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Press Release

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****PHOTO ATTACHED****

Three Represent the District as Students of the Year

Baton Rouge, LA – East Baton Rouge Parish School System has thousands of outstanding students who are involved in everything from the arts to philanthropy and who have gone above and beyond on test scores and their grand point averages. **Sixty-eight school sites' Students of the Year** were **nominated for the district-wide awards, and the three who walked away winners** are representative of the best and brightest in our School System.

The three winners, one for each level, for the district this year are:

ELEMENTARY STUDENT OF THE YEAR

Nina Dicharry, Fifth Grade, Westdale Heights Academic Magnet School

Dicharry is fascinated by science “because I think it is exciting, and I like to experiment and find the answers to my questions. Another hobby of mine is studying maps, because I am interested in traveling and I like to know the names of different places. In fact, I collect maps and post them all over my bedroom,” she said.

Reading is Dicharry’s favorite hobby, however. The straight-A student enjoys amazing stories where she can picture mini adventures in her mind. Outside of academic endeavors, she also plays soccer for the Baton Rouge Soccer Association, takes drum lessons at Baton Rouge Music Studios and is a third-year Girl Scout in Troop 518.

“In the future, I would like to study to become an environmental scientist, because I am interest in science and believe I could make a difference in our world,” Dicharry said. “I am concerned that Louisiana’s coasts are being washed away because of levees, animals dying because of loss of habitat and invasive species taking over. I have realized humans are responsible for much of this damage; building the levees to control water, cutting down trees to make more space for building homes and bringing in boats with animals and plants that don’t even belong in our environment. I hope to learn more about these issues and make a positive impact on our Earth as I continue to study and learn about the environment.”

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Dicharry also is interested in the issue of childhood obesity, as well as poverty in third-world countries. She participated in a Girl Scout project to help African children obtain better soccer supplies, is helping with a soccer equipment drive and participates annually in Operation Christmas Child in donating toys and school supplies to children in third-world countries. She also is a member of the Kiwanis Club's K-Kids Volunteers. In addition, she was a member of the Tara Tarpons swim team, is the school's Student Council (secretary), is on the Honor Roll, is a former Student of the Month and has been a presenter at the Ocean Commotion program held at LSU.

Her awards include: Top 11 finisher for two years in her class ranking of girls in the Rocket Kidz Triathlons, fourth-place 2008 finisher in the Rouge Runners Race, third place in the piano scales competition for Music for Kids piano program and the Excellence Award from the district Music Camp.

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT OF THE YEAR

Lindsey Tillery, Eighth Grade, Sherwood Middle Academic Magnet School

Lindsey Tillery, a 13-year-old student at Sherwood Middle Academic Magnet School, plans to be an obstetrician-gynecologist one day. "I want to be a part of bringing life into the world and helping women through their pregnancies," she said. "I am planning to attend Johns Hopkins University for my graduate and medical school years."

The three issues Tillery would like to focus on are hunger, homelessness, and education. "Hunger is a worldwide problem, and it makes me sad to see children starving," she said. "For Thanksgiving, I gathered non-perishable food items ... for people living at the Grandparent's House, an apartment complex for grandparents raising grandchildren. ... In the future, I plan to start a non-profit organization called Feed the Need to help donate food to the people who need it."

Tillery has stopped to help individual homeless people and donates items to the homeless shelter. She also headed a book drive in her community for Title I schools.

Tillery enjoys reading, assisting Volunteers in Public Schools with the Stuff the Bus program, participating in the Buddy Walk for the National Down Syndrome Foundation, and singing in her church's children's choir.

An eighth grader, Tillery also participates or has participated in school activities like the school swim team, and an elective course of Pre-Law. Her favorite subject is math, and she has been taking math courses beyond her grade level. As a result of her hard work, she will enter the ninth grade with four high school credits. At the age of 12, she scored a 25 on the ACT test as part of the Duke Talent Identification Program and received state and national recognition. She has made a perfect score on one or more sections of the iLEAP test over the last two years, and has qualified this year for the John Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth Talent Search.

Teachers have nominated Tillery for membership in the school's Beta Club, and she mentors a sixth grader and assists teachers as a Peer Helper. At the age of 11, Tillery was recognized by Pupil Appraisal Services as being in the Upper Extreme Range of gifted. She scored at the 12.4 level in every area.

Tillery's recent awards include: the straight-A honor roll, a TOPS award and awards for academic excellence and community service from East Baton Rouge Mayor/President Melvin "Kip" Holden, Louisiana State Sen. Sharon Weston Broome and Louisiana State Rep. Regina Ashford Barrow.

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HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT OF THE YEAR

Devika Balachandran, 12th Grade, McKinley High School

When Devika Balachandran, the High School Student of the Year, was growing up, her father and sister would test the pH levels of their juice, build K'Nex ferris wheels and Rube Goldberg machines to dispense vitamins and calculated the change and sales tax before getting to the grocery store register. The McKinley High School senior enjoys Math classes the most and joined the Mathcounts Team in middle school (which placed first in regionals and state and allowed her to place second in the Individual Competition to win a place on the state team for the national competition). She also likes Science and was enrolled in a summer Honors Chemistry class at LSU and took Advanced Placement courses in Chemistry and Biology at her school.

One summer, Balachandran volunteered in a cardiovascular pathophysiology lab at the LSU School of Medicine and learned the details of experimentation. This past summer, she worked in the entomology lab in the LSU Life Sciences Department and learned how to extract DNA.

A long-time violin player, Balachandran was named to the Louisiana Junior Youth Ensemble and later the Louisiana Youth Orchestras. The straight-A student participates annually in the Louisiana All-State Honors Orchestra competition, as well. Beyond music, she has been a member of the VolunTEENS service organization. In addition, she has held leadership positions with Louisiana Mu Alpha Theta, Beta Club and the school's Quiz Bowl Team. Balachandran has received the Siemens Award for Advanced Placement, won second place in the Concours Francophonie 2009 and is a National Merit Semifinalist.

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