



STATE OF NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Monmouth County Educator Named 2025-2026 New Jersey State Teacher of the Year

Trenton, NJ – The New Jersey Department of Education announced today that Gillian Ober, an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher in the Freehold Borough School District, has been named the New Jersey State Teacher of the Year for 2025-2026.

Gillian has worked as an ESL teacher in the Freehold Borough School District since 2019, first at the Park Avenue Elementary School and currently at the Freehold Intermediate School. She has earned dual master's degrees, one in curriculum and instruction from Western Governors University and another in Spanish and ESL instruction from Monmouth University. She taught abroad for several years before starting work in New Jersey as a Spanish teacher at Manasquan High School.

"New Jersey is proudly home to the nation's top-ranked public education system, which is an honor we can only boast thanks to the tireless work of our educators. Gillian is truly a testament to our state's dedicated teacher workforce," **said Governor Phil Murphy**. "Her story reminds us of our obligation to uplift all students, providing them with a world-class education and readying them to thrive throughout their lives."

"Many of my students are newcomers to New Jersey, and they often have interrupted formal education and significant trauma," **said Gillian Ober**. "My students, often at the earliest stages of English acquisition, turn to me in times of distress as they navigate a new language and culture. I pride myself on trauma-informed practices that help them navigate past ordeals they may have experienced while processing the new world around them. The learners I work with are so brave, and the relationships we form are the launchpad for learning. When students feel seen and safe in the classroom, it's really amazing how high they can soar."

"New Jersey schools are filled with talented and dedicated educators, and Gillian exemplifies the kind of excellence, empathy, and innovation that we see every day in classrooms throughout New Jersey," **said Kevin Dehmer, Commissioner of Education**. "Gillian's dedication inspires her students, her colleagues, and those who may be considering a career in education. We are proud to recognize Gillian as New Jersey's 2025-2026 State Teacher of the Year."

"On behalf of the State Board of Education, I extend congratulations to Gillian Ober for being named New Jersey State Teacher of the Year," **said Kathy Goldenberg, President of the State Board of Education**. "Through her daily commitment to fostering a trusting environment, Gillian tailors various AI experiences to educate and nurture her multilingual student population. By harnessing their existing knowledge, she

enhances their learning and ensures they feel respected and supported in their academic journey. Her generous professional development of colleagues also strengthens the school's overall culture, as well as promotes a robust partnership with families. The Freehold Borough School District is exceptionally fortunate to have her expertise on staff.”

Gillian incorporates technology into her instruction, such as utilizing artificial intelligence to create a comic book to help her students visualize the novel they’re reading and using virtual reality goggles to take students on computer-generated field trips to World Heritage Sites in their home countries. Outside the classroom, she works as an adjunct professor at Monmouth and Georgian Court Universities, where she helps current and prospective teachers gain insight into working with multilingual learners. She has been published in academic textbooks and peer-reviewed journals.

Gillian started teaching in 2014, with one of her first jobs as an ESL teacher in Phang Nga, Thailand. It was there – in 102-degree heat, with monsoon rains pouring through the ceiling of an open-air classroom with a roof and open sides – that she discovered her calling. “As sweat – or perhaps water from the ceiling – dripped down my face, I thought, ‘How am I not completely miserable right now?’” **Gillian said.** “The answer came as I looked at my students, who came to my class each day with enthusiasm and readiness to learn. They laughed about the classroom puddles from the monsoon and tackled the day’s assignment with excitement. I was overjoyed and fueled by their passion. I had found my passion for working with multilingual learners, and New Jersey public schools called me back home.”

“Gillian Ober consistently demonstrates her deep respect for students, their journeys, and the value of multilingualism. She continuously fosters a culture of collaboration, mutual respect, and solutions-oriented thinking, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued,” **said Asia Michael, Superintendent of the Freehold Borough School District.** “Gillian’s advocacy for multilingual learners is equally impactful; she views multilingualism as a “superpower” and works tirelessly to help her students see their identities, languages, and cultures as sources of strength.”

“Here at Freehold Intermediate School, we are incredibly proud to celebrate Gillian Ober as State Teacher of the Year! Gillian’s unwavering dedication to her students in and out of the classroom is an inspiration to us all,” **said Principal John Brovak.** “This recognition is not only a testament to Gillian's excellence, but also a reflection of the hard work and commitment of our entire staff here at Freehold Intermediate School.”

In her role as State Teacher of the Year, Gillian will work with the New Jersey Department of Education and give presentations to colleagues and stakeholders around the state, speak with aspiring teachers, and visit classrooms to advance the teaching profession. She will also take part in national conferences with other State Teachers of the Year.

Additional information can be found on the [Governor's Educator of the Year webpage](#).



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