

OUR

SOUNDTRACK TO SUCCESS:

AWARD WINNERS REVEAL THEIR GO-TO SONGS

W

hat drives an award-winning educator through their toughest days? We asked ACTE's 2025 Excellence Award winners — who were honored at ACTE's CareerTech VISION 2024 — to share the songs that fuel their passion, the student moments that keep them inspired, and how ACTE has supported their success in career and technical education (CTE). From power ballads to personal breakthroughs, these outstanding educators know the power of the right soundtrack.

“My students have shown me the power of resilience and curiosity in learning. Their ability to embrace new challenges with a growth mindset has inspired me to stay adaptable and open to evolving teaching methods.”

—Nickolas Lebo, ACTE Teacher of the Year



NICKOLAS LEBO

Teacher of the Year



CTE Business Teacher & Department Chair,
Austin ISD, Texas

RHONDA SAMPLES

Administrator of the Year



Executive Director of Career, Technical and
Agricultural Education, Hall County Schools, Georgia

JENNIFER KLINE

Postsecondary

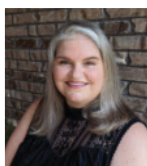
Professional of the Year



Associate Dean of Academics,
Erie County Community College, Pennsylvania

SHELLY KALER

Counseling & Career Development
Professional Award



Career Coach, Pell City High School, Alabama

WYATT GERTH

New Teacher of the Year



Creative Marketing Communications Instructor,
Tri County Tech, Oklahoma

APRIL BLACKWELL

Teacher Educator of the Year



Director of Instructional Services,
Northeast Tech, Oklahoma

TROY REICHERT

Carl D. Perkins Community
Service Award



CTE Teacher (Industrial Technology),
Guernsey-Sunrise High School, Wyoming

CINDY STOVER

Lifetime Achievement Award



Executive Director (Retired), Illinois ACTE,
Capital Area Career Center, Illinois



IF YOUR WORKDAY HAD A THEME SONG WHAT WOULD IT BE?

- **“Livin’ on a Prayer”**
by Bon Jovi
- **“One Moment in Time”**
by Whitney Houston
- **“High School Never Ends”**
by Bowling for Soup
- **“Eye of the Tiger”**  
by Survivor
- **“Don’t Stop Believin’”**
by Journey
- **“Ain’t No Mountain High Enough”** by Marvin Gaye
and Tammi Terrell
- **“Unstoppable”** by Sia
- **“Takin’ Care of Business”**
by Bachman-Turner Overdrive

A quarter for your thoughts?

Send us your own workday
theme songs for a chance to
see them featured on a playlist
at ACTE’s CareerTech VISION.
Imilgram@acteonline.org

“They rise to the occasion!” —STOVER

“Flexibility, perseverance, grace and a hunger to learn and achieve.” —BLACKWELL

“I’ve seen how students thrive when they’re treated as emerging young professionals. They remind us that feedback goes both ways and passion drives performance. When students are allowed to choose pathways that align to their interests and future goals, their engagement and success will soar. These young adults are our future!”

—SAMPLES

WHAT HAVE YOUR STUDENTS TAUGHT YOU THIS YEAR?

“My students work hard, but they know their limits, and they taught me to respect my limits better.” —REICHERT

“My students taught me to believe in myself. I told one of my students that I would be going out of town for a conference and that I would attend a fancy awards gala, and she asked if I would be receiving an award. I told her that I was one of the finalists but there was no chance I would win. She looked at me, disappointed, and said, ‘Mrs. Kaler, you tell us all the time how creative, talented, and amazing we are! And you expect us to believe that we have great potential deep within us. Why do you not believe that you have great potential within yourself?’

“I was speechless! A 16-year-old had stopped me in my tracks. I was preaching something that I didn’t practice. This was one of the biggest lightbulb moments of my entire career.” —KALER

“This year, my students have taught me that they learn best through experiences and meaningful connections. They’ve reminded me that relationships and relevance matter just as much as rigor. The most lasting learning happens when students see themselves reflected in what they’re doing.” —KLINE

HOW HAS ACTE SUPPORTED YOU ON YOUR CAREER JOURNEY?

“The advocacy efforts of ACTE have benefited me, my staff, students and community.” —STOVER

“Being part of the ACTE community has been one of the most meaningful and impactful parts of my professional journey. ACTE is a family. It's a vibrant community of educators who uplift one another, share freely, celebrate each other's wins and stand shoulder to shoulder in the face of challenges. Becoming involved with ACTE has opened doors for me — to mentorship, to leadership opportunities and to long-lasting friendships.

“One of the greatest gifts ACTE offers is the chance to build meaningful, lasting connections. Whether it's through a conference session, committee involvement or a simple hallway conversation, every interaction is a chance to grow. These relationships remind us that we are not in the work alone.” —SAMPLES

“ACTE provides exceptional professional development resources and a community of collaborative professionals who believe career and technical education is the key to success in future industries.” —BLACKWELL

“The number of resources from ACTE is incredible. I can remember a time when I hit the burnout stage of the school year, and I needed to be recharged and refreshed. I turned to the ACTE website and started looking around. I found so many resources that motivated me. Connecting with professional mentors and other educators was exactly what I needed for an end-of-year reboot.” —KALER

“The ACTE community has been a cornerstone of my professional growth and career journey. I have connected with a network of passionate, forward-thinking educators who inspire me to innovate, collaborate and build resources to help move CTE initiatives forward. Through ACTE's resources, conferences and professional development opportunities, I have gained practical tools and fresh perspectives to strengthen myself as a leader, a teacher and an advocate in my role. Most importantly, ACTE has given me a sense of belonging.”

—KLINE

“I love bouncing ideas off of other educators and hearing what they're doing in their classrooms and communities. The relationships and networking provided through ACTE help me be a better teacher.” —REICHERT

A note from the admin's office

Final thoughts from Rhonda Samples, ACTE's Administrator of the Year

“My journey began as a high school marketing student and CTSO competitor. That experience didn't just shape my career. It shaped who I am.

“Now, I continue to carry that same passion and purpose. This work is a calling. CTE opens doors, builds futures and transforms lives. Over the years, I've had the privilege to watch students grow into thriving professionals, to collaborate with dedicated educators who go above and beyond, to witness the incredible impact that career and technical education has on individuals, families and communities.

“Let's remain committed to our students, to our colleagues and to the work that drives us forward every day. It's been an incredible journey filled with purpose, growth and countless lives changed. And even after 44 years, I am still inspired because there is more work to be done.”

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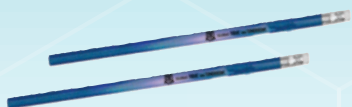
**Celebrate CTE All Year Long
with these fun & festive products!**

www.shopacte.com

Balloons



Mood Pencils



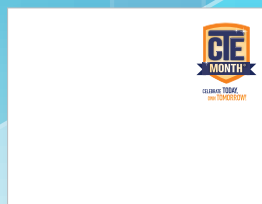
Mood Pens



Mood Bracelets



Adhesive Notes



Lanyards



“ Don't forget to celebrate the small things, too. Years ago, one of my students was ready to call it quits. I remember the day he sat in a chair at my desk and started crying because he didn't see any other option but to quit school. He was behind on credits, had horrible attendance and discipline issues, and had recently become a father. I remember asking him if he would let me help.

“We worked on an action plan and decided to put a large calendar on the wall to track his progress. I reminded him that babies learn to crawl before they walk, and they take baby steps before they take big jumps. I celebrated each day he came to school. Those days turned into weeks, and the weeks turned into months. His grades improved and he ultimately graduated. Because he finally had someone in his corner. **”** —KALER



An honor well deserved

Do you know an outstanding educator who is worthy of recognition? If you've ever considered nominating a colleague for an ACTE award, we hope you do! How you represent a candidate's accomplishments is critical in making the best impression on our judges. Here are some tips for making the most out of your nomination.

1. Does your nomination address the criteria for the award? Looking at the rubric will give you an idea of what areas are most important.
2. Are you being descriptive enough with your candidate's achievements? How did the nominee contribute to the goal, and what were the end results? Include measurable outcomes or milestones where possible.
3. What makes this candidate unique from others in the profession? Provide concrete examples.
4. Can you sum up in one sentence why the nominee deserves recognition? Keep your writing focused and make every word count.
5. Is it easy for the reader to follow your train of thought? Identify how every point addresses the criteria for the award. Explain achievements in plain language. Judges may not be familiar with activities that are specific to your content area or program.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE ?

“ ACTE staff, members, regions and states have been a vital part of my career and technical education journey. I cherish the friendships and memories. Everyone should get involved. **”**

—STOVER

“ I strive hard to model the teaching cycle daily — prepare, train, assess, reflect and adjust — and I hope to leave a lasting impact on new instructors in our ACTE community. **”**

—BLACKWELL

“ I'm just so grateful to ACTE — especially for the fellowship programs. **”**

—KLINE

“ If we want to see more students look at becoming teachers, we as teachers have to start talking positively about our careers. I grew up a dirt-poor farm kid, so I think the money is good, the time off is great, and honestly, I love being around every single one of my students. **”**

—REICHERT