



Alabama Education News

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“Final Four” Announced for Alabama Teacher of the Year

The educators who have emerged as the “final four” finalists vying to serve as the 2015-2016 Alabama Teacher of the Year share a common belief that there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to instructing 21st century learners.

By incorporating technology, the arts, hands-on lessons, and a dose of compassion, each strives to ensure that ALL students are excited about learning and are motivated to reach their full potential in the classroom and throughout their lives. The finalists are:



Minnette R. Wiggins



Sarah Reznikov Stroud



Jennifer Brown



Levert Hedgemon, Jr.

Elementary

- **Minnette R. Wiggins**, Trace Crossings Elementary School, Hoover City Schools, District III
- **Sarah Reznikov Stroud**, Northport Elementary School, Tuscaloosa County Schools, District VII

Secondary

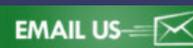
- **Jennifer Brown**, Vestavia Hills High School, Vestavia Hills City Schools, District III
- **Levert Hedgemon, Jr.**, Westlawn Middle School, Tuscaloosa City Schools, District IV

“THE FINAL FOUR CANDIDATES ARE INNOVATIVE AND ENTHUSIASTIC EDUCATORS WHO ARE COMMITTED TO CULTIVATING LIFE-LONG LEARNERS AND HELPING STUDENTS ACHIEVE SUCCESS IN THE CLASSROOM AND BEYOND. THEY OFFER TO OUR STUDENTS THE BEST OF WHAT QUALITY INSTRUCTION CAN GIVE.”

– State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tommy Bice

The next step for the final four is an extensive interview with the state judging committee. The 2015-2016 Alabama Teacher of the Year will be revealed at a ceremony hosted by the Alabama State Board of Education and the Alabama State Department of Education at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, May 13, 2015, at the RSA Plaza Terrace in Montgomery.

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The Alabama Elementary and Secondary District Teachers of the Year will also be recognized during the ceremony. They are:

Elementary District Teachers of the Year

- **Renee Busby Phelps**, Summerdale School, Baldwin County Schools, District I
- **Sonia Crutchfield**, Montana Street Academic Magnet School, Dothan City Schools, District II
- **Emma Black**, Adamsville Elementary School, Jefferson County Schools, District IV
- **Elena Ramona Pop**, Pike County Elementary School, Pike County Schools, District V
- **Jordyn Pollard**, Centre Middle School, Cherokee County Schools, District VI
- **Kellie Evans**, Riverton Elementary School, Madison County Schools, District VIII

Secondary District Teachers of the Year

- **Marilyn Ward**, Foley Middle School, Baldwin County Schools, District I
- **Jon Segars**, Auburn High School, Auburn City Schools, District II
- **J. Mark Coleman**, Booker T. Washington Magnet High School, Montgomery County Schools, District V
- **Jeanna Justice Plunkett**, Arab High School, Arab City Schools, District VI
- **Gerilynne Shadeed**, Mountain Brook Junior High, Mountain Brook Schools, District VII
- **Jenny Massey**, Buckhorn High School, Madison County Schools, District VIII



Alabama's Teacher of the Year spends the majority of the school year serving as the spokesperson for education and the teaching profession as well as presenting workshops to various groups. Additionally, Alabama's representative is a candidate for the National Teacher of the Year Award.

Following is more about this year's final four candidates:

Minnette R. Wiggins, Trace Crossings Elementary School, Hoover City Schools, District III
"My successes are when a child is excited about something he has learned, when she has an 'ah-ha' moment, when he achieves a goal, and when academics makes a difference to the individual life of a child. My students inspire me daily to be the best teacher I can be, and they deserve nothing less. I am so very proud to be a small part of the teaching world."

Sarah Reznikov Stroud, Northport Elementary School, Tuscaloosa County Schools, District VII
"For me, teaching is an opportunity to reflect on society's present situations

and invest in the future. I believe students are the driving force behind

change. In order for them to succeed and guide this society, teachers need to teach social responsibility, to teach community, and to empower students to take charge of their learning."

Jennifer Brown, Vestavia Hills High School, Vestavia Hills City Schools, District III

"I am privileged to have the opportunity to affect lives every single day. It is my goal to create a student-centered classroom packed with diverse individuals who are inspired by my passion and unafraid to make mistakes. I will continue to improve by experimenting with new strategies and by taking my own risks so that my students will enjoy an extraordinary learning experience."

Levert Hedgemon, Jr., Westlawn Middle School, Tuscaloosa City Schools, District IV

"As a teacher, it is my calling to make the relationships I have with my students as compelling and engaging as possible. I take joy in watching my students become a community of learners with mutual respect for each other. There has been nothing more compelling in my professional life than the fulfillment of having built

My Year as Alabama Secondary Teacher of the Year



Chris Payne
Alabama Alternate Teacher
of the Year 2014-2015
Alabama Secondary Teacher
of the Year 2014-2015

Last year when I received the call

that I was a finalist for Alabama Teacher of the Year I just chuckled. I never thought this could actually happen to me. I am just an art teacher. I do not feel like I have any special skills that set me apart from any other teacher across the state. But as the year has gone on, I have been humbled to find that my teaching career has meant so much to so many. I have enjoyed reminiscing about special moments that I often overlooked. But those moments made an impact in ways I never knew. It has been an incredible

experience having the opportunity to represent the teaching profession as I have traveled across the state of Alabama this year. It has been an honor to meet so many dedicated professionals with a passion much like mine to make a difference in the lives of children.

I am an art teacher. I spend my days teaching teenagers how to unlock their inner artist. I coach them through developing their artistic ability to create incredible works of art. I am obsessed with art history and using it to bridge the gap of understanding about human history. I use art to help students understand the world and our place in it. I try every day to show my students what is possible and challenge them to push past their own doubts and just create. I am blessed to be an art teacher, and I have the privilege of sharing my love for the arts with some amazing students.

I wear many hats at school as do most teachers who are committed to making a difference. What I am most proud of is my involvement in a club called Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD). I started the club back in 2005 after 12 of my former students died due to destructive choices. I made a commitment to change the school climate and create a level of

understanding that every decision you make will dictate the life you lead. I started with just 15 students. Today my SADD chapter is one of the largest in the United States with over 450 members. My students have volunteered over 60,000 hours of community service and earned over 200 Presidential Volunteer Service Awards. They have earned several million dollars' worth of scholarships to schools ranging from Harvard to more than 30 different colleges and universities. They are representatives on national teen councils, state councils, and local groups related to destructive behaviors. We have

I USE ART TO HELP STUDENTS UNDERSTAND THE WORLD AND OUR PLACE WITHIN IT.

started SADD chapters in three states and continue to recruit new schools to join the club. On March 9th we hosted a Teen Distracted Driving Summit. We are one of 17 schools from across the country to host one of these events. Every single day we challenge our students to make a difference in the life of just one person. This program has allowed me to teach beyond my classroom walls and to teach students the value of life in service. This past summer two of my students spoke on Capitol Hill in the senate auditorium in Washington, D.C., to challenge America to make a difference in the lives of teenagers. What more could a teacher ask for?

I have enjoyed spending the year sharing my students' accomplishments with schools across Alabama. I have crisscrossed the state speaking to thousands of students, parents, and teachers about the value of devoting a little more time to making someone feel important. You don't need to give money to a cause to change the world. Time is priceless because we are all in limited supply. Your time is the most valuable

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CCRS Teaching Academies – Summer Sessions

We are pleased to announce that the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) and A+ College Ready are once again partnering to offer a series of CCRS Teaching Academies to be held this summer across the state of Alabama. The CCRS Teaching Academies 2015 will offer an opportunity for teachers in Grades 6-8 in Alabama's focus schools, priority schools, and schools in a feeder pattern that include a priority school to engage in National Math Science Initiative (NMSI) Teacher Training/Laying the Foundation (LTF) in English language arts, mathematics, or science.

NMSI Teacher Training/LTF offers meaningful support to teachers as they construct effective classrooms. Through thoroughly tested content materials and research-based instructional strategies, this training enables and encourages teachers to:

- Choose significant and worthwhile content and connect it to other knowledge.
- Use appropriate questioning strategies to develop conceptual understanding.
- Clarify to students the importance of abstract concepts and "big questions."
- Use formative assessments to improve instruction and achieve higher goals.
- Guarantee equitable access for all students to information and achievement.

Four days of training in English language arts, mathematics, or science will be offered:

- **June 16-19, 2015**
 - Albertville High School, Albertville, AL
 - Brewbaker Technology Magnet, Montgomery, AL
- **June 23-26, 2015**
 - Florence High School, Florence, AL
 - Daphne High School, Daphne, AL
- **July 7-10, 2015**
 - Hewitt-Trussville High School, Trussville, AL

Each eligible participant will receive a stipend of \$400 to cover expenses and must attend all four days to receive payment. The stipend will be processed through the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Regional



InService Center. No partial stipends will be awarded. Professional development hours will be credited for the in-session hours.

Eligible participants must meet all of the following criteria:

- Teach in a focus school, a priority school, or a school that feeds to or from a priority school.
- Teach English language arts, mathematics, or science in 6th, 7th, or 8th grade.

Regional Support Coordinators (below) will be providing registration information to the focus schools, priority schools, and priority feeder schools that are eligible to attend.

Regions: 1 (UNA), 2 (Athens), 6 (JSU)
Karen Winn kwinn@alsde.edu

Regions: 3 (AAMU/UAH), 5 (UAB)
Gay Finn gfinn@alsde.edu

Regions: 4 (UA), 7 (UM)
Phyllis Montalto pmontalto@alsde.edu

Regions: 8 (ASU), 11 (Troy)
Molly Killingsworth mkillingsworth@alsde.edu

Regions: 9 (AU), 10 (USA)
Catherliene Williamson cwilliamson@alsde.edu

If you have any questions, please contact your Regional Support Coordinator or Ms. Gay Finn, CCRS Administrator, at gfinn@alsde.edu.

Three Schools, One University Named The Alabama 2015 Green Ribbon Schools

The Alabama State Department of Education

(ALSDE) will honor the 2015 Green Ribbon Schools (GRS) on May 13 at the Alabama State

Board of Education meeting. The schools are honored for their approach to create "green" environments through reducing environmental impact, promoting health, and ensuring a high-quality environmental and outdoor education.

The Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE) worked in collaboration with the ALSDE to nominate Auburn University and will be honoring the university.



The **winning schools and university** are:

- **Lincoln Elementary School**, Talladega County Schools
- **Lincoln High School**, Talladega County Schools
- **Bluff Park Elementary School**, Hoover City Schools
- **Auburn University**, Auburn, AL

All schools will be celebrated with a picnic lunch at Eat South Farm in downtown Montgomery provided by the Environmental Education Association of Alabama (EEAA). Green Ribbon Flags, sponsored by Legacy, Partners in Environmental Education, will be presented to each of the schools. The [U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools Program \(GRS\)](#) is a federal recognition program that began in 2011. Honored schools exercise a comprehensive approach to creating "green" environments through reducing environmental impact, promoting health, and ensuring a high-quality environmental and outdoor education to prepare students with the 21st century skills and sustainability concepts needed in the growing global economy.

Alabama's previous GRS state nominees include:

- **2014:** Brock's Gap Intermediate School, Hoover City Schools; F. E. Burleson Elementary School, Hartselle City Schools; Homewood Middle School, Homewood City Schools.
- **2013:** Munford Middle and High Schools, Talladega County Schools; Fayetteville High School, Talladega County Schools; Gwin Elementary School, Hoover City Schools; Talladega School District winner
- **2012:** Munford Elementary School, Talladega County Schools; Winterboro High School, Talladega County Schools; Mill Creek Elementary School, Madison City Schools.

AAAE Annual Summer Workshop

The Alabama Alliance for Arts

Education (AAAE) will present its annual summer workshop, Sustaining Artful Instruction and Learning (**SAIL**), July 12-15, 2015, at the Marriott Muscle Shoals. This workshop has three strands: *Creating Value: Science*, *Creating Value: Language Arts*, and *Making Value Visible Plus*.

The *Creating Value* strands are recommended for educators, K-12, interested in integrating the arts into their classroom or arts educators who are entirely new to arts integration concepts. Educators will connect science, mathematics, language arts, music, and visual arts throughout the three-day and evening sessions. These strands will motivate educators to actively unite the subjects they already love to teach, while adding a new twist. Classroom teachers and arts teachers will collaborate to share knowledge and create arts-integrated lessons ready to implement in the coming school year.

Making Value Visible Plus is recommended for educators who already teach or integrate the arts, arts specialists, and teaching artists. Members of community arts and/or cultural arts organizations are invited to participate. Educators and administrators will learn how to support school reform by creating a curriculum that is collaborative, innovative, and strongly accountable, thus embedding itself as essential to student learning.

Encouragement and authorization of the SAIL workshop will improve your teachers' abilities to integrate the arts as well as assess and document their students' art work. Scholarships are available for school teams to attend. Teachers can apply online at the [AAAE Web site](#), or contact the program director, [Tara Sartorius](#), at 334-269-1435 or 334-462-6760.

Thomasville's "Teacher of the Year" Follows in Dad's Footsteps



As a child, Stephanie Davis Wright spent many hours playing "school" with her brother Keith. She was always the teacher, using old science textbooks that belonged to her father, Oscar Davis, a beloved teacher who taught science for 31 years at Thomasville High School.

Davis touched the lives of hundreds of children, both in and out of the classroom, where his students learned to love science, nature, and the great outdoors. Davis's other classroom was on the sports fields, where he spent many years coaching football, baseball, and basketball.

Oscar Davis also deeply influenced the lives of his two children. "We would spend the summers with Daddy where he made the outdoors a classroom of learning," explained Wright. "He made everything about nature seem so interesting and fun!"

This year, Stephanie Davis Wright will complete her 18th year in education, and recently she was named "Teacher of the Year" for the Thomasville City School District. At her recognition ceremony before the Thomasville City Board of Education, Wright pointed out that her daddy influenced her to become a teacher. "Daddy is my hero!! He always taught us to do our best and respect others. I witnessed him help many of his students either in the classroom or in coaching by being there and making a difference in their lives. I can truly say that I have never met a student that did not like him! His former students always smile when I say that I am his daughter! He made learning an enjoyable experience by connecting it to the outdoors and his passion for hunting and fishing. I really admire my dad, and I want to bring those same experiences to my students," she added.

Wright's passionate love of science is evident to all that enter her classroom. "I absolutely love the content I teach, and I want to let students know that there are so many amazing careers in science other than just being a biology teacher."

"When it comes time for me to retire," Wright added wistfully, "I pray that I will leave a legacy behind that has shown students that they are special and have value. I want them to remember that I always encouraged them to give 110% and to do their best."

Wright is married to Russell Wright of Thomasville. They have two children, Russ and Rachel, who are both in college. The Wrights are active in the Stave Creek Baptist Church.

"Teaching is my passion," she stated. "I love THS and feel honored to teach the students in Thomasville. I thank God for allowing me to fulfill my childhood dream!"

Notice of Revised Draft Renewal of the Elementary And Secondary Education Act Flexibility Waiver Request

The Alabama State Department of Education is continuing its efforts to solicit feedback on the ESEA Waiver Renewal. Stakeholder feedback is a vital component of the ESEA Renewal Request.

On behalf of all of its school districts in the state, the Alabama State Department of Education has reposted the revised Draft Renewal of the ESEA Flexibility Waiver Request that was originally submitted May 3, 2013. This repost includes modifications based on feedback received during the March 17, 2015, through March 31, 2015, public comment period.

To view the document, click [here](#). To view the document with strike-through changes, click [here](#). To view the attachments that will accompany the draft renewal request, click [here](#). Written comments may be emailed to esearenewal@alsde.edu by Monday, May 11, 2015.

Labels for Education Help Districts “Earn Free Stuff” For Their Schools

Seven Alabama public schools received \$1,000 through a sweepstakes sponsored by the Labels for Education program.

The Labels for Education program is a school fund-raising program designed as an alternative to traditional fund-raising. By saving and redeeming product UPCs and beverage/sauce caps from participating products schools can earn free educational merchandise, such as computers, software, sports equipment, musical instruments, library books, and even a minivan.



Labels for Education recently sponsored a sweepstakes where 1,000 grants of \$1,000 each were awarded to schools across the nation, including:

- **Chestnut Grove Elementary**, Decatur City School System
- **East Elementary**, Cullman County School System
- **Skyline School**, Jackson County School System
- **Kitty Stone Elementary**, Jacksonville City School System
- **Brooks Elementary**, Lauderdale County School System
- **Valley Elementary**, Pelham City School System
- **Duran South Junior High**, Pell City School System

Skyline School Labels for Education Coordinator Wanda McLain said the school submitted approximately 3,200 UPC labels to the sweepstakes, which counted for 3,200 entries over a five-month period. In addition to the win, McLain said Skyline has almost enough points to redeem for another \$1,000 in gift cards.

“At a time of proration and budget cuts, our schools can use every dollar they can get to help our children learn,” McLain said, noting the overwhelming response from the requests for UPC labels to enter into the sweepstakes “just goes to prove there are programs out there that are willing to help schools if someone will take the time to participate.”

Montgomery County School Choirs Mark Music in Our Schools Month

In recognition of National Music in Our Schools

Month, nearly a dozen Montgomery County School System choirs gathered at Aldersgate United Methodist Church recently for the 2nd Annual Montgomery Music Festival.

The festival included performances by choirs from McKee Middle, Carr Middle, Bellingrath Middle, Brewbaker Middle, Capitol Heights Middle, Jeff Davis High and Lanier High Schools that competed for gold, silver, and bronze awards. The goal of the event was to raise awareness of the benefits of music education and focus attention on the need to support music programs in public schools.



“The benefits of music

education are extraordinary, and studies have consistently shown the positive effect music education has on a child’s academic performance, sense of community, self-expression, and self-esteem,” said Johnnie Carr Middle School Choral Director Christine Moore, who co-organized the event. “Public school music programs need more support because they are often greatly reduced during budget shortages or due to lack of student participation. Plus, it can be tough for parents who otherwise might make the investment in a musical instrument or voice lessons for their child, but are juggling other financial priorities.”

McKee Middle School Choral Director Anita Roberson believes lack of funding is a concern, but its effects can be softened by public support. This is the second year she and Moore have co-hosted the Montgomery Music Festival, which was well attended this year.

“Community support is critical to the success of our music programs. Purchasing sheet music, donating instruments, and having professional artists give of their time and talent to our young musicians is important, but equally important is supporting our public performances,” Roberson said. “Students need that feedback to grow musically.”

Source: Montgomery Public Schools Communications Office

My Year as Alabama Secondary Teacher of the Year

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gift you can give. Some of my most successful students have come from circumstances that would make most people cry. However, they light up when they serve because they see the value of the only thing they have to give, their time. I always tell my students to serve one meal to someone in need and see whose life gets changed.

I am blessed to have a wonderful wife and three incredible little boys. I am most grateful that my children are old enough to enjoy this time in my life. I want to thank them for allowing me to share my stories with others this year. To my boys, I have been and will always be their Teacher of the Year. I will share this last little token of inspiration with the teachers of Alabama that I have learned from my children. My boys love to dress up like super heroes. They can choose from a variety of powerful figures; however, my smallest son always chooses to dress up like a teacher. You see a teacher is more powerful than Superman or Batman because they just change lives for a moment, but a teacher changes a life forever. The outfit may not be as cool but the impact is much more impressive. Thank you so much and be someone's super hero.

Twelve Alabama Teachers Receive Fund for Teachers Grant Awards

Congratulations to the 2015 Alabama Fund for Teachers (FFT) grant award recipients! Fund for Teachers annually awards grants to pre K-12 educators who address professional learning gaps through self-designed summer fellowships.



The 2015 recipients are:

- Forest Oaks Elementary School: LeAnn Cox, Christine Sexton, Mary Ramsey, Virginia Derzis Carroll, and Abigail Brock
- Madison County Elementary School: Pamela Berry and Leslie Lawhorn
- Homewood Middle School: Molly Knudsen and Briana Morton
- Monrovia Elementary School: Vincenza Sweet
- New Market School: Courtney Harper and Amber Moore

To learn more about the teachers and their self-designed summer fellowships, visit fundforteachers.org.

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AEN EDITORIAL STAFF

Managing Editor: Dr. Michael O. Sibley

Contributing Editors: Ed Crenshaw | Erica S. Pippins

Malissa Valdes-Hubert, APR | Beverly Davis

Graphic Artist: Charles V. Creel

Contact **Alabama Education News**
334-242-9950 (p) · 334-353-4682 (f)
aen@alsde.edu (e) · www.alsde.edu (w)

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P.O. Box 302101
Montgomery, AL 36130-2101

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