

# Raines High teacher named Duval County's 2020 Teacher of the Year

The 2020 Florida Blue Duval County Teacher of the Year named during a ceremony Friday



**JACKSONVILLE, Fla.** – Leena Hall-Young, a 10th-grade language arts teacher at Raines High School, was named Duval County's 2020 Teacher of the Year at the 29th Annual Eddy Awards Gala on Friday night at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront.

Hall helped her students improve their reading proficiency by 29 percent and helped create professional learning communities among the teachers at Raines High. She also participated in Duval County's Innovative Educator Program.

The five finalists included [Hall-Young](#), [Michael Ham](#) (Gilbert Middle School), [Renee McNulty](#) (Jean Ribault High School), [Carol Thomas](#) (Dinsmore Elementary School) and [Leslie White](#) (Leadership Academies at Eugene J. Butler).

Area selection committees convened by Jacksonville Public Education Fund selected the finalists from the more than 180 teachers nominated by their schools for their results in the classroom and their commitment to their students.

"These teachers are outstanding educators in the classroom, helping students achieve their goals to be successful in college, career and life," said Rachael Tutwiler Fortune, president of the JPEF. "But they also stand out because they are teacher leaders, making an impact beyond their classrooms."

JPEF has built the Eddy Awards, Duval County's Teacher of the Year Awards, into a yearlong professional learning and celebration experience to help retain great teachers in public schools. Last year, 88% of teachers surveyed said they were more likely to stay in the classroom as a result of their experience through the Eddy Awards.

The selection committees are made up of teachers as well as representatives from Duval Teachers United, the Duval County Parent-Teacher Association, Duval County Public Schools and the community. The volunteer committee members reviewed the teachers' applications and observed a select group of the teachers in their classrooms to make their selection for the finalists.

## More on the 5 finalists

**TEACHER OF THE YEAR SEMI-FINALIST**  
DUVAL COUNTY

- 10th grade Language Arts
- Raines High
- Purpose is to help every child reach their full potential

**LEENA HALL**

**Leena Hall** teaches 10th-grade language arts at Raines High School in Northwest Jacksonville, where she has helped her students improve their reading proficiency by 29%. She serves as department chair, helping to create professional learning communities among the teachers at Raines, and supporting first-year teachers. She has also participated in Duval County's Innovative Educator Program.

"My sole purpose is to be a facilitator in releasing the human potential in every child."

## TEACHER OF THE YEAR SEMI-FINALIST

DUVAL COUNTY



**MICHAEL HAM**

- **6th grade Math**
- **Matthew Gilbert Middle**
- **Aims to raise expectations**
- **Wants to make sure every child knows they matter**

**Michael Ham** teaches sixth-grade math at Matthew Gilbert Middle School. His mission as a teacher is to raise expectations for his students and show them that they can achieve great things. In his first year, he taught lower-performing sixth-grade students, and started the year with frank conversations about what had allowed them to reach sixth-grade math without having mastered grade-level skills. That year, 100% of students in the lowest quartile had grown significantly. In his second year, he challenged his students to take on an advanced curriculum. As a result, the school offered a seventh-grade Algebra I class for the first time in nearly a decade. He is actively involved with the Teach for America Alumni Board and JaxPrism, an LGBTQ+ advocacy board for Teach for America and City Year alumni.

“In a world so full of negative discourse and hate-filled language, it can be easy to forget what ‘every student’ means. It’s not just the ones from backgrounds like ours or the ones that look and sound like us. It is every child who walks through our classroom doors no matter the identities, experiences, or baggage they carry in with them.”

## TEACHER OF THE YEAR SEMI-FINALIST



RENEE MCNULTY

- Jean Ribault High School
- Geometry
- She has seen double-digit gains in math proficiency in her students

**Renee McNulty** is a veteran 25-year educator who teaches geometry at Jean Ribault High School in Northwest Jacksonville. She has helped her overage students go from 0% graduation ready to 91% graduation ready, and seen double-digit gains in math proficiency with her students. She uses a multi-sensory approach to teaching with music, movement and color, and dances for joy when her students learn a new math skill. Last year, when six students were at risk of failing math and failing to graduate, she opened her home on the weekends to tutor them.

“I dare you to love your kids. If you don’t love them, you’ll do all kinds of stuff wrong. You’ll expect them to meet you at your level, instead of meeting them at theirs. You’ll be blind to their physical and emotional needs, thinking what they need is to learn what you’re teaching. You could even make the mistake of focusing more on the lesson plan on a piece of paper than on the very real people who just walked into your room.”

## TEACHER OF THE YEAR SEMI-FINALIST



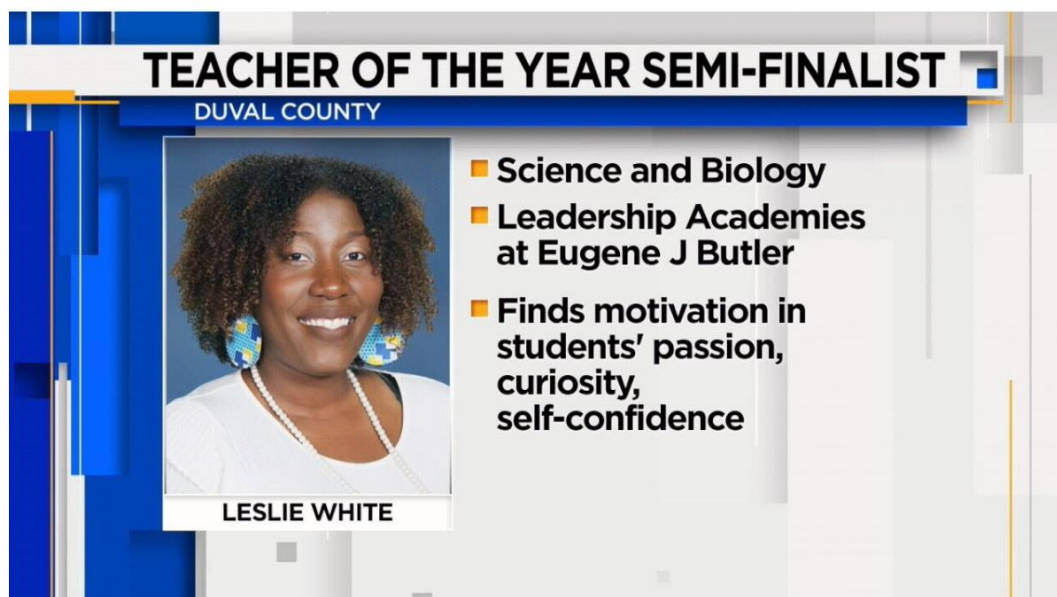
CAROL THOMAS

- Dinsmore Elementary School
- First grade
- Teaching new students to have a growth mindset

**Carol Thomas** teaches first grade at Dinsmore Elementary in Northwest Jacksonville. Over the 2018-2019 school year, her students' average scale score for math had increased 58 points and reading increased 81 points. She has served as the grade level chair for five years, bringing best practices and exchanging tips with teachers across her school. She also hosts a model classroom in her school, which allows new teachers to come observe her instructional and classroom management skills. At the district level, she helped create an instructional video that taught teachers across the district how to implement a new phonics program.

Thomas is a passionate believer in teaching her students to have a growth mindset. Her life story has been an example of this. She worked in a daycare center at minimum wage until a woman at the Jacksonville Children's Commission encouraged her to go back to school to become a teacher.

"I am an overcomer! I always teach my students that they, too, are overcomers! I lead by example and teach my students to be confident, to have a growth mindset, to love themselves, and to persevere."



**Leslie White** teaches science and biology at the Leadership Academies at Eugene J. Butler. She uses data to differentiate her instruction based on students' achievement level, allowing her to work more closely with students who need extra help. She promotes critical thinking by using the ACE strategy, which prompts her students to "answer," "cite evidence," and "expand." She also works with her students to set personal goals, which helps them not only in her class but also throughout their education.

Outside the classroom, she is the leader of her school's science department, has led a district training for eight-grade science teachers and participated in the Innovative Educator Program.

"Becoming a teacher has been the most challenging and rewarding experience in my life. On those tough days, I find motivation in my students, who inspire me daily by their passion, curiosity, and self-confidence. I am so proud of each of them, and grateful to be a part of their story."