

PA EdVentures



May's EdVentures: 2026 Teacher of the Year Finalists, Courtroom to Classroom Contests, & Advancing Education Together Summit Information

This May, PDE announced new funding increases for [CTE and apprenticeship programs](#) as well as additional funding for [PAsmart Advancing Grants for Career and Technical Education \(CTE\) grants](#), allowing more students explore all paths to success and chart their own course.

We recently relaunched the [Teach in PA website](#) to further bolster the educator workforce in the Commonwealth, providing resources that allow individuals to more easily find relevant job opportunities. Acting Secretary of Education [Dr. Carrie Rowe also launched her Substack](#) where she'll be providing her thoughts and professional expertise on all things education in Pennsylvania.

2026 Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year Finalists

2026 Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year Finalists Announced

Earlier this month, PDE announced 12 PA educators who are currently in the running to be named Pennsylvania's 2026 Teacher of the Year.

The finalists are:

- Whitney Bellomo, Dallastown Area School District, York County
- Nicole Birkbeck, Council Rock School District, Bucks County
- Katherine Blandino-Nienhuis, Pittsburgh Public School District, Allegheny County
- Renee Decker, Central York School District, York County
- Madeline Loring, Jefferson-Morgan School District, Greene County
- Jenna Love, Elizabethtown Area School District, Lancaster County

- Jennifer Nesser, Laurel Highlands School District, Fayette County
- Ashley Oldham, Big Spring School District, Cumberland County
- Andrea Rutledge, Hempfield School District, Lancaster County
- Rachel Sebastian, Governor Mifflin School District, Berks County
- Rebecca Showalter, Mount Lebanon School District, Allegheny County
- Elizabeth Troxell, Penns Valley Area School District, Centre County

Pennsylvania's 2026 Teacher of the Year will be announced at an awards ceremony in early December 2025 and will represent the Commonwealth at various local, regional, and national functions culminating in the National Teacher of the Year ceremony at the White House. To learn more, please visit the [Pennsylvania's Teacher of the Year program webpage](#).

Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness (OTDA) Student Challenge Selects Winner

This year, the Organ Donation Advisory Committee (ODAC) held its 2025 PSA Innovations Challenge, inviting students across the Commonwealth to submit a 30-90 second PSA to support organ donor education.

Students from Bedford High School (Owen Taylor, Alexander Koontz, Khale Ellingson, and Adam Fisher) were selected as the winners of this year's Innovation Challenge. The statewide winning team will be awarded \$3,000. The winning team members will receive certificates as well as their school receiving a traveling trophy and a permanent trophy engraved with the school's name. The team will also be invited to attend the Annual OTDA Spring Conference in State College on May 7, 2025.





Courtroom to Classroom Contests

Pennsylvania Courts Announce Statewide Contests for Students

Recently, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania Historical Commission launched a statewide initiative aimed at engaging students in grades K–12 through creative educational activities highlighting the importance of the judicial branch of government.

The *Courtroom to Classroom* initiative is made up of a dynamic series of contests and interactive projects that include the following:

- **Drawing Contest** (Grades K-5) – Students are invited to illustrate what justice means to them. Whether it's judges, courtrooms or symbols of justice, students are encouraged to let their imaginations soar and show what justice means to them – through art.
- **Essay Contest** – Students are invited to submit a 1-page essay responding to one of the following prompts:
 - (Grades 3-5) – Imagine you are a Justice on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. What would your day be like, and what kinds of cases might you hear?
 - (Grades 6-12) – How do decisions made by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court impact your community, school or family life?
- **Infographic Contest** (Grades 6-12) – Students can combine research and design to create an engaging infographic that explains the structure and role of the judicial branch, focusing on how it interprets laws and ensures justice.
- **Video Activity** (Grades K-12) – Students are invited to produce short videos responding to one of the following prompts:
 - *What do you think judges do?*
 - *Do you think you would make a good judge?*
 - *Why do we need judges?*
- **Flat Judge Project** (Grades K-5) – Inspired by the “Flat Stanley” concept, this activity invites students to decorate a paper judge and take it on real or imagined adventures to learn more about the courts and the work judges do.
- **Social Media Activity** (Grades 6-12) – Students are invited to create a dynamic social media campaign focused on educating their peers and the public about the judicial branch using engaging posts and/or videos.

How to Enter:

Students can participate in any of the contests by submitting their work in one of the following ways:

Online: Tag @PACourts on X or @pennsylvaniacourts on Instagram

By Email: communicationsoffice@pacourts.us

By Mail:

AOPC Communications
601 Commonwealth Avenue
Harrisburg, PA 17120

FID Application Final Notice

The deadline for FID applications for 2025-26 SY is June 1, after which PDE cannot grant extensions.

School entities cannot use an FID without an accepted application. A list of accepted applicants with effective and termination dates can be found on the [Flexible Instructional Day Program webpage](#).

If you participate in this program, the table below may help you decide whether to reapply:

Public School Entities	Effective Date	Termination Date	Do I need to reapply during the 25-26 SY FID application window to retain the program?
ABC School District	7/1/22	6/30/25	Yes -- after 6/30/25, you do not have the program. You would lose the program if you do not reapply by 6/1/25 and have your application accepted.
DEF CTC	7/1/23	6/30/26	No -- your application is still active until next year, so there is no need to reapply at this time.
GHC CS	7/1/24	6/30/27	No -- your application is still active for two more years, so there is no need to reapply at this time.

If you do not participate in this program, you still have time to complete the application, but it must be submitted by June 1. Any questions may be directed to RA-FID@pa.gov.

**NEW DRIVER
WORK ZONE SAFETY PROGRAM**

Learn how to safely
**NAVIGATE
WORK ZONES**

PENNSYLVANIA TURNPIKE | **Pennsylvania Department of Transportation**

Free Online Training for New Drivers in Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) and the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission (PA Turnpike) have joined forces to develop a New Driver Work Zone Safety Program to teach new drivers how to navigate work zones safely and confidently.

The free 35-minute online course emphasizes 'the why' behind work zone safety for drivers and for the road crews working alongside traffic.

The course covers key aspects of work zone safety, including driving practices in work zones, real-life scenarios drivers might encounter, and work zone laws.

Work zones can be hazardous for both drivers and workers, but by understanding our state's work zone laws, we can prepare Pennsylvanians to safely navigate the road ahead. To learn more and take the course today, visit the [New Driver Work Zone Safety Program webpage](#).

New Driver Work Zone Safety Program



PDE Office of Safe Schools is now the Office for School Climate and Well-Being

The Office for Safe Schools at the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) is now operating under the name Office for School Climate and Well-Being. While the name of the office is changing, the services and resources you've come to rely on will not be changing. School safety is multi-dimensional, and the new name more accurately reflects the work and expertise of staff have been doing over the past several years to engage with external partners and act as a conduit to support school entities. Our continued focus on mental health and school climate ensures that learning environments are not only *safe*, but also *healthy*.

Our Mission:

To work collaboratively with Pennsylvania school communities and stakeholders to advance efforts to develop and sustain equitable trauma-informed learning environments that promote and support the academic, physical, and psychological safety and well-being of all students and staff.

Our Vision:

To prepare all Pennsylvania school entities to provide safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments for all students and staff) remain the same.

While the name has changed, our mission and vision remain the same. Accordingly, Director Scott Kuren and his team will continue to serve in their positions to support you.

You may recall that last year, Safe Schools grants moved under the jurisdiction of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), and that process also remains unchanged. You should continue to work with PCCD for questions, concerns, or needs you have related to grant applications and awards.

Join us for the 2nd Annual Advancing Education Together Summit!

The second annual PDE Advancing Education Together Summit is sponsored by the Offices of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) and Postsecondary and Higher Education (OPHE). This summit brings together

LEA administrators and higher education deans from EPPs for a day of learning and collaboration. Held at the Harrisburg Hilton on July 10, 2025, this day will be highly collaborative and is free of charge to participants. To learn more about the sessions being offered at the Summit and to register, please visit the [Advancing Education Together Summit webpage](#).



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