethel College



Katie Pourcho, Danville Community School Corporation

Ms. Pourcho is an imaginative, animated, and inspiring educator who infuses her experience as a professional artist into her classroom. Ms. Pourcho is a recipient of the 2016 Lilly Endowment, LLC. Teacher Creativity Fellowship, and a graduate of Ball State University Honors College. She teaches art to K-2 students at Danville North Elementary School.



B.A. – Ball State University



Christopher Roberts, Fort Wayne Community Schools

Mr. Roberts was born and raised in Fort Wayne. Mr. Roberts had two supportive parents as in Mike and Barb, as well as two brothers and a sister. His family has been in the field of education including coaching, guidance, and teaching. He began his educational career at his Grandma Helen's preschool - "Ding Dong School". He began his career as the instructor of Concrete, Masonry, and Cabinetmaking. Mr. Roberts earned a bachelor's degree from IPFW. He is involved with the SkillsUSA chapter in which he has coached 11 state champions and the fundraising for the new HVAC program. Mr. Roberts has been married to his loving and supportive wife Tarrah for 12 years and is the father of four beautiful daughters; Ella, Allison, Isabelle, and Emilie.



B.A. – IPFW University



Deborah Thomas, Mt. Vernon Community School Corporation

Ms. Thomas earned a Bachelor's Degree in Secondary History Education from Purdue University, a Master's Degree in Education from Butler University, and her Certification in English at IUPUI. She has taught seventh-grade social studies and language arts at Mt. Vernon Middle School since 1990. Ms. Thomas is a seventh-grade team leader, co-chair for the grade incentive program, and co-sponsor of the geography bee. She coaches the Social Studies Junior Academic Super Bowl team, and for 14 years in a row, the social studies teams earned a State Top Ten Award and two state championships. Ms. Thomas is passionate about providing educational opportunities for those inside and outside her classroom. She is the president of the Chapter EN Philanthropic Educational Organization which provides educational opportunities for women.



B.A. – Purdue University
M.Ed. – Butler University



Lauri Vitale, Tippecanoe School Corporation

Ms. Vitale is a graduate of Purdue University with a Bachelor's in Elementary Education. She has taught fifth grade at Klondike Elementary for seven years and has also taught fifth grade inclusion classroom. She is a corporation leader in STEM education. Ms. Vitale is an elementary science chair for the corporation, commissioned Klondike STEM committee, and partnered with Purdue University and the SLED program as a master teacher. She was selected by the Hoosier Association of Science Teachers, Inc. as the 2019 recipient of the Cheryl Cowan Memorial Award for Elementary Science Teaching and by the Discovery Educator Network to attend their DEN Summer Institute. Ms. Vitale works with St. Thomas Aquinas Haiti Ministry, has traveled to Haiti six times, and has completed trips to serve as an English instructor. She currently lives in West Lafayette with her husband, Gabe.



B.A. – Purdue University

