

Winter
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Alabama

Elementary Administrator

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Karissa Lang
Alabama's NAESP
2023 National
Distinguished Principal



AAESA President's Report



Karissa Lang
Crestline Elementary
Hartselle City

Elementary schools serve as the foundation for a child's educational journey, and the leadership provided by principals

plays a pivotal role in shaping the learning environment. Principals are not just administrators; they are educational leaders who guide their schools toward success. There are five key aspects of effective principal leadership that can positively impact students, teachers, and the entire school community.

One of the primary responsibilities of a principal is to be an instructional leader. This involves actively supporting and promoting effective teaching practices within the school. The best way to do this is to “be in the trenches” with them. This allows Principals to stay connected to the classroom, remain knowledgeable about the latest educational research, curriculum developments, and instructional strategies. In addition, regular classroom observations, feedback sessions, and professional development opportunities contribute to a culture of continuous improvement and high-quality teaching.

Investing and facilitating in professional development of teachers is key as school leaders. You must allow teachers choice and voice in determining training needed. Principals should encourage a culture of continuous learning and ensure teachers have the tools and knowledge needed to deliver high-quality instruction.

Effective principals build strong relationships with students, teachers, parents, and the broader community. They are approachable and visible, actively participating in school events, parent-teacher conferences, IEPs, and community outreach. By establishing open lines of communication, principals create a supportive network that contributes to student success and overall school improvement.

A positive school culture is vital for the overall well-being and success of students. Principals play a crucial role in creating and maintaining this culture by fostering a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment. They set the tone for communication, collaboration, and positive behavior. A strong school culture enhances student engagement, reduces discipline issues, and promotes a sense of belonging among students.

Finally, support teachers. They are the backbone of any education setting and deserve to be treated as professionals. Teaching is hard and they need support and encouragement. Most importantly, we must never forget that school wouldn't happen without the dedication and hard work of teachers.



Celebrating ACAP Success



Cilia Smith
Kate Duncan Smith
DAR Elementary
Marshall County

Have you had the opportunity to ride in a 2024 school bus? If you haven't, you are missing out! They are OUT OF THIS WORLD! They come equipped with air conditioners and a self-adjusting radio volume that stays above the noise of the engine. Now, I am not writing an article about a bus, but the culmination of a plan that celebrated our school's success.

In early August, ACAP data was analyzed, and the idea was formed to celebrate those students who scored a four in reading, math, or science. Yard signs were designed that read, "KDS DAR Elementary School could not ask for more, I made a 4 as my ACAP score." Letters were sent home to parents notifying them of their child's achievement and that a yard sign would be brought to their home or could be picked up from the front office.

The transportation director granted us permission to take a '24 model, fully equipped "Party Bus" out into the community. On the hottest day of the year, I lined up the PE coach to drive the bus. We all know coaches need those celebrations and a break from the heat during that time of the year. A time was set for each grade level to go into the community and deliver the signs. The teachers were greeted with personalized signs such, "My 2nd grade is 2nd to none" and "my 3rd grade is better than yours." So from a cool bus, with even cooler music playing, the teachers got to place a sign in their students' yards. This was an amazing teambuilding activity, and a step toward creating a culture that values academic success.

The smiles, the excitement, and the joy were contagious. The importance of recognizing our teachers and their hard work in various ways cannot be

overestimated. People who know that they are appreciated and valued will work harder and be more satisfied with their jobs. Our parents enjoyed seeing the teachers out in the community jumping off buses to stick signs in yards about student success. The new buzz among students is that they all want to make a 4 on their ACAP so they get a sign next year.

Very few projects in education are pleasing to all stakeholders. The parents, the students, the teachers, and the community raved about our success. Hard work was recognized, academic excellence was celebrated, and a culture that values learning was strengthened. So if you drive through Grant, Alabama anytime soon you will see signs around town and if you are still curious, most everyone can tell you what it means to make a 4 on the ACAP.



Executive Director's Report



Vic Wilson
AAESA Executive
Director

Greetings everyone,

The first semester is almost complete, and I hope that you have had a productive one. I cannot believe we have made it to the end of the semester so quickly. It seems like only a few days ago we were celebrating a great start to the year, and now we find ourselves getting ready for a well-deserved and much-needed break.

I hope you take some time to reflect on your successes from the first semester, and I hope you are prepared for the second semester. I also hope you take some time to relax during the break. Your mental health is important, and you need to take time to recharge your batteries so that you can lead those under your care during the second semester. I know that we will spend time with friends, family, and others during the break, and that is important too; however, you must also take care of yourself and protect your time.

We have had a great first semester at AAESA, and that is due to the hard work of the principals and assistant principals in the association. You all have worked hard to ensure that learning, collaboration, networking, and more occurs often and at high levels. The Fall Instructional Leadership Conference, New Principals Institute, district meetings and more have all been very successful due to your hard work. Thank you all for that.

The second half of the year will be very important for all of us. The legislature begins the session on February 6, 2023, and you will be a huge part of the advocacy for AAESA and CLAS. Please take time to read the advocacy updates you will receive every Monday and take time to engage with Whitney Miller-Nichols at any time about issues of importance to school leadership. Our CLAS platform can be found on the CLAS Website, and I hope you will take time to read this important information and let us know how we can assist you with advocacy.

We will have great professional learning in store for you as well. The Assistant Principal's Conferences and the Principal Leadership Symposium will be great opportunities to learn with and from great speakers and your peers. Check the website for details on these and more activities.

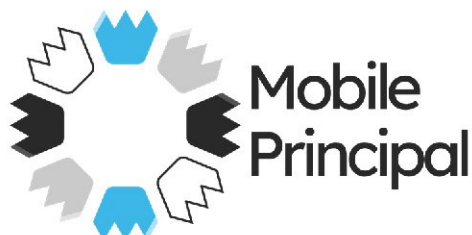
Thank you all for the great job you do for everyone under your care. You are all rock stars in my book.

2023 AAESA Fall Instructional Leadership Conference Gold Sponsors

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State Advocacy Update



Whitney Miller-Nichols
CLAS Director of
Governmental Relations

State Advocacy Update: School Principal Leadership and Mentoring Act

It was a pleasure to meet so many AAESA members at the fall conference in Orange Beach. As a former classroom teacher, I know how energizing it can be to connect with colleagues and get ideas to take back home.

I'm excited to be part of the CLAS team and to work on behalf of school leaders in Alabama to get you the funding you need for your students' academic success. Budget advocacy is my number one responsibility as Director of Governmental Relations. As your lobbyist, it's my job to bring the school leader's needs and perspectives to the negotiating table and to have my words underscore the message you're already sharing with your state legislators and state board members.

Experts are predicting a modest bump in state budget growth, with around \$500 million available for "new" spending in the ETF. With passage of the School Principal Leadership and Mentoring Act in 2023, the Legislature pledged stipends for school leaders – up to \$10,000 a year for school principals and up to \$5,000 a year for assistant principals, as well as modest additional stipends for leaders serving in high-poverty or low academic achievement schools.

With minimal growth in the budget, it will be incumbent on AAESA members and other school leader affiliates to tell your state legislators how important the school leader stipends are. If you're not sure who your school's state representative and state senator are, use [this tool](#) to find them with your school's address.

When you do reach out, let them know how compensation is impacting your school or system's ability to recruit principals and assistant principals. Several principals mentioned at CLAS and AAESA events this semester that they have teachers making more than their assistant principals because of special contracts and stipends like TEAMS and NBCT. This is the kind of information legislators need and want to know!

Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have questions about state laws and policy related to your school. Email me at whitney@clasleaders.org or call me at 205-602-7465. I'm here as a resource for you!

PS – If you have questions about the 2023 School Principal Leadership and Mentoring Act, please email them to SPLMA@alsde.edu and copy me (whitney@clasleaders.org). We are collaborating with ALSDE on an FAQ resource, and we want all questions included!

2023 Fall Instructional Leadership Conference



Stan Stokley
Saraland Elementary
Saraland City

The Fall Leadership Conference kicked off Monday, November 13th at the Perdido Beach Resort in Orange

Beach, Alabama. The weather was damp and windy, but the conference and content were outstanding. Dr. Ed Nichols kicked off the first general session with an inspiring workshop titled, “Every Day Above Dirt is a Great Day”. An important part of his message was a reminder that we cannot take care of others long term, unless we first take care of ourselves. He also encouraged us to take time to see the little things and laugh along the journey. He admonished us to invest our time in relationships. He is one of my favorite speakers from Alabama.

The second session was related to the Alabama Literacy Act, the Numeracy Act, and Unified Insights presented by Bonnie Short, Cody Rowell, Karen Anderson, and Stacy Royster. Information on the Literacy and Numeracy Act were rooted more in theory than in practical steps. It was pointed out that the Literacy Act is “about prevention – not retention”. There are many parts of the Numeracy Act which are still be worked out by the steering committee. The presentation on the Unified Insights in PowerSchool was extremely informative. If you have not been exposed to these new features you need to reach out to someone in your district who can give you a quick demonstration. This presentation gave me a more favorable opinion of PowerSchool.

The afternoon sessions were Managing a Multi-generational Workforce and Using PST to Strengthen School MTSS structures. In this session we

learned about the different views of the world depending upon the decade you were born. We learned that 45% of the U. S. population is under 35 years of age. We also learned that the current generation of new workers have limited time management skills and they are not good at conflict resolution. We ended the day with a reception sponsored by Kids First Education.

Day Two began with one of my favorite sessions titled, “Pause. Breath. Flourish: Living Your Best Life Now as an Educator” by Will Parker. Mr. Parker’s session was a great follow up to Dr. Nichols session on day one. It may not have been accidentally that we heard back-to-back sessions about taking care of yourself so you can better take care of others. Mr. Parker talked about the importance of your mind, your body, your influence, your time, your friendships, your spirituality, your resources, your intimacy, your future, and your legacy. He offered five strategies for long term success: exercise, eat health, sleep well, use moderation, and seek inspiration. He also has a book available with the same title as his presentation.

At mid-day we had a break for the awards luncheon. All of the National Distinguished Principal nominees were recognized from each district. The Bill Miller, Sr. Friend of Education Award was presented to Dr. Jeff Backus, an orthodontist from Hoover, Alabama. The Truman M. Pierce Leadership Award was presented to Mrs. Hope Zeanah who recently retired from serving in many roles in the Baldwin County School System, including Assistant Superintendent.

The afternoon was filled with concurrent breakout sessions including: Leading with a Trauma-Informed Lens, Jazz up Your PD meetings, Numeracy Act, and Show me the Money. All of the afternoon sessions were unique and informative. We had our afternoon business meeting and Dr. Vic Wilson present-

2023 Fall Instructional Leadership Conference

ed on the Principal Mentoring Bill. In the 2024-2025 school year principals will be eligible for a \$10,000 stipend and assistant principals for a \$5,000 stipend. These stipends will go toward your retirement. The legislature passed the bill in the last session, but did not fund it for this year. We expect it to be funded for next school year. Each current principal will write a professional learning plan with goals related to student achievement or student growth, along with one goal about school culture. New principals will be assigned a mentor trained through CLAS. CLAS plans to hire retired principals for part time positions to serve as mentors.



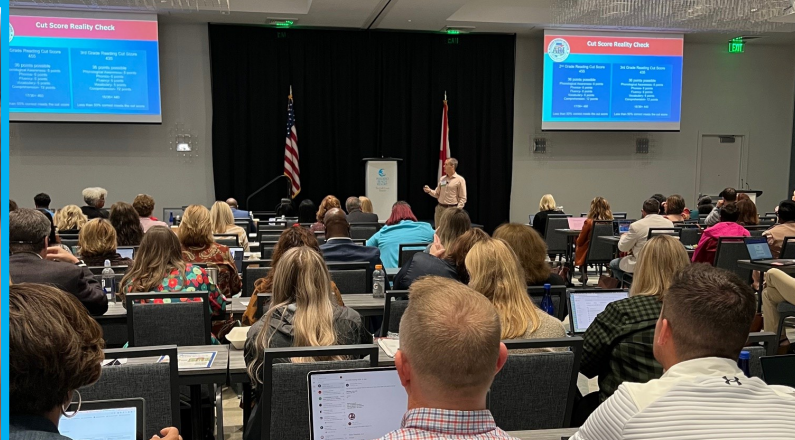
The last day we heard a pre-recorded presentation from Dr. Eric Mackey. He made reference to the Principal Mentoring Bill and believes it will be funded in the coming session. He also talked about funding priorities for the 2024 legislative session. Our new Director of Governmental Relations, Mrs. Whitney Miller-Nichols, shared about the importance of building relationship with our local legislators and how we can be involved in lobbying efforts. There will be legislative hill days we can attend on February 21st and April 10th. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to Whitney at 205-602-7465. She works full-time for our CLAS organization.



It was a wonderful conference with ample opportunities to learn, connect, and relax. We appreciate all of the hard work Rickey Darby, AAESA Executive Director, invested in the conference along with Dr. Vic Wilson and the CLAS staff. Karissa Lang, President of AAESA, did an outstanding job leading the conference. We especially enjoyed having Jill Eaton, Magazine Editor, back with us this year. If you were unable to attend, we encourage you to make plans for 2024 conference to be held in the same location November 17-20, 2024! I hope you see you there!



2023 Fall Instructional Leadership Conference



Truman M. Pierce Leadership Award



Scott Mitchell
Brock's Gap
Intermediate
Hoover City

Congratulations to Ms. Hope Zeanah who was selected as the recipient for the Truman M. Pierce Leadership Award for 2023. This award is given by the Alabama Association of Elementary School Administrators (AAESA) to an educator who has made outstanding contributions to advance the direction of education in Alabama.

Ms. Zeanah recently retired as the Assistant Superintendent for the Baldwin County Public School System. She began her educational career in 1984 as an elementary teacher. Since leaving the classroom, Ms. Zeanah has worked as an assistant principal, an elementary principal, and has served the last thirteen years as the assistant superintendent for Baldwin County Public Schools. Ms. Zeanah has presented at many conferences including the National Middle School Conference in Toronto, Canada, the National Association of State Directors of Special education in Louisville, Kentucky, the National Reading Council in New York, New York, the National Reading Council in Los Angeles, California, and the Fall Conference for CLAS Leaders in Birmingham, Alabama, to name a few.

Ms. Zeanah has earned many awards, which are a testament to her dedication with serving children and their families. The Optimist Club of Elberta (Elberta, Alabama) recently named her Educator of the Year, along with the Perdido Bay Optimist Club awarding her as the Outstanding Educator of the Year. In addition, The Baldwin County Reading Council has selected her as their Administrator of the Year. Ms. Zeanah has also served as Alabama's National Distinguished Principal, representing our great state in Washington, DC. She remains an active member of AAESA, NAESP, AAESP, CLAS, and ASCD.

While her professional career has earned Ms. Zeanah well-deserved recognition, the "behind the scenes" things she has done are equally impressive. One example of her commitment to service of others came years ago through the assistance she provided twin students who attended Elberta Elementary School. Throughout their elementary years, she personally helped them as their family faced financial struggles. As they advanced to mid-

dle school, the girls decided to join the school band. Again, she came to their aid. When it appeared that they would no longer be able to participate because of the family's transportation issues, Ms. Zeanah began picking them up from after-school band practices and taking them home. She continued providing their transportation throughout their high school years. Ms. Zeanah taught these girls to drive and took them for their driver's license tests. She sat at their Baldwin County Career Technical School and Foley High School graduations. She helped them enroll into college and assisted with fees and tuition. She continues to be a vital part of their lives in adulthood. The assistance she gave these girls is only one example of the many children and families from her community who Ms. Zeanah has worked to provide adequate clothing, food, and financial assistance to improve the quality of their lives.

AAESA is proud to recognize Ms. Zeanah for her accomplishments, honors, and dedication in educational leadership that have significantly impacted educators and students. It is with great pleasure that Ms. Hope Zeanah has been selected as the 2023 recipient for the Truman M. Pierce Leadership Award.



Bill Miller, Sr. Friend of Education Award



Stan Stokley
Saraland Elementary
Saraland City

Each year the Alabama Association of Elementary School Administrators (AAESA) recognizes a non-educator who has made significant contributions to the field of education. This

award is for an individual who is NOT in the field of education, but who has made considerable contributions to education over the years. Dr. Jeffery Backus, an orthodontist from Hoover, Alabama is our winner, and he was nominated by District IV.

Dr. Jeff Backus grew up in Hoover, Alabama attending Berry High School and was valedictorian of his class. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Zoology from Auburn University where he finished Summa Cum Laude. He earned his Doctorate of Dental Medicine from The University of Alabama at Birmingham.

After completing dental school, he completed specialty training and earned a Certificate in Orthodontics from Louisiana State University School of Dentistry. Dr. Backus is honored to give back to the community in which he serves by supporting local schools and served on the board of the Hoover City Schools Foundation for 6 years.

He is an active member at Prince of Peace Catholic Church and supports organizations including but not limited to Smiles Change Lives, Hope for Autumn Foundation, Camp Smile-A-Mile & the Ronald McDonald House. When Dr. Backus is not creating magnificent smiles, he enjoys spending time with his wife, Dominique and their three children.

Dr. Backus contributes to many organizations to best support the children of Hoover who he not only serves as part of his practice but in various other important ways. Not only does this show how dedicated he is to the children and families of Hoover, but it also shares examples of the many ways that Dr. Backus supports and contributes to organizations that focus on improving the lives of children in many ways.

He has supported local sports leagues, helped with carpool tags, provide t-shirts for field trips, as well as provided snacks for school employees. Other acts of service have included sup-

porting student government organizations, providing awards for PTO events, and supporting local organizations who support cancer research and special needs students. As you can see Dr. Backus goes over and beyond to help local schools and his community. We are proud to honor him with the Bill Miller, Sr. Friend of Education Award.



Meet Your District V President



Katie Holland
Eura Brown Elementary
Gadsden City

Greetings! My name is Katie Holland and I am honored to serve as president of District V this year. I am currently in my seventh year as principal at Eura Brown Elementary School in Gadsden City. I am a proud product of Gadsden City Schools, graduating from Emma Sansom High School in 2006 then attending Jacksonville State University where I received my Bachelor's in Elementary Education in 2010. Prior to administration, I taught 4th and 5th grades in St. Clair County then Gadsden City Schools. When I wasn't teaching, I was a cheerleading coach and then the high school danceline sponsor.

When I began exploring masters' programs, my principal at the time (who is still a wonderful mentor to me) encouraged me to pursue a field that would open the most opportunity for leadership. Thankfully, I listened to his wise advice and earned my Instructional Leadership degree from the University of Alabama in 2015. In 2017 I took a leap of faith and applied for the principal's position at Eura Brown Elementary and my administrative career began. I was 29 years old, the youngest building administrator in the district, with a lot of work ahead of me and much to prove. Seven years later, I am proud to continue my career at Eura Brown Elementary with a phenomenal team of teachers, wonderful students, and a great community that I am proud to call home.

The best administrative advice that I live by is: there is a learning opportunity found in every success and every failure. Throughout my career I have had many of each, and I have grown and learned from each equally. When I am not at school, I can be found cheering on my 8-year old daughter Elizabeth on the soccer field with my 4-year old daughter, MJ, usually in my lap. My husband is a science teacher and baseball

coach at Gadsden City High School, Go Titans! I am thankful for the opportunity to serve my district in a leadership role in AAESA and I look forward to many years serving the students, teachers, and families of Gadsden and the state of Alabama.



An Experience of a Lifetime



Karissa Lang
Crestline Elementary
Hartselle City

It has been an honor to serve as Alabama's National Distinguished Principal for 2023. I never imagined when I became

an administrator 14 years ago this would happen. I was completely shocked and overwhelmed the day I was named NDP. My assistant principal pulled off the surprise of the year. I was reluctantly pulled away from school while the entire student body gathered in the gym awaiting my return. I had been told by my AP we were holding an assembly to welcome our new school superintendent. I rushed to the gym thinking I was going to be late for my new boss only to be greeted by 589 yelling students! My husband, the school board, city council members, and other dignitaries greeted me with applause and cheer. I was completely overwhelmed with tears and the entire experience was humbling and has forever changed my life.

The past few months have been a whirlwind. I have completed interviews, written several articles on leadership, and presented at multiple conferences. I have had the pleasure of being recognized at the state school board meeting and attending the Governor's proclamation for National Principals Month. However, my experience in Washington, D.C at the National Distinguished Principal Recognition Ceremony was absolutely amazing. For three days, NAESP recognized principals from across our nation.

Our celebration began at the historic Willard Intercontinental Hotel. The rich history and beauty of the building was remarkable. Past United States Presidents along with other notable figures have and continue to frequent the hotel. Upon check-in, guests are provided with information highlighting the architecture and history. All NDPs were then invited to a hospitality room where we were greeted by the NAESP

staff, offered congratulatory praises, and provided gift bags. We immediately connected with other NDPs and that moment was the start of many conversations and friendships.

Each NDP was asked to give a two-minute speech highlighting our school and our journey to success. I had spent time writing my speech prior to the trip and was ready..... or so I thought. Our afternoon session was filled with connections, celebrations, and joyful tears as we listened to each other's journey. As I sat there listening to one inspiring speech after another, I decided to change my speech. I walked on stage and went for it. I shared about my amazing teachers, my staff, my students, and my great community. I shared my staff's motto: Be Where Your Feet Are. I explained our goal was to always be the best teacher to our students when we are in the classroom, to be the best co-worker to our grade level when we are school, to be the representative of our school when out in our community, but to also be the best mom, dad, aunt, uncle, sister, etc. when we are home. Our families have provided us with support and patience on our professional journey and they deserve our best too. I challenged them to hold fast to that motto: always remember to be truly present wherever your feet are.

Our day ended with a welcome reception at the Observatory Roof Terrace at America's Square. The view of the city was breathtaking. The U.S. Capitol building was our backdrop and we all stood in awe as we watched the sunset from atop the terrace. We spent the evening eating delicious food, exchanging funny school stories, and enjoying each other's company.

Day two was packed with activities. We started the day with an early morning walk to the White House. We had a group photo made and recorded a video for the NAESP website. We returned to the Willard for a Leadership Session with NAESP staff where we had opportunities to connect with other principals while sharing ideas and programs being implemented at our respective schools. I gleaned so many ideas from the session and was in awe of the talent of the other NDPs. Our session continued at the United States Department of Education. We were greeted by several

An Experience of a Lifetime Cont'd

staff members who updated us on policy and current initiatives. U.S Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona was unable to attend in person but spoke to us via Zoom. He thanked us for our service and challenged us to continue our journey in reaching every student. I had the pleasure of attending a roundtable discussion on the importance of Pre-K and the transition to kindergarten. We had opportunities to share ideas and provide insight to department staff about our current realities. It was amazing to think that our conversations could have a direct impact on decisions made on the national level. Our afternoon ended back at the Willard with our memento sharing. Each NDP shared items that represented their state. I partnered with the U.S Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville and brought astronaut food: freeze dried ice cream sandwiches. It was a big hit! Many had never heard of such. We had a blast enjoying each other's memento and learning about their great state!

Our day ended with a magical night at the awards banquet. It is not often we get to attend a black-tie event just for principals! I had the pleasure of bringing my husband with me and Vic Wilson joined us later that evening. We were all in awe of the beautiful banquet room and the yummy food. Each NDP was recognized on stage, presented a framed certificate, and given a bell. The tradition at the end of the ceremony is for NDPs to stand and ring the bell in honor of the students they serve. That moment was my favorite and one of the most memorable of my life. Listening to the sound of the bells filling the room was unforgettable. And yes, I cried. That moment was a reminder of why we do what we do. We finished the night with lots of fun and dancing! It is a night I will never forget.

The entire NDP experience has been incredible. It has been an absolute honor to represent the great State of Alabama and all the principals who serve our children. Our state is filled with rock star administrators who have and continue to make a positive impact on the lives of students. Through AAESA, I have had the privilege to not only work alongside you but to represent you throughout this year. I look forward to continuing our work together!



An Experience of a Lifetime Cont'd



An Experience of a Lifetime Cont'd



An Experience of a Lifetime Cont'd



We Are Thankful for Our Professional Organization



Rickey Darby
AAESA Assistant
Executive Director

As another calendar year comes to a close, as an association we take time to stop and be thankful for all our blessings. As your assistant

executive director, I am thankful to work with our professional organization and the elementary administrators from across the state.

We are thankful for another successful Fall Instructional Leadership Conference. We had approximately 187 administrators registered for the conference. We had 37 vender booths with us this year. We were thankful for each of our gold, silver, and bronze sponsors. We are especially thankful for the incredible CLAS staff that helped throughout the year with the planning, organizing and implementation of the conference. Mark your calendar to save the date for next year's conference at the Perdido Beach Resort on November 17-20, 2024.

We are thankful for the opportunity to attend national conferences each year. This year is a great opportunity to attend the joint elementary and secondary principals conference in Nashville, TN. The NAESP/NASSP conference this year will be July 15-17, 2024. This year many of our members will be able to drive to the conference. If you have never attended the national conference, this will be a great opportunity to attend a variety of professional learning sessions and network with other administrators from across the country. In you have never attended, you can apply for the **Glenys**

Mason Scholarship given by AAESA. The application for the \$1,500 scholarship can be found on the CLAS website under AAESA and awards. The deadline to email the completed application packet to rickey@clasleaders.org is **February 1, 2024**.

We are thankful for another year of growth in membership in our organization. We have over 850 members. Continue to encourage all elementary and middle level administrators from across the state to join our professional organization. We are thankful for all our members who were able to attend the fall district meetings and our annual fall conference. Watch your email for information about the next district meeting that will be held by Zoom in January or early February.

We are thankful for the members who are willing to take on leadership positions on the board each year. Watch for the electronic ballot that you will receive in your email in January for this year's election. You will be voting for Vice-President and several positions on the CLAS Board of Directors. If you have served as district president or district representative for your local district, you can be nominated for any of the open positions in November each year.

We are thankful that our organization has several opportunities to recognize our members with nominations, scholarships, and awards. Ten of our members were nominated for National Distinguished Principal and eight were nominated for National Outstanding Assistant Principal of the Year. We have two individual scholarships and other awards nominations that the districts consider each year. You can find information on the CLAS website for the awards. Look for Bill Miller, Sr. Friend of Education Award, Truman Pierce

Assistant Executive Director's Report Cont'd

Leadership Award, Marie Taylor/Michale Carr Scholarship, and Glenys Mason Scholarship. Jill Eaton does an excellent job in recognizing these individuals in our association magazine that comes out four times a year.

We are thankful that through CLAS our members have the opportunity to be involved in CLAS Advocacy Days during the legislative session. Look for information from Mrs. Whitney Miller-Nichols and Dr. Vic Wilson from the CLAS office in the coming months. This is a great opportunity to let your voice be heard in Montgomery.

I would like to close with a quote from Rosalynn Carter, our former first lady who recently passed away. "Do what you can to show you care about other people, and you will make our world a better place."



Candidates for 2024-2025 AAESA Officers

Vice President

Sheneta Smith

Howell Graves Preschool
Muscle Shoals City

Alice Turney

Riverchase Elementary
Hoover City

CLAS Board of Directors

Jenny Breazeale

Fairhope West Elementary
Baldwin County

Veronica Coleman

Chastang-Fournier K-8
Mobile County

Charlies Gardner

Hokes Bluff Elementary
Etowah County

Karissa Lang

Crestline Elementary
Hartselle City

Tisha Lewis

Westside Elementary
Demopolis City

Eric Kirkman

Kilby Laboratory School
UNA/Florence City Schools

Waller Martin

Brookwood Elementary
Enterprise City

Jami Rainey

Northridge Middle
Tuscaloosa City

Submitted by Addam Moody, Nominating Committee Chair

Character Education in Schools



Christy Amick
Chickasaw Elementary
Chickasaw City

Think about the values your parents and family members instilled in you. What words come to mind? Respect, kindness, integrity, perseverance?

integrity, perseverance?

What are some of your fondest childhood memories? Did they involve human interaction? Such as playing outside with neighborhood friends, picking and shelling peas from a family member's garden in the heat of summer (maybe this was just me), learning a life skill like cooking or fishing, and hearing stories about "the good old days?"

Did the TV shows you enjoyed as a child reflect family values? Did your parents turn the channel when something "adult" came on the TV?

Hopefully, you have been able to say yes to many of these questions and reflect on some character-building memories from your youth that existed outside of school hours.

Every generation sees a shift in morality and character, but our generation of students has the whole world... the good, the bad, and the ugly at their fingertips. Other "folks" are teaching them under our very own roofs through their devices.

The word respect has taken on new meanings for our current generation of students. When most of us were

kids, respect went one way - from the child to the adult. Now respect is expected to be mutual, and in most instances, if the adult doesn't show respect to the child first, no respect is given in return. On top of this, it's acceptable to some parents for their child to be disrespectful to authority figures.

When we talk to students about their afternoons or weekends, how many times do they reference video games, spending time on social media, or doing something in isolation? The human connections that most of us remember outside of school are almost non-existent for some of our students.

How many of your personal children have said when you go to turn the channel on something you deem as inappropriate, "It's ok, I see worse/I hear worse at school in the hallways"?

Alabama and most states across the nation are pouring money into initiatives to promote character education in students, which is amazing for our current generation of students but can be exhausting to some educators.

As educators, we are taking on so much more than courses of study aligned to state standards. We are spending time undoing the disconnect between human interactions, combating strangers, teaching our children anything under the sun, and often teaching our parents to parent.

What are some initiatives that can make a difference?

As an administrator, I have witnessed amazing growth in students through implementing Safe and Civil School Foundational Practices, the Alabama Department of Ear-

Character Education in Schools Cont'd

ly Childhood's Early Education's P3 Initiative, connecting with the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET), Character.org, and the Hope Leadership Academy.

In 2017, Chickasaw City Schools was selected to participate in a state-wide initiative entitled Safe and Civil Schools. This professional development includes looking at student data for discipline, absenteeism, and teaching procedures in all common areas. One of my most gut-wrenching moments as a principal was when we were reviewing the afternoon dismissal protocol and not one adult said goodbye or interacted positively with a student...not one! How were we supposed to positively impact behavior and attendance if no one spoke or interacted with children? With tears in my eyes, and of those who were tasked with these common area observations, we vowed to make a change in the adults that would impact the students and the community.

We grasped tight to our district motto #ChieftainPRIDE (mascot plus prepared, respect, integrity, determination, and excellence). To this day, we recognize students daily who exhibit this core value through morning and afternoon announcements, and staff who exhibit these same values weekly.

Chickasaw Elementary School has been deemed a model Safe and Civil School. We are NOT perfect! Our data certainly does not reflect perfection; however, our survey data shows marked improvements from where we were 6 years ago.

One of the greatest takeaways from the years of Safe and Civil professional development came from a single conversation with national consultant Jacob Edwards where he revealed the following, "Decisions are made based on perspective, statistics, and observation. This opened our team's eyes that statistical data is not every-

thing! We need to also understand perspective and rely on observational data.

During this time, our school was able to gain 11 points on the state's report card. Was it easy? NO! It took true commitment to a common goal to increase achievement, and academic growth and decrease chronic absenteeism.

Our district has been privileged to implement the Alabama Department of Early Childhood's P3 Initiative for the past five years. This initiative focuses on GOLD standard documentation rather than traditional grades. Our teachers provide individualized instruction by consistently analyzing and evaluating observational notes and portfolio samples. Students learn through play stations (such as family living, writing centers, exploration, career dress-up, etc.) and small group instruction.

During the summer of 2022, Dr. Ben Mardell from Harvard University and his fellow Dr. Melissa Scarpate visited Chickasaw Elementary School to observe the paradoxes between play and school, and how educators use playful learning to address trauma. After his visit, Dr. Mardell published "Playful Learning in Alabama."

For several years, our district participated in a grant from NIET to align effective teaching and foster collaboration around a common language, instructional leadership, and campus climate. We were privileged to receive a grant that afforded us the opportunity to have a national consultant, Dr. Tad Savage, who faithfully invested his time into providing high-quality character education for students and staff.

At Dr. Savage's nudging, Chickasaw Elementary School applied to be a Promising Practice School for Principle #4

Character Education in Schools Cont'd

which highlights our school district's School Resource Officer for creating a caring environment for the community. In early November, the School Resource Officer, Detective Johnny DuVal, Assistant Principal Michele Hewlett, Math Coach Brooke Love, and I were able to share this Promising Practice on a global scale at the 30th Annual Character.org Conference in Washington, D.C.



This year, our district has been blessed to partner with Liz Huntley, author of *Fly Like a Bird*, Alabama attorney, and advocate for children. Liz inspires educators across America with stories of her childhood and how education saved her to be the mother and professional she is today. Liz is a co-sponsor of the Hope Leadership Academy for educators in Alabama. She tells her story of abuse, perseverance, and advocacy for children to all who will listen.



For any school leaders who want to learn more about character education, check out Character.org. This platform offers education, professional development, and principles that will influence students and families in amazing ways.

This current generation may or may not have the same values or memories as you, but they are every bit as deserving as the investment of time to develop character. Alabama has a multitude of resources at our fingertips to make a difference in the lives of students. It's up to the leaders to have the foresight and willingness to connect with your students.



Federal Relations



David Carpenter

Jeter Primary

Opelika City

During a November Federal Relations Coordinators meeting, David Griffith (Associate Executive Director of NAESP) expressed relief and surprise that Congress was able to pass a “Continuing Resolution” (CR) to provide temporary government funding and avoid a government shutdown. The funding is in effect for 45 days. Congress can work on finalizing FY24 funding during that time. Congress can also pass another short-term CR at the expiration of the current one. The government will shut down on November 17 unless either one of those actions occur.

David said that the House plan is to now try to pass their pending appropriations bills out of committee and on the House floor. He reminded the FRCs that the current House FY24 appropriations bill includes an 80% cut to Title I and the complete elimination of Title II (professional development) and Title III (English language acquisition grants). In contrast, the Senate FY24 appropriations bill increases Title I by \$175 million and Title III by \$7 million and maintains Title II funding at \$2.2 billion. The Senate bill was passed out of committee with large bipartisan support.

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NAESP has issued an action alert to its members asking them to contact their members of Congress and urge them to reject the House proposed cuts and to support the Senate spending figures.

In addition, NAESP co-hosted a Congressional Policy Briefing on Wednesday, October 18 on the topic of federal support for K-12 education, notably Title II funding for professional development along with the other major formula grant programs (Title I, II, III, and IV) in the Every Student Succeeds Act. The event took place on Capitol Hill and was done in partnership with the American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). The following key points were noted from the event:

- NAESP expressed the importance of the federal Title II program (professional development) and the need to maintain FY24 K-12 funding at current levels.
- NAESP President Liza Caraballo-Suarez represented the association as one of the panelists. Caraballo-Suarez shared that Title II funding helped her to recruit teachers and to retain them through professional support and mentorship.
- Principals Carey Cunningham from St. Louis and Felicia Thomas-Williams from Brentwood, New York, emphasized that the title programs are most effective when they work in coordination with each other.
- Deputy Assistant Secretary Ruth Ryder from the U.S. Department of Education also spoke to the roughly 140 school leaders and Hill staffers in attendance at the briefing.

In closing, Families love their children’s school and strongly support their teachers. Those are

Federal Relations Cont'd

the unambiguous takeaways from two recent polls on American education. It's also clear that the general public does not share this same enthusiasm. A key advocacy goal for all school leaders, therefore, is to maintain this high level of trust among families while spreading the word to the larger local community about all of the great things your school is doing. As Abraham Lincoln observed, "Public sentiment is everything. With it, nothing can fail; against it, nothing can succeed."

FRC Roundup

- FRCs resumed a discussion from last month about any surge of student immigrant enrollment they are seeing in their state's schools. Several FRCs said they are not seeing a noticeable increase in students enrolling in schools, while others noted that some cities, like Denver, are seeing an increase while other localities are experiencing a typical seasonal influx.
- A discussion also ensued about social media, students, and schools. A pending lawsuit was referenced and the growing trend of districts suing tech companies. Many FRCs recounted the negative impact on their students and expressed great concern about how to handle it, especially since online issues can consume much of a school leaders' time.
- The upcoming National School Leaders Advocacy Conference (NSLAC) will be held March 10-13, 2024 in Arlington, VA. The conference will include members of NAESP and NASSP.

FUTURE EVENTS

CLAS Convention

June 9-12, 2024

Riverview Plaza Hotel and Mobile

Convention Center

Mobile, Alabama

UNITED: The National Conference on School Leadership (formerly the NAESP Pre-K-8 Principals Conference)

July 15-17, 2024

Music City Center

Nashville Tennessee

AAESA Fall Instructional Leadership Conference

November 17-20, 2024

Perdido Beach Resort

Orange Beach, Alabama

Membership is Mentorship



Barry Wood
Pleasant Home School
Covington County

We have a lot to be thankful for in education today. We've seen a rise of support from our communities and legislators after COVID and that support has manifested itself in a renewed appreciation for the hard work educators do each and every day. That support did not come easy, much of that support was due in large part to the work performed by our professional organizations, CLAS, AAESA, and NAESP, in rallying on behalf of our members. That support is just one of the many benefits we enjoy as we work to grow our membership and there is much work to be done.

Unfortunately, membership in AAESA is down slightly from last year (7%) providing us with the opportunity to sell the benefits of membership to our colleagues as we promote AAESA and NAESP. From veteran educators among us to our aspiring leaders, there are tremendous advantages for everyone in our organization. In talking with other education leaders at varying stages in their careers it's evident that we find a variety of value from membership in our state and national affiliates.

When asked about the value of CLAS membership, Principal Bettye Anne Older, Straughn Elementary principal and a proven building leader, responded, "Membership in CLAS has provided me with a wealth of professional opportunities for over 21 years as a school administrator. Regular communications, networking, professional learning, up-to-date legislative happenings, legal support, school and personnel recognition programs, excellent conferences, and Dr. Vic's *Friday Updates*' music playlists during legislative sessions are a few of the many reasons that I've remained a loyal CLAS member for decades!" On the other side of the spectrum in her first year as a

principal, Principal Tania Thompson, Brewton Elementary, found some similarities in the value of our professional organizations. She said, "The professional learning I experienced through the Assistant Principal's Conference helped to prepare me for the principalship, but now that I'm in that chair, it's the networking and mentorship that have been most beneficial in these past few months. We have so many talented leaders in our schools and activities like the New Principal's Institute is just one example of an exemplary organization that actively promotes the connections and mentorship that we know makes the difference in making the best decisions for our children."

Take a moment to think about what membership in CLAS, AAESA, and NAESP mean to you and share that with others. Take advantage of the conferences, learning opportunities, affiliate meetings, and fellowship our organization offers, and take the time to help us grow our ranks as we do the work necessary to move our learners forward.





Bonnie Sullivan
Pike Road Intermediate
Pike Road City

NAESP continues to advocate for education by being actively involved in education issues and legislation at the national

level. NAESP Principals Conference was held July 9-12, 2023 in the National Harbor, Maryland. AAESA was well represented at the conference. There have been several key discussions brought to the table through NAESP. We look forward to receiving more additional information about education from the National Leadership Conference as well as the National Conference with NAESP and NASSP in 2024.

Ask Your Representative to Reject Pending Funding Cuts to K-12 Education

Congress is considering significant funding cuts to K-12 education as part of their FY24 budget. The current House bill would cut Title I by 80% and eliminate Title II professional development grants (-\$2.2 billion) and Title III English Language Acquisition grants (-\$890 million). Head Start would also be cut by -\$750 million. In total, the House bill would cut education funding by 28%. Please reach out to your representative and ask them to OPPOSE these devastating cuts to the programs that support our nation's students, educators, and schools.

National Partnership for Student Success

One of the Biden administration's key learning recovery strategies is the National Partnership for Student Success (NPSS), an initiative of volunteer organizations that provide high-impact tutoring, mentoring, and expanded professional pathways to K-12 schools. The NPSS Summit celebrated-187,000 tutors-toward the White House's goal of 250,000 additional tutors and mentors in schools by 2025. The Summit also provided an opportunity for school district and state education

agency leaders to share first-hand experiences and strategies in leveraging these volunteers and resources. In a breakout session, school district leaders shared the importance of encouraging flexibility on each campus while still implementing tutoring with fidelity. The U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona encouraged educators to explore the free playbooks and toolkits to help implement high-impact tutoring.

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency has published a K-12 School Safety and Security Guide that offers tools to enhance security in your school communities, including resources to address mental health crises, violence prevention, and cybersecurity threats.

2024 IMPORTANT EVENTS & DATES

March 10 – General Assembly, Arlington, VA

March 11-13 – National School Leaders Advocacy Conference, Arlington, Virginia

Just a reminder-----mark your calendars for the **2024 "United! The National Conference on School Leadership"** (formerly **The NAESP Pre-K-8 Principals Conference**) powered by NAESP and NASSP in Nashville, Tennessee. You are invited for the three day conference on **July 15-17, 2024**, for another celebration of leadership through both education and networking.



AAESA Business Meeting



Cindy Poteet
Northside Intermediate
Opelika City

AAESA Business Meeting
Fall Instructional Leaders Conference

November 14, 2023

Call to Order

Karissa Lang

Adopt Agenda

Karissa Lang

Motion to approve: Stan Stokley

Seconded: Veronica

Vote: All approved

Awards

Scott Mitchell

Bill Miller Sr, Friend of Education Award and Truman Pierce Leadership Award winners were recognized at the Awards Luncheon. NDP were also recognized at the Awards Luncheon. AP of the Year will be announced in March.

Marie Taylor and Dr. Michael Carr – scholarships for someone pursuing a degree in educational leadership.

Glenys Mason Convention Scholarship - for someone that has never attended a national convention.

Budget & Finance

Rickey Darby

We are in a great financial situation. Our finances are in good standing.

Fall Conference 2023

Rickey Darby

187 people are registered to attend at this time; 35 people are registered for the preconference (this is enough to cover the 600 cost to host the meeting).

37 booths and 33 vendors (See handout for the long version of the agenda)

List of sponsors are included in the packet

CLAS Staff - "Stars" program – went really well, with a lot of positive feedback.

Fall Conference 2024

Rickey Darby

Nov. 17-20 at the Perdido Beach Resort

Federal Relations

David Carpenter

NAESP issued an action alert - when you go online and attach your name and school information the alert will be automatically sent to our congressman. (Huge cuts to the budget for Title 1 have been proposed by the House up to 80% and completely eradicate Title 2 and Title 3) It only takes approximately 3 minutes to complete.

A large amount of shared concern regarding social media and the effects it is having on schools and also the impact of the immigrant influx into the schools.

Magazine Editor

Jill Eaton

All school principals are invited to write an article that highlights your school – anytime

Membership

Bonnie Sullivan

AAESA is right in the middle with memberships with 181 members in NAESP

NAESP Representative

Bonnie Sullivan

September 2023 CLAS Board Meeting



Dil Uswatte
Rocky Ridge Elementary
Hoover City

CLAS Board of Directors
Meeting

The Shoals

September 18, 2023

Prayer: Prayer was offered by Jeff Cole.

Call to Order/Approval of Agenda and Minutes: The meeting was called to order by President Chris McCullar at 8:32 am. Tony Sanders made a motion to approve the agenda and was seconded by Michelle Washington. A motion to approve the minutes from June 11/23 was made by Suzanne Lacey and seconded by Evelyn Nettles-Hines. Both motions passed.

Chuck Marcum, ALSE Chief of Staff, Alabama State Department of Education:

- The cut score was lowered on the ACAP reading test based on TAC committee recommendations because the test was adjusted
- Budget requests: Boost up to \$5000 from \$1000 for Special Ed teachers, 70 new career coaches, \$3 million for JAG program, \$20 million line item for school safety/security/climate, \$23 million for Numeracy Act, \$30 million for Principal Act
- Concerned about future budgets with ESSER funds running out
- We will continue to hear about school choice- concerned about homeschool parents receiving funds because we don't know quality of those program; believe private schools should have some kind of accreditation agency and have to take ACAP testing

to assess quality of education

- Questioning whether the ACT test should be the assessment for high school students. Or should we develop our own test? These questions are currently being explored
- They have a new office in Birmingham

Excited about the future of education in Alabama due to the leadership across the state

STAFF Reports:

Year-End Membership and Convention Summary Reports (Dr.Vic Wilson): There were record numbers for membership (membership report shared.) AAESA is the largest affiliate. No affiliate went down. National affiliates have leveled out, largely due to high costs. We made approximately \$10,000 instead of projected \$85,000-we believe this was due to the impact of members not needing a PLU this year due to COVID. \$70,000 was the price tag for AV alone! Sponsors helped to offset the costs. The number of vendor booths was up.

Professional Learning Update (Dr.Demica Sanders): First Lunch and Learn was on Aug. 31st. 96 people attended the New Principal conference. Leadership Institute no longer has virtual attendance, but numbers are going up. The PLU report was also shared with 752 people participating. There will be some changes regarding PLUs-more news to follow from the State Department. The Secretary of the Year nominations have opened now.

Legislative Update (Dr. Wilson): Whitney Miller-Nichols was not available to attend but she has hit the ground running. She is collecting data to see the impact of possible funding for nonpublic education. She is working closely with legislators/state representatives, but it is important for us to know our representatives.

September 2023 CLAS Board Meeting Cont'd

Vic is meeting with the Principal Act design team regarding Principal Bill; there are multiple CLAS members on this team. Mentoring component goes into effect July 1st, 2024. They are reviewing several of the existing outstanding mentoring programs in a variety of school districts. They will next work on the PLP portion that must address growth and/or achievement and climate. We should start to look at subgroups and career/college readiness data to assess how to move the needle. Vic is very pleased with Dr. Mackey's proposed funding for this Principal Act. We will have several retired principals for mentoring.

Legal defense data was presented. The balance is approximately \$18,600. The Year End Financial report was also presented; we ended the year with approx. \$172,000.

Action Items:

Membership Report: As of 9/11/23 we are down by 74 members (2631), but this should go up soon. Stan Stokley made a motion to accept the report and was seconded by Antjuan Marsh. Motion passed.

Financial Report (David Gallagher): Things are going in the right direction. We are still waiting to see what the federal government will do regarding rates. We could go through a mild recession. CD rates are great right now, so we are trying to extend time on those. We have weathered the storm and he recommends we stay on the path we are on.

The current financial report was shared by Vic Wilson. Beware of all these agencies that are trying to acquire Employee Retention Credit during COVID. There is \$150,000 credit coming our way for CLAS that we did not expect. Motion to accept the report was made by Waller Martin and seconded by Carrie Bus-

by. Motion carried.

We have grown to 12 affiliates. Alabama Alliance of Black School Educators wishes to join us. They have a very strong financial report. It is NOT an alliance of black educators but black school educators. Motion to accept this affiliate was made by Tony Sanders and seconded by Evelyn Nettles-Hines. Motion carried. We now have 13 affiliates.

All bids came in over \$40,000 for the roof for CLAS. Allen Cannon was able to fix all roof issues for approx. \$24,000. An insurance claim of about \$1,500 helped to cover some of the cost.

Director Comments (Vic Wilson): Hopefully this retreat helped us to recharge. Floyd Collins (APASS Director) is the official Rock Paper Scissors Champion! Vic challenged us to craft our narrative and celebrate our successes. He also praised the CLAS staff for their outstanding efforts. He presented a picture to Tony Sanders and Waller Martin for the Principal Bill Act.

Presidents Report: President McCullar made the following committee appointments: Membership Chairman-Tony Sanders; Awards and Recognition Committee: Connie Davis, Lana Tew and Melinda Bonner; Elections Committee: Evelyn Nettles-Hines, Carlos Nelson and Jeff Cole

Motion to adjourn: was made by Jeff Cole and seconded by Charlie Gardner. Motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 9:51 am.



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