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CONTACT: Communication
334-242-9950
comm@alsde.edu

ALABAMA TEACHER OF THE YEAR “FINAL FOUR” ANNOUNCED
2014-2015 winner and alternate to be named May 14

Montgomery, Ala. — It is down to the final four candidates vying to serve as the 2014-2015 Alabama Teacher of the Year. The finalists are:

Elementary
- Ellen Anson, Rocky Ridge Elementary School, Hoover City School System, State Board District III
- Ann Marie Corgill, Cherokee Bend Elementary School, Mountain Brook City School System, State Board District VII

Secondary
- Christopher D. Payne, Dothan High School, Dothan City School System, State Board District II
- Carrie Jones, Hewitt-Trussville High School, Trussville City School System, State Board District VII

State Superintendent of Education Tommy Bice said after a long and detailed process, the final four candidates for the Alabama Teacher of the Year have been chosen from many other outstanding examples of educational leadership in the state.

“The final four candidates are shining examples of educators who have devoted time, attention, and love to the education of students in Alabama. They have given all their energy and expertise to help prepare students for the world,” Bice said.

The next step for the final four is an extensive interview with the state judging committee. The 2014-2015 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 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 14, 2014, at the RSA Plaza Terrace.

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.

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

**Biographies**

![Ellen Anson](image)

**Ellen Anson, Rocky Ridge Elementary School, Hoover City School System, State Board District III**

“I have learned that while I am thrilled with major accomplishments, it is the tiny steps of progress that my students make that keep me enthusiastic. It is their smiles when they are understood and their excitement when they accomplish a task that keep me celebrating and dedicated to teaching them day after day, year after year.”

Before she even stepped into her first classroom, Ellen Anson knew she wanted to spend her career teaching special needs children to help others see beyond their mental and physical limitations. Each child, Anson believes, is capable of some level of communicating, whether it is a look in their eyes, the intonation of vocalizations, or a simple gesture. It is her job to help them be heard. Currently, a K-5 Special Education teacher at Rocky Ridge Elementary, the Alabama A&M University and University of West Florida graduate taught in the Huntsville City School System from 1995-2008. Anson uses assistive technology to help her students become more active participants in the school community, which includes creating virtual field trips and producing programs on mobile devices to teach a broad range of concepts. Colleague Jennifer Helenius said, “I am blown away by her ingenuity and resourcefulness.” Outside of the classroom, Anson is involved with the Special Olympics, the Board of the Evening Star Quilters, and various programs at her church, Our Lady of the Valley Catholic Church in Hoover.
Ann Marie Corgill, Cherokee Bend Elementary School, Mountain Brook City School System, District VII
“Day after day, year after year, I realize that my job is not simply about teaching, but reaching students by learning about them, honoring their passions, helping them overcome obstacles, and building foundations so that they can achieve their goals, both as learners and people.”

Anne Marie Corgill originally set out to design and build homes, but she opted instead to create and construct firm foundations for students to stand on as they learn, grow, and become successful contributing members of society. Cherokee Bend Elementary Principal Betsy Bell said Corgill’s efforts to develop and cultivate a nourishing environment for young learners “is far beyond anything that I have ever seen in my 34 years of being an educator.” Corgill believes that by seamlessly integrating social and emotional learning into current academic standards, educators can teach children self-management skills, responsible decision-making, and ethical problem-solving. The National Board Certified Teacher received both her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from The University of Alabama. She has served as the featured speaker at several education conferences throughout the state and nation and is a member of the National Council of Teachers of English. She currently holds a position on the Council’s Elementary Section Steering Committee.
Christopher D. Payne, Dothan High School, Dothan City School System, State Board District II

“I believe every single child has the ability to learn and to create. For some, it may take a little more time than others to grasp a concept or complete their work. I tell all of my students, ‘The best things in life take a little time to create. God took nine months to make you and look how amazing you turned out to be.’

A self-described military brat who spent his formative years living in cities throughout the United States and overseas, Christopher D. Payne credits the “everyday heroes” who taught him from kindergarten through high school with inspiring him to become a teacher. A 9th-12th grade art instructor at Dothan High School since 2007, Payne strives to unlock his students’ hidden potential by motivating them to believe in themselves. He often tells them, “Even a spider can draw a line, so imagine what you can create with a pencil.” In addition to his work in the classroom, the Troy University graduate encourages students to strive for success through his role as Dothan High’s Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) advisor. He served as the organization’s national advisor from 2012-2013, and his leadership has left a lasting impact on students such as Alyssa Newton. “Through him I learned that happiness truly comes through helping one another and that every single random act of kindness can help change the world and the lives of people in it.”
Carrie Jones, Hewitt Trussville High School, Trussville City School System, State District VII

“I believe the art of teaching in the noblest profession one can aspire to obtain…It is the inherent job of a teacher to inspire students to be greater than anyone believes they can, go farther than they think they are able, and give more than they feel they possess.”

Inspired by her father’s example of love and service, Carrie Jones knew she would choose a service-oriented profession. Though she originally aspired to be an English teacher, two years into her degree program, she felt led to become an educator for exceptional needs children. Jones established the Life Skills Academy at Hewitt Trussville High in 2005, a multi-faceted program that focuses on functional academics, daily living skills, vocational training, recreational and leisure programming, and general population integration through peer partnering. She credits the undeniable love she has for her work for pushing her when she is tired, renewing her spirit when she is discouraged, and driving her to persevere for the benefit of her students and others who are impacted by the Life Skills Academy. Outside of the classroom, Jones serves as the executive director of Independence Place, a non-profit program that provides recreational and leisure services for exceptional needs adults in Trussville and surrounding communities.

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