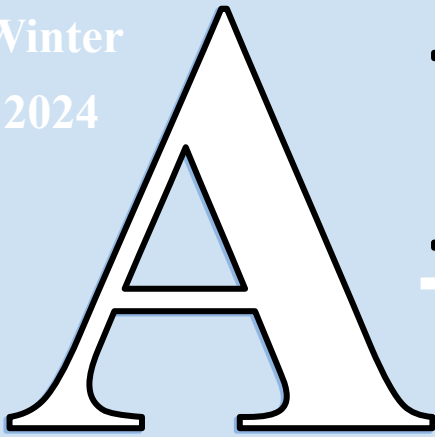


Winter  
2024



Vol. 73 No. 2

Alabama

Elementary Administrator

# *Changing of the AAESA Guard*



## **Welcome Hope Zeanah!**

**Assistant Executive Director**

# AAESA President's Report



*Stan Stokley*  
*Saraland Elementary*  
*Saraland City*

## **Gratitude and New Beginnings: Updates from AAESA**

As we approach the new semester, I want to take a moment to extend my warmest wishes to all our members. I hope this message finds you well and full of holiday cheer. Reflecting on the past year, I am filled with gratitude, especially for the camaraderie and support of my peers in the Alabama Association of Elementary School Administrators (AAESA).

It was a joy to see so many of you at our Fall Conference in November. With record-breaking attendance, the event was a tremendous success, showcasing the strength and enthusiasm of our community.

This season of gratitude also brings transitions. As many of you know, Rickey Darby, our Assistant Executive Director, retired at the end of 2024. Rickey has been a steadfast leader and friend to AAESA for the past seven and a half years. During the Fall Conference, we celebrated his service with a cash gift, a plaque, and an exciting new initiative: the Rickey Darby Scholarship. This \$500 scholarship will help a new principal attend the AAESA Fall Conference for the first time, ensuring Rickey's legacy continues to impact future leaders. We wish Rickey the very best as he steps into his well-earned "second" retirement.

Looking ahead, we are thrilled to announce that

Hope Zeanah has been unanimously selected by the AAESA Board of Directors to succeed Rickey as Assistant Executive Director. Hope brings with her an impressive legacy of 37 years in education within the Baldwin County School System, where she held roles ranging from teacher to interim superintendent and assistant superintendent.

Hope's connection to AAESA and our professional community runs deep. Over the years, she has been an active member of CLAS, AAESA, and NAESP, even serving on the AAESA executive board. Among her many accolades, she has been recognized as a National Distinguished Principal, recipient of the Truman Pierce Award, Educator of the Year, and Administrator of the Year by the Optimist Club. Her extensive experience, leadership, and passion for education make her the perfect fit for this role.

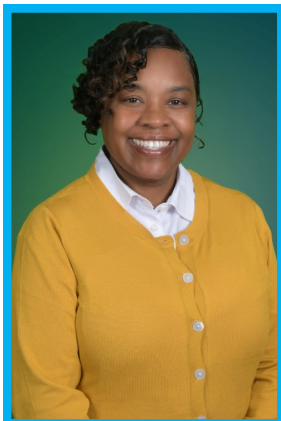
Upon her selection, Hope shared her gratitude and enthusiasm for the opportunity:

*"I am deeply honored to join AAESA as Assistant Executive Director. This organization has played a pivotal role in my professional growth, and I am excited to give back to the community that has given me so much. Together, we will continue to support and empower school leaders across Alabama."*

Please join me in welcoming Hope to her new position. I am confident she will bring energy and dedication to advancing AAESA's mission and supporting our members.

As we begin 2025, I encourage each of you to take time to reflect on the blessings in your life and the difference you make as leaders in education. Wishing you and your faculty a great start to the new semester!

# An Incredible Opportunity



## *Shannon McCaskey Frances Nungester Decatur City*

I am honored to share the wonderful opportunity of visiting our nation's capital for the 2024 National Distinguished Principal Award Ceremony given

by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). This was by far the most rewarding experience of my career. I represented the state of Alabama and had the incredible opportunity to share this journey with NDP's from 38 other states. During the visit, I participated in various events, including professional development sessions, networking opportunities with other principals and state representatives, and a formal award ceremony.

The wonderful capitol of Washington DC was absolutely breathtaking upon arrival. I took in all of the sights and joined in on the "Monuments by Moonlight Trolley Tour" offered by the NDP committee. There was an autumn chill in the air, but the picturesque views of the Washington Monument and the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial was well worth it. The driver was very knowledgeable and kept my attention for 2.5 hours as I soaked in the rich history. I also had the opportunity to visit the National Museum of African American History and Culture which was filled with interesting exhibits. I was wowed by the attention to detail on all three floors and how it captured how American values are reflected in African American history.

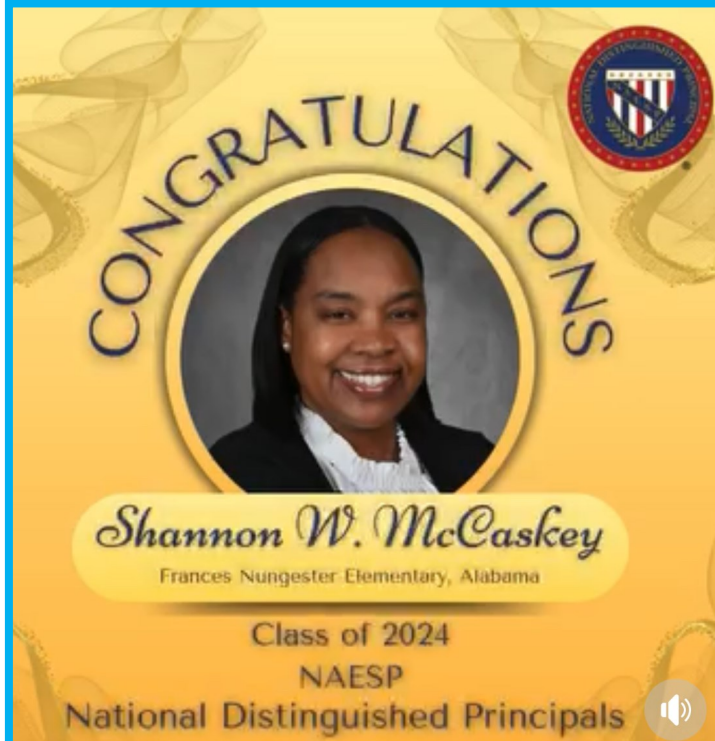
The NDP honorees were afforded the opportunity to visit the White House which was one of the most memorable stops of my visit. This visit was top notch as the security was very tight and the Secret Service

agents are stationed throughout. This was a surreal experience as I visited rooms and corridors of our past presidents. The historic architecture, artwork, and furnishings make it an unforgettable experience. Taking a picture by the famous portrait of Michelle Obama was inspirational to me as I am always captivated by her grace, strength, and influence.

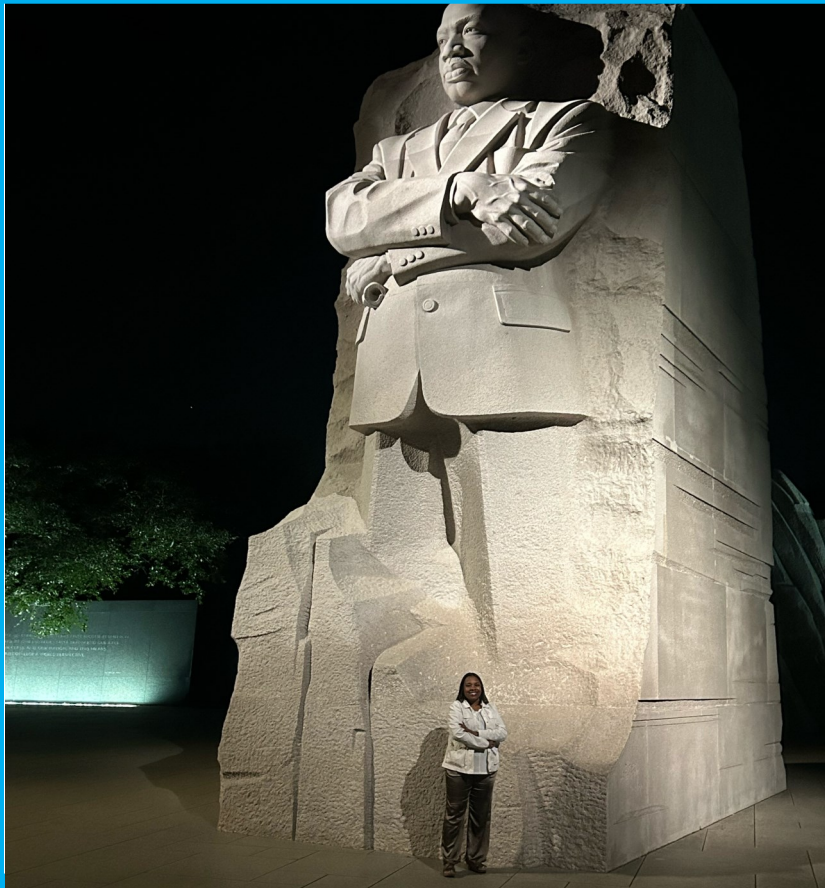
This 3-day event was filled with networking opportunities with other principals which was a valuable way to exchange ideas, discuss challenges, and build support systems in the educational community. I immediately formed a bond with principals from my region as we shared some of the same issues that impact our schools. We attended professional development sessions geared toward school leadership, networking mixers, and visited the Department of Education. The visit to the Department of Education allowed the honorees to participate in roundtable discussions and be heard on common issues facing education. We also shared memoirs and keepsakes from each of our home states. We vowed to stay connected as we left, and I am eager that I have created a supportive network to help enhance my leadership and impact within my school.

The culminating event was the NDP ceremony which highlighted each principal. Each principal was presented with a certificate of their achievement and a commemorative school bell which symbolized the principal's role in leading, guiding, and being the figurative "bell" that calls students to learning. This awards ceremony meant a lot to me as it recognized and honored the unwavering faith that educators make on a daily basis. I accepted this award not only for me, but for all of my mentors, colleagues, and teachers who believed in me throughout my journey. It was truly humbling to be recognized in this way, and I could not have done it without the love and support of my late grandmother and parents. Thanks to all of you that believed in me!

# An Incredible Opportunity Cont'd



# An Incredible Opportunity Cont'd



# Writing and Family Engagement Through Camping



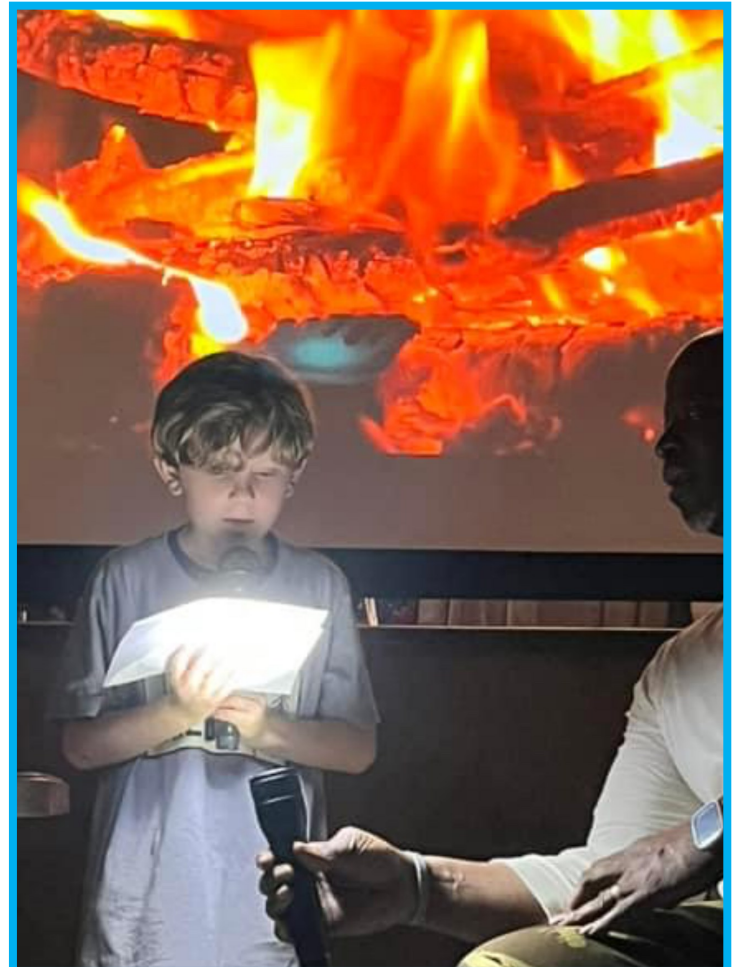
*Eric Kirkman*  
*Kilby Laboratory School*  
*UNA*

On Friday, November 8, 2024, the Kilby Laboratory School hosted a school-wide campout at their school as a way to engage students with literacy and creative writing. The campout was also a way to engage parents with the “One School, One Book” program that has led the Kilby students on a literary adventure in the outdoors wilderness. One School, One Book is a literacy program where every student K-6 reads the same book. The younger students are encouraged to have their parents read to them while the older student read the book and answer trivia questions, which serve as comprehension checks from the book. This year, Kilby students are reading “My Side of the Mountain” by Jean George. This story depicts the adventures of a young boy who runs away from the city and seeks refuge in the Catskill Mountains on his family’s farm.

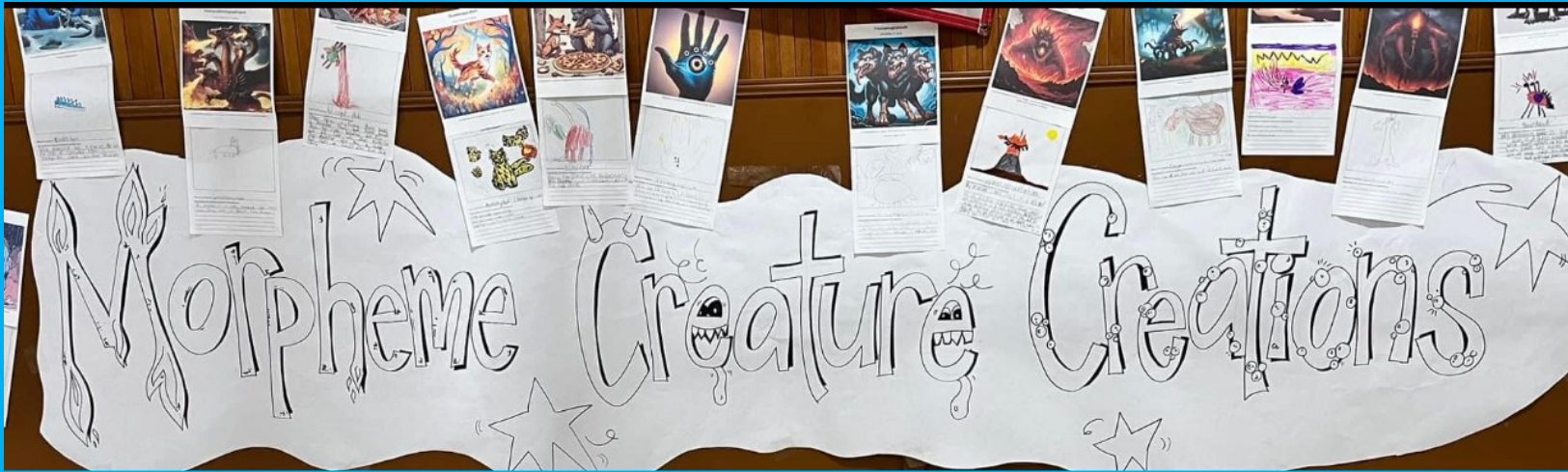
Prior to the Kilby campout, students engaged in creative writing by describing “monsters in the woods” using morphology to create fictional monster names. The local reading specialist then took the students’ descriptive writing and loaded them into an AI program which then created images of what their monsters would look like based on their descriptions. The images were incredible and terrifying at the same time! The students’ writing and their images were displayed for a gallery walk for parents to come and view the students’ writings and artwork during the campout.

The second phase of the campout involved creative writing in the form of campfire stories. The students

wrote their own original campfire stories, which were read aloud around the campfire during the campout. Students also engaged with live birds, snakes and horses from local partners who brought their animals in for the students to view and learn about. In addition, a personalized “falconry training presentation” video was shared with the students. The video was created by the United States Air Force Academy Falconry Team. The campout was a huge success, with over 100 participants coming and engaging in the writing activities, and 24 families staying overnight in camping tents on the school playground. The students and families all enjoyed the campout. Aside from the delicious s’mores made around the campfire, lasting memories were created with those students who had never camped out before. The Kilby parents have already decided that the “Kilby Campout” should be an annual activity every fall!



# Writing and Family Engagement Through Camping



# 2024 Fall Instructional Leadership Conference



*Sheneta Smith*  
*Howell Graves*  
*Preschool*  
*Muscle Shoals City*

The Fall 2024 Instructional Conference, "Leading Through Mentoring: Signs Leading To Improvement" brought together edu-

cational leaders and administrators from across the state to share insights, strategies, and best practices aimed at enhancing student achievement and promoting a positive school climate. This year's conference offered an array of engaging sessions that sparked collaboration and dialogue around crucial topics in elementary education, notably the keynote address by Colonel Art Athens, discussions on pivotal state legislation such as the Alabama Numeracy and Literacy Acts, Principals Mentoring Act and Leadership Framework and focused breakout sessions addressing various aspects of school leadership and management.

Kicking off the conference, Colonel Art Athens captivated attendees with his presentation titled "What Leaders Really Do." Drawing from his extensive military experience, Athens emphasized the vital importance of leadership beyond basic administrative tasks. He said that effective leaders must inspire and engage their teams, cultivate a shared vision, and foster an environment where every member feels valued and motivated. His insights prompted us all in discussions among the audience about the critical qualities leaders should embody, particularly in navigating challenges within the educational community.

## **Leveraging the Alabama Numeracy Act for Student Growth and Literacy Act-Prevention of Retention**

As the conference explored legislative impacts on education, a session focused on the Alabama Numeracy Act provided invaluable strategies for using this legislation to boost student growth through targeted intervention. The speakers Dawn Zinn and another SDE representative discussed how implementing the Act can help identify students struggling with mathematics early on and offer necessary supports that can lead to better outcomes. This proactive approach emphasizes the importance of intervention and enrichment, ensuring all students have access to the resources they need for academic success. In conjunction with the Numeracy Act, Bonnie Short and Tiffany Davis highlighted the need for a complementary focus on literacy through the Alabama Literacy Act. This legis-

lation lays the groundwork for preventing literacy barriers and retaining students who may otherwise struggle in their educational journey. Mrs. Short also focused on the book "Highroad to Leadership" by John C. Maxwell -New York Times bestselling author, speaker, coach and leader. She quoted his book "Everything rises and falls on leadership. And we are heading up stream and not downstream with Alabama students. Tiffany Davis cheered us on and motivated participants by pointing out the major accomplishments we have made over the last couple of years with the implementation of the Alabama Literacy Act. Breakout sessions provided by other members of the association shared with participants with actionable tools and strategies to implement literacy interventions effectively and assessment methods to monitor progress.

## **School Personnel Management and Recognizing Staff**

An engaging session titled "30 Ways to Recognize and Reward Your Staff" brought to light innovative approaches to improving school climate. Effective personnel management is essential not only for maintaining an efficient school environment but also for fostering a culture of appreciation and recognition. Educators shared practices ranging from simple daily acknowledgments to organized events celebrating teacher contributions, all aimed at enhancing morale and ultimately improving student outcomes.

## **Incorporating a Whole-Child Approach to Student Achievement**

The conference also emphasized the significance of a holistic approach to education, recognizing all factors affecting student achievement. This included dedicated discussions on addressing mental health issues among students and what schools are mandated to do under special education laws. It is crucial for educators to be equipped with the knowledge of the Principles Act in Alabama, supporting leaders in their roles to ensure compliance and enhance educational opportunities for all students.

## **Principals Leadership Network and Panel Discussion**

The National Distinguished Principals panel discussion provided a platform for successful principals to share their experiences and insights regarding effective school leadership. Key themes revolved around fostering a positive school culture, enhancing communication between stakeholders, and addressing the diverse needs of students and staff. These discussions fostered a network of support among educational leaders, encouraging collaboration to overcome common challenges facing schools.

## **Updates from the National Association of Elementary School Principals**

The conference also featured updates from the National Association of Elementary School Principals, focusing on the cur-

# 2024 Fall Instructional Leadership Conference

rent pulse of schools across the nation. This dialogue emphasized the need to develop strong school cultures that promote inclusivity and support for all students. Attendees were encouraged to reflect on their own school climates and consider the changes necessary to improve engagement, accountability, and collaboration among staff, students, and families.

## **X Marks the Spot: Extending Learning for Growth and Achievement**

One of the most distinctive features of the conference was the innovative session named "X Marks the Spot." This session led by Kathrine Rutledge-Ball and Jeff Norris focused on identifying key areas within schools where targeted efforts could lead to significant growth and achievement. Through reflective session and collaborative discussions, educators were able to pinpoint strategies and practices that resonate with their unique contexts, ultimately leading to meaningful improvements in student learning outcomes.

The Awards Luncheon was a heartfelt celebration that brought together educators, leaders, and supporters to honor the remarkable achievements of district nominees who exemplify excellence in school leadership. This special event not only highlighted the dedication and impact of these outstanding principals but also provided a special moment to recognize Rickey Darby for his invaluable years of service as the Assistant Executive Director of AAESA. His unwavering commitment to educational leadership and advocacy has left an indelible mark on the community. To commemorate his legacy, the association announced the establishment of an annual scholarship in his name, ensuring that his passion for fostering leadership in education will continue to inspire future generations. The luncheon was a testament to the profound influence of dedicated administrators and the importance of celebrating their contributions to the field of education.

In conclusion, the Fall Instructional Elementary Conference served as a vital gathering for educators committed to fostering both academic and personal growth in their students. With invaluable sessions that tackled crucial topics ranging from effective leadership to student mental health and legislative impacts on education, participants left with actionable strategies, renewed motivation, and a strengthened network of support. As schools continue to face evolving challenges, the insights garnered from this conference will undoubtedly contribute to the development of resilient, thriving educational communities



# 2024 Fall Instructional Leadership Conference



# Truman M. Pierce Leadership Award



*Scott Mitchell*  
*Brock's Gap*  
*Intermediate*  
*Hoover City*

The Alabama Association of Elementary School Administrators (AAESA) has named Dr. Vic Wilson as the recipient of the prestigious Truman M. Pierce Leadership Award for 2024. This accolade, recommended by the elementary principals of AAESA District IV, recognizes educators who have made outstanding contributions to advancing education in Alabama.

Dr. Wilson's remarkable career spans 32 years in public education, during which he has served as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, superintendent, and now as the Executive Director of the Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS), a role he has held since 2017. His extensive experience reflects a lifelong commitment to improving education and fostering equity and inclusivity across Alabama's school systems.

Throughout his career, Dr. Wilson has played a pivotal role in shaping education policy and advocating for best practices. His collaborative efforts with state legislators, school superintendents, and educational organizations have driven meaningful change. Notably, he was instrumental in the creation of the School Principal Leadership and Mentoring Act, a cornerstone initiative aimed at empowering school leaders.

Dr. Wilson's leadership extends beyond state boundaries, as he has actively contributed to national dialogues on education. He has served on the planning committee for the State Executive Directors' Conference for NASSP/NAESP, reflecting his influence on educational leadership at a broader level.

In addition to his professional roles, Dr. Wilson is a dedicated educator. He has been an adjunct professor at Samford University since 2013, mentoring both master's and doctoral students. His contributions to the academic community underscore his commitment to cultivating future generations of educational leaders.

## Educational Background and Affiliations

Dr. Wilson holds a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Samford University, as well as advanced degrees from the University of Montevallo and Samford. His affiliations include longstanding memberships in organizations such as the School Superintendents of Alabama, NASSP, and AASSP, where he served as a past state president.

## Awards and Recognition

Dr. Wilson's contributions to education have earned him numerous accolades, including the Alabama State Superintendent of the Year (2016-2017), the Lawrence L. Malone Outstanding Principal Award (2009-2010), and the AASSP G.B. Beasley Leadership Award (2014-2015). His recognition as the 2024 Truman M. Pierce Leadership Award recipient adds to this distinguished list of honors.

## A Legacy of Leadership

AAESA proudly celebrates Dr. Wilson's accomplishments and his unwavering dedication to Alabama's educators and students. His transformative impact on education, advocacy for equitable resources, and leadership excellence embody the spirit of the Truman M. Pierce Leadership Award.

Congratulations to Dr. Vic Wilson for this well-deserved honor, and thank you for your continued efforts to advance education in Alabama.



# Bill Miller, Sr. Friend of Education Award



*Katie Holland*  
*Albertville Elementary*  
*Albertville City*

The Bill Miller, Sr. Friend of Education award is given annually to an individual who is not in education, yet has made considerable contributions to public education over

the course of several years. This year, the Alabama Association of Elementary School Administrators is honored to present this award to Tuscaloosa Mayor, Walt Maddox.

Walt Maddox is a Tuscaloosa native and graduated from Central High School in 1991. He earned his bachelor's degree in political science and master's degree in public administration from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. In 1996, Walt began his professional career as a Field Director with the Alabama Education Association. In 2001, he was appointed Executive Director of Personnel for the Tuscaloosa City Schools. In that same year, he was elected as City Councilor for District Six. On May 17, 2021, Walt Maddox was sworn in for his fifth term as the City of Tuscaloosa's Mayor, the role in which he currently serves.

During Walt Maddox's first term, the Pre-K Task Force was developed to investigate and plan the path to ensure Tuscaloosa's academically-at-risk four-year-old children receive a quality pre-k education. Together with the Tuscaloosa City Schools and funding provided by Elevate Tuscaloosa, the Pre-K Initiative has made it so that every family in Tuscaloosa has access to a high-quality pre-k education. Walt Maddox also created the annual Mayor's Cup 5k for Pre-K, which has raised over \$335,000 to go directly into the pre-k classrooms. The nationally recognized Tuscaloosa Pre-K Initiative is now the model for the state's pre-k program.

Leadership is about being strategic and bold which is why Walt proposed and passed Elevate Tuscaloosa. Elevate is vastly expanding pre-k, fully funding up to 12 hours of dual enrollment for City Schools 10th through 12th grade students, investing in public safety and creating a new experience economy. Over the next ten years, Elevate will bring Tuscaloosa the Saban Center, new and upgraded parks and recreation opportunities, longer and more connected riverfront trails, increased connectivity, and a safer community. Walt knows that our future rests with the next generation and we want our children ready to create, find

jobs and invest right here in Tuscaloosa.

To ease the impact of the one cent sales tax increase on working-class families, residential garbage rates were decreased by over \$300 per family per year. The ELEVATE dual enrollment scholarship was created under the leadership of Walt Maddox by the City of Tuscaloosa in 2020. The scholarship has expanded to allow eligible 10th, 11th and 12th graders to take up to twelve free credit hours at The University of Alabama, Shelton State Community College (SSCC) and Stillman College. Shelton State also gives students who take dual enrollment at Shelton State using the ELEVATE scholarship during high school the option to take twelve additional credit hours at SSCC in the summer or fall after they graduate high school, completely free of charge. TCS dual enrollment participation has increased greatly in the past few years, growing 65% from the 232 students enrolled in Fall 2021. The ELEVATE scholarship is a unique opportunity offered exclusively to TCS students.

Under Walt Maddox's leadership, a unique public-private partnership was developed to advance STEM and the arts in Tuscaloosa. The project was catalyzed by a \$1.25 million donation from Nick and Terry Saban and their non-profit organization, Nick's Kids Foundation. The Saban Center will bring together the Children's Hands-On Museum (CHOM) and the Tuscaloosa Children's Theatre in a first-of-its-kind STEM and arts campus where education, experience and innovation meet. The Saban Center will be a hub for education training, arts participation and academic support for teachers and families alike. Walt Maddox has been nationally recognized for his crisis management after April 27, 2011, when an EF-4 tornado destroyed 12.5 percent of the City of Tuscaloosa. He currently serves as a senior fellow with the Program on Crisis Leadership at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. In 2012, Walt was named Municipal Leader of the Year by American City and County. In 2021, Walt Maddox was awarded the Distinguished Leadership Award for an Elected Public Official by the Alabama Chapter of the American Planning Association.

AAESA would like to thank Mayor Walt Maddox for his tremendous support of education, his servant leadership, and his heart for public service. He has truly embodied what it means to be a "friend" of education.

Thank you to Preeti Nichani and Jami Rainey from District III for providing the information and nomination of our Bill Miller, Sr. Friend of Education Recipient.



# Renaissance



# Executive Director's Report



*Vic Wilson*  
*AAESA Executive*  
*Director*

Happy New Year!

I hope you all had a great break, and I hope you all had an even better start to the new year! The second semester is upon us, and we all know the time between January and May is fast and furious. Make sure you take time for yourself during this busy semester.

Join me in congratulating and thanking Mr. Rickey Darby for more than seven years of excellent leadership as the Assistant Executive Director for AAESA. Rickey is the epitome of elementary leadership. His entire career has been devoted to elementary education, and he has done a fabulous job on the school, system, district, state, and national level.

Rickey and I started our current jobs at the same time in 2017, and I will greatly miss his leadership and friendship. Every aspect of AAESA is better because of Rickey's work, and I want to say thank you for a job well done! Rickey, you are a rock star in everyone's book!

Good luck on your well-deserved retirement. I hope you enjoy your time with Jeanette as the great husband you are and with Catherine as the great father you are. They are fortunate to have you in their

lives. See ya' real soon.

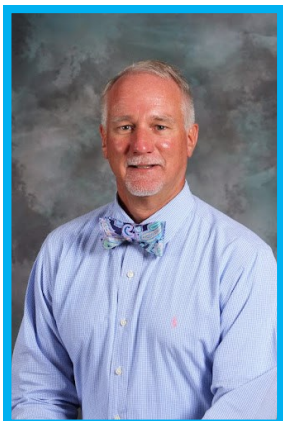
When Rickey decided to announce his retirement, his main concern was ensuring a great process for a new hire was in place. He worked with AAESA President Stan Stokely and the AAESA officers on the process to find the right candidate to fill the position. Rickey truly has a good-to-great mindset, and he wanted the absolute best person possible to be the next assistant executive director of AAESA.

Dr. Stokely and the AAESA officers did a fantastic job with the process. Several great candidates were interviewed, and the committee and board selected Hope Zeanah to be the new AAESA Assistant Executive Director. Hope started in November and worked with Rickey on the AAESA Fall Instructional Leadership Conference, and she has done a fabulous job so far. I am thrilled to be working with her, and I know that everyone else will be thrilled as well when they get a chance to meet and work with her. Congratulations, Hope.

As always, let us know how we can assist you on your leadership journey. Thank you for the job you do for those under your care every day! You are all rock stars in my book.



# Happy Retirement Rickey Darby! Again!



*Charlie Gardner*  
*Hokes Bluff Elementary*  
*Etowah County*

Please join me in congratulating and wishing the best for our AAESA Assistant Executive Direc-

tor, Mr. Rickey Darby! Recently, Rickey decided it was time for him to step away from this role and retire for a second time to enjoy and do the things that we all aspire to do one day when we retire. I served on the AAESA Board of Directors when Rickey was hired and have been fortunate to work with him since 2017. Our organization has been privileged to have some outstanding directors since its inception and I have been lucky to have worked with two, Jim Chesnutt and Rickey Darby. As a board member, I thought it would be an impossible task to replace Jim but we found another one to carry on the influence and strength of our elementary association in Rickey.

Rickey retired from the Shelby County School System where he served for 37 years. After a series of “firsts,” the first assistant principal at Elvin Hill Elementary School, the first principal at Chelsea Elementary School, and the first principal at Oak Mountain Intermediate School, Rickey became the elementary coordinator for Shelby County Schools in 1996. He held this position until retirement in 2017. As an administrator, Rickey held several offices within AAESA as well as AASCD. He has served on the CLAS Board of Directors since 2000.

Rickey has worked diligently to recruit new members to AAESA and we are now the largest CLAS affiliate. He has ensured that all things related to the plight of elementary administrators are considered when making decisions affecting our organization. To quote Rickey, “the last seven and a half years have been a great personal

and professional opportunity that I will always remember with fond memories. The relationships I have built with administrators across the state have been a true blessing. I am proud of our association’s growth in membership, increase in CLAS Board members, and our firm financial standing.” As AAESA Executive Director, Dr. Vic Wilson states, “Rickey Darby has had a wonderful career in education and has worked tirelessly on behalf of elementary school leaders. His service has been instrumental in the growth of AAESA and the learning taking place in Alabama schools. He will be missed.” AAESA President, Dr. Stan Stokley says, “Rickey Darby’s leadership over the past seven and a half years has been transformative for AAESA. His vision and commitment have led to a remarkable increase in membership and established a solid foundation for our organization. Rickey’s ability to bring people together and foster a strong, supportive community has left a lasting legacy. His impact will be felt for years to come, and we are incredibly grateful for his dedication and hard work.”

As he stated, developing relationships has certainly been his strength and passion. This was certainly evident during the global COVID pandemic when the work didn’t cease yet we had to navigate all the protocols and regulations regarding conferences and meetings. His advice has been sought on numerous issues affecting administrators from state department officials to local school districts. If you have ever called Rickey to seek an answer, if he didn’t know he would find out, then help guide you in decision making. We are happy for Rickey and his family and wish him blessings upon the next phase of his life. Whatever that may be, I know it will include a sweet piece of cake or pie!

One of Rickey’s favorite quotes, “The more you help other people become successful, the more success finds you.”

Thank you Rickey. AAESA will forever be grateful to you for your leadership!

# A Walk Down Memory Lane



# A Walk Down Memory Lane Cont'd



# A Walk Down Memory Lane Cont'd



***Rickey, thank you for your love and dedication to our organization!  
You've left a mark that won't be forgotten!***

# Thanks for the Memories



**Rickey Darby**  
**AAESA Assistant**  
**Executive Director**

This time of year, we take time to consider all the things that we are thankful for in our lives. I am thankful for my family and friends. I am also thankful for the last seven

and a half years that I have been given to serve in the role of Assistant Executive Director. I'm thankful for the opportunities the board has given me to serve our professional organization. In 1989, I first got involved in AAESA as a member of the board. I was blessed to be given the opportunity to serve AAESA in the role of Assistant Executive Director in 2017. We have seen our membership grow from 610 in 2017 to 964 members at the end of December. Because of the tremendous growth this year, we have gained another CLAS Board seat. At 10, we are now the affiliate with the most board seats. We have strived to have district meetings at least twice annually. I am thankful for the district leadership members that have helped me lead these meetings in person and on Zoom.

I am thankful for our members. Thanks to all the members who attended their local district meetings and/or the Fall Conference. Please encourage elementary administrators in your school system to join CLAS and AAESA. Our AAESA Magazine provides updates and informative articles for our members. Although not required, NAESP provides meaningful opportunities for professional growth through national meetings and publications.

I am thankful for another successful Fall Instructional Leadership Conference. It was a great success and provided some meaningful opportunities for professional learning. We had a record 238 administrators registered for the conference. The exhibit hall had a record 42 booth spaces. The record number of sponsors included twelve gold sponsors, three silver sponsors, and five bronze sponsors. The conference provided

sessions for professional growth and many opportunities for networking for our members. This year our members were also able to gain hours to meet the requirements of the Principals' Act.

I am thankful for the administrators across the state who are willing to serve in leadership positions in our professional organization and serve on the executive board. They are willing to meet three times a year and represent their members. Also, I want to thank those individuals who were nominated for having their name placed on the AAESA ballot. Watch your email for the electronic ballot for the election in January. Thanks to Dr. Stan Stokley for serving in the role of president his year. He did an outstanding job leading our general sessions at the fall conference and the organization throughout the year.

Our association has two opportunities to recognize members for their accomplishments at their local school. Congratulations to the ten principals who were nominated for Alabama's NAESP National Distinguished Principal. They were recognized at the Awards Luncheon at Fall Conference by representatives from our sponsor Renaissance Learning. They are completing their applications to submit to the judges in January. Then in February the judges will visit the schools of the three finalists. There were also eight assistant principals who were nominated for Alabama's Outstanding Assistant Principal sponsored by NAESP. They submitted their applications in December for the judges. They will be recognized at the business meeting at the CLAS Summer Convention by the sponsor Publisher's Warehouse.

As we enter the second semester, take time to enjoy your family and friends. They give our lives balance, and we need time away from work to rejuvenate ourselves to do the important work we do for the students each day. Remember to let your staff know how much you appreciate what they do each day for the students in your building.

Again, as I write my final article as the AAESA Assistant Executive Director I would like to express my sincere appreciation to everyone in the association and the CLAS staff that have helped me over the last seven and a half years. We have worked to strengthen

# Assistant Executive Director's Report Cont'd

and grow our association. I am proud of the growth and opportunities given to our members. At the conference the board recognized me with gifts and the formation of the Rickey Darby Fall Conference Scholarship. This action truly touched my heart. This represents what we have stressed over several years, which is the importance of getting our members involved and encouraging them to attend our fall conference. When we get members involved, they will continue to be involved. I encourage each of you to continue to grow the professional organization by inviting administrators to join and attend meetings and the annual fall conference.

If I can ever be of assistance to you, please feel free to contact me. I hope to see many of you in Orlando at the 2026 NAESP Conference.

A quote from the television show, The Good Doctor, "When you touch one life, You don't just touch one life, You touch every life that life touches."



## Candidates for 2025-2026 AAESA Officers

### *Vice President*

#### **Veronica Coleman**

Chastang-Fournier K-8  
Mobile County

#### **Brigett Stewart**

Piedmont Elementary  
Piedmont City

### *CLAS Board of Directors*

#### **Dana Bottoms**

WJ Carroll Elementary  
Baldwin County

#### **David Carpenter**

Jeter Primary  
Opelika City

#### **Charlies Gardner**

Hokes Bluff Elementary  
Etowah County

#### **Laura Herron**

Daphne Elementary  
Baldwin County

#### **Tisha Lewis**

Sweet Water High School  
Marengo County

#### **Waller Martin**

Brookwood Elementary  
Enterprise City

#### **Scott Mitchell**

Brock's Gap Intermediate  
Hoover City

#### **Jami Rainey**

Northridge Middle  
Tuscaloosa City

*Submitted by Addam Moody, Nominating Committee Chair*

# From PreK to Prom: Joys of Unit School



## ***Barry Wood*** ***Pleasant Home School*** ***Covington County***

Being a principal of a rural P-12 school serving 503 students in South Alabama presents a unique set of benefits and challenges. Having served at the elementary, middle, and high school level, the P-12

environment is solidly enjoyable but still challenging on a number of levels. For me, the drive in begins that appreciation for my community school. Like others, each morning I pass the family farms often with the tractors already in the fields and the homes passed down through generations. The turn in reminds me that soon our golf team will be practicing in the hay field in front of the school while the Conecuh National Forest bordering the back stirs the imagination for my young adventurers as well as my high-schoolers ready for deer and turkey season. As the kids, both large and small, file off the bus and make their way to breakfast, it's a joy to see how that sense of community can be expressed through randomness of a cafeteria line. Family and friends, young and old all getting ready to start the day.

That wonderful diversity also brings the challenges of meeting all their diverse needs. As the leader of a unit school, we too struggle with the navigation of the Literacy and Numeracy Acts, First Class Pre-K, and the ACAP while adding the ACT, WorkKeys, A.P. and dual enrollment opportunities for our upper grades. Our counselors and teachers work to balance the academic, social, and emotional needs of all those learners whose development spans the entire spectrum in an increasingly challenging time. And then there's sports and the AH-SAA. I'll stop there.

Through that litany of challenges, I'm thankful I get to meet those obstacles as in many ways, the unit school is a much needed bookmark in time. For many P-12 institutions, the school is perhaps more responsive to and reflective of the community as it serves a child for their entire academic ca-

reer, just as it likely did their parents. It reminds me of the days before mega-churches and mega-schools where time moved slower and connections, more deep.

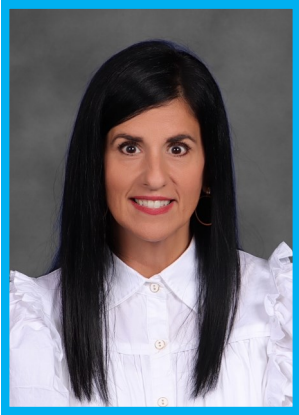
As I reached out to others, I found their experiences to be similar and their thoughts profound. Megan Driggers, principal of Kinston School in Coffee County, said "While there are some challenges to a unit school, such as scheduling, I can imagine no greater experience than being part of a P-12 setting. In a unit school, you experience students' learning journeys from beginning to end. Additionally, students of varying ages interact and support one another. One of my favorite things at school is seeing how our high school students nurture the elementary students, and in turn, the elementary students admire the high school students. The unit school environment truly fosters a familial atmosphere."

Tony Ingram, now in his second year as the principal of Red Level School in Covington County and a product of that school, said, "There's something to be said about being able to watch the different stages of the process and seeing the growth of your students from start to finish." I too would agree as when we see the hard work being done at every grade level and in all aspects of a student's school experience by so many, it is truly humbling. For an instructional leader looking for a rewarding career and experiencing all that public education has to offer, Tony added, "It's kinda like my mom's camp stew, you get a little bit of everything."



***Mother dropping off a Pleasant Home elementary student on her way to fertilize the fields***

# SEEC: Where Learning Begins for the Spartans



***Kimberly Williams***  
***Saraland Early***  
***Education Center***  
***Saraland City***

Imagine a place where excitement and discovery fill the air, where children feel safe, valued, and eager to learn. A place

where teachers inspire, play is encouraged, and learning is an adventure. Welcome to *The Happiest Place in The Land*, where the journey begins for Lil' Spartans. In Saraland, the mission is simple—*Expect More. Achieve More*—with high expectations set for every student who enters school doors. Motivated by the vision of *Building a Foundation for Student Success*, the Spartans ensure every child's first steps in education are filled with the skills, confidence, and enthusiasm needed to succeed.

At Saraland Early Education Center, this foundation is built on both academic and social-emotional growth. Serving approximately 575 students in Kindergarten and First Grade, developmentally appropriate practices provide the cornerstone for lifelong learning. Whether in the classroom, on the playground, or through special classes, every aspect of the school community is designed to build foundational skills, encourage curiosity, and foster a love of education.

Each day, students are encouraged to strive for excellence while the support needed to succeed is provided by caring educators. Time after time, students exceed expectations—becoming confident, capable learners ready for future challenges. Whether mastering early literacy, exploring mathematical concepts, or developing social skills, the goal is to create an environment where all children feel empowered to achieve their very best.

Spartan educators are passionate about their career choice and take pride in building strong relationships with students. They are committed to making learning both challenging and fun. Whether students are solving

a math problem or exploring creative ideas in art, teachers provide the guidance and encouragement needed to help students reach their full potential.

One of keys to the school's success is an exceptional teaching staff with a heart for Lil' Spartans. With a staff of 35 support teachers and 38 certified teachers, 76% of whom hold master's degrees or higher and five National Board Certified teachers, Saraland Early Education Center is proud to have a team that lives by *The Spartan Standard*—a commitment to excellence in everything. These highly skilled educators are not only experts in their fields but also invest their time and talent in the academic, emotional, and social well-being of each student. Doing whatever it takes, understanding the unique needs of early learners, and providing instruction that encourages curiosity, independence, and growth is part of the culture at Saraland Early Education Center.



Education is not solely academic; it also involves learning to engage socially and respond considerately to others. Believing students who feel valued are more likely to take pride in their learning and contribute positively to the school community, character development is fundamental to success. Through school counseling initiatives like the *Kindness Tree*, students learn values of kindness, empathy, and respect—principles that define *The Spartan Way*.

In addition to the core curriculum, each day offers exciting opportunities for the Lil' Spartans to participate in interactive learning experiences. Classes in art, music,

# SEEC: Where Learning Begins for the Spartans

STEM, library, and technology allow students to explore interests, develop creative skills, and discover new talents. Whether building a robot in STEM, painting a self-portrait in art, or experimenting with technology, the Spartans believe learning should be both engaging and fun.

The Lil' Spartans also enjoy daily physical education classes and recess, providing time for physical activity and social play. Recess is an essential part of child development, fostering creativity, teamwork, and resilience—benefitting students both academically and emotionally.

Career exploration starts early in Saraland. Through the *Careers on Wheels* event, students explore a variety of careers that are literally *on the move*. From first responders and construction workers to truck drivers and postal workers, exposure to these and other diverse careers sparks students' imaginations and inspires them to explore exciting possibilities.

Today's young learners are digital natives, and Saraland Early Education Center is dedicated to equipping them for life in a technology-driven world. Through the school's 1:1 iPad program and access to the iMac Lab, students develop essential skills that enrich learning and foster digital literacy—skills vital for thriving in a technology-rich society.

Saraland Early Education Center's commitment to excellence has been recognized across the state—hosting instructional rounds and welcoming educators from outside the district to participate. Additionally, the school earned a 98/A on its state report card, a testament to hard work, dedication, and a strong focus on student achievement. It has been designated a Purple Star School for its support of students in military-affiliated families. In addition, the school received the 2023 Alabama School Counseling Program of Distinction and was honored by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) with the 2023 Recognized ASCA Model Program (RAMP) award, a national distinction. These accolades reflect an unwavering dedication to *The Spartan Standard*—a standard of excellence demonstrated every day.

The Spartans believe that education is a partnership, and the school actively encourages family involvement by providing opportunities for families to engage in their child's learning. From the Art Walk and STEM Night to programs like Bingo for Books and the Grandparents' Day Program, these events foster a strong sense of community and allow families to connect with their child's educational journey.

At Saraland Early Education Center, the focus is not only on teaching, but on building future leaders, creators, and thinkers. Whether setting high academic expectations, developing character, or introducing students to exciting career opportunities, the goal is clear: to ensure every child has the foundation needed for success. From the school's outstanding educators to its engaging programs, the Spartans provide an environment where students thrive. Welcome to *The Happiest Place in The Land*—where the foundation for learning begins in Saraland City Schools.



# District IV News

## District 4 President Amy Burbank and Her Academic Coaches Model Leadership at ARI Professional Development

This fall, District 4 President Amy Burbank, along with her team of academic coaches, served as the model for the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) Strong Leaders professional development session. Their involvement provided an invaluable opportunity for school leaders across the area to observe effective leadership strategies in action.

The centerpiece of the Professional Development Day was the *Leadership Lab*, where Mrs. Burbank and her team conducted an *admin. coaches* meeting for participants to observe. Using a "fishbowl" approach, the leadership team gathered in the center while the participants sat in a circle around them, watching their interaction. This setup allowed for a unique, inside look at the dynamics of a leadership team and how they collaborate to drive improvement.

During the meeting, Mrs. Burbank and her team engaged in rich discussions about recent classroom observations, analyzed student data, and began planning future professional development for a specific grade level. The collaborative process exemplified the key elements of data-informed decision-making in real-time.

As observers, participants were given a *Note Catcher* to document their observations based on four guiding prompts:

- What Happened: What did I see, hear, or notice?
- What Does it Mean: What conclusions can I draw from this?

- What I Wonder: What questions do I have or areas do I want to explore further?
- What Are My Next Steps: How can I support these strategies in my own school?

After the meeting, Mrs. Burbank and her team debriefed with the observers, facilitated by ARI Literacy Specialist Jodie Lawley. The team answered questions and provided valuable insights into the decisions they made and the challenges they faced. This debriefing allowed participants to reflect on their observations and think critically about how to apply the strategies they saw in their own school settings.



## Leader in Me

At Florence B. Mathis Elementary, the faculty and staff's belief system are driven by the paradigm that every individual within the school community can be a leader. The paradigm of leadership is represented at Florence B. Mathis Elementary through their efforts to engage students, teachers, families, and the community in the practice of the 8 Habits of Effective Leaders.

The faculty and staff prioritize and value their students' leadership abilities. Every classroom has a dedicated time in which their focus is on learning the best practices of leadership structures. Every classroom has leadership roles students apply for to give them a choice and a voice. Students are also invited to apply for school-wide leadership roles.

Dr. Shannon McCurdy, the building principal, supports the faculty through giving them a choice for an action team to join in which they can contribute to the most effectively. The faculty participates in monthly action team meetings where they collaborate to help make decisions for the school. The school's motto is "It begins with M.E." The faculty and staff know the antecedent of "it" can be anything we want it to be: "Change," "Learning," "Growth," can all be antecedents of "it." However, M.E. is always going to be a pun for "myself" and an acronym for "Mathis Elementary." Teachers model resilience in their personal and professional lives. They are open to trying new models of teaching using methods such as Kagan Cooperative Learning, and they are accepting of coaching to adjust their teaching as needed. Teachers are also willing to try new activities in their personal lives like playing pickleball or exercising after school on their own. By participating in professional development to provide innovative and effective strategies, teachers consistently work to bring change to their instructional methods to develop growth in their students.

The faculty and staff model service learning and teach how it impacts changing the world. For example, their Physical Education Coaches encourage students to raise money for organizations such as The American Heart Association. Setting academic and personal WIGs brings change in academics and non-academic areas for both teachers and students. Additionally, teachers develop professional goals

that are aligned to our school-wide goal. The goals motivate teachers to establish lead measures that are directly tied to student success. Leadership notebooks contain each child's journey of success and celebrations to create a pattern of actions for long-term, meaningful change.

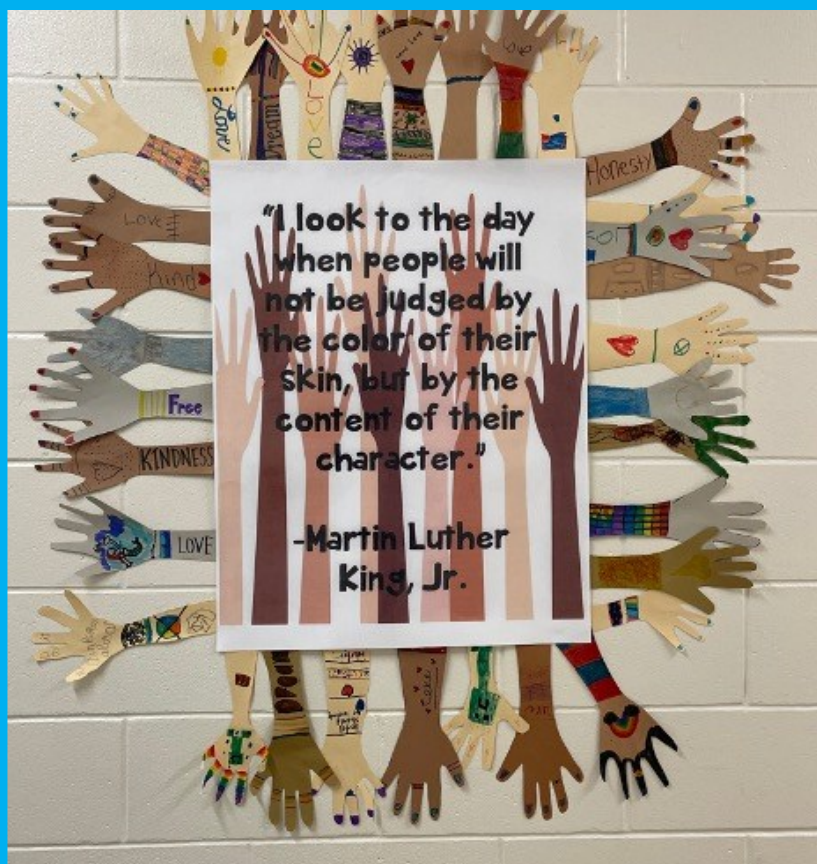
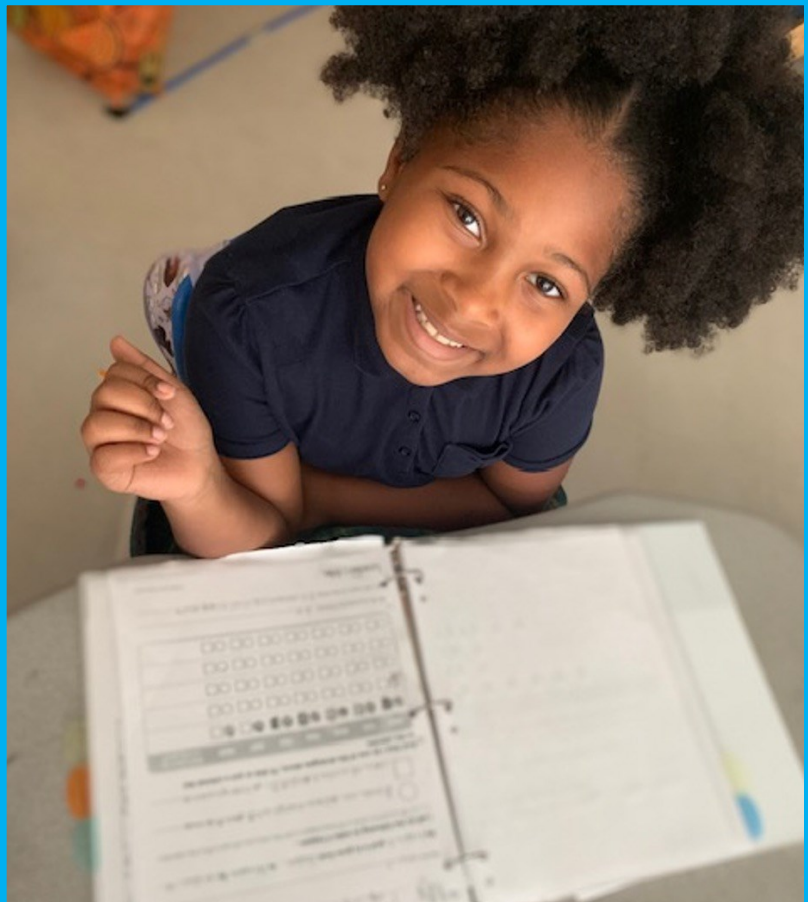
The Foley community partners are instrumental in supporting the school's vision of teaching kids to reach their full potential. Their faculty and staff begin with the end in mind. They are intentional in providing students opportunities to explore career options so they are not only hearing a vision for their future, but they are also seeing a vision so they know it can become their reality. Teachers give students opportunities to explore their own interests and see a variety of careers in the arts and in the business sector of life.

For students to explore their interests at school, they have club days once a month where they travel with their grade level peers to their club of choice. From Legos to nature art, students have a variety of choices. To generate ideas for students to explore natural talents, they host an Artisan Showcase, where local artists come to share their own creative talents with our kids. From Quilters to musicians, we cover a wide spectrum of talent for students to see and hear. Mathis Elementary also hosts a Career Fair to show students opportunities in the business world for their futures. Many of local businesses offer hands-on learning so students can have an experience of seeing and feeling different careers in a variety of professions such as firefighters, police, pilots, bankers, nurses, and more. To culminate their experiences at Mathis Elementary, when students are in 6th grade, they are given an opportunity to visit Auburn University. Depending on their interests, students may explore the College of Nursing, College of Engineering, Music, Band, or Athletics.

Dr. McCurdy was recently promoted to Elementary Assistant Superintendent, and will focus on academics and school improvement, bringing her proven track record of success and dedication to all Baldwin County schools.

"Dr. McCurdy has consistently demonstrated her ability to lead and inspire excellence at every level of her career," said Superintendent Eddie Tyler. "Her commitment to academic achievement and inclusive education will serve Baldwin County well in this vital role."

# District VIII News Cont'd



# Meet Your District I President



## *Addam Moody* *Brooks Elementary* *Lauderdale County* *Schools*

My name is Addam Moody, and I have the privilege of serving as the principal of Brooks Elementary School, a P-6 school in Killen, Alabama. For the past five years, I have led this incredible school community of roughly 900 students and 120 staff members. Brooks Elementary is a place I am immensely proud of—a school known for its loving and caring environment, as well as its dedication to character development and academic excellence. Recently, our school was honored to receive the CLAS School of Distinction Award, recognizing our entire school family's hard work and commitment.

I've spent the past nine years as an elementary education administrator, and I consider it a blessing to work in this field. Being an educator is one of life's greatest callings, a chance to make a difference for the next generation. Each day, I strive to leave a mark on the lives of those entrusted to me, moving them one step closer to Jesus. I am passionate about creating a positive, supportive environment where students and staff can thrive.

I am pursuing a Doctorate in Educational Leadership at the University of Alabama. My dissertation focuses on helping school leaders better understand and address the challenges faced by students dealing with multidimensional poverty. This work aligns with my belief in providing equitable education for every child, ensuring they have the tools and support needed to succeed both academically and morally.

On a personal level, I feel blessed to have an incredible wife, Candice. She truly has a heart after Jesus and brings joy to everyone she meets. If I had to describe her in one word, it would be "home." Candice is my partner in life and my most significant source of support. Together, we love traveling, exploring new places, and creating lasting memories with friends and family.

I also enjoy spending time outdoors and staying active. I played collegiate golf, and my love for the game continues to this day. I am a proud fan of University of Alabama athletics and enjoy water sports and anything that lets me experience the beauty of the outdoors.

Through my role at Brooks Elementary and my personal life, my mission remains to serve, inspire, and lead purposefully. I am grateful for the opportunity to influence so many lives and work daily to build a legacy of compassion, character, and faith.



# State Advocacy Update



*Whitney Miller-Nichols*  
*CLAS Director of*  
*Governmental Relations*

## **FY2026 Budget Forecast**

The rate of growth in the Education Trust Fund (ETF) continued to shrink at the end of Fiscal Year 2024, with just 2.20% growth in the final month

but a total 10.40% year-over-year growth. That healthy activity means the economic slowdown we've been warned about since 2021 has yet to arrive. If you're skittish about proration like I am, take comfort in knowing that adjustments made to the Education Trust Fund through the Rolling Reserve Act and other legislation over the last several years make 2000s-style proration an almost-impossibility.

The state Legislative Fiscal Office is predicting a modest \$381M in new dollars for K-12 appropriations in FY2026. However, the [official FY2026 ETF request from the State Board of Education](#) is for \$471M over its FY2025 appropriation, which includes a \$52M budget request for the fledgling [Struggling Readers Beyond Grade 3 program](#) and a \$51M request for school safety funding in line with [2024's School Security Act](#) (SB98). The SBOE was adamant that legislative funding for these two programs is essential in the 2025 session. The Legislature would have to reduce line item growth for other entities in order to meet the SBOE's full \$471M request.

When the Legislature [established the ETF Secondary Spending Limit \(SSL\)](#) with Act [2023-390](#), it codified the percentage by which ETF appropriations can increase over the previous fiscal year's appropriation. The SSL began at 6.5% and will decrease incrementally to 5.75% by the FY2027 budget cycle. While intended to help protect against proration, the SSL is also creating an artificial cap on funding growth that is diverting multiple hundreds of millions of dollars a year into various legislative "savings accounts" like the Educational Opportunities Reserve Fund instead of funding education. Dollars remaining in the ETF after the cascade of accounts receive their required deposits may then be appropriated in supplemental appropriation bills.

The Legislative Fiscal Office is projecting around \$520M available for an FY2025 supplemental appropriation bill, and the Advancement & Technology Fund balance will be at almost \$875M. School systems and higher ed have historically received the ma-

jority of funds in a supplemental appropriation bill, but other state interests have been included in more recent years, such as \$25M for the new State House and a \$50M deposit in the CHOOSE Act fund in 2024. In the 2023 session, almost half of the \$2.78B supplemental appropriation bill went to non-education entities. The Legislature is under no obligation to make either an A&T Fund or ETF Supplemental appropriation in any year.

## **Budget and Advocacy**

I encourage you to review the SBOE's [FY2026 ETF budget request](#) and let your system's legislators know which line items are of particular importance for your students. Use [this tool](#) to find their contact information.

## **Parents Right to Know**

Trish Crain [reported in late October](#) that only 60% of the school and system websites she examined have their curriculum publicly available online in compliance with Senate President Pro Tem Greg Reed's 2024 "[Parents Right to Know](#)" law. Different schools and systems have interpreted this new requirement in different ways. Some list only state Course of Study standards; some list textbook and/or curriculum names; and some provide a contact form for parents to request more information. It's likely that some schools are sharing this information behind a login, e.g. in Schoology. State Superintendent of Education Dr. Eric Mackey's [September 26, 2024, memo](#) advises that curriculum must be posted at the beginning of the school year and within 30 days of a change.

In addition to school-level requirements, teachers are now required by law to provide a syllabus listing supplementary reading materials for the school year. The bill also requires school systems to have a process by which parents of enrolled students can request to inspect material and to file a complaint with the local superintendent if the school or teacher does not comply with the act. If the parent complaint is not addressed within 10 days, the parent should file a complaint with ALSDE using the form in the state memo. The state superintendent is required to annually report to the legislature the number of complaints received by county.

Please reach out if you have questions about state laws and policies related to elementary education. Email me at [whitney@clasleaders.org](mailto:whitney@clasleaders.org). I'm here as a resource for you!

# Federal Relations



*David Carpenter*  
*Jeter Primary*  
*Opelika City*

## Federal Updates

- The Senate Appropriations Committee originally approved its FY25 funding bill at the end of July. It was much more favorable for preK-12 funding than the House education funding bill. **In October** Congress extended temporary FY25 funding at current levels through December 20<sup>th</sup>. Congress is adjourned until after the November elections when they will reconvene for a lame duck session.
- The July Senate bill increased Title I and maintains existing funding levels for Title II. The House bill cuts Title I by 25% and completely eliminates funding for Title II.
- Key funding levels comparisons between the House and Senate bills:

Key Differences Between FY25 House and Senate Appropriations Bills

	FY24 Budget	FY25 President's Budget Request	FY25 House Appropriations Committee Approved	FY25 Senate Appropriations Committee Approved
<b>Title I Grants to LEAs</b>	\$18.407 billion	\$18.587 billion (+\$180 million)	\$13.688 billion (-\$4.7 billion)	\$18.687 billion (+\$280 million)
<b>Title II Supporting Effective Instruction State Grants</b>	\$2.19 billion	\$2.19 billion (no change)	\$0 (-\$2.19 billion)	\$2.19 billion (no change)
<b>Title III English Language Acquisition</b>	\$890 million	\$940 million (+\$50 million)	\$0 (-\$890 million)	\$895 million (+\$5 million)
<b>Head Start and Early Head Start</b>	\$12.272 billion	\$12.541 billion (+\$27 million)	\$12.297 billion (+\$25 million)	\$12.97 billion (+\$700 million)
<b>IDEA Grants to States</b>	\$14.214 billion	\$14.394 billion (+\$180 million)	\$14.239 billion (+\$25 million)	\$14.509 billion (+\$295 million)

\*House Title I dollars include rescission of \$938 million in already enacted FY24 advance funding intended for FY24

- NAESP has been highlighting the stark differences between the two bills and the obvious preference for the Senate version.

## Online Children's Privacy

- The House Energy & Commerce Committee passed two bills to increase online protections for children in September.
- The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA 2.0) and Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA) would:
  - Increase the age of privacy protection from 13 to 17 years-old
  - Ban personal information of children from being collected
  - Ban targeted advertising to youth 17 and under
  - Create an "eraser button" to delete children's personal information
  - Create a "duty of care" for tech platforms to be proactive in protecting children.
  - Disable addictive features for youth users.
  - Give parents more control over accessible content and personal information
- The Senate passed these bills in July. The House bills have the same names but contain different provisions.
- The full House would have to pass these bills when they return in mid-November and resolve the differences with the Senate bills before the end of the congressional term on January 2<sup>nd</sup>. It is a very tight timeline. The process starts all over in January.
- Notwithstanding this recent progress, state actions to protect children online are also vitally important in their own right and to keep the pressure on Congress to act.

# Federal Relations Cont'd

## The PDK Annual Survey of the Public's Attitudes about Public Schools

- 58<sup>th</sup> annual survey
- Survey Highlights:
  - More than 80% of the public supports 1) students graduating college and career ready and 2) attracting and retaining good classroom teachers
  - More than 7 in 10 Americans favor an increased focus on student mental health and academic recovery
  - 61% favor increased funding for schools
  - 60% would not want their children to become teachers.
    - ◇ This is a complete reversal from 11 years ago when 60% would like their child to be a teacher.
    - ◇ Meager pay and classroom discipline were primary factors in this concern about teaching.
  - Mixed opinions on AI use in education
    - ◇ Roughly 2/3s support using AI to help teachers prepare lesson plans, or tutor students, or help students practice tests.
    - ◇ Only 43% think students should be able to use AI for homework
- The complete survey results are available at <https://pdkpoll.org/2024-poll-results/>

## National School Leaders Advocacy Conference

- The advocacy conference held jointly with NASSP will be on March 9-12, 2025

## **FUTURE EVENTS**

### **CLAS Convention**

June 8-11, 2025

Riverview Hotel and Mobile  
Convention Center  
Mobile, Alabama

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

July 11-13, 2025

Seattle Convention Center/Arch  
Seattle, Washington

### **AAESA Fall Instructional Leadership Conference**

November 16-19, 2025

Perdido Beach Resort  
Orange Beach, Alabama

# NAESP Update



*Bonnie Sullivan*  
*Pike Road Intermediate*  
*Pike Road City*

## NAESP 2023-2024

### Financial Overview

The 2023-2024 Final Audit shows that NAESP's total combined Liabilities and Net Assets stand at **\$14,414,664**. Of this amount, unrestricted net assets total **\$9,522,837** as of June 30, 2024. This represents a significant improvement in our financial position, with unrestricted assets growing by **\$1,821,836** from 2023 to 2024. NAESP is committed to building on this success and ensuring the continued fiscal health of the association.

### Professional Learning and Member Engagement

NAESP is adapting proactively to meet the evolving needs of school leaders. Our professional learning initiatives have seen substantial growth:

- **42% increase in mentor training registrations**
- **37% increase in participation in the Pre-K-3rd Leadership Academy**
- Over **1,200 school leaders** engaged in our community of practice.

These initiatives are designed to equip principals with the skills and knowledge necessary to address the changing demands of their roles.

### Principal Magazine Updates

Recent updates to **Principal magazine**. The publication now features:

- A stronger focus on **middle-level education**
- More diverse **member voices**
- Engaging new article series, including "**Picture Perfect**" and "**Book Talk**"

NAESP is also enhancing the digital presence by leveraging **video** and **social media** to showcase the incredible connections and collaborations happening within the NAESP community.

### Membership Development

Membership growth remains a priority for NAESP. We are implementing a range of strategies to promote the value of NAESP, leverage our members' voices, and attract new members. To bolster these efforts, we've brought on a new **Membership Liaison**, Dr. Melissa "Missie" Patschke, who will play a key role in driving engagement and supporting membership recruitment and retention.

### Advocacy and Policy Efforts

NAESP continues to advocate for school leaders nationwide. Recently, NAESP endorsed the **Children and Teens' Online Privacy Protection Act**, which:

- Increases the age limit for targeted online advertising from **13 to 17** years old
- Expands parental control over children's online privacy settings

We've also worked vigorously to secure increased **K-12 funding** through the Senate's FY25 appropriations bill and have urged members to contact their representatives.

Looking ahead, NAESP is launching the **School Leaders Advocacy Network** in November and will be partnering with the **National Association of Secondary School Principals (NAASP)** for the **2025 National School Leaders Advocacy Conference** in Washington, D.C. (March 9-12, 2025).

### Upcoming Events

NAESP is excited to announce the opening of registration for the **2025 UNITED: The National Conference on School Leadership**. Join us in **Seattle** from **July 11-13, 2025**, with pre-conference sessions on **July 10**, to celebrate leadership, engage in professional development, and network with peers.

Additionally, we are pleased to share other important updates from our recent board meeting:

- **National Distinguished Principal application criteria** have been updated to clarify that nominees must be practicing principals at the time of nomination.
- A new **selection process for Directors at Large** on the NAESP Board has been approved. Candidates will submit applications and video responses, which will be reviewed and ranked by the Board using a point system.
- The **membership categories and dues structure** were reviewed, and no changes were made at this time.



*Bonnie Sullivan*  
*Pike Road Intermediate*  
*Pike Road City*

## **NAESP: Adapting to the Evolving Needs of School Leaders**

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) is committed to staying at the forefront of educational leadership, proactively adapting to the ever-changing needs of school leaders. As the role of principals continues to evolve, NAESP is enhancing its professional learning resources to ensure that school leaders are equipped with the skills and competencies required to address the diverse challenges of today's educational landscape.

### **Expanding Professional Learning Opportunities**

NAESP's professional learning initiatives have experienced remarkable growth, demonstrating the increasing demand for quality leadership development. In recent months, the association has seen a 42% rise in mentor training registrations, highlighting the importance of mentorship in developing future leaders. Additionally, participation in the Pre-K-3rd Leadership Academy has increased by 37%, reflecting a heightened awareness of the critical early years in a child's education.

One of the most exciting developments is the engagement of over 1,200 leaders in NAESP's Community of Practice. This network allows principals and educators to collaborate, share best practices, and support one another in navigating the complexities of school leadership.

### **New Features in Principal Magazine**

NAESP is also enhancing its flagship publication, **Principal** magazine, to better serve its members. The latest edition introduces a

stronger focus on middle-level education, recognizing the unique challenges and opportunities faced by principals who oversee both elementary and middle schools. In addition, there is an increased emphasis on member voices, ensuring that the insights and experiences of NAESP members are central to the magazine's content.

Readers can also look forward to engaging new article types, including "Picture Perfect" and "Book Talk." These fresh formats are designed to capture the diverse range of experiences and perspectives within the NAESP community, while offering valuable content that principals can immediately apply in their schools.

### **Harnessing Technology and Social Media for Greater Impact**

In today's digital world, NAESP is leveraging technology to connect and engage its members in new ways. Video content and social media platforms are being used to showcase the incredible connections and collaborations happening within the NAESP community. These platforms provide a dynamic way for school leaders to stay informed, exchange ideas, and celebrate successes.

### **Strengthening Membership Development**

As membership development continues to be a key priority, NAESP is using a variety of strategies to highlight the value of the association and encourage new memberships. Central to these efforts is the recruitment of a new membership liaison, Dr. Melissa "Missie" Patschke, who will spearhead initiatives aimed at boosting engagement and retention among current members, while also driving membership recruitment efforts.

Dr. Patschke's leadership will play a critical role in ensuring that NAESP remains a vital resource for school leaders and continues to meet the evolving needs of the education community.

### **Looking Ahead**

As NAESP continues to adapt and grow, the association remains dedicated to supporting the development of effective, innovative school leaders. With enhanced professional learning resources, a more dynamic Principal magazine, and a commitment to leveraging technology and social media, NAESP is ensuring that principals have the tools and support they need to succeed in an ever-changing educational environment.

# AAESA Business Meeting, November 19, 2024



*Cindy Poteet*  
*Northside Intermediate*  
*Opelika City*

**AAESA Business Meeting**  
**Fall Instructional Leadership**  
**Conference**

**Chair:** Dr. Stan Stokley

## 1. Call to Order

- Meeting officially called to order by Dr. Stokley.

## 2. Adoption of Agenda

- Motion to approve by Waller Martin, seconded by Karissa Lang. Motion carried.

## 3. Key Updates and Reports

- Legislative Update (Dr. Vic Wilson)
  - Discussion of laws affecting education (2017: 11 laws, 2023: 29 laws).
  - Advocacy for focus on leadership, literacy, and numeracy. (These are the talking points we need to use when speaking to anyone in legislation.
- Federal Relations (David Carpenter)
  - Discussed handout and referred to comments made by Earl Franks earlier.

## 4. Fall Conference Updates

- 2025 Conference (Mrs. Hope Zeanah)
  - Seeking ideas for speakers and topics.

## 5. Financial and Membership Reports (Rickey Darby)

- **Financials:** Stable, with increased sponsorships and attendees.
- **Membership:** Currently 899 members (up by 29). The next goal is 950 which is another seat on the CLAS board.

## 6. NAESP Updates (Ms. Hope Zeanah)

- Financially sound
- Referred to announcements made by Dr. Franks earlier.

## 8. Nominations and Elections (Rickey Darby)

- Various nominations for board seats and vice-presidency discussed.
- 3 vacant seats for the Board seats and 6 nominees and 1 vacant set for Vice President with 2 nominees.

## 9. Executive Director and Assistant Director Reports

- Reflection on achievements and recognition of contributions by Rickey Darby.

## 10. Closing and New Business

- District planning for 2025 discussed.
- Vic suggested that we include this business meeting in the future to be a part of the last session on Tuesday so that attendance will be greater and important points will be heard.
- Motion to adjourn by Charlie Gardner, seconded by Veronica Coleman. Motion carried.
- Congratulations to Us!!

## ***Congratulations to Us!!!***

AAESA's record 964 members this year enabled us to gain another CLAS Board Seat!

With 10 seats on the CLAS Board of Directors, we will have more than any other affiliate organizations!

Thanks to all that helped to make this possible!

### **Current Membership Count**

<b>District</b>	<b>Members</b>
District I	145
District II	79
District III	75
District IV	163
District V	162
District VI	49
District VII	115
District VIII	92
District IX	104
District X	80
Non-District	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,064</b>

# September 2024 CLAS Board Meeting



*Waller Martin*  
*Brookwood Elementary*  
*Enterprise City*

The CLAS Board of Directors Meeting was held on September 23, 2024 at the Renaissance Ross Bridge in Birmingham, Al. The meeting was called to order by CLAS Board President Dr. Michelle Washington. CLAS Staff present included Dr. Vic Wilson, Whitney Miller-Nichols, and Debbie Lee. Affiliate Staff present included Katrina Akers, AASSP, Dr. Dell Goodwin, AASPA, Dr. Larry Haynes, AAMSP and Dr. Jane Cobia, AASCD.

Mr. Chuck Marcum, ALSDE Chief of Staff provided an Alabama State Dept. of Education update for board members. Dr. Wilson presented the 2023-2024 Year End Membership Report. The year ended with an increase to 4440 for total CLAS membership. He also reminded affiliates to pay special attention to their affiliates' membership and recruit members accordingly. The More Members, More Rewards membership recruitment incentive was once again promoted for 2023-24 membership year.

Dr. Wilson presented the final 2024 Convention Summary Report. Revenue was up and expenses were up. However, the profit from the convention was slightly over \$81,000. Dr. Wilson also reported to the board that Legal Defense fund expenditures are already more than \$53,000 and there will most likely need to be a budget adjustment on that item. Dr. Wilson then presented the year-End Financial Report. He then informed the board that some corrections were made on the previously reported financial statement

and presented the corrected one for the board's review.

Whitney Miller-Nichols reviewed the 2025 Legislative Priorities and spoke to concerns for the upcoming session. The CLAS board will vote on the priorities at the December CLAS Board meeting.

A membership survey was sent to every CLAS member. This survey is conducted every three years. The membership was overwhelmingly positive regarding how the association work is being done. President Washington presented the membership report for board acceptance. CLAS membership is 2864 as of September 17, 2024. A motion was made, seconded, and passed.

David Gallahar, Raymond James, reviewed the CLAS investment report with the board. Investments are beginning to increase. January through September reported an increase of 8.4%. The Market is expected to grow for the next four or five years. Dr. Wilson discussed the current financial reports. Membership revenue has increased. President Washington then presented the financial report for approval. A motion was made, seconded, and passed.

President Washington made the following committee appointments: Awards and Recognition Committee, Tiffany Yelder, Caroline Obert, Sheneta Smith. Elections Committee, Resia Brooks, Charla DeLeo, Deanna Goodwine. Membership Committee Chairperson, Drew Glass.



**Alabama Association of Elementary School Administrators**  
**P.O. Box 428**  
**Montgomery, AL 36101-0428**  
**(800) 239-3616 or (334) 265-3610**  
**Fax: (334) 265-3611**  
**[www.clasleaders.org](http://www.clasleaders.org)**



## **AAESA Officers**

### **President**

Stan Stokley  
Saraland Elementary  
229 McKeough Avenue  
Saraland, AL 36571  
Phone: (251) 679-5739  
Fax: (251) 679-5749  
[sstokley@saralandboe.org](mailto:sstokley@saralandboe.org)

### **President-Elect**

Sheneta Smith  
Howell Graves Preschool  
3201 Alabama Avenue  
Muscle Shoals, AL 35661  
Phone: (256) 389-2630  
FAX: (256) 389-2632  
[ssmith2@mssc.k12.al.us](mailto:ssmith2@mssc.k12.al.us)

### **Vice-President**

Katie Holland  
Albertville Elementary  
145 West End Drive  
Albertville, AL 35950  
Phone: (256) 894-4822  
Fax: (256) 891-7902  
[katelynholland@albertk12.org](mailto:katelynholland@albertk12.org)

### **Secretary**

Cindy Poteet  
Northside Intermediate  
601 North 5th Street  
Opelika, AL 36801  
Phone: (334) 745-9731  
Fax: (334) 745-9755  
[cindy.poteet@opelikaschools.org](mailto:cindy.poteet@opelikaschools.org)

### **Immediate Past President**

Karissa Lang  
Crestline Elementary  
600 Crestline Drive SW  
Hartselle, AL 35640  
Phone: (256) 773-9967  
FAX: (256) 751-5656  
[karissa.lang@hartselletigers.org](mailto:karissa.lang@hartselletigers.org)

### **NAESP Representative**

Bonnie Sullivan  
Pike Road Intermediate  
4710 Pike Road  
Pike Road, AL 36064  
Phone: (334) 420-5360  
FAX: (334) 4205365  
[bonnie.sullivan@pikeroadschools.org](mailto:bonnie.sullivan@pikeroadschools.org)

### **Executive Director**

Vic Wilson  
P.O. Box 428  
Montgomery, AL 36101  
Phone: (800) 239-3616  
Fax: (334) 265-3611  
[vic@clasleaders.org](mailto:vic@clasleaders.org)

### **Assistant Executive Director**

Hope Zeanah  
P.O. Box 428  
Montgomery, AL 36101  
Phone: (800) 239-3616  
Fax: (334) 265-3611  
[hope@clasleaders.org](mailto:hope@clasleaders.org)

### **CLAS Board of Directors**

Jenny Breazeale  
Fairhope West Elementary  
408 North Section Street  
Fairhope, AL 36532  
Phone: (251) 928-8400  
Fax: (251) 928-6709  
[jbreazeale@bcbe.org](mailto:jbreazeale@bcbe.org)

Dana Bottoms  
W.J. Carroll Intermediate  
1000 Main Street  
Daphne, AL 36526  
Phone: (251) 626-0277  
Fax: (251) 626-0488  
[dbottoms@bcbe.org](mailto:dbottoms@bcbe.org)

Veronica Coleman  
Chastang-Fournier K-8  
2800 Berkley Avenue  
Eight Mile, AL 36617  
Phone: (251) 221-2081  
FAX: (251) 221-2080  
[vcoleman@mcpss.com](mailto:vcoleman@mcpss.com)

Charles Gardner  
Hokes Bluff Elementary  
5375 Main Street  
Hokes Bluff, AL 35903-4736  
Phone: (256) 492-5571  
Fax: (256) 492-2513  
[Charles\\_Gardner@ecboe.org](mailto:Charles_Gardner@ecboe.org)

Eric Kirkman  
Kilby Laboratory School  
611 North Pine Street  
Florence, AL 35632  
Phone: (256) 765-4304  
Fax: (256) 765-4167  
[ekirkman@una.edu](mailto:ekirkman@una.edu)

Karissa Lang  
Crestline Elementary  
600 Crestline Drive SW  
Hartselle, AL 35640  
Phone: (256) 773-9967  
FAX: (256) 751-5656  
[karissa.lang@hartselletigers.org](mailto:karissa.lang@hartselletigers.org)

Waller Martin  
Brookwood Elementary  
6500 Boll Weevil Circle  
Enterprise, AL 36322  
Phone: (334) 393-9542  
Fax: (334) 393-9547  
[wmartin@enterpriseschools.net](mailto:wmartin@enterpriseschools.net)

Sheneta Smith  
Howell Graves Preschool  
3201 Alabama Avenue  
Muscle Shoals, AL 35661  
Phone: (256) 389-2630  
FAX: (256) 389-2632  
[ssmith2@mssc.k12.al.us](mailto:ssmith2@mssc.k12.al.us)

Stan Stokley  
Saraland Elementary  
229 McKeough Avenue  
Saraland, AL 36571  
Phone: (251) 679-5739  
Fax: (251) 679-5749  
[sstokley@saralandboe.org](mailto:sstokley@saralandboe.org)