



January is Gifted Education Month

January marks the beginning of a new year, a time for reflection, resolutions, and in the world of education, a month dedicated to celebrating the bright minds that shape our future.

Recognized as Gifted Education Month in Alabama, January serves as a reminder of the importance of identifying, nurturing, and supporting the unique needs of gifted learners in Alabama's K-12 schools.

On January 11, 2024, Governor Kay Ivey signed a proclamation in recognition of Gifted Education Month. This annual observance not only highlights the achievements of these students, but also raises awareness about the challenges they may face, and the crucial role that educators play in fostering their growth.

In 2023, through the Gifted and Talented Students Education Program Grant, the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) awarded \$1.425 million in additional funding to local education agencies (LEAs) to support the development of new, advanced educational and specialized programs or continuing programs for gifted and talented children in Grades K-12.

What is Gifted? Approximately 7% of Alabama's K-12 students are designated as gifted. These students possess exceptional abilities and potential that set them apart from their peers. These abilities may manifest in various areas, including intellectual, creative, or specific academic fields. Gifted learners are often curious, learn quickly, and show a deep passion for their interests. Despite these exceptional qualities, giftedness comes with its own set of challenges. This includes heightened sensitivities, perfectionism, and potential struggles with socialization and interacting with peers.

Gifted Education Month is Alabama's opportunity to emphasize and explain the significance of tailored educational programs that address the unique needs of gifted students. Traditional classroom settings may not always provide the level of challenge and stimulation necessary for these

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students to reach their full potential. Therefore, educators and policymakers are encouraged to implement strategies and programs that foster a supportive and enriching environment for gifted learners.

How are Gifted Students Identified? There are multiple ways of identifying a gifted student. Alabama's schools participate in **Second Grade**

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Child Find, a process that takes place in 2nd grade and serves as a means of identifying potentially gifted children for further testing and observation. “The Child Find process consists of six lessons to identify gifted traits and behaviors and a group screener. Gifted Specialists are trained to look at student potential and strengths. There are a variety of ways a child can be gifted,” said Emily Hurst, one of two ALSDE Gifted Specialists who provide support and technical assistance to LEAs. In addition to Child Find, students can be referred by a parent or guardian, teachers, administrators, counselors, peers, and even themselves for an evaluation for gifted education. Referrals may occur at any time for students 6 years of age and older and enrolled in public school.

Gifted at Madison City Schools: The gifted program in Madison City Schools does an outstanding job of offering a wide variety of educational experiences to gifted student in topics ranging from entrepreneurship to theatre and photography topics, to computer science focuses, and even artificial intelligence.

“We don’t just want our students to feel confident answering higher-level thinking questions.” Beth Woodard, Teacher at Madison Elementary, said. “We want them to develop the habit of creating higher-level questions

themselves.” Madison City Schools has received the Gifted grant for the past six years to help foster an environment of curiosity, creativity, and perseverance for gifted children.

Gifted classes play a pivotal role in the realm of education by providing a specialized and enriching environment for students with exceptional abilities. As we recognize the importance of nurturing diverse talents and potential, it becomes evident that gifted services are a necessity for gifted students to become college, career, and workforce ready.

Gifted at University Charter School: Gifted learners at the University Charter School in Livingston, Alabama brewed up a unique concept: BrewCS, a coffee shop conceptualized and staffed by the school’s gifted learners. BrewCS is another opportunity for gifted learners that has been funded through the Gifted and Talented Student Education Program Grant.

Fourth grade gifted learners at University Charter were challenged to come up with a concept of what is missing in the rural area of the school, which is located on the UWA campus. In return, they decided to open a coffee shop, took the lead on the project, and even worked on the branding, logo and color scheme. BrewCS is completely staffed, stocked, and inventoried by students. Performing these tasks assist gifted learners with gaining even more affective abilities.

“We want to always push the learner to learn things from different perspectives.” said Jessie Johnson, the Gifted Specialist of University Charter. This year proceeds from the profitable coffee shop will be used to help fund a trip to Space Camp and a robotics course for their gifted students.

Who can teach gifted? Gifted students participate in general education courses and supplementary services. “It is very important for gifted students to get what they need,” said Ashley Strickland, Gifted Specialist at the ALSDE. “It is important that general education teachers meet the needs of the high-end students. They need complexity and instruction that goes beyond the general curriculum and opportunities for creative expression.”

Educators interested in furthering their skillset regarding gifted education have options. Certifications, a master’s and even a Ph.D. in gifted are available at multiple higher education institutions in Alabama. Additionally, educators who are enrolled in the programs can serve as the Gifted Specialist for three years while working towards the credential.

Alabama Achieves more when we address the unique needs of **Every Child, Every Chance, Every Day**.

More information on gifted activities and initiatives in Alabama’s schools can be found [HERE](#).





Alabama's Turnaround Schools Initiative

By: Alabama Governor Kay Ivey

Alabama's Turnaround Schools Initiative will give some of our most struggling public school students a chance to achieve their dreams.

As 2023 came to a close, it naturally offered an opportunity to look back at all we have done over the last year. In Alabama, I believe we have, once again, made progress. When I was sworn in for my second term as governor last January on the front steps of the State Capitol, I promised the people of Alabama that improving our students' education would be my number one priority. I think our year reflected those efforts. A highlight for me personally was visiting our 15 Turnaround Schools.

During my visit to Hayes K-8 School in Birmingham, I was speaking with students in a kindergarten classroom when one girl raised her hand. I called on her, and she informed me she wanted to be a doctor. I asked her what kind of doctor she might want to be, and she quickly responded by saying, "a good doctor." Then her classmates started excitedly raising their hands to tell me what they dreamt of being one day. One boy told me he wanted to be a police officer. Another girl told me she wanted to be a teacher.

Hayes K-8 is one of 15 schools in my Turnaround Schools Initiative. This is a strategic program designed to transform low-performing schools and the surrounding communities. We have schools in some very rural parts of Alabama, like in my home county of Wilcox, included in this program. We also have schools like Hayes K-8 that are inner-city schools. But no matter what a child's zip code is, we must afford them the chance to achieve their dreams. The Turnaround Schools Initiative will do that.



Receiving a quality education opens doors to whatever you want to be, whether it be a teacher, a police officer or a "good" doctor. Think about what it means to be an educated person in America: We can truly do anything when we put our minds to it. This is where the American Dream begins. I visited each of the 15 Turnaround Schools, and to say I was encouraged and inspired by these students would be an understatement. Not even a year in, the Turnaround Schools Initiative is delivering results. Almost all 15 schools have jumped off the Comprehensive School Improvement List or the Priority Schools List. A school in Huntsville, Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary, which was previously scoring an "F" on the state report card is now at a "C." Highland Gardens Elementary in Montgomery has been able to add art, music and Spanish classes, as well as a STEM teacher. I was proud to learn Wilcox County had the highest percent increase in 3rd grade reading out of any district in the state. Perhaps most importantly, we are seeing greater parent engagement. The list of progress goes on, but it all can be credited to the Turnaround Schools Initiative and these students and teachers springing into action.

The Turnaround Schools receive additional funding that is customized to that school's specific needs. And on top of the targeted support these schools receive from the Office of School Improvement, community and state partners such as the Department of Early Childhood Education, the Department of Human Resources, the Department of Mental Health, the Alabama Arts Alliance and others are all at the table and ready to help. Truly, this is an all-hands-on-deck, team approach. I am committed to the Turnaround Schools Initiative being an ongoing effort. We want to get this model right for both turnaround efforts and continuous school improvement.

"We all know that a quality education begins at home, carries into the classroom and expands through the community, so our wholistic approach is necessary if we want our students to thrive."

As policies like the Literacy and Numeracy Acts take full effect, efforts like the Turnaround Schools Initiative help students become proficient in both reading and math, and most importantly, it continues to support them in the grades ahead. When we see Alabama's reading and math scores improve in the years to come, we can look right back here to this initiative. The hard truth is that some may want to write these students off, but I choose to see Alabama's future doctors, police officers and teachers.

As I visited many of the schools, I reminded these students that they - Alabama's students - are our future and my number one priority.

This is a vital effort that will change the trajectory of the lives of thousands of students, which is exactly why I will continue championing this program in the years ahead. Our students are counting on us to help them succeed and achieve their dreams.





Perry County Educator Selected as 2023-2024 Grants in Place Fellow Awardee



Cassandra Williams Allen was recently named by Rural Schools Collaborative to represent Alabama as a 2023-2024 Grants in Place Fellow Awardee! The Grants in Place Fellows Program is offered annually to rural classroom teachers who teach in school districts that are located in one of the Rural Schools Collaborative's 16 Regional Hub areas.

Allen is an educator at Francis Marion High School (Perry County School System), where she specializes in Business Education and Computer Science. With a decade of teaching experience, she has been guiding and inspiring students from sixth through twelfth grade. Additionally, Cassandra proudly serves as the advisor for the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) chapter, nurturing the next generation of business leaders. Beyond her teaching role, she is a member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc, contributing to community service and leadership initiatives.

The 2024 Fellows will each work with their students on place-based education projects that will impact their school and rural community. Each Grants in Place Fellow is awarded a grant which supports the place-based project, shares a professional development presentation, and receives an honorarium for the educator. Rural Schools Collaborative is proud to support these innovative rural teachers and their initiatives in better connecting their students to their local communities.

Francis Marion High School's Garden and Flower Bed Revival Project is a community-driven initiative aimed at transforming the Francis Marion High School garden and flower bed into a vibrant, educational, and environmentally sustainable space. Beyond tending to the garden, students will utilize technology to monitor growth, study environmental data, and optimize crop yield. This approach combines hands-on learning with data-driven problem-solving. The garden becomes an innovative outside classroom, where students not only grow vegetables but also their knowledge in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Simultaneously, Cassandra and her students will share the bountiful harvest with the community, providing fresh, locally grown vegetables, enhancing nutritional access, and strengthening the bond between the school and the neighborhood.

Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST)

The Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST), are the nation's highest honor bestowed upon Grades K-12 Mathematics and Science teachers. The PAEMST recognizes teachers who have both deep content knowledge of the subjects they teach and the ability to motivate and enable students to be successful in those areas.

Alabama's awardees who demonstrate the positive impact of excellent teachers on student achievement were recently announced at an event in Montgomery.

Congratulations!

[See More Photos](#)





North Alabama Middle School Recognized for Outstanding Achievements



Sardis Middle School's Peer Helpers PLUS program, in collaboration with ThriveWay, has garnered national recognition for its exceptional achievements in fostering positive change and creating an inclusive school environment. Recently distinguished in the latest Acts of Service contest, their Peer Helpers PLUS program stands as a beacon of success, impacting thousands of lives in north Alabama.

The Peer Helpers PLUS program at Sardis Middle School is defined by its innovative approach to promoting awareness and inclusivity. A standout feature is the integration of schoolwide challenges, transforming the promotion of a drug-free environment into a creative and engaging experience for all students. These challenges range from encouraging positive self-reflection to addressing important issues like reporting concerns for others in need.

A significant aspect of the program is its dedication to addressing serious matters such as suicide and mental health awareness. The impact of training and open discussions on Peer Helpers has been profound, empowering them to identify and assist fellow students in distress. Reports from students highlight that their training has led to legitimate concerns being promptly addressed, ensuring their peers receive the help they need.

The Peer Helpers PLUS program has elicited a positive response from students, resulting in behavioral, confidence, and academic performance improvements, as well as creating a culture of positivity within the school.

[Learn more](#) about this unbelievable youth mental health program today!

Sardis Middle School's Peer Helpers PLUS program has introduced key initiatives that have significantly impacted the school environment:

Schoolwide Challenges: A creative approach to raising awareness within the student body, making it a fun and inclusive experience. Challenges range from positive self-reflection to addressing serious concerns for others.

Start with Hello Week: Setting a positive tone for the school year by promoting student interaction, school spirit, and community building.

Hallway Displays: Diverse displays bringing awareness to events and monthly themes, unraveling a variety of topics previously unknown to students.

World Smile Day: Creating smiley faces with positive/funny quotes, fostering a positive atmosphere within the school.

Suicide Prevention/Mental Health Training: A crucial component addressing serious matters, proving essential for Peer Helpers in assisting others in distress.

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More Than 20 Alabama High Schools Included on the National AP School Honor Roll

The Advanced Placement Program (AP) enables students to pursue college-level studies while still in high school. It develops college-level courses, which local high schools can then offer annually to build student academic skills through more in-depth learning and AP Exam offerings.

The AP School Honor Roll recognizes schools nationwide, whose local AP programs are delivering excellent results for students while also broadening their achievement.

This year, Alabama had 27 public schools to earn special recognition as some of the nation's top performers for the AP School Honor Roll program.

Schools earn this prestigious recognition annually, based on criteria, which reflects local commitment to increasing its college-going culture, providing opportunities for more students to earn college credit, and community commitment to maximizing college readiness.

The AP School Honor Roll offers four levels of distinction: **Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum.** For a school to be recognized on the AP School Honor Roll, it must meet each of the following criteria for their students in the most recent graduating class:

- **College Culture:** 40 percent or more of the graduating cohort took at least 1 AP Exam during high school.
- **College Credit:** 25 percent or more of the graduating cohort scored a 3 or higher on at least 1 AP Exam during high school.
- **College Optimization:** 2 percent or more of the graduating cohort took 5 or more AP Exams during high school. At least 1 of those exams was taken in 9th or 10th grade, so that students are spreading their AP experience across grades, rather than feeling disproportionate pressure in any single year.

The AP School Honor Roll program and criteria utilize research-based relationships between AP and college outcomes to advance student and classroom achievement.

To learn more about Alabama's AP programs and resources contact ALSDE Program Administrator [Dr. Michal Robinson](#).

Alabama's 2023 AP School Honor Roll

- Alabama School of Cyber Technology and Engineering · TIER: Platinum
- Alabama School of Fine Arts · TIER: Gold with Access
- Alabama School of Mathematics and Science · TIER: Platinum
- Thompson High School (Alabaster City) · TIER: Silver with Access
- Fairhope High School (Baldwin County) · TIER: Bronze
- Hartselle High School (Hartselle City) · TIER: Bronze
- Homewood High School (Homewood City) · TIER: Gold
- Spain Park High School (Hoover City) · TIER: Silver
- Hoover High School (Hoover City) · TIER: Bronze
- New Century Technology High School (Huntsville City) · TIER: Gold
- Virgil I Grissom High School (Huntsville City) · TIER: Bronze
- Jefferson County IB School (Jefferson County) · TIER: Platinum with Access
- James Clemens High School (Madison City) · TIER: Silver
- Bob Jones High School (Madison City) · TIER: Bronze
- Hazel Green High School (Madison County) · TIER: Bronze with Access
- Madison County High School (Madison County) · TIER: Silver
- Buckhorn High School (Madison County) · TIER: Bronze
- LAMP High School (Montgomery County) · TIER: Platinum with Access
- Mountain Brook High School (Mountain Brook City) · TIER: Silver
- Muscle Shoals High School (Muscle Shoals City) · TIER: Bronze with Access
- Orange Beach High School (Orange Beach City) · TIER: Bronze
- Russellville High School (Russellville City) · TIER: Silver with Access
- Helena High School (Shelby County) · TIER: Silver with Access
- Chelsea High School (Shelby County) · TIER: Bronze with Access
- Oak Mountain High School (Shelby County) · TIER: Gold
- Hewitt-Trussville High School (Trussville City) · TIER: Silver with Access
- Vestavia Hills High School (Vestavia Hills City) · TIER: Silver





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January Board Meeting Agenda

- a. Resolution in Recognition of Mary Gray Wright, W. P. Davidson High School, Mobile County School System, 2023 Science Presidential Award Finalist, State School Board District One
- b. Resolution in Recognition of Sherri Whitehead, Mountain Brook Junior High School, Mountain Brook City School System, 2023 Mathematics Presidential Award Finalist, State School Board District Three
- c. Resolution in Recognition of Nathan Kenny, Hillcrest High School, Tuscaloosa County School System, 2023 Mathematics Presidential Award Finalist, State School Board District Four
- d. Resolution in Recognition of David Dai, Barton Academy for Advanced World Studies, Mobile County School System, 2023 Mathematics Presidential Award Finalist, State School Board District Five
- e. Resolution in Recognition of Melanie Dimler, Hewitt Trussville High School, Trussville City School System, 2023 Science Presidential Award Finalist, State School Board District Seven
- f. Resolution in Recognition of Brandon Renfroe, Geraldine High School, Dekalb County School System, 2023 Science Presidential Award Finalist, State School Board District Eight
- g. Resolution Recognizing Jasper City School System as the First School System in Alabama to Achieve Level One Certification in Marzano High Reliability Schools (HRS)
- h. Resolution Honoring Mr. Jamie Daniels as the “Barbara Fannin Memorial Employee of the Quarter” for January-March 2024
- i. Resolution in Recognition of January 2024 as Gifted Education Month in Alabama Schools
- j. Resolution to Approve Educator Preparation Programs, Faulkner University
- k. Announce Intent to Adopt New Alabama Administrative Code Rule, 290-3-3-.61, Pertaining to Literacy Coursework: Science of Reading



Alabama State Department of Education, Eric G. Mackey, State Superintendent of Education

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