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## Juanita Gardine Educator Cherise Davis Named 2025 State Teacher of the Year

**Third-grade teacher Cherise Davis of Juanita Gardine K-8 was selected over St. Thomas finalist Cornell Hanley as State Teacher of the Year, an honor she says reflects both personal growth and the support of her educational community.**

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**From left to right, Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach, Cherise Davis, and Education Commissioner Dionne Wells-Hedrington. By. VIDE**

In a ceremony held over the weekend, Cherise Davis was announced as the territory's 2025-2026 State Teacher of the Year. Ms. Davis, the St. Croix District Teacher of the Year, prevailed over Cornell Hanley, Teacher of the Year on St. Thomas.

“This is not just a personal achievement for me,” said Ms. Davis, a 3rd grade teacher at the Juanita Gardine K-8 School, upon being announced as the winner. “It’s a reflection of all the work that I have done, not only myself, but the support I have received from my administrators.”

In a pre-announcement video message, Ms. Davis said that she became a teacher “to create a space where students feel seen, heard and valued, where their questions are welcome, their mistakes are embraced and their growth is celebrated.” She remembers the impact her teachers made on her as a child growing up, and says that it is now her turn to “pay it forward.”

“I teach because I want to be a part of something bigger than myself,” Ms. Davis said. “I want to make a difference in the lives of my students and my community.”

Commissioner of the Department of Education Dionne Wells-Hedrington hailed the two finalists, noting that the nominees “represent the highest standard of our profession.” She underscored the importance of competent teachers in the positive development of the territory’s youth. “To be a teacher...means showing up not just in the classroom, but in the lives of our students who need more than just lessons,” she said, arguing that the district Teachers of the Year were exemplars of the profession. “They are innovators, mentors and champions for our children,” Wells-Hedrington declared.

Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach drew upon his own educational experiences to underscore the value of teachers, especially at the elementary level. “They lay the critical foundation that our children only build on when they pursue higher education,” he argued. “We celebrate the both of you for the impact that you have made on our children.”

Before she concluded her remarks, the newly announced 2025 State Teacher of the Year rallied support for her chosen initiative, Little Literacy Leaders. “I will be contacting you, so please be sure to answer my call,” Ms. Davis said, soliciting donations of books or offers to come into the classroom to read.