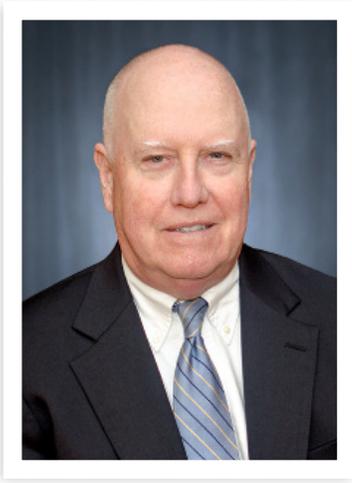




AEN Alabama Education News

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



STAKEHOLDERS WELCOME MICHAEL SENTANCE AS STATE SUPERINTENDENT

Superintendents, local and state board members, and other education, business and industry stakeholders recently gathered in Montgomery, AL to officially welcome Alabama's new State Superintendent of Education, Mr. Michael Sentance.

The reception, sponsored by The Alabama Association of School Boards (AASB), Alabama Education Association (AEA), A+ Education Partnership, Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS), Business Education Alliance (BEA), ALFA Farmers Federation, Manufacture Alabama, School Superintendents of Alabama (SSA), and the Alabama Association of School Business Officials (AASBO), was yet another opportunity for Alabama's new top education official to meet and greet other education advocates. Mr. Sentance, a native of Massachusetts who was selected by the Alabama State Board of Education on August 11, 2016 to serve at the helm of Alabama's public education system, briefly addressed the attendees of his

In the next decade, I want to see Alabama be the nation's biggest success story in terms of public education.

- State Superintendent of Education Mr. Michael Sentance

optimism about the challenges that lie ahead and limitless expectations for the state.

"This is an exciting time for me personally and for the state of Alabama. When I go out and visit schools and meet people across the state, I find a lot of positive feedback about public education," Sentance said. "There are a lot of people who want to improve education in the state - that's something I am deeply committed to trying to achieve. In the next decade, I want to see Alabama be the nation's biggest success story in terms of public education."

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

Clay-Chalkville English teacher Dana Jacobson was selected as the Alabama Teacher of the Year in May. In the first of a two-part essay, Jacobson reflects on her time as the state's representative for Alabama educators thus far.

Several months ago, at the end of the school year, I, along with 15 District Teachers of the Year, attended a beautiful awards ceremony that honored the outstanding work of Alabama elementary and secondary educators.

I felt so privileged to be in the company of colleagues who have dedicated themselves to students and their learning. The ceremony not only honored the work that teachers do but also celebrated the remarkable creativity, talents, and abilities of our students. What a moving way to begin this year as an ambassador for Alabama's teachers!

Over the last three months in my new capacity, I have participated in professional development, attended teacher institutes, and spoken at meetings. While my term as the Alabama Teacher of the Year has just begun, here are a few lessons that I have learned through my experiences that which I believe are key to improving school culture.

Building a strong community is the first step toward improving school culture! Creating community in my classroom and within my larger school community has always been a number one priority. I spend time at the beginning of the year getting to know my students and having them getting to know one another. Students get more excited about doing classwork, even homework, when I have done the foundational work of building relationships. After all, many students may not remember the specific content of a class, but they all will remember how we treated them. This summer, a kindergarten teacher told me that building community in her classroom is the theme for the entire year. Developing a sense of belonging goes a long way and is, perhaps, the most overlooked variable within the teacher's grasp that we can influence and, at the same time, has a powerful effect on learning.

Years ago, I heard about a great school wide team-building retreat that an entire middle school participated in for two days in the summer. Knowing that this would be

the ideal way to help my own school develop that sense of community I was longing for, I returned to my school where I encountered obstacle after obstacle, such as summer band practice, location, feasibility for a large student body, and football practice. This summer, 12 years later, I learned about a faculty-developed program that a local school implements the first days of school with the explicit goal of developing community based on a shared vision and common experiences.

I went to the school to witness how the teachers, staff, and administrators work together to build a positive school community. I went back to my school to share

Each of us has a voice, and our voices cannot be heard unless we use them.

- Alabama Teacher of the Year Dana Jacobson

what I had learned, and within a week, we had developed a vision for how our school might implement a similar program. What seemed impossible a decade earlier was now possible! When everyone's voice is heard, everyone truly feels engaged, and we are now working to define ourselves as an inclusive learning community! In fact, building a strong community is the critical step toward creating a strong school culture, one in which life-long learning can be cultivated.

We all have a voice, so share and be heard!

Since being named the Alabama Teacher of the Year, I have felt validated by the award in two key ways. First, what a validation it is to be recognized by my peers for the work that I do! Second, the award itself made me realize that I have a voice. What I want those working in our schools to know is that each of us does have a voice, and that our voices cannot be heard unless we use them. One key way we can extend our school community is to

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Welcome Mr. Sentance

...from front page

Mr. Sentance, a graduate of Georgetown University, Duquesne University School of Law, and Boston University School of Law has a professional background that spans a variety of positions, including but not limited to, the



Assistant Attorney General, Director of the Governor’s Legislative Office, Undersecretary of Education, Secretary of Education, and Senior Education Advisor to the Governor – all in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, a state which boasts one of the finest public education systems in the country. Since then, Mr. Sentance has served as a regional representative with the United States Department of Education in Washington D.C., representing New England and as a consultant on education policy and improvement.

Outside of his career steeped in legislative affiliations, education policy and strategic education reform, Mr. Sentance enjoys horticultural gardening as well as reading and studying American history – particularly colonial era interests. He has said, “I’m fascinated

by the people who were willing to put their lives on the line for an idea.” Sentance also enjoys the writings of Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. A huge sports fan, Sentance played baseball in high school and soccer (goalie) in college and continued to play softball well after his college days. He still roots for his hometown Boston Red Sox, Celtics, and New England Patriots. Mr. Sentance and his wife Mary Ann have a son who works in sales for the Oracle Corporation in the U.S. and Canada, and a daughter who works with emotionally disturbed children in rural Massachusetts.



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Alabama Librarian Awarded Grant

At the 2016 American Library Association (ALA) Annual Conference in Orlando, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) announced the inaugural recipients of grants made possible by the generosity of AASL member Marina “Marney” Welmers. The additions to the organization’s prestigious awards program provide funds for public middle or high school libraries to update their existing collections or plan a special event in order to enhance student learning.

The Inspire Collection Development Grant provides funds to extend, update, and diversify a school’s book, online subscription, and/or software collections in order to improve student achievement. Public school libraries may apply for up to \$5,000 and up to \$20,000 per year will be awarded annually.

The 2016 recipients include:

- Kelly Beckham, Kannapolis Middle School, Kannapolis, NC
- Cheryl Goff, Carrie D. Kendrick Middle School, Jonesboro, GA
- Shanna Miles, South Atlanta High School, Atlanta, GA
- Leigh Morlock, Jefferson High School Middle College for Advanced Studies, Portland, OR
- **Chalice Tillis, Abbeville High School, Abbeville, AL**

“The committee was excited by the high quality of programs and events being developed by all of the grant applicants,” said Val Edwards, grant committee chair. “The selected applications showcased programs and events that will have a long-lasting impact on students. These programs and events were developed to meet the voiced needs of students and provide avenues for many types of learners to engage and enjoy literary experiences.” The American Association of School Librarians www.aasl.org, a division of the ALA, empowers leaders to transform teaching and learning



ESSA Community Engagement Tour 2016 Wraps Up

Thank you! The Community Engagement Tour to inform Alabama educators, staff, community members, and others of the Every Student Succeeds Act and obtain input, visited eight cities across the state and garnered many comments and questions. The ALSDE appreciates your input, time, and attention to this important part of the design for a customized, strategic plan for education in Alabama.

- Visit the [ALSDE ESSA page](#) to get the presentation, pamphlet, and other resources AND to view the Q&As from the tour stops.
- Check out the ALSDE [Flickr album](#) for pictures from the stops.
- Search [Twitter](#) using #ESSAAlabama or #ESSA to see tweets and thoughts on ESSA.
- Visit the [Governor’s ESSA Implementation Committee page](#) to learn more about next steps and meeting dates.



Alabama School Joins “Voices Around the World Choir”

W. J. Carroll Intermediate School, Baldwin County School System, is the first choral group in Alabama to participate in the Voices Around the World (VATW) project. VATW is a non-profit project dedicated to linking the voices of young people around the world through music.

Participants in this musical experience included over 5,000 students from 1,400 national, independent, and international schools. W.J. Carroll Choral Director Frances Alexander, who also serves as the school’s library media specialist, said her Daphne, Alabama, students were proud to be part of this project.



“I was just surfing the net. I read about the project and my students voted to participate, she said. “They learned the new song, ‘Listen to Us,’ and because of their extraordinary efforts, great things have resulted. We are international recording artists!”

Each year, a song written especially for the VATW Choir is learned by its choir members and recorded. This year’s song, “Listen to Us,” was centered on the Olympics. The money from downloading the “Listen to Us” CD and DVD will be used to help St. Mary’s School in Tanzania, Africa.

“We are so proud to represent our school and state in this worldwide musical project,” Alexander said. “We are so fortunate to have this opportunity to help others. I hope that the people of our state will show we are a caring community of people by downloading the VATW recording. This is an amazing venture.”

For more information about the Voices Around the World project, or to purchase the CD or DVD, visit www.voicesaround.com.

Thomasville High Seniors join Coalition to Combat Underage Drinking

Four seniors from Thomasville High School (THS) and THS Principal Charles Alford recently attended a meeting of the county coalition to combat underage drinking at the Clarke County Courthouse in Grove Hill. Pictured at right (left to right) are THS seniors David Dean, Julie Rembert, Jeremy Carter, Zack Woodard, and Principal Charles Alford.



The meeting also included Emma Perryman, founder of the coalition; and District and Juvenile Judge J.R. Morgan.



Meet some Network for Alabama Teaching Fellows

In 2015, the Network for Alabama Teaching Fellows (NATF) was conceptualized and actualized through the collaborative efforts of the [Alabama State Department of Education](#) (ALSDE), [Alabama Education Association](#) (AEA), and [A+ Education Partnership](#). The NATF was created for the primary purpose of unifying individual voices of Alabama educators into one, collective, powerful voice to improve educational outcomes for all students. To accomplish this, 22 Teacher Fellows were selected to represent educators throughout the 11 in-service regions in Alabama for a three-year service term. To learn more about the NATF and joining our work, click [HERE](#).



Laura Mussleman Hillhouse is in her fifth year as an Instructional Partner at Forest Hills Elementary in Florence City School System. She taught second grade at Forest Hills from 1992-2011 and began her educational career teaching kindergarten at McAdory Elementary from 1989-1992. Laura graduated from Birmingham-Southern College in 1989 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education. She was born and raised in Florence, AL. and is married to husband Jim and has four children. Her two sons have graduated from Florence High School and her two daughters are presently attending schools in the Florence City System.



Emily Berry is a second grade teacher at Thurston T. Nelson Elementary School in Scottsboro City School System. Berry graduated summa cum laude with her bachelor's and master's degrees from Auburn University. She has taught throughout the state of Alabama in Auburn, Huntsville, Grant, and Scottsboro for nine years in Grades 1-4. Emily is involved in Scottsboro Women's Junior Progress Club, Scottsboro's Impact Learning Center, Network for Alabama Teaching Fellows (NATF), and Legislator and Educator Advocacy Partnership (LEAP). Emily is now pursuing her National Board Certification. She believes that school should be fun, engaging, and rigorous everyday and strives to make school a place that kids want to be. She currently resides in Scottsboro with her husband, Scott, and two dogs, River and Huck.



Eric Creel-Flores, a math teacher at Valley High School in the Chambers County School System, has just completed his 19th year of teaching. He is originally from Juarez, Mexico, but has lived most of his life in Eufaula, AL. Eric graduated from Eufaula High School in 1992 and Troy University in 1996, and has spent the last 14 years teaching in Chambers County. During his time in Chambers County, he has been the District Teacher Leader for TEAM-Math and AMSTI Teacher Leader for W.F. Burns Middle School and Valley High School. Building relationships with teachers and interns he has trained over the years has been one of his most rewarding experiences he has had in his 19 years of teaching.



Amber Dudley teaches English, social studies, and college prep at Wadley High School in the Randolph County School System. She is entering into her fifth year in education. While teaching a variety of classes Ms. Dudley sponsors the Scholar's Bowl Team and Key Club and has coached volleyball, basketball, softball, and track and field. She is a graduate of Jacksonville State University where she ran track and cross country. Her degrees include a B.A. in political science and a M.S.E. in social science education.



Bonnie Garrett is a Highly Qualified Biology, General Science, and Project Lead The Way (PLTW) educator who has been working within the Huntsville City School System for the last 15 years. She graduated from Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University with a bachelor's degree in Biology, a master's degree in Biology, and a master's of education degree in Biology Education. Bonnie is certified in General Science and eight PLTW Gateway modules, which allows her to serve as a PLTW Gateway Master Teacher for colleges and universities all over the nation. A published author, Bonnie is a native and lifelong resident of the great state of Alabama and she is a product of the Clay County School System (Lineville High School).

Prudential Seeks Applicants for the 2017 Spirit of Community Awards

Applications are now being accepted for the 2017 Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, the largest youth recognition program based exclusively on volunteer community service in the United States.

The program's goals are to applaud young people who already are making a positive difference in their towns and



neighborhoods and to inspire others to think about how they might contribute to their communities.

Now in its 22nd year, more than 115,000 youth volunteers have been honored by the program, which is sponsored by Prudential Financial and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP).

The process begins at the school level. After students fill out applications online and submit them to their principals, schools select their top youth volunteers. The top applicants receive the President's Volunteer Service Award and are evaluated by a state-level judging panel, which selects the top middle-level and high school candidate in each state and the District of Columbia.

The online application form is available at <http://spirit.prudential.com> and www.nassp.org/spirit. Students must submit their application and accompanying materials to his/her principal or designated school official by November 8, 2016. The top youth volunteers and distinguished finalists in each state will be announced in February 2017.

The state winners will receive a \$1,000 award; an engraved silver medallion; and a trip to Washington, D.C., for the program's national recognition events.

Nominations Open for LifeChanger of the Year Award

LifeChanger of the Year is an annual program that recognizes and rewards K-12 education professionals. LifeChangers must be K-12 educators, teachers, administrators, or any member of a school's staff who makes a positive difference in the lives of students.

Anyone – including administrators – can nominate up to three educators per academic year for LifeChanger of the Year. Students also are welcome to submit nominations but need to have support of an adult if under the age of 18.

Nominations for 2016-17 close at midnight on January 1, 2017.

The National Grand Prize Winner will receive \$10,000 – a \$5,000 personal cash award, and a \$5,000 donation to their school. Monetary prizes will also be awarded to the National



Grand Prize Finalists (4); LifeChanger Awards recipients (10); and the recipient of the LifeChanger Spirit Award, which recognizes the community that shows the most spirit for their LifeChanger and rallies behind them to recognize their positive influence and leadership.

In addition to the awards and donations, the top five winners will be flown to the National LifeChanger of the Year Awards Ceremony, that will be held in April 2017 in Naples, Florida.

Click [here](#) to learn more.



Do you have the ALSDE APP?

Get directions, contact information, and calendar dates. **Come on, get APPY!**



Alabama Teacher of the Year

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use our voices to tell the outside world what we are doing and another is to bring the outside world into our schools.

We need to let all stakeholders – parents, local government representatives and state legislators, business people, and media – know what we are doing in our classrooms by inviting them into our rooms and creating authentic learning experiences outside our classroom walls.

John D. Rockefeller said, “Next to doing the right thing, the most important thing is to let people know that you are doing the right thing.” I consider myself a private person, and although I have had a Facebook account since 2007, I did not see its benefit to the classroom. However, becoming the Alabama Teacher of the Year transformed me almost instantly.

On the drive home from the Awards Ceremony, my 26-year-old son said, “Mom, you are going to have change! Where is your phone? Let me help you get a Facebook group for the Alabama Teacher of the Year!” Allergic to selfies before, I now find myself instigating them and alongside me one or more people whose messages need to be heard. We simply must share what we are doing so that we ourselves can tell the stories about public education that should be heard!

**The second part of 2016-2017 Alabama Teacher of the Year Dana Jacobson’s essay will appear in an upcoming edition of Alabama Education News.*

2016-2017 Student Advisory Council



Student interaction and interest in state-level policies and programs is integral to PLAN 2020’s goals. Having a Student Advisory Council allows for direct input from our greatest stakeholder – the student.

The State Superintendent Student Advisory Council is a group of 16 middle or secondary school students (two from each board member’s district) who will discuss how decisions made at the state level are affecting students throughout Alabama.

There was tremendous response this year with over 400 applications received! Students were selected and notified at the end of September. For a complete list of students, [click here](#).

Members are chosen by a committee of Alabama State Department of Education and education organization representatives based on an approved rubric. Members will gather input from their district on students’ needs or opinions on state-level policies or directives. Council members will meet two to three times throughout the school year (in person or virtually). The State Superintendent will then bring agreed upon recommendations to the Alabama State Board of Education Members at a late spring 2017 work session.

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