

RECOGNIZING INSPIRING SCHOOL
EMPLOYEES (RISE) AWARD
FACT SHEET





Fact Sheet

The RISE Award Recognizing Inspiring School Employees Recognizing Achievement in Classified School Employees Act, Public Law No. 116-13

WHO: The Recognizing Inspiring School Employees (RISE) Award honors classified school employees on a national level who provide exemplary service to students¹. A classified school employee is defined as an employee of a state or any political subdivision of a state, or an employee of a nonprofit entity, who works in any grade from prekindergarten through high school in any of the following occupational specialties:

- paraprofessional,
- clerical and administrative services,
- transportation services,
- food and nutrition services,
- custodial and maintenance services,
- security services,
- health and student services,
- technical services, and skilled trades.

The U.S. Department of Education (Department) invites the governor or designated state official of each state and the chief executive of the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Outlying Areas to nominate up to two classified school employees annually. Not later than November 1 of each year, the Secretary shall solicit nominations of classified school employees from the occupational specialties described above from the Governor of each State.

Prior to May 31 of each year, the Secretary shall select one classified school employee to receive the Recognizing Inspiring School Employees (RISE) Award for the year. The Department will communicate the honoree's story to inspire other innovative practices and excellence among classified school employees. The award and recognition provided under this Act has no monetary value.

The selected honoree's state is encouraged to celebrate and honor them in a big way. Please reference the RISE celebratory video that is included here - accessible on YouTube https://youtu.be/-RGHyA7_Qxg as well as the blog from previous program year honoring the 2023 RISE Honoree Ms. Carlene Pacheco <https://blog.ed.gov/2023/04/2023-rise-awardee-announced/>. We will continue with this format as a surprise congratulatory moment moving forward for these amazing honorees – with the success of last year's first in person celebration – we look forward to continuing to expand the program and having all states nominate and shine a light on all classified employees across the nation.

WHAT: The Recognizing Inspiring School Employees (RISE) Award was created March 2019 to recognize and promote the commitment and excellence exhibited by full- or part-time classified school employees who provide exemplary service to students in prekindergarten through high school.

¹ Public Law No: 116-13



The Recognizing Achievement in Classified School Employees Act (Public Law No. 116-13), which was passed by Congress in March 2019, directs the U.S. Secretary of Education to establish a national award program recognizing the excellence exhibited by public school non-teaching employees (called paraprofessionals and school-related personnel) who provide services to public or private prekindergarten through high school students across the nation.

The act was passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in the House of Representatives and Senate and creates the first national U.S. Department of Education award of its kind.

- This year, we are excited to share the first-ever RISE Award celebratory video that is accessible on YouTube at https://youtu.be/-RGHyA7_Qxg. We are asking all states to highlight the RISE AWARD by including the video on your state website and share with your local district and school community – we encourage you to reach out to your Governor’s Office and State Education Department to help get the word out this month about the RISE AWARD - the only national program that is geared toward recognizing classified employees across the nation.

What does a RISE Honoree receive? On a national level the U.S. Department of Education will announce the honoree and present the selectee with the RISE Award prior to May 31 – once the honoree has been selected the RISE Director will be in touch with the honoree’s nominating state official to plan for the award presentation. We will recognize all classified school employees on the departments site, we encourage states to recognize their nominees on their site as well. We encourage all governors and/or designated state official to provide their nominees with a congratulatory letter. We also encourage states to include their “National Honoree” as well as other RISE selected nominees in annual professional development ie: workshops, seminars, conferences, training, cross-state, district team building, speaking engagements with state Governor and/or designated state or district official for a meet and greet are just some ways to include and honor your classified employees.

WHEN: The U.S. Secretary of Education shall solicit nominations from the governor of each state by Nov. 1 each year.

Prior to May 31 annually, the U.S. Secretary of Education shall consider the nominees and select a single classified school employee to receive the Recognizing Inspiring School Employees (RISE) Award. After the selection the Department will communicate the honoree’s story to inspire other innovative practices and excellence among classified school employees. In addition to that, there will be three finalists and all current nominees will be acknowledged at the time of the public announcement. States are encouraged to recognize and celebrate their finalists as well as all their nominees submitted in that current program year.

States are encouraged to make every effort to ensure that a diverse range of individuals, representative of the different categories of classified employees and serving distinct student populations, are considered for nomination. They are also encouraged to build upon existing state classified school employee recognition programs or to develop new ones, where they do not exist, in order to broaden recognition of classified school employees across their district.

WHY: To celebrate classified school employees as the unsung heroes—the “living infrastructure”—of America’s public schools. They engage with students on the bus and in the classrooms, cafeterias, health suites and hallways of America’s public and private schools across the nation. Their unique professional skill sets range from classroom and library assistant, school health aide, bus driver, mechanic, and school crossing guard, to cook, janitor,



school secretary, vision and hearing tester, accounting control clerk and much more. They work closely with students every day, keeping them healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged so that learning can take place. To educate the public on the important, and often invisible, educational support rendered by some of the hardest-working people in our schools – they serve in the capacity of the glue to the school. In short, to remind the school community that it takes a village to ensure student success.

HOW: States must document nominees' performance in the following areas in the Nominee Submission Form, including signatures from the applicable school, school district, and state officials.

Selection Criteria:

Nominees must demonstrate excellence in the following areas:

- (A) Work performance;
- (B) School and community involvement;
- (C) Leadership and commitment;
- (D) Local support (from co-workers, school administrators, community members, etc., who speak to the nominee's exemplary work);
- (E) Enhancement of classified school employees' image in the community and schools. They may wish to cite testimony from letters of recommendation.

Governors or their designated state official shall consider nominations submitted by the following: local educational agencies; school administrators; professional associations; labor organizations; educational service agencies; nonprofit entities; parents and students; and any other group determined appropriate by the U.S. Secretary of Education.

Ways to Honor your Nominees: All states are encouraged to recognize their finalists and runners-up, by bestowing state specific titles. Other ideas include receptions, banquets, ceremonies, virtual events; online profiles, videos, blogs, and press releases; plaques, letters, and certificates.

All states are encouraged to include their "National Honoree" as well as other RISE selected nominees in annual professional development ie: workshops, seminars, conferences, training, cross-state, district team building, speaking engagements with state Governor and/or designated state or district official for a meet and greet are just some ways to include and honor your classified employees.

Gubernatorial staff and state education agency personnel may contact RISE Award Director, Frances W. Hopkins at frances.hopkins@ed.gov with any implementation questions.