



STATE OF NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Somerset County Educator Named 2024-2025 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year

Trenton, NJ – The New Jersey Department of Education today announced that Stefanie Lachenauer, a civics and mindfulness teacher at Montgomery Upper Middle School in the Montgomery Township School District, has been named the 2024-2025 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year.

Stefanie, who earned her master’s degree from Rutgers University, has been teaching and pioneering innovative curricula in the Montgomery Township School District for more than 18 years. Her work has fostered socially conscious learners and has positively affected the health and well-being of both students and staff in the school district. For instance, her Skills for Success course, which is personalized to each student, has integrated a brief mindfulness lesson in each class where students learn about neuroscience and how to self-regulate.

“In New Jersey, we have made it a priority to uplift our students academically, but we know supporting our children means more than ensuring they have access to a best-in-the-nation public education – it means giving them a strong foundation of social and emotional supports that will help them thrive throughout their lives,” **said Governor Phil Murphy**. “Stefanie Lachenauer is the kind of educator who cares for the whole student, from their academic growth to their emotional well-being. The lessons she has imparted to her students have set them up for lifelong success.”

“One of the driving forces in the strength of New Jersey’s public school system is the quality of our educator workforce, and Stefanie Lachenauer exemplifies the kind of success and innovation that we see occurring in schools throughout the state,” **said Kevin Dehmer, Acting Commissioner of Education**. “When teachers like Stefanie make an impact on so many people, it serves as an inspiration to students and fellow educators. She is an outstanding example of the kind of positive change a great teacher can bring about.”

“On behalf of the State Board of Education, I extend congratulations to Stefanie Lachenauer for being named New Jersey State Teacher of the Year,” **said Kathy Goldenberg, President of the State Board of Education**. “We know that middle school grades can be a critical time in students’ lives and their learning development, and Stefanie strives to not only educate, but to inspire and nurture the students in her school to carry the torch for mental health and wellness leadership. Moreover, her work also provides support to the emotional wellness of her contemporaries. The staff and students of the Montgomery Township School District are all extremely fortunate to have Stefanie on their team.”

“I was one of those kids who always knew that I was called to be a teacher,” **said Stefanie Lachenauer** in her application, which described how she started an academic summer camp in her backyard at age 12. “As I traveled through middle school and high school, my passion for the type of educator I wanted to become grew. I continued to struggle with stress and often felt hindered by outside pressures to be social, academic, well rounded, and perfect. School was very difficult for me. I earned good grades, but many days were an internal struggle. I knew that I wanted to be the teacher who understands that students are more than their studies; the teacher who not only sees the strength, power, and magic in each student, but also makes them feel seen, valued, and connected.”

Beyond the classroom, Stefanie serves as Co-chair of her school's Compassionate Care Team, District Wellness Champion, leading professional development for her colleagues on trauma-informed approaches for teaching and restorative practices for classroom management. She serves as the Title I Family Engagement Coordinator, and hundreds of students have learned stress-relief strategies in the Reflections Club that she created.

Noticing a significant change in student stress, Stefanie became a certified yoga and mindfulness instructor and integrated her skills into courses, creating a full mindfulness curriculum that all students take at Montgomery Upper Middle School. She continues to organize the school's Cougar CARE Days by providing students with healthy coping strategies and executive functioning skills.

"Always seeking opportunities to better serve our students, Stefanie Lachenauer was instrumental in the creation, curriculum writing, and instructional delivery of the courses Active Citizenship and Global Leadership. These courses integrate Social Studies standards with SEL standards and challenge students on how they see the world," **said Mary E. McLoughlin, Superintendent, Montgomery Township School District.** "Stefanie has also initiated curricular and extracurricular service-learning opportunities for students ranging from volunteering at the local food pantry to building homes for families in Central America. In addition to assisting students, Stefanie positively affects the health and well-being of all staff throughout MTSD as a Wellness Champion co-chair."

"Ms. Lachenauer is an extraordinary educator at Montgomery Upper Middle School. Her unwavering commitment to the well-being and development of students and staff sets her apart as a beacon of inspiration," **said Raquel Estremera-Rivera, Principal Montgomery Upper Middle School.** "Beyond the classroom, Ms. Lachenauer has expanded students' horizons by championing extracurricular travel opportunities, enriching their educational experiences."

In her role as State Teacher of the Year, Stefanie will work with the New Jersey Department of Education and give presentations to colleagues and stakeholders around the state, speak with aspiring teachers, and visit classrooms to advance the teaching profession. She will also take part in national conferences with other State Teachers of the Year. Additional information can be found on the [Governor's Educator of the Year webpage](#).



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