



# 2024 National Award Winners

CAP's K-6<sup>th</sup> grade [Aerospace Connections in Education \(ACE\) program](#) began in 2007 as the Jr Cadet program. In 2008, the program name was changed to ACE and the sixth grade curriculum began being used in grades 6-8. Since the program's inception, over 638,000 students have been impacted. During the 2023-2024 AY alone, over 101K students were involved! Each year, those who are nominated for their stellar ACE work are considered for awards. Awards are included for the [ACE Plus Adopt program](#) as a component of the ACE program which connects CAP squadron as mentors for grades 5-8. The names found below are the award winners for 2024. Each award recipient will receive an award plaque and a grant award courtesy of the [Air & Space Forces Association Education Council](#).

Click on each blue award, below, for each winner's story!

[National ACE School of the Year: Grayhawk Elementary School](#)  
[National ACE Coordinator of the Year: Grayhawk's Michelle Lindstrom](#)

~ Principal, Eli Hubbell, Scottsdale, AZ

Site of the 2024-2025 National ACE Liftoff Event on Oct 15, 2024!

[National ACE Teacher of the Year: Thomas Ellis, 5-8<sup>th</sup> Grade Science Teacher](#)  
Palm Beach Day Academy, Palm Beach, FL

[National ACE Collaborative Teacher of the Year: Caitlin Hayes, STEM Teacher](#)  
St. John the Apostle Catholic School, Virginia Beach, VA

[National ACE Resource Teacher of the Year: Kayla Kill](#)  
LeMay Elementary School, Bellevue, NE

[TWO National ACE Students of the Year:](#)

[Mason Grinder, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade](#)

Macon County R-IV School, New Cambria, MO ~ Dawn Johnson, Teacher

[Kyle Adams, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade](#)

Palm Beach Day Academy, Palm Beach, FL ~ Thomas Ellis, Teacher

[National ACE Plus Adopt Collaborative Squadron and School Teams of the Year:](#)  
[GLR-MI-059 Adrian Composite Squadron & Prairie Elementary School and](#)  
[SER-FL-049 Ormond Beach Composite Squadron & Ormond Beach Middle School](#)  
Adrian, Michigan, and Ormond Beach, Florida

## ***How are ACE awards determined?***

**N**ominations are accepted for the major ACE awards of National Teacher, School, and Student of the Year for the Aerospace Connections in Education (ACE) program.

For other ACE awards selected, to include the collaborative ACE Plus team award, the CAP National HQ ACE team in Montgomery, AL, identifies schools, teachers, and/or squadrons having gone above and beyond; uniquely standing out via their photos sent to the HQ team and their social media posts which tagged @CAPaerospace.

***For all ACE participants for the upcoming 2024-2025 Academic Year, keep the ACE team informed of all being done with ACE students and remember to tag @CAPaerospace on any social media posts about your CAP work so that YOUR work will be noticed!***

## ***Points of Pride for 2023-2024***

**E**xceeding the goal of 100,000 “faces of ACE” across the nation was the highest achievement of the year. Reaching 101, 384 students with 658 teachers from 548 schools in 48 states + Europe (DoD) was a significant milestone. (See ACE list by state [HERE.](#))

In addition to a variety of school types, there were Boys and Girls Clubs, Scout groups, Women in Aviation International (WAI) groups, after-school programs, museums, libraries, and summer camps all using the ACE program. Proudly, CAP had a large group of ACE Plus teams this year, as well.

- 98% educators view ACE as fitting well with standards; supporting STEM education; a valuable use of time; and a positive influence on behavior and learning.
- 78% of ACE schools are Title 1 Schools, therefore allowing CAP to reach a broad range of ethnicities and socio-economic demographics.

The new [ACE Plus: Squadron-Classroom Adopt program](#) expanded in its fourth year to have CAP squadrons connect with teachers to help teach the ACE lessons, share information about the CAP cadet program, coordinate field trips, and teach about a variety of STEM careers. Included in this year’s ACE Plus Adopt program was 8 Regions, 24 wings, 30 squadrons, 38 teachers, and 2,786 students. (See the outstanding ACE Plus award winners above.)

## ***Through the Years***

Since 2007 inception: over 638,000 ACE students in 50 states + DC & PR + Europe (DoD)

- ***The [Air & Space Forces Association](#) has been a steadfast partner, providing shirts and award grants. CAP appreciates their continued support.***
- To get a perspective of the overall ACE program and history, see the 16-year milestone and 2024 ACE awards story in CAP.NEWS, [HERE.](#) (July 2024)



***2024 National ACE Collaborative Teacher of the Year:***  
**Caitlin Hayes, STEM Teacher**  
**St. John the Apostle Catholic School, Virginia Beach, VA**

**Caitlin Hayes** is being recognized for her work to collaborate within the aviation community to enhance her work with CAP's ACE program. Her collaborative efforts have led to new aviation-related STEM programs at the school, such as an aerial drone team, which impressed her school team and the students' parents; many of which are military families in this Purple Ribbon (military supportive) school. Teaching ACE to the students led, also, to a 46.4% increase in pre/post test scores!

**In Caitlin's words:**

"As a new middle school teacher, I stumbled upon the CAP-ACE program last year and began the program then. After spending 20 years in Naval Aviation as an electrician, this program helped me blend my expertise seamlessly.

"The ACE program wasn't just a personal boon—it sparked a drive to innovate in my classroom. Inspired by ACE, I launched an Aerial Drone Team with the Robotics Education & Competition (REC) Foundation. We mixed ACE lessons with our regular meetings, forming a standout team of future aviators.

"Throughout our elementary school grades, we tied cross-curricular standards of math, science, and ELA into our rocket lessons. We are a military Purple Ribbon school, so many of the kids have military parents who resonated with the aviation lessons.

"Our collaboration paid off big time. The Aerial Drone Team snagged awards for our fresh approach and dedication. Plus, ACE sparked a passion for aviation in our students, driving them to explore connections across different subjects. We hosted a STEM Career Connections event in April where we had local aviators, naval pilots, and drone operators from the local fire department come and connect with our youth so that they understand the career opportunities that exist within aviation.

"In short, CAP-ACE didn't just enrich my journey—it sparked a wave of inspiration and innovation in our school. It's empowering a new generation of aviators ready to reach for the sky."

**From Caitlin Hayes:**

"I'm humbled and honored to be recognized as the National ACE Collaborative Teacher of the Year! I've just returned from travel with my aerial drone team at the middle school national championship. The ACE program has brought so many learning opportunities to our students and I'm so grateful to be a part of this program!"

Caitlin Hayes and her students participating with 5<sup>th</sup> grade ACE lessons and guest presenters.



**CONGRATULATIONS, CAITLIN HAYES,  
NATIONAL ACE COLLABORATIVE TEACHER OF THE YEAR!**