2018-2019 District Teachers of the Year

Nadine Lynch
St. Elmo Elementary School, Mobile County School System
District I Elementary Teacher of the Year

Jessica C. Kinard
Faulkner Middle School, Baldwin County School System
District I Secondary Teacher of the Year

Dr. Brittnie Duncan
Wrights Mill Road Elementary School, Auburn City School System
District II Elementary Teacher of the Year

Dr. Blake Busbin
Auburn High School, Auburn City School System
District II Secondary Teacher of the Year

Carol McLaughlin
Greystone Elementary School, Hoover City School System
District III Elementary Teacher of the Year

Lincoln Clark
Berry Middle School, Hoover City School System
District III Secondary Teacher of the Year

Meghan Allen
Minor Community School, Jefferson County School System
District IV Elementary Teacher of the Year

Lora Gaine
Homewood Middle School, Homewood City School System
District IV Secondary Teacher of the Year

Jennifer J. Parton
Thomaston Elementary School, Thomaston City School System
District V Elementary Teacher of the Year

Zestlan Simmons
Booker T. Washington Magnet High School, Montgomery County School System
District V Secondary Teacher of the Year

Dr. James Tarlton Wilder, III
Odenville Middle School, St. Clair County School System
District VI Elementary Teacher of the Year

Ashley Nicole Holmes
Follett High School, Morgan County School System
District VI Secondary Teacher of the Year

Rachel Pucko
Northport Elementary School, Tuscaloosa County School System
District VII Elementary Teacher of the Year

Robin M. Thompson
Florence High School, Florence City School System
District VII Secondary Teacher of the Year

Danna Holderfield
John S. Jones Elementary School, Etowah County School System
District VIII Elementary Teacher of the Year

Stephanie T. Smith
Buckhorn Middle School, Madison County School System
District VIII Secondary Teacher of the Year

How does the Program Work?

The Alabama State Board of Education and Alabama State Department of Education sponsor the Alabama Teacher of the Year program. The National Teacher of the Year program, presented by the ING Foundation, is a project of the Council of Chief State School Officers. The Alabama State Department of Education’s Communication Office sends the application booklets to local superintendents, elementary school principals, and secondary school principals. The booklet describes the guidelines for selection of the State Teacher of the Year.

A school-level Teacher of the Year selection committee solicits nominees and selects the school’s Teacher(s) of the Year (elementary and secondary).

The committee forwards the application(s) of its honoree(s), along with a cover letter from the principal, to the school system superintendent for participation in the system-level selection.

Once the system-level selection committee has chosen its Teacher of the Year honorees, applications are sent to the Alabama State Department of Education with a cover letter from the local superintendent. The letter acknowledges that the applications represent the school systems’ official nominees for the system level of the selection process. The applications from each local school system will be reviewed by a district-level Teacher of the Year selection committee in each of the eight State Board of Education districts.

Each committee will select a district elementary Teacher of the Year and a district secondary Teacher of the Year for a total of 16 district honorees. Following the selection process the 16 district finalists submit a ten-minute video presentation taken in their classrooms. The State Committee, representing the Alabama State Board of Education, the State Superintendent of Education, professional educators, education-related organizations, the PTA, and business and community leaders, reviews the applications and videos and selects two teachers from each category. One elementary and one secondary teacher are selected from the top four. The State Committee selects the Teacher of the Year and the Alternate Teacher of the Year.

For information about the Alabama Teacher of the Year Program and the Speakers Bureau, contact:

Ann Starks
Alabama State Department of Education
P.O. Box 302101
Montgomery, AL 36103-2101
(334) 242-9700

For media inquiries, contact:

Ed Crenshaw at ecrenshaw@alsde.edu or (334) 353-1497

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ALABAMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Eric G. Mackey, State Superintendent of Education

SP E A K E R S  B U R E A U

A program of the Alabama State Board of Education and the Alabama State Department of Education

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ALABAMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Eric G. Mackey, State Superintendent of Education

1870-2101, telephone (334) 694-4717.

Discrimination policies: Title IX Coordinator, Alabama State Department of Education, P.O. Box 302101, Montgomery, AL 36103-2101, telephone (334) 242-9700.

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Zestlan Simmons
2018-2019 Alabama Teacher of the Year
2018-2019 Alabama Alternate Teacher of the Year
Zestlan.simmons@mmps.k12.al.us · (334) 324-0003
Twitter: @ZestlanSimmons · Instagram: zsimmons99

Teachers have a great sphere of influence, and every teacher desires to make a difference and provide support for not only the students with whom they interact but also with the colleagues with whom they work. In my 19 years as an educator, I have found that participating in collaborative learning communities and creating collaborative learning opportunities encourage a growth mindset of achievement and academic excellence. In this type of culture, teachers work together to create an atmosphere of unity and acceptance that is strengthened by open and honest communication as well as accountability.

In this type of environment, students can discover their individual intelligences and develop them with a variety of teaching and learning strategies. It has been my focus to assist students in discerning these intelligences and to expose them to knowledge and experiences that will enhance their learning as well as inspire them to become well-informed decision makers and contributors in society. In a collaborative learning classroom, students are empowered to succeed in a global society as they learn about the benefits of discovering their own strengths and how the benefit the world around them.

In the same way, new teachers can benefit from collaborative learning communities, in addressing teacher isolation, in particular for new teachers. I believe a nurturing school culture through collaboration with veteran teachers will ensure the professional and emotional support that will promote teacher retention.

Before I began teaching, I claimed to believe that ‘all students can learn.’ Then, my students came with barriers such as poverty and disability challenging this belief and ultimately strengthening it. Belief is the first step in improving educational outcomes for all students. Action is the next step. We must work to close the achievement gaps. For students with disabilities, let’s ensure that their opportunities outweigh their obstacles, and that their abilities shine brighter than their disabilities. To do this, we must advocate for further inclusion of children with disabilities to learn alongside their nondisabled peers. For students in poverty, we must recruit and retain highly effective educators, improve access to preschool, and differentiate instruction in high needs’ schools. We must think outside the box about creative ways to remove educational barriers. For me, that meant learning to drive a bus to make the functional curriculum accessible for my students and providing family trainings in my students’ homes. May we always do whatever it takes to remove obstacles and improve the educational outcomes for all students in Alabama.

Education
- Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education Language Arts, Auburn University Montgomery, 1999
- Master’s of Science in Secondary Education Language Arts, Auburn University of Montgomery, 2007
- National Board Certification, 2010
- Master’s of Science in Instructional Leadership, Auburn University of Montgomery, 2017

Leadership Activities
- Mentoring Chinese Mandarin language teacher, 2017-2018
- ESL trainer for middle school teachers, A Plus College Read, 2014-present
- AP Language Presenter for Saturday Sessions, National Math and Science Initiative, 2014-present
- Cooperating teacher for student-teacher internship (Huntingdon College), Spring 2017
- Site Facilitator for Montgomery County, APlus College Readiness, 2013-2016
- AP Language Presenter, A Plus College Readiness, 2017-present
- Conducted professional development for faculty on Varying Teaching Strategies for the Different Learning Styles and Addressing Issues in Low Income Schools, 2016
- Collaborated with grade level teachers to construct the 11th Grade ELA Curriculum guide, July 2013
- Conducted System-wide in-service for Secondary English Language arts teachers on the Alabama College and Career readiness standards, August 2013
- Co-sponsor Booker T. Washington Magnet chapter of National Honor Society, 2013-present
- Conducts Workshops for parents of incoming students, 2015-present
- AP English Lead Teacher: Mentored three APlus College ready grant AP English teachers 2011-2013
- Mentored French teacher, Fall 2011
- Cooperating Teacher for student-teacher (University of Alabama Birmingham), Fall 2009
- Mentored first-year Photography teacher (Booker T. Washington Magnet High School), 2009
- Mentor any first year ELA, foreign language or fine arts teachers, 2009-present

Meghan Allen
2018-2019 Alabama Alternate Teacher of the Year
2018-2019 Alabama Elementary Teacher of the Year
mallen@jfcoed.com · (205) 629-9133
Twitter: @MAllenSIPED

Before I began teaching, I claimed to believe that ‘all students can learn.’ Then, my students came with barriers such as poverty and disability challenging this belief and ultimately strengthening it. Belief is the first step in improving educational outcomes for all students.

Action is the next step. We must work to close the achievement gaps. For students with disabilities, let’s ensure that their opportunities outweigh their obstacles, and that their abilities shine brighter than their disabilities. To do this, we must advocate for further inclusion of children with disabilities to learn alongside their nondisabled peers. For students in poverty, we must recruit and retain highly effective educators, improve access to preschool, and differentiate instruction in high needs’ schools. We must think outside the box about creative ways to remove educational barriers. For me, that meant learning to drive a bus to make the functional curriculum accessible for my students and providing family trainings in my students’ homes. May we always do whatever it takes to remove obstacles and improve the educational outcomes for all students in Alabama.

Education
- National Board Certification, Exceptional Needs Specialist, 2013
- Master of Arts in Early Childhood Special Education, University of Alabama at Birmingham, 2012
- Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood, Special, Elementary, and Collaborative Education, Samford University, 2009

Leadership Activities
- College internship leader, Kampala, Uganda, 2018
- Lead special education teacher, 2017-present
- Task force member, ALSDIE Special Education Services, 2014, 2015, 2017
- Inaugural member, Jefferson County’s Superintendent’s Teacher Advisory Council, 2017-present
- Founding mentor, Friends of Exceptional Children, 2017-present
- Executive council member, Samford University Alumni Association, 2015-2018
- Co-facilitator, Continuous Improvement Leadership Team, 2014-present
- Teacher mentor, local university students, 2009-present

Awards
- Jefferson County Elementary Teacher of the Year, 2018
- Minor Community School Teacher of the Year, 2018
- Phi Mu Fraternity Outstanding Advisory Council Member, 2016
- Ocean Buhllard Beeson School of Education Golden Apple Award for Outstanding Teacher who is an Alumnus of Samford University, 2015
- Crumly Chapel Elementary School Second Mile Teacher, 2010

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2018-2019 Alabama Teacher of the Year Awards

- A+ Education Partnership
- Alabama Association of School Boards
- Alabama State Board of Education and Alabama State Department of Education
- Alabama Teacher of the Year
- National Board Certification, Exceptional Needs Specialist
- Master of Arts in Early Childhood Special Education, University of Alabama
- Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood, Special, Elementary, and Collaborative Education, Samford University
- College internship leader, Kampala, Uganda
- Lead special education teacher
- Task force member, ALSDIE Special Education Services
- Inaugural member, Jefferson County’s Superintendent’s Teacher Advisory Council
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- Executive council member, Samford University Alumni Association
- Co-facilitator, Continuous Improvement Leadership Team
- Teacher mentor, local university students
- Jefferson County Elementary Teacher of the Year
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- Ocean Buhllard Beeson School of Education Golden Apple Award for Outstanding Teacher who is an Alumnus of Samford University
- Crumly Chapel Elementary School Second Mile Teacher
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- Pearson Edutainment
- School Superintendents of Alabama
- Alabama Scottish Rite Foundation
- CASH AWARD FOR ALABAMA TEACHER OF THE YEAR
- Powderschool
- Ed Price Floral Creations
- Shoe Station
- Smart Technologies

Awards are subject to change on a yearly basis

2018-2019 Alabama Alternate Teacher of the Year

- Alabama Association of School Boards
- GIFT CARDS FOR THE DISTRICT TEACHERS
- Alabama Association of School Boards
- GIFT CARDS FOR THE DISTRICT TEACHERS
- Alabama Alternate Teacher of the Year
- $2,500
- Alabma Alternate Teacher of the Year
- $1,500
- Alabma Alternate Teacher of the Year
- $1,500