

Palm Beach Public teacher named Mentor of the Year

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Mentoring has always been something personal for Katie Judge.

Long before she was named 2026 Mentor of the Year for Palm Beach County, the Palm Beach Public Elementary School third-grade teacher said the mentorship example that shaped her most came from home — her late mother, Ann Judge, who also was an educator.

"My mom was my biggest mentor," Judge said. "She was a teacher, and she's the reason why I became a mentor. She has always been such a refreshing person to talk to, because she taught for a long time. Up to her retirement, she still loved it. She still had the energy and the passion."

Judge said that influence continues to shape how she approaches her own classroom and her work supporting fellow teachers. Her mother died last year, but Judge said she still draws on her advice daily.

"Every day when I think of how I want to make a difference, I always think if I can just do one thing that my mom would do, then I've done my job for the day," she said. "She's sort of still guiding me."

That approach is a big part of why Judge, a West Palm Beach resident, was named 2026 Mentor of the Year by the Education Foundation of Palm Beach County and the School District of Palm Beach County. She also was recognized as the district's Teacher of the Year in 2024.

At Palm Beach Public Elementary, where she has taught since 2019, Judge plays a key role in supporting teachers in the classroom.

She describes her role as a mentor as working closely with teachers on instruction and day-to-day classroom challenges.

"I would define it as someone that teachers can rely on for support within their classroom in the area of academics, planning lessons and implementing lessons," she said. "It's also someone that they can lean on for situations with parents or tricky situations with students."

Judge has taught for 23 years across Palm Beach and Hillsborough counties, working in classrooms with first-



Palm Beach Public Elementary School teacher Katie Judge stands in her classroom on May 26 in Palm Beach. Judge was named Mentor of the Year by the Education Foundation of Palm Beach County and the School District of Palm Beach County. PHOTOS BY MEGHAN MCCARTHY/PALM BEACH DAILY NEWS

through fourth-graders, as well as in gifted, ESOL and Exceptional Student Education programs. She currently serves in multiple leadership roles, including professional development chair, literacy cohort leader, third-grade chair and mentor leader.

She has worked with about 10 to 13 student teachers over the years, including at least one who later became a

third-grade teacher in the district.

Principal Christie Schwab at Palm Beach Public praised Judge's mentorship approach in a recommendation for the award, writing that Judge helps new teachers not "just survive their first years but truly thrive."

Schwab also highlighted Judge's efforts to build community among staff, including informal collaboration and



Palm Beach Public Elementary School teacher Katie Judge, left, and Ella Allen are pictured May 26 in Palm Beach. Judge was a mentor to Allen while Allen was a student at Palm Beach Atlantic University. She is now a third-grade teacher at Palm Beach Public Elementary School.

social gatherings that support new teachers beyond the classroom.

"Katie is the perfect individual for this award," she wrote. "Her commitment to fostering the next generation of educators has transformed our school into a place of continuous growth."

Judge said much of her mentoring happens through everyday interactions during the school year, which ends May 29 for the start of summer vacation.

"It doesn't have to necessarily be a scheduled meeting with someone, or a sit-down meeting with someone," she said. "It can be while we're walking to lunch or on the way back from dropping kids off at fine arts. It's really nice."

Beyond mentoring, Judge has led schoolwide initiatives including a literacy-room redesign, family-engagement efforts such as monthly bike rides and STEM activities, and programs supporting student achievement.

But she said her focus remains simple.

"I really just try to be the best version of a teacher I can be," she said. "I think about how I want my students to be taught. I also think about how I want my peers to be treated. I think of these kids as like they're going to go off to the next grade. I want the teachers to be the best they can be. I want to put the students first always in all of my decisions."

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