



Distinctive Schools Names Jessica Martorano 2026 Teacher of the Year

CICS Irving Park 7th and 8th grade English Language Arts teacher receives inaugural Teacher of the Year award

CHICAGO, IL, UNITED STATES, August 25, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Distinctive Schools](#), a 501(c)(3) charter school management organization serving eight Chicago International Charter Schools (CICS) throughout Chicago, awarded its inaugural 2026 Distinctive Schools Teacher of the Year Award to Jessica Martorano, 7th and 8th grade English Language Arts (ELA) teacher at [CICS Irving Park](#).

The network-wide honor recognizes educators who demonstrate exceptional instructional practice, foster joyful and inclusive classroom cultures, drive student growth, and exhibit visionary leadership within their school community. Out of more than 20 peer- and leader-nominated candidates across Distinctive Schools, Martorano was selected following a rigorous review of student achievement data, staff nominations, and family testimonials.

"Jessica Martorano brings the Distinctive Schools mission and vision to life in her classroom every day," said Mary Beck, President & CEO of Distinctive Schools. "She holds unapologetically high expectations for her students while providing the personalized support they need to be successful in ELA and in life. Year after year, her students deliver outstanding growth and proficiency, with 69% of her students achieving ELA proficiency on the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR), far outpacing state and regional averages. We are so proud to celebrate her leadership and impact."

Criteria for Teacher of the Year consideration came from five key components: Exceptional Instructional Practice, Commitment to ALL Learners, Student Experience & Classroom Culture, Reflective Practice & Growth Mindset, and Leadership & Contribution to the Adult Community. Martorano's classroom at CICS Irving Park is widely known for its high student engagement, student-led discussions, and culture of long-term ambition.

"When middle schoolers know their teacher respects their potential and refuses to let them settle, they rise to the occasion," says JW Kuebler, Principal of CICS Irving Park. "Jessica provides the steady guidance and intellectual challenge our students need to discover their own voices. She treats her students, families, and colleagues as partners, finding new and innovative ways to push everyone's thinking, no matter who they are. She has been a trusted mentor to new staff

and constantly looks for opportunities to better her own craft. We are thrilled to celebrate her in this honor."

The Teacher of the Year award was officially presented to Martorano during the annual Distinctive Schools Network Kickoff Event on Friday, August 14, 2026.

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Distinctive Schools: Distinctive Schools is a nonprofit charter school management organization for eight Chicago International Charter Schools (CICS) across Chicago, offering a unique public education experience where every student is seen, heard, and valued. We cultivate diverse, joyful, and welcoming communities rooted in social justice and rigorous learning. We embrace continuous growth, supporting every student's personal journey to success, ensuring they are prepared to thrive throughout their education, career, and life.

To learn more, visit [distinctiveschools.org](https://www.distinctiveschools.org).

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