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Finalists announced for 2026 Toyota Family Teacher of the Year

Educators from Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, Michigan, Rhode Island, and Texas are in the running to receive \$20,000 to support family engagement in their communities.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LOUISVILLE, KY (August 26, 2026) – The National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) is excited to announce the finalists for the 2026 Toyota Family Teacher of the Year. For 30 years, NCFL, with support from Toyota, has recognized educators from across the nation who use a strong multigenerational approach to learning and focus on building effective family-school partnerships that support student learning outcomes and school improvement.

Educators from across the country were nominated by their peers or leadership to be considered for the 2026 Toyota Family Teacher of the Year honor. Six finalists were chosen based on a variety of criteria, including the educator's demonstrated passion and persistence for supporting family engagement and the innovative ideas they've implemented to expand their programs.

The educator selected as the 2026 Toyota Family Teacher of the Year will receive a \$20,000 grant to further ongoing family engagement efforts. One runner-up will receive \$5,000. The winner and runner-up will be officially announced later this fall; both will also be recognized at the annual Families Learning Conference, happening November 8-11, 2026 in San Antonio, Texas.

2026 Toyota Family Teacher of the Year finalists:

- **Mary Cluley**, physical education teacher at Burkburnett Independent School District in **Burkburnett, Texas**
- **Holly Daugherty**, youth services librarian at McCreary County Public Library in **Whitley City, Kentucky**
- **Heather Hall**, STEM teacher at Montview Elementary School in **Huntsville, Alabama**
- **Kristen Kardos**, health teacher and supervisor of health and wellness at Nowell Leadership Academy in **Providence, Rhode Island**
- **Dr. Nisha Phillip Malahoo**, STEM teacher at Pinewood Elementary in **Orlando, Florida**
- **Richard Roe**, career technical education teacher at Lincoln High School in **Ypsilanti, Michigan**

“Programs that support teachers to introduce innovative learning initiatives into their schools and communities are essential to help our students grow,” said Colleen Casey, general manager of workforce development and sustainable development at Toyota Motor North America. “Research shows when teachers have the space to design creative and innovative programs, student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement improve significantly. By working together with NCFL, teachers and parents are better equipped to make learning accessible to more families and align with our mission of Mobility for All.”

“By celebrating the finalists selected for the 2026 Toyota Family Teacher of the Year, we’re recognizing their day-to-day contributions to improving learning outcomes for children,” says Dr. Felicia C. Smith, president & CEO of the National Center for Families Learning. “Educators who recognize the importance of the home learning environment for student success, and who work with children and families to positively influence that environment, are key to NCFL’s own mission to break cycles of poverty through family education solutions. It is our honor to lift up the accomplishments of these exceptional educators and the meaningful ways they’re working to strengthen the home/school connections that help children thrive.”

Family engagement creates a win-win-win scenario for students, families and educators: children experience higher graduation and attendance rates; families build social connections and develop an expansive perception of the important role they play in their child’s education; and educators build trust with families and learn to see parents as partners in learning in and out of the classroom. By recognizing educators with a strong commitment to family engagement, the Toyota Family Teacher of the Year award spotlights the best practices that make a difference for children and families.

Since 1997, Toyota Family Teacher of the Year winners, runners-up, and their respective organizations have received \$755,000 and funded 59 innovative teacher-led projects. For a full list of past winners, visit [NCFL’s website](#).

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About the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL)

NCFL is a national nonprofit that has worked for more than 35 years to eradicate poverty through education solutions for families. We believe education is a shared, nonpartisan responsibility and that collaboration among families, schools, and community members can lead to powerful learning experiences. NCFL’s vision is to establish coordinated and aligned family learning systems in 60 communities, built with and for families, to increase education and economic outcomes and create thriving communities. For more information on NCFL, visit familieslearning.org. To learn more about our vision or become a Family Learning Community™ partner, visit familieslearning.org/flc.

About Toyota

Toyota (NYSE:TM) has been a part of the cultural fabric in North America for nearly 70 years, and is committed to advancing sustainable, next-generation mobility through our Toyota and Lexus brands, plus our more than 1,800 dealerships.

Toyota directly employs nearly 64,000 people in North America who have contributed to the design, engineering, and assembly of over 50 million cars and trucks at our 14 manufacturing plants. In 2025, Toyota's plant in North Carolina began to assemble automotive batteries for electrified vehicles.

For more information about Toyota, visit www.ToyotaNewsroom.com.