



AEN Alabama Education News

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Elementary School Thrill Ride: Madison City School System Sixth Grade Teacher Amara Alexander Receives \$25,000 Milken Educator Award

An Alabama teacher whose students apply their physics skills to build roller coasters in class found herself on a thrill ride of a different sort when she walked into a surprise school assembly and was presented with the prestigious [Milken Educator Award!](#)

Sixth-grade teacher Amara Alexander was recognized for her commitment to her students, colleagues and the community as the newest recipient of the \$25,000 cash award, hailed by *Teacher Magazine* as the “Oscars of Teaching.” Alexander is the second member of her family to receive the honor. Her mother, Dr. Tammy Alexander, was named Alabama’s Milken Educator in 1998.

The announcement came during the [Milken Family Foundation’s](#) 30th Annual Coast-to-Coast Tour to reward outstanding educators. Presented by Milken Educator Awards Senior Vice President Dr. Jane Foley and State Superintendent of Education Michael Sentance, the award recognizes the exceptional work of educators as a model for the state and nation.

“Amara Alexander is a gifted teacher who passionately explores the creative side of science in the classroom,” said Foley. “Her multidisciplinary approach boosts student engagement, and propels academic achievement in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Training our nation’s future leaders in these areas is essential to succeeding in a global economy. Amara is setting them on the right path. I commend Amara on this well-deserved recognition and look forward to her contributions to the Milken Educator Network.”

Sentance also extended congratulations to Alexander for her being committed to excellence. Her students post some of the Madison City School System’s highest scores on assessments.

“[The Milken Educator Award](#) is a direct reflection of Amara Alexander’s passion for generating excitement about science and interest in STEM-related careers among her students,” Sentance said. “By using daily targets, guiding questions and an inquiry-based approach, she keeps her students engaged in the process and promotes important real-world skills such as critical thinking

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First Lessons Learned Since Being Named the 2016-2017 Alabama Teacher of the Year: Part II

In the second part of a two-part essay, 2016-2017 Alabama Teacher of the Year Dana Jacobson discusses some of the things she has learned from fellow educators during her visits to schools across the state and shares tips for best practices.

One thing leads to another: #RippleEffect!

Since I have been tweeting and applying hashtags, #RippleEffect has become one of the most frequent I have used. Once I opened my door, stepped outside my classroom, and started looking, listening, and participating, more than I could have imagined has come my way.

This is one of the principles I have learned in my private life as a calligrapher and book artist: Creativity happens in the midst of doing! It is through the ritual of practice that the Aha! moment happens. Similarly, as I have been looking for good things going on in our schools and sharing with other educators and community members, the more positive things I seem to notice.

A positive mindset and outlook have had a ripple effect, leading me to notice the positive things going on and focus on developing solutions as well. One thing leads to another. However, this chain reaction cannot begin unless we put ourselves, our classrooms, our learning communities, and our schools out there in the midst of it all, where we can come together, sharing in the true spirit of collaboration, unafraid to take risks because of mutual support.

High expectations must underpin everything we do

Throughout my many conversations with colleagues, I have learned that “expectations” is a word that continues to emerge. I think our expectations as teachers are critical to producing student learning outcomes. Our expectations determine how we design learning experiences for our students. I think we can make positive, cost-free changes by simply changing our expectations.

When our expectations are high, we must also create instructional supports to help our students succeed. There is no longer a one-size-fits-all solution to education. We must continue to have high expectations for everyone and constantly design learning experiences that include differentiation and scaffolding.

Embed literacy in fun, student-created products

I would love to share two things that each teacher can implement in his or her classroom on a daily or weekly basis.

No. 1: Written Daily Log – The student writes a log of the activities during a single class. This can be in paragraph form, or it could be in any of the following forms: an acrostic, a poem, a rap, a fairy tale, meeting minutes, a poem in two voices (presented with a peer), or a timeline (HSTRY Timeline is a great app for this). The student in charge of the written daily log decides on the form it takes. The student gathers information during class and presents the written daily log the next day of class.

No. 2: Visual Daily Log – The student documents the class by taking photographs. The student then makes a visual daily log using a program such as PowerPoint, Emaze, Animoto, or Prezi. Each photograph should have a brief caption, and the teacher might set the time limit at two minutes. Music can be used in creative ways to enhance the visual daily log.

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ALABAMA SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

A Christmas CAROL

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ACT NOW! curtain closes on Dec. 24th!
Visit www.asf.net and use code: **ALEDU**

The ALSDE Welcomes Three Educators To State Staff!

On Friday, December 1, the State Department of Education officially welcomed Dr. Dee Fowler as the State Superintendent of Education's Chief of Staff; Dr. Barbara Cooper as the Deputy State Superintendent/Chief Academic Officer; and Mrs. Chasidy White as Director of Strategic Initiatives.

In a doughnut and coffee breakfast reception, State Superintendent Michael Sentance acknowledged the newest staff members stating that he is very optimistic about the direction of the Department and is looking forward to the work of improving public education in Alabama.

Dr. Fowler has worked for both Madison County and Madison City Schools serving as a classroom teacher, assistant principal, principal, director of administration/operations and personnel, assistant superintendent and superintendent. Fowler's educational background includes a bachelor's degree from Lipscomb University; a master's degree from George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University; AA Certification from Alabama A&M University, and a Doctorate in Education from The University of Alabama.

"This is a very invigorating time to be in education in Alabama. We are facing a pivotal point as we strive to become leaders in our region and nation. I am very pleased to be in a position to serve and learn from our students, teachers, and district staff," Dr. Fowler said.

Prior to becoming the deputy superintendent in the Huntsville City School System in 2011, Dr. Cooper served as a classroom teacher, assistant principal, principal, chief equity and engagement officer, as well as director of family engagement and community outreach for the Aurora Public School system in Aurora, CO.

"I am excited to answer the calling to serve as the Deputy State Superintendent of Education/Chief Academic Officer at the ALSDE," Dr. Cooper said. "I am committed to ensuring an equitable education for all 737,451 students in the great state of Alabama. I look forward to working with the ALSDE team to support all districts in becoming educational centers of excellence and equity."

Dr. Cooper holds a bachelor's degree in Education (summa cum laude) from Western Illinois University, as well as a master's degree in administration, supervision and curriculum development (magna cum laude), and a Ph.D. in Education Leadership and Innovation, both from the University of Colorado at Denver.

Chasidy White comes to the Department from Brookwood Middle School (Tuscaloosa County School System) in Vance, AL, and serves as the Director of Strategic Initiatives. In this role she will work with the state superintendent and ALSDE leadership to lead the identification, development, and statewide implementation of research-based initiatives. Mrs. White said coming to the Department marks the beginning of many educational opportunities.

"I am both humbled and thrilled to join such an outstanding team," Mrs. White said. "It is a blessing to have the opportunity to help Alabama students benefit from advances in educational initiatives and policy that lie just beyond the horizon."

White has taught World History for more than 12 years. She was the state of Alabama District 4 Teacher of the Year and a state finalist in 2014. Mrs. White has a bachelor's degree in secondary education comprehensive social studies from The University of Alabama and a master's degree in secondary education history from the University of West Alabama. [AEN](#)



Dr. Dee Fowler



Dr. Barbara Cooper



Mrs. Chasidy White



Mr. Michael Sentance



Lori MaGee and Elizabeth Fisher

Alabama ACT Aspire Scores Show Increase for Third Straight Year

*Alabama Students Improve in All Subjects
in Nearly Every Grade Tested!*

Teachers and administrators throughout Alabama are working tirelessly to make sure students receive a quality education. This is no easy task, but momentum is moving in the right direction. Although we continue to improve compared to previous years, we must make sure Alabama students reach a level of educational attainment that equals or exceeds that of students across the country and internationally.

- State Superintendent of Education Michael Sentance

Alabama public schools students have completed the third year of ACT assessments and the [results](#) show progress towards increased achievement. This most recent round of ACT Aspire assessment scores shows increased proficiency as Alabama students continue to move towards greater levels of college and career readiness.

In spring 2016, a total of 383,279 students in Grades 3-8 and 10 took the third year of [ACT Aspire](#) assessments, which are aligned with the [Alabama College- & Career-Ready Standards \(CCRS\)](#).



* With the sunset of ACT Plan in 2015, ACT Aspire was administered to students in Grade 10 for the first time in spring of 2016.

ACT Aspire Math – Percentage Proficient

(Scored Ready or Exceeding on Assessment)

Grade	2016	2015	2014
3rd	59	54	52
4th	53	48	45
5th	45	43	39
6th	54	50	43
7th	37	33	31
8th	31	27	29
10th	18	*	*

ACT Aspire Reading – Percentage Proficient

(Scored Ready or Exceeding on Assessment)

Grade	2016	2015	2014
3rd	37	35	35
4th	41	38	38
5th	36	34	34
6th	42	43	42
7th	36	34	35
8th	45	44	48
10th	32	*	*

ACT Aspire Science – Percentage Proficient

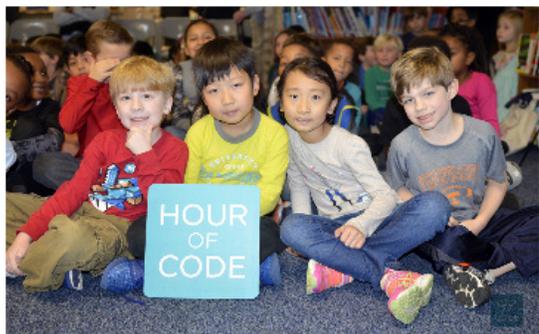
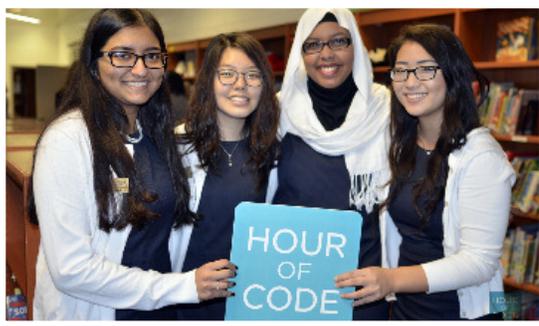
(Scored Ready or Exceeding on Assessment)

Grade	2016	2015
5th	39	37
7th	36	33
10th	23	*

This is Alabama's second year assessing science using ACT Aspire. Students statewide show an increase in grades tested.

The ACT Aspire represents a significant change from how student achievement has been defined in the past and helps to showcase student and school academic performance. The expectation of what students must know and be able to do on state assessments has become more rigorous.

State-, system-, and school-level data can be found at the ALSDE [Data Center \(Click tab for 2015-16 data\)](#). Assessment results for the *Alabama Alternate Assessment* can be found here as well. [AEN](#)



ALSDE and Auburn Early Education Kick-Off Statewide Computer Technology Celebration

Understanding technology is an essential part of a well-rounded education. To support a national effort to increase youth interest in technology careers, Alabama schools celebrated Alabama Computer Science Education Week – The Hour of Code, on December 5-11.

A special event was held at the Auburn Early Education Center to officially kick off this celebration. Speakers included State Superintendent Michael Sentance, Deputy State Superintendent Philip Cleveland, Technology Business Founder Boyd Stephens, and Alabama Alternate State Teacher of the Year Dawn Davis.



Computer-savvy Alabama high school student, Parker Jones, also shared his thoughts about why computer science education is personally important to him – college and career readiness.

Some well-known career options in computer science are Software Developer, Software Engineer, Cyber Security Analyst, and Computer Scientist.

More young professionals will be needed in these areas in the future. Nationally, nearly 71 percent of all new jobs in STEM areas are in computing areas. However, only about 8 percent of STEM graduates are in computer science.

According to the Department of Labor, the average salary of Computer Research Scientists in our state is more than \$109,000 per year!

“We were proud to be a part of this statewide effort to increase awareness about the benefits of computer science education,” said State Superintendent of Education Michael Sentance. [AEN](#)

- Alabama is an emerging hub for Information Technology (IT). Employing approximately 15,000 professionals, Alabama’s IT companies have been estimated to generate more than \$1 billion in revenue annually.
- Top regions in Alabama for IT talent and industries include the metro areas of Auburn-Opelika, Birmingham, Huntsville, Mobile, Montgomery, and Tuscaloosa.
- Nationally, about 71 percent of all new jobs in STEM areas are in computing areas. However, only about 8 percent of STEM graduates are in computer science. More young professionals are needed.

UWA Offers Scholarships for Teaching in the Black Belt

The University of West Alabama (UWA) plans to launch a program in early 2017 for education majors who will receive scholarships and other assistance in exchange for committing to teach in a Black Belt community for at least three years.

The first round of scholarships for the Black Belt Teaching Corps will be awarded in the spring semester that begins in early 2017, according to the [Tuscaloosa News](#). Dean Jan Miller told the publication The Julia S. Tutwiler College of Education will award 10 scholarships a year to education majors. The students must apply for the program.

Students will receive partial scholarship of \$2,500 per semester. The average undergraduate tuition for Alabama residents is \$7,286 and \$14,573 for non-residents. Miller said a committee is finalizing details of the scholarships and the application process. The college hopes to begin taking applications in November 2017. As a part of the program, the students will participate in a leadership training program, which will include site visits to rural schools and service projects.

The program is funded by \$250,000 earmarked by the Alabama Legislature for the teaching corps. The bulk of the funds will go for



The first round of scholarships for the the University of West Alabama Black Belt Teaching Corps will be awarded in the spring semester that begins in early 2017.

scholarships. Miller goes on to say, while initially the funds are a one-time appropriation, she hopes the program will receive regular state funding in the future. The teaching corps will also provide as much as \$1,000 for a service project at each student's school.

Mmiller also said the students will decide on service projects and come up with solutions. The service projects will give the students experience with fund-raising opportunities and grant-writing. As part of the corps, the students agree to teach in Alabama's Black Belt at a partnering school for at least three years. The region includes Barbour, Bullock, Butler, Choctaw, Clarke, Crenshaw, Dallas, Greene, Hale, Lowndes, Macon, Marengo, Montgomery, Perry, Pickens, Pike, Russell, Sumter, and Wilcox counties.

According to Miller, the goal is for teachers to become mentors to the next generation of teachers. UWA is partnering with multistate non-profit, the Rural Schools Collaborative, for the teaching corps. Collaboration provides networking opportunities for UWA to connect with similar programs in other regions of the country and learn from their experiences. UWA's teaching corps program is modeled on a similar Ozarks Teacher Corps in Missouri. [AEN](#)

Read more [here](#).

View the ALSDE "Thank You" Videos!

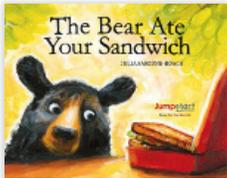
Alabama State Department of Education staff recently collaborated to show gratitude in the form of two videos to the thousands of educators, administrators, and support staff in the 137 school systems across the state.

The videos, featured on the department's [YouTube channel](#), included staff from sections of the department expressing their heartfelt thanks and deep appreciation. [AEN](#)



Alabama Schools Participate in Jumpstart's Read for the Record Day

The Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) was excited to take part in Jumpstart's *Read for the Record*® (RFTR), a national campaign that was



launched over a decade ago to address the educational inequities that leave too many children unprepared for kindergarten. Millions of children and adults gathered to learn, laugh, and read this year's campaign book, "The Bear Ate Your Sandwich" by

Julia Sarcone-Roach as part of the world's largest shared reading experience.

"We are keenly aware that not every child comes to school with a backpack full of wonderful literacy experiences, so for us, this is an opportunity to highlight the importance of early reading by asking grandparents, parents, caregivers, and communities to engage in efforts to support early reading and literacy in their community," Porter said. "It continues to be the mission of the ARI to help schools, teachers, and parents to close the gap in reading so that each child has an equal chance for success in school and beyond."

It is a delight for the ARI to be part of this national event and share this adorable story with some of our youngest learners. - ARI Program Coordinator Karen Porter

Jumpstart is a national early education organization working towards the day every child in America enters kindergarten prepared to succeed. By participating in Jumpstart's year-long program, children develop the language, literacy, and social-emotional skills they need to be ready for school setting them on a path for lifelong success. [AEN](#)



The ARI regional staff partnered with principals and reading specialists to read "The Bear Ate Your Sandwich" to young children in 26 locations across the state!

- Attalla Elementary School, Attalla City
- Autaugaville High School, Autauga County
- Pine Grove Elementary School, Baldwin County
- Barrett Elementary School, Birmingham City
- Wylam K-8 School, Birmingham City
- Appalachian School, Blount County
- Verbena High School, Chilton County
- Cherokee Elementary School, Colbert County
- Austinville Elementary School, Decatur City
- Moon Lake School, DeKalb County
- Flomaton Elementary School, Escambia County
- Glen Oaks Elementary School, Fairfield City
- Samson Elementary School, Geneva County
- McDonnell Elementary School, Huntsville City
- Leeds Primary School, Leeds City
- Wacoochee Elementary School, Lee County
- Tanner High School, Limestone County
- Holloway Elementary School, Mobile County
- Iola Roberts Elementary School, Pell City
- Ridgecrest Elementary School, Phenix City
- Dixie Elementary School, Russell County
- Salter Elementary School, Talladega City
- Northington Elementary School, Tuscaloosa City
- Sumiton Elementary School, Walker County
- McIntosh Elementary School, Washington County
- J. E. Hobbs Elementary School, Wilcox County



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Innovation Celebration Showcases

Lanett and Chambers County School Systems

Lanett City and Chambers County School systems were the most recent stops on the Alabama State Department of Education's "Celebrate Innovation" tour.

State Superintendent of Education Michael Sentance, ALSDE staff, and local education and civic leaders were treated to tours of the Lanett City School System's robotics program and STEM education program, which begins at the elementary level and continues through junior high and high school.

The innovation celebration continued at the Chambers County Career Technical Center in LaFayette, where all core classes are taken virtually. By partnering with Lanett City Schools, students in either school system have opportunities available in both systems. The Chambers County Career Technical Center offers Precision Machining, Engineering, Automotive Technology, and Health Science on campus. Culinary Arts and Graphic Arts classes are taught on LaFayette High School's campus, and Teacher Education is located on Eastside Elementary School's campus. [AEN](#)



Mock Election Gives Alabama Students an Opportunity to Participate in the Electoral Process

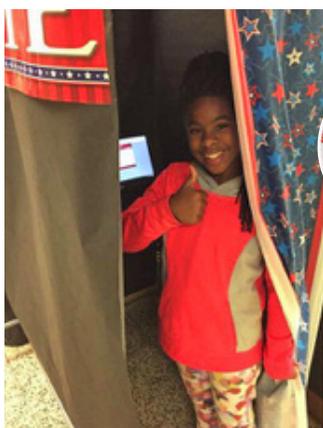
Alabama students in Grades 4-12 had an opportunity to gain an understanding of the electoral process by conducting a mock election for Alabama's November 2016 General Election.

The Alabama Votes Student Mock Election was a partnership among the Office of the Alabama Secretary of State, the Alabama State Department of Education, the American Village, and Alabama Independent School Association. The student mock election aims to generate interest and spur excitement among Alabama's student population about civic responsibility and democratic principles.

Participating schools visited www.alabamavotes.gov/mockelection and inserted an access code that was provided to them by the Alabama Office of the Secretary of State. Students then submitted their vote by selecting the ballot of their chosen presidential candidate and clicking the "VOTE" button.

According to the statewide results on the Secretary of State's Student Mock Election Page, Republican Candidate Donald Trump received 43.58 percent of the votes (75, 878 votes), while Democratic Candidate Hillary Clinton received 38.40 percent of the votes (66,871 votes).

A total of 174,125 votes were cast statewide! [AEN](#)



Lessons Learned: 2016-2017

Alabama Teacher of the Year: Part II

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While students might collaborate, I think that assigning one student to each of these activities will help students develop a sense of independence and ownership as they grow their capacities as creators of messages. These ideas can be used for all grades and across all content areas.

Imagine the literacy skills that we can develop at the middle and high school levels if all teachers had their students complete each activity once every 32 days (if we have 32 students per class).

That means that even with larger classes, students would have the opportunity to have their written and visual products published in the classroom 12 times a year. #authenticassessment

Not only do these logs improve literacy, but they also build community in the classroom, and frequently, students break out into uncontrollable laughter – one of the best team-building strategies ever. [AEN](#)

Arts And World Languages Courses of Study Available For Public Review



In a constant effort to continually improve outcomes for students in Grades K-12, the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) is asking for [public feedback](#) specifically related to the newly developed [Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards](#) for arts and world languages. This [review](#) offers an opportunity for those who are genuinely interested in improving education to offer feedback related to each standard for arts and world languages for each grade.

ALSDE encourages all educators and staff to participate in the [review process](#) of the newly developed Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards for arts and world languages. Your input is highly regarded and invaluable as we seek to maintain the highest level of rigor and challenge for all students in Alabama's public schools.

The [public review](#) began on December 6, 2016, and conclude on January 6, 2017. At the conclusion of the public review, the feedback generated will go to the state Arts and World Languages Courses of Study committee and task force. The comments that will be considered for action by the committee and task force are those of academic substance that are tied specifically to a standard. The Arts and World Languages committee and task force will submit their recommendations to the Alabama State Board of Education. [AEN](#)

ASF Opens Auditions for 2017 State Youth Theatre



Outstanding high school students from across the state are invited to audition for a coveted spot in the the Alabama Shakespeare Festival's (ASF) State Youth Theatre, a two week residency program at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. Those selected work side by side with

professional New York theatre artists for a two-week intensive workshop. The program culminates with a public performance on the Octagon Stage at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival.

Students will be housed on the campus of Auburn University at Montgomery for the duration of the program. Most students are required to pay tuition; however, some need-based scholarships are available.

Auditions will be held at four different locations across the state:

Saturday, January 7 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Birmingham: Alabama School of Fine Arts • 1800 Rev. Abraham Woods Jr. Blvd.

Auburn: Auburn High School • 405 South Dean Road

Cullman: Fairview High School • 841 Welcome Road

Saturday, January 28 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Montgomery: Alabama Shakespeare Festival • One Festival Drive

Callbacks will be held February 11 at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. For more information, visit [HERE](#) or contact ASF at 334-271-5300.

Singing to the Rafters! Escambia County High School Choir Selected to Sing New York Festival

Officials of Festival at Carnegie Hall, one of the two most prestigious musical events in the world for middle school and high school students, have selected Escambia County High School (ECHS) Choir to be a part of the 2017 festival.

Marion Gomez, General Manager of Carnegie Hall, announced the selection in a letter to ECHS Choir Director Conrad Weber. "Your choir has been chosen to perform in the world-renowned music venue, Carnegie Hall, in collaboration with the finest school-aged singers in the United States and beyond," Gomez wrote.

Weber, who is in his fourth year as director of the local high school's choir, said that select ECHS choir members will make the four-day trip, which includes the prestigious performance, as well as a trip to a Broadway and sight-seeing adventure in the "Big Apple."



ECHS Choir Director
Conrad Weber

Weber, who sent an [audition video](#) to festival officials earlier this year said the choir has been working for months towards possible inclusion in the festival, although they didn't know that until he received the letter from Gomez. "This is something we've been talking about since last spring. The students knew we were working on something, but they didn't know what it was until yesterday when I told them. They are very excited," he said.

The choral director said that the willingness of his students to explore new musical territory is the most satisfying part of the effort to get to Carnegie Hall. "In order to get into this festival, we had to show the ability to sing more concert-choir type music. That, to me, is the biggest accomplishment in this. It shows that they are willing to follow us into new areas musically, and this is a big part of that process."

Credit: Atmore Advance newspaper

Amara Alexander: The 2016 Milken Educator Award Winner



continued from front page...

and problem solving."

Alexander's students learn about science by dancing, singing, writing songs, researching, designing, building, and teaching their peers. She often lets her students teach while she facilitates the discussion and works to incorporate organizational skills into her class procedures, such as coaching students on note taking. For English Language Learners (ELLs), Alexander deftly differentiates curriculum, providing appropriately-leveled materials and grouping students to support the ELLs' participation in discussions and experiments.

In addition, Alexander strives to build positive relationships with all stakeholders by inviting families, colleagues, and administrators to participate in classroom activities with her students. She is active in Project Lead the Way, leads Horizon's science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) efforts, and directs the school's extended-day program. A long-time Girl Scout, Alexander is a cadet leader and meets weekly with middle school girls to discuss issues such as bullying, advocacy, budgeting, and time management.

Alexander is a graduate of Alabama A&M University, where she earned a Bachelor and Master of Science in Elementary Education in 2007 and 2010, respectively.

Each year the [Milken Family Foundation](#) travels across the country surprising teachers, principals, and specialists with \$25,000 awards to further excellence in education. Since Alabama joined the [Milken Educator Awards](#) program in 1998, 34 Alabama educators have received the "Education Oscar" and a total of \$850,000. [AEN](#)

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AEN EDITORIAL STAFF

Managing Editor: Dr. Michael O. Sibley
Contributing Editors: Ed Crenshaw, Erica S. Pippins,
Malissa Valdes-Hubert, APR
Graphic Artist: Charles V. Creel

AEN CONTACT INFORMATION

334-242-9950 · 334-353-4682 (f)
aen@alsde.edu · www.alsde.edu
Alabama Education News · P.O. Box 302101
Montgomery, AL 36130-2101

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