

# 2025 TAA Teacher HEROES



January.....	Becky Bryant
February .....	Kelly Orr
March .....	Rebecca Williams
April .....	Kelli Hytinen
May .....	Shauna Mason
June .....	Kathy McMillan

**Scroll on to read about each Teacher Hero!**



**Becky Bryant** - *January Teacher Hero*  
Visual Art Teacher  
Athens Middle School  
Athens, Tennessee  
*Principal: Mike Simmons*  
*Director of Schools: Joe Barnett*  
*Nominator: Mike Simmons*

Becky Bryant brings to Athens City Middle School a strong passion and appreciation for visual art, which gives her students the opportunity to make amazing connections for success. She believes, as Pablo Picasso did, that every child is an artist, and that the arts provide a valuable foundation for learning about core subjects, cooperation, and experiencing success in life. She has involved her students in many great projects, including the Let's Read 20 Bus, creating lettering and murals for the school, and adopting a senior citizen at Morning Point residence. On several occasions, she has brought visiting artists to the school and community, which have resulted in creating a mobile for the Athens Art Center and a metal sculpture garden for the school. She encourages students to participate in art competitions and to help design and fabricate sets for local productions to help them experience a sense of accomplishment.

*"Becky has served our art community for a long time. She is a lifetime lover of art, recalling a Christmas memory when she received a set of paints and a drawing pad. She was heavily influenced by her high school art teacher Mrs. Chattin who taught her to have a positive approach to everything in life. During her time at Athens City Middle School, she has served as a mentor teacher as well as the Related Arts Team Leader. She is a valuable asset to the Performing Arts Department as well, designing and building the sets for four productions, as well as contributing to productions at The Arts Center here in Athens. She is the model for hard work and work ethic."*

Joshua Bragg, Music/Theatre, Athens City Middle School



## **Kelly Orr - February Teacher Hero**

Visual Art Teacher

Tullahoma High School

Tullahoma, Tennessee

*Principal: Dr. Greg English*

*Superintendent: Dr. Catherine Stephens*

*Nominator: Sarah McVey*

Kelly Orr exemplifies excellence in fine arts education. More than 30% of her school's population is enrolled in visual arts, media arts, or visual arts work-based learning programs—a testament to her unwavering support and commitment to providing diverse learning opportunities. Her students consistently showcase their work in local and regional art exhibitions. She organizes field trips to expose her students to quality art at local, state, and even international levels. Most recently, in collaboration with a Spanish teacher, Kelly led a trip to the Dominican Republic, where students immersed themselves in the country's rich cultural and artistic traditions. Kelly is deeply committed to making art accessible to all students, believing there is always space at the table for anyone interested in visual or digital arts. She meets her students where they are, nurtures their skills, and provides them with opportunities to grow and thrive. Beyond her classroom, Kelly is a leader within both the school and local arts communities, advocating for her students and serving as a strong voice for Tullahoma City Schools.

*“Kelly Orr is my hero and such a blessing because she is committed to giving all her art students a voice. She embodies all the qualities of an exceptional art teacher and leader by going above and beyond for her students, parents, and colleagues at Tullahoma City Schools.”*

Kathy McMillan, Colleague



**Rebecca Williams** - *March Teacher Hero*  
Theatre Teacher  
Independence High School  
Thompson's Station, Tennessee  
*Principal: Dr. Niki Patton*  
*Superintendent: Jason Golden*  
*Nominator: Savannah Aiello*

Throughout her tenure as a theatre teacher at Independence High School, Rebecca Williams has excelled in engaging the Franklin, Thompson's Station, and Spring Hill communities. Her events, such as the Character Breakfast and the 24-Hour Musical, have become beloved traditions that bring people together and showcase the talents of students. These events provide students with invaluable opportunities to develop their skills, gain confidence, and experience the joy of performing. Mrs. Williams' partnership with the BrightStone organization highlights her commitment to community service and inclusivity. By creating performance opportunities for BrightStone residents, she teaches her students the importance of using their talents to make a positive impact on others. Additionally, her work with feeder schools and the Young Actors Yearly camp has a lasting influence on young aspiring actors. The camp not only nurtures their passion for theatre but also helps them build a strong foundation for their future involvement in Independence's Theatre program. In essence, Mrs. Williams' contributions go beyond the stage. She cultivates a supportive and inspiring environment that encourages creativity, empathy, and a lifelong love for the arts.

*"Mrs. Williams' impact on Independence High School and the surrounding community is profound. Her dedication to the arts has not only enriched the school's cultural landscape but also fostered a sense of unity and collaboration among students, staff, and community members. Independence High School truly thrives because of her unwavering dedication and passion."*

Melanie Robe, Assistant Principal, Independence High School



## **Kelli Hytinen** - *April Teacher Hero*

Visual Art Teacher

Madison Academic High School

Jackson, Tennessee

*Principal: Chad Guthrie*

*Superintendent: Dr. Marlon King*

*Nominator: Christopher Taylor*

Kelli Hytinen has a positive influence on the students and staff of Madison Academic High School every day. She encourages her students' creativity and celebrates their successes. She exposes her students to a variety of art techniques, such as painting and drawing. She shows them examples of great works of art and leads students through a demonstration of the techniques being taught. She also serves as a mentor to new teachers by offering advice and by leading professional development sessions that include the importance of literacy in the art curriculum, teaching art in schools with students from low-income families. She also presents basic technique classes on watercolor and painting. Several of her former students are pursuing a career in arts education or have already become art teachers, and Kelli continues to mentor them on their journey. She received the First Year Art Educator of the Year award from the Tennessee Art Education Association for the years 2014 to 2015. When she is not teaching or mentoring, she coaches the girls' volleyball team and has led the team to regional competition twice.

*"Kelli Hytinen contributes more than teaching her classes and helping her students achieve their art goals. She also contributes to our school's culture and community through volunteering to help coordinate prom for our seniors and her input on our staff and student 'dress down days.' Mrs. Hytinen is a great asset to Madison Academic and our students."*

Chad Guthrie, Principal, Madison Academic High School





**Shauna Mason** - *May Teacher Hero*

Music Teacher

Rocky Fork Elementary School

Smyrna, Tennessee

*Principal: Scott Bolden*

*Superintendent: Dr. James Sullivan*

*Nominator: Brandon Pope*

Shauna Mason is a graduate of Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) whose approach to the classroom leaves students feeling well-loved, appreciated, and talented. Her adaptation to multiple styles of teaching leaves her with a vast repertoire, logical sequences, and an incredibly fun environment for her students. She goes above and beyond the classroom walls by leading clubs for after-school students, assembling choirs and rehearsing school-wide performances, on top of being a friendly resource and helper to her fellow colleagues.

Shauna Mason has attended the TAA Summer Institute each year since 2022, a reflection of her strong commitment to professional development and continual growth as an educator. She values opportunities to sharpen her skills and connect with peers from across the state. TAA is excited to welcome her back this summer, especially as the Institute will be held on the campus of her alma mater, MTSU!

*“Shauna is a passionate and smart educator whose care for her students is shown in so many actions and choices she makes throughout each day.”*

Alexandria Johnston, Colleague



**Kathy McMillan** - *June Teacher Hero*  
Visual Art Teacher  
West Middle School  
Tullahoma, Tennessee  
*Principal: Cindy Herrera*  
*Superintendent: Dr. Catherine Stephens*  
*Nominator: Melody Weintraub*

Kathy is a positive, enthusiastic, and passionate educator with more than twenty years of experience engaging students in innovative learning. She has been a member of the Tennessee Art Education Association (TAEA) for twenty-five years and currently serves on the board as the TAEA Middle Region Co-Chair. She received the Teacher of the Year award at the building and system level for Tullahoma City Schools in 2022. Kathy's own artwork was nationally published in the November 2020 edition of SchoolArts magazine in an article covering the Frank Juarez Gallery's online art exhibit titled, Pushing the Envelope: An Online Mail Art Exhibition. Kathy's artwork has also been exhibited and awarded in the TAEA Connections Exhibition at The Tennessee Arts Academy. Kathy has showcased her students' artwork at Tullahoma City Schools Arts Night and presented her own artwork for Tullahoma City Schools, at the Tullahoma Art Center, and regularly on social media. Her students at West Middle School created ornaments displayed in Washington, DC, on the National Christmas Tree display in 2021.

Kathy contributes to the school community with a passion for inspiring creativity and critical thinking in students. She has a proven record of improving art performance scores by 85% by revamping her curriculum to incorporate diverse art techniques and by giving students a voice.

*"Kathy McMillan is the heart and soul of West Middle School in Tullahoma. Her room is a place where no one in the building feels unwelcome or uncomfortable. When she opens the doors for Art Club, she regularly has more students apply than she has room for. Students love her energy, her teaching space, and the way she makes them all feel valued."*

Atticus Hensley, Former Fine Arts Coordinator, Tullahoma City Schools

*"As a talented, creative, and innovative Fine Arts teacher, Kathy inspires her students to explore their artistic potential, enabling them to create outstanding works of art. She continually enhances her skills in both art and teaching by sharing her insights and ideas through various platforms. Kathy is recognized for her kindness and positivity, fostering strong relationships with her students, who regard her as not only an artist and teacher but also a trusted friend."*

Cindy Herrera, Principal, West Middle School