The Louisiana Department of Education has launched a new program that allows one educator, chosen from the previous year’s list of Louisiana Teacher of the Year finalists, to spend a school year advocating for an education initiative of their choosing.

The fellowship is supported by a $50,000 stipend of state funding that is paid directly to the recipient’s school system. It allows the recipient to take a yearlong sabbatical or to decrease their teaching load for the upcoming school year and may be used to pay for substitute teachers, travel costs and other expenses incurred by the recipient related to his or her advocacy initiative.

“Educators who are named Teacher of the Year spend that school year working on education initiatives alongside the Department of Education, serving on the Educator Effectiveness committee of the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and engaging with their peers across the state and nation to better understand the strides that have been made in public education, as well as the challenges that persist,” said BESE Vice President Holly Boffy, who was the 2010 Louisiana Teacher of the Year. “Rather than immediately return to their classroom following their year of service and learning, this fellowship gives the educator the opportunity to act on the initiatives they deem most valuable to our schools and schoolchildren.”