

The

Communicator

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2019

BROADBAND:
EDUCATION EDITION



Two young girls with blonde hair are sitting and looking at a yellow tablet. The girl on the left is wearing a pink shirt and a large pink bow in her hair. The girl on the right is wearing a light blue shirt. They are both smiling and appear to be enjoying the activity.

STARTING EARLY

Children benefit from
Alabama's pre-K program

NEW GENERAL MANAGER

Daniel Martin begins
leadership at NHTC

SHAPING A GENERATION

Broadband educates
tomorrow's workforce



BY SHIRLEY BLOOMFIELD, CEO
NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Program helps small telcos with cybersecurity

Our lives are impacted in countless ways by broadband internet access. With such connectivity, however, comes threats that must be guarded against, including cyber-attacks targeting network operators. Local, community-based providers such as your telco do a great job protecting against cyberattacks, despite not having the resources of the big, nationwide companies.

But there is more we can do, and NTCA is excited to work with our members and the Department of Homeland Security on the Cyber-Threat Information Sharing Forum for Small Network Operators. While there are other programs for sharing cyberthreat information, these generally do not meet the unique needs of small telcos. Our pilot program provides a trusted environment for small network operators to share information about cyberthreats, vulnerabilities, best practices and mitigation activities. Further, it is bolstered by connections to network defenders across the globe, including federal resources.

During this summer's pilot phase, participants exchanged information via a variety of online platforms, participated in weekly virtual meetings to share cyber intelligence and heard from guest speakers. They also collaborated with their peers and received daily open-source and weekly technical reports created by NTCA's pilot support team.

This is yet another example of how local telcos like yours all across America are working together to ensure you have the best broadband experience possible in today's connected world. [📞](#)

Home prices boosted by faster internet

BY NOBLE SPRAYBERRY

Access to speedy internet service increases the market value of homes, according to a first-of-its-kind study reported online by the Daily Yonder.com.

The study evaluated 887 "remote rural" counties, which are those not adjacent to a metropolitan area. And it evaluated data such as median housing value, housing characteristics, income growth, employment and more.

Speeds of 25 Mbps or less can make a dramatic difference in overall home values. A 10% increase in the percentage of residents with access to at least 200 Kbps — far slower than the speeds now offered by many rural telcos — would raise the average housing value by \$661.

"These may not seem like massive numbers, but when applied to the average number of households in each county, they add up to significant increases in property values, which would likely have meaningful impacts on county property tax collections," wrote the study's authors, Brian Whitacre, of Oklahoma State University; and Steven Deller, of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The authors pointed out additional benefits of increased broadband adoption, including residents who become more civically engaged, reduction of social isolation and even income generation. [📞](#)

BY THE NUMBERS: BROADBAND IN RURAL REMOTE COUNTIES

94%

of the houses had access to download speeds of 200 Kbps.

63%

had access to 25 Mbps, the FCC's definition of broadband.

38%

had access to 100 Mbps.

9%

had access to 1,000 Mbps.

6%

on average, of houses had no fixed internet availability beyond dial-up.



Source: "Broadband's Relationship to Rural Housing Values," a study by Steven Deller and Brian Whitacre



Be aware

A dose of skepticism
and care will foil
phone and online
scammers

Helpful pop-up messages frequently appear on computer screens, including weather notifications, news alerts or reminders to update software. Not all pop-ups, however, are benevolent. In fact, some consumers have learned tough lessons about trust in the digital age.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) describes one form of grift as “tech support scammers.” A pop-up window appears on a computer screen, complete with well-known technology company logos and a phone number for help

solving a problem with a balky operating system, computer virus or similar woe.

The end goal for these scams is to have someone wire money or to provide gift cards to the scammers. And the pitches and patter from the scammers are polished — people are fooled. There are many variations, including offers to help someone recover a refund.

Fraud is certainly not limited to computers. Telephone scammers target the elderly with phone calls in which the scammer pretends to be the grandchild or another

relative. The scammer may even claim to be a lawyer or police officer, increasing the urgency, according to the FTC.

The scammer paints the picture of an urgent situation, asking for money to be sent immediately through a service such as UPS, whose terms and conditions for use state that it does not agree to ship cash. As a result, UPS, which does work with law enforcement on such cases, is not liable for the loss, says Matt O’Conner, senior manager of public relations for the company. ☎

TIPS FOR AVOIDING TECH SUPPORT SCAMMERS

PHONE CALLS: If you get a phone call you didn’t expect from someone who says there’s a problem with your computer, hang up.

POP-UPS: Do not act on pop-ups appearing on your computer that request you to call a number. Real security warnings and messages will never ask you to call.

WEB-BASED ADS: If you’re looking for tech support, go to a company you know and trust. Scammers will try to trick legitimate websites into posting ads for bogus companies.

For additional tips, or if you feel you’ve been scammed, visit consumer.FTC.gov and search for tech support scam.

TIPS FOR AVOIDING FAKE EMERGENCY SCAMMERS



If you receive a call you suspect is a fake emergency scam, follow a few simple steps toward safety.

Check out the claim by looking up the phone number of the friend or family member the scammer claims is in need. Call that person, even if the scammer requested that you do not.

Do not pay. Anyone who requests you to wire money, send a check, overnight a money

order, or pay with a gift card or cash reload card is always, always, always a scammer. These payment methods are nearly untraceable.

If you sent money to a family-emergency scammer, contact the company you used to send the money and tell them it was a fraudulent transaction. Ask to have the transaction reversed, if possible.

Please report such calls or messages to FTC.gov/complaint.

Starting a new chapter

NHTC has served our communities for almost 70 years, and it's with that legacy of service in mind that I'd like to thank the board of directors, employees and the community for placing their faith and trust in me to carry on the vision of our cooperative.



DANIEL MARTIN
General Manager

One of the first things I want our members to know about me is that I am a believer in the cooperative business model. I grew up in Grant, and I have family living in all three exchanges where NHTC has always met their needs in providing voice, TV and broadband services. I went to work for NHTC in the summer of 2001, and I started my career in an entry-level position. I worked my way up to ultimately become operations manager before leaving for Huntsville Utilities.

My work — which spans 19 years with NHTC, Huntsville Utilities and the military — reinforced to me that serving matters. In serving our community and country, I have found great reward in meeting the needs of my family, friends and neighbors, which is the business model of a cooperative. When local people work

together to meet the needs of their own communities, great things can be accomplished. The people of NHTC have built a strong company that offers valuable services to its communities.

As members, you should be proud of what you have accomplished here. We were created by the community to serve our own needs when Ma Bell would not deliver services because it wasn't profitable. We have built a fiber network that rivals that of any urban market to deliver reliable services backed by a top-notch team of employees and board members dedicated to the people they serve.

These are ever-changing times for rural telcos. We are dependent on federal funding mechanisms to remain financially secure. In our rural areas, we have an average of 27 homes per mile. In urban areas, there are over 100 homes per mile. It takes the same amount of capital investment and maintenance to serve either system. Technology is changing. Customer demands are changing. It takes a clear vision, hard work and dedication to the cooperative's original mission to chart a course for the future.

Despite the challenges we face, I can't think of a more exciting and rewarding industry. After all, the core of our mission is connecting people. Today, we use broadband from the time we wake up until we go to sleep. Broadband touches everything we do from how we manage our finances to how our children are educated to how we plan our days.

I do not see the changes in technology slowing down in the future. Here at NHTC, we are constantly evaluating technology and how to incorporate it into our network to bring about more reliable and efficient services. Changes in telemedicine, streaming entertainment, cloud-based computing, home automation and distance learning will rapidly increase the importance of a reliable broadband connection. I am excited to see how future technology will improve the way we work and live. I am proud to be an employee and member of NHTC, and all of us here are eager to meet your broadband needs. 📺

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On the Cover:



DAR Pre-K students Millie Franks, left, and Harper Downs enjoy an educational cartoon on an iPad in the classroom.
See story Page 12.

Join us!

You are invited to a day of food and fun at

NHTC'S CUSTOMER APPRECIATION DAY

Don't miss it!

Friday, Oct. 25, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at the New Hope office on Main Drive.

THANK YOU FOR TRUSTING NHTC AS YOUR TECHNOLOGY PROVIDER!

Congratulations!

Brady Browning won first place for his submission in the third-grade Biography Bottle Buddy Library Project at New Hope Elementary. He is the son of Mike and Rebecca Browning and the grandson of Linda Hutchens Nash.



30th Annual New Hope Founders Day

Bring the family and enjoy games, food, crafts and music on Oct. 12. Founders Day events begin at 9 a.m. in historic downtown New Hope. The parade will begin at 1 p.m. For more information, call 256-655-5140 or 256-603-3182.



Haunted Hollow Cave Tour

Presented by the DAR High School Marching Band

Where: Cathedral Caverns State Park
637 Cave Road in Woodville

When: Saturday, Oct. 12, 19 and 26

Time: 6-11 p.m.

All ages are welcome! Carnival games and light concessions will be available. Tickets are \$12 per person for the Haunted Hollow Cave Tour.

A portion of each admission will go to the DAR High School Marching Band.

For safety, please no flip flops.

HAPPY LABOR DAY

The NHTC offices will close Monday, Sept. 2, in observance of Labor Day. Have a safe and happy holiday!



Attention bargain hunters!

Saturday, Sept. 28, 2019
Beginning at 6:30 a.m.

The annual yard sale extends more than a mile along Main Street in Grant. Vendors are welcome with a \$25 fee. For more information or to rent a space, call the Grant Chamber of Commerce, 256-728-8800. For updates, follow Grant's Mile Plus Yard Sale on Facebook.



Taking 'City Farmhouse'

on the road

BY JOHN CLAYTON

Before an alphabet soup of cable television channels like HGTV and DIY began delivering tips and advice for home decor and remodeling, Kim and David Leggett were finding dusty treasures and building their City Farmhouse brand.

That part of the business — the hunt for the rusty and the rustic — has remained the same for the Leggetts since they started the business 25 years ago in Franklin, Tennessee. But City Farmhouse evolved as trends changed, venturing into “pop-up fairs” and “pop-up shops,” terms now part of the lexicon as antiques and decor items move beyond the four walls of the traditional retail space.

“The pop-up fairs and pop-up shops are becoming a popular way all across the U.S. for people to sell all kinds of things,” Kim Leggett says. “It’s not just relating to antiques. They’re extremely popular in New York and California, where people are selling everything from jewelry to fashion.”

The Leggetts began their City Farmhouse Pop-Up Fairs in 2012 in Franklin. Shoppers and vendors from across the country have attended. In 2017, the couple licensed City Farmhouse fairs in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Medina, Tennessee.

While Kim Leggett has been putting her touch on her own City Farmhouse brand for more than two decades, her fingerprints are now all over a series of Country Living Fairs.

As program director for the 2019 fairs, sponsored by the popular Country Living Magazine, Leggett is coordinating presenters for the main and kitchen stages. “The goal is to bring Country Living Magazine to life,” Leggett says.

“Visitors will learn from top-notch influencers in the industry, while enjoying vendors with antiques, home decor, food, crafts, clothing — everything you might see in an issue of Country Living Magazine.” 🗨️



Kim and David Leggett have curated the City Farmhouse style for over two decades.

A family business by the book

Kim Leggett says the pieces she discovers, buys and sells can come together to create a home that makes memories. “We don’t always know the whole story behind a piece, but when it goes to another home, it becomes part of another story, and we have that going forward,” she says.

To Leggett, connections between past and present are at the essence of what has become the “city farmhouse” style of decor, which she promotes with shows and her Franklin, Tennessee-based business.

She authored “City Farmhouse Style,” a 2017 book about a design movement that features urban homes decorated in farmhouse style. The work includes photography by Alissa Saylor. “Farmhouse style is time-tested. It has staying power. You can bet the farm on it,” writes Country Living Editor-in-Chief Rachel Hardage Barrett in the book’s foreword.

A love for antiquing and decorating is part of Kim Leggett’s family heritage. “My grandmother, who raised me, and my aunt — she was at our house all the time — went to auctions and local flea markets like the ones in every little small town,” she says. “So you could say I was raised in the business. My grandmother wasn’t actually a seller, but she would buy things, and when she got tired of something, she would sell it to a neighbor.”

Leggett was hooked, going to the auctions and first buying “blind boxes” filled with surprises. “There would just be all kinds of interesting little things in the box,” she says. Soon enough, she began buying with purpose, teaming with her husband to create City Farmhouse and applying knowledge gained through the years to bring a country style into households across the country.



“People in farmhouses were very eclectic, especially people who didn’t have a lot of money,” Leggett says. “They used whatever they could find, and maybe there was a craftsman in their backyard who was a cousin or a neighbor and they could make some wonderful things inexpensively.”

Leggett has introduced these relics — and their stories — to cabins, cottages, mansions, homes of celebrities and even restaurants across the country. From national design awards to features in national magazines, Leggett is recognized for her passion and efforts in sharing a decorating style that connects people with the past while writing a new story for their future.

CITY FARMHOUSE AT THE COUNTRY LIVING FAIRS

Sponsored by Country Living Magazine

The first fair this year was in Rhinebeck, New York. The final two 2019 events are set for Columbus, Ohio, Sept. 13-14 and Atlanta, Georgia, Oct. 25-27.

In addition to hundreds of vendors from more than 25 states, this year’s fairs will feature a City Farmhouse Pop-up SHOP. This special section of the Country Living Fairs will include unique finds from the Leggetts, along with curated sellers and popular vendors from other City Farmhouse events.

Other antique events

ANTIQUING ROUND TOP AND SURROUNDING AREA

This Texas event increases the tiny hamlet’s population of 90 exponentially as thousands from around the state and nation descend for the spring and fall dates. Round Top’s 2019 Fall Antiques Week is set for Sept. 30-Oct. 5. You can find City Farmhouse at Booth BD1 at the Marburger Farms Antique Show in Round Top. It happens in the spring and fall, Oct. 1-5 this year.

Meet Daniel Martin

Grant native named NHTC general manager

BY LISA SAVAGE

Daniel Martin remembers helping turn the TV antenna in just the right direction when he was just a little boy to get a few local channels at his family's home in the Butler Mill community near Grant. Someone would stand in the doorway and keep an eye on the TV while someone else turned the outside antenna's pole attached to the side of the house. Excited voices yelled to stop turning when the TV's picture became clear.

Martin's family had phone service with NHTC, so when the cooperative offered cable TV, Martin's father signed up.

"When I was 8 or 9, we'd look every day riding home on the school bus to see how many poles had been put up that day," Martin says. "All the kids were excited that we were going to get cable TV with 20-something channels."

Now, some 30 years later, Martin's excitement about NHTC remains strong. He began as general manager July 1, and he's back at the company where he first started in the telecommunications industry in 2001. Martin grew up in Grant. He graduated from Kate Duncan Smith DAR High School in 1996, and he joined the Army National Guard in 1998, serving in a telecommunications unit. There, his exposure to telecommunications set him on a career path in the industry. He would continue serving in the National Guard for 14 years.

Meanwhile, with the National Guard being part time, he had other jobs until he came on as a cable splicer helper at NHTC. By then, he was married, and he wanted a good job close to home. Tom Ed Butler served as general manager at the time, and his words of encouragement served Martin well.

"He told me, 'You're not going to get rich working here, but you'll earn a good

living and get to serve your community,'" Martin says.

In Martin's early years at the cooperative, he was involved in advancing internet technology. NHTC had divisions for copper and fiber lines. He served as a fiber team leader and later gained a promotion to operations manager. He worked to help develop the NHTC fiber network from the ground up, providing faster speeds and more reliable service than ever before. He worked three years at Huntsville Utilities as the fiber operations manager before returning to NHTC as general manager. "It's pretty amazing to see all the new technology that we have available to us today," Martin says. "I'm excited to be a part of that."

He and his wife, Marla, live in Grant, where she teaches second grade at DAR Elementary School. They have two daughters: Erin, a high school senior, and Avery, a sixth grader. 📞



Daniel Martin began in the telecommunications industry at NHTC in 2001 and returned July 1 as general manager.



Daniel Martin began general manager duties on July 1.

Tools for learning

Community learning centers provide hands-on training

BY LISA SAVAGE

Andrea Bridges has a pet peeve: It's when someone refers to The CARE Center's after-school programs as babysitting.

Bridges is the executive director at The CARE Center in New Hope, which sponsors after-school programs at New Hope, Owens Cross Roads and Madison County elementary schools, as well as New Hope High School.

Through the program, students receive a healthy snack and have a safe place after school to learn about subjects usually related to the STEM platform, which is science, technology, engineering and math. They receive tutoring and homework help as needed. During the school day, students don't always have the time or the resources for as much hands-on learning as they need, so it's the goal of the after-school programs to fill that gap. "We might be teaching them about trajectory or velocity on the archery range or how sound travels with piano lessons," Bridges says. "We incorporate some type of lesson in everything we do."

The kids do 3D printing, computer-aided design, robotics, rocketry, cooking, cultural crafts, canvas painting, gymnastics, musical theater, show choir or other activities. "It's really amazing and helps kids connect the dots between school-day learning and real-life application," Bridges says.



Andrea Bridges of The CARE Center.



Second grader Bailee Phillips makes a coaster in the Crocheting Club.

MEASURED SUCCESS

The program was first offered at New Hope Elementary nine years ago and at Owens Cross Roads and Madison County elementary schools three years ago. At New Hope High School, where it started five years ago, there is a focus on the show choir and art club. Among the four schools, 500 to 550 students participate in the after-school program each year. The funding comes from 21st Century Community Learning Center Grants.

Each school provides space for the after-school programs and an office space for a site director. The program lasts from 2:30 to 5 p.m. each school day, and transportation is available for students who need it afterward. Measurable goals and objectives help determine the success of the program. "Our success is based on how students improve in their work, attendance and behavior during the school day," Bridges says.



Fifth and sixth graders learn how to play chords in the Ukulele Club.

The program's success led to Bridges' recognition as one of 15 Afterschool Ambassadors in the United States for 2018-19 from the national Afterschool Alliance, a nonprofit advocacy and awareness program that seeks to ensure every student has access to quality after-school programs. During her year-long term as an ambassador, Bridges continued leading the local programs, and she also organized public events and communicated with policymakers.

She visited Washington, D.C., to share the importance of after-school programs and the funding that provides for them. She continues to work toward adequate funding. "I am a firm believer in this program because I've seen the success of many of our students," she says. 📺



ONLINE opportunities

Broadband internet takes education to another level

Tomorrow's workforce may appear very different from today's due to an expected increase in the number of science, technology, engineering and math jobs. And the market for jobs requiring more education than a high school diploma but less than a college degree is also expected to grow.

But with the opportunities a changing workforce represents, challenges also appear. Fast broadband internet services, however, can help by providing rural communities access to the educational tools to make those career paths a reality.

A report by NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association found that improved access to broadband internet allows communities to better provide critical training. Many small, rural communications providers offer fiber-based broadband services that can support distance education, and many also work closely with educators and industry to develop opportunities for students to acquire STEM — science, technology, engineering and math — and middle-skills jobs.

Students like Nathaniel Treadaway develop skills that increase economic opportunities in rural areas through work-training programs, apprenticeships and classroom instruction. Treadaway grew up in Kuttawa, Kentucky, with aspirations to teach music. But after studying music education at the University of Kentucky for a short time, he quit. "I decided the teaching field wasn't for me," he says. So he started working at a bank.

He soon realized the need to combine technology and his job, and he decided to go back to college. He enrolled at West Kentucky Community and Technical College in Paducah to pursue an internet technology degree. He got an internship at a major Paducah corporation that provides customer network support, and now he works there full time while continuing his education online. He expects to graduate this year.

At 29, Treadaway is part of a growing number of students attending college while continuing to work. "This is a rural area, and I'm thankful we have these opportunities," he says. "It's vital for those of us who want to stay here."

West Kentucky Community and Technical College continues to address the problem of young people across rural America leaving for the bigger cities. "In the past, some of the younger generation felt like they had to leave the area to make a good living and raise their families, but they're itching to come back," says David Heflin, vice president of academic affairs at the college. "We want to find employment that can provide that opportunity for them. We can't allow the 'brain drain' to continue taking our kids from this area. We have to provide opportunities so they have a reason to stay."


DISTANCE LEARNING

Broadband internet leads the way in the industrial revolution, and it's a driving force in education and jobs. Not only does broadband impact technology in jobs, but also manufacturing plants often rely on high-tech tools such as robots and cobots, which are computer-guided devices that assist a person. Partnerships among industry and educators are a growing trend to ensure that schools are offering courses that meet the requirements for these and other jobs.

Using technology to partner with other high schools and postsecondary institutions, high school administrators can create programs that help students prepare for guided postsecondary education, according to the report. Partnerships with other area institutions can help students prepare for regional job markets.

For rural community colleges, distance education plays a big role. Often, there's not enough enrollment to support a local classroom, and online classes can fill a gap. It's a growing trend. At Collin College in Texas — with locations in Frisco,





McKinney and Plano — online classes now account for about 40% of the enrollment.

When Glenn Grimes, a Collin College professor of computer science, first started teaching 17 years ago, all the classes were face to face. “Back then, people didn’t have the bandwidth necessary to drive the audio and video needed to do online classes,” he says. Students now have the ability to pick and choose topics they wish to study from campuses all over the world. “It’s a huge benefit for students,” Grimes says. “It gives them so many more options.”

Rural broadband providers are playing vital roles, leveraging their networks and working closely with local educational institutions, the NTCA report states. Rainbow Communications of Hiawatha, Kansas, provides fiber connectivity to Highland Community College, the oldest college in the state.

The network allows the school to offer numerous courses at various sites. Career and technical education courses at HCC include building trades and medical coding. The college also supports the agricultural industry through such courses as precision agriculture and diesel mechanics, areas of study which are necessary as farms increasingly rely on precision agriculture that blends traditional mechanical equipment with analytical tech and GPS-guided systems.

In Brainerd, Minnesota, Consolidated Telecommunications Co. works with Bridges Career Academies & Workplace Connection, which brings together high schools, local colleges and businesses to provide career guidance and training. The effort focuses on building local career opportunities.

Nex-Tech in Lenora, Kansas, works with local charitable foundations and public utilities to support high school and college internships. Students earn at least \$10 per hour and are offered technical and nontechnical career experiences in areas like agriculture, economic development, automobile restoration, medical services, computer technology, art, banking, legal and others. ☞



Broadband and its impact on education

- Youth who live in areas with broadband are found to have earned higher scores on college entrance exams such as the SAT or ACT.
- More than 70% of NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association members can provide 25 Mbps and higher broadband to their customers.
- A 2005 study found no significant difference between the writing skills of on-campus and off-campus students utilizing distance learning.
- Distance education can help address the lack of specialization possible in small, rural schools that can’t provide as broad a range of courses as larger schools because of affordability or demand.
- Distance education can also assist in early college attendance for high schoolers, particularly in rural areas that lack resources to support the increased expenses of college.
- Broadband-enabled distance education allows all eligible students who have access to broadband to participate.
- Distance education can also provide flexibility for working students and accommodate ongoing family obligations.

Source: Rural Broadband and the Next Generation of American Jobs, a report of NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association.





STARTING YOUNG

Alabama's pre-K ranked among the nation's best

BY LISA SAVAGE



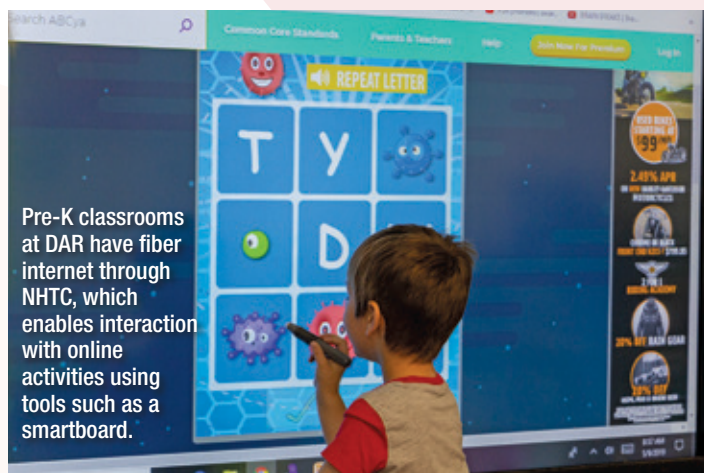
Beth Martin, a pre-K teacher at Kate Duncan Smith DAR School in Grant, works on a project with students.

Two girls huddled together, giggling as they watched an educational cartoon on an iPad. Another student asked for her teacher's help in putting on a pair of kid-sized work gloves. Meanwhile, in another classroom, a teacher used a smartboard to practice alphabet skills with a group of students.

It's a typical day in the prekindergarten classrooms at Kate Duncan Smith DAR Elementary School. "We don't do typical schoolwork," says Beth Martin, one of the pre-K teachers at the school. "We focus on motor skills and social development."

There are no desks, and students might be sitting on a rug on the floor or at a table as they work on a project. "We want to spark their imagination," Martin says. "I feel like this is my one shot to make them excited about learning. They're learning, and they don't even know they're learning."

The teaching methods in Alabama's pre-K classes are working. The state's pre-K program, which has topped the national rankings for 13 consecutive years, appears in a documentary produced last year by the Harvard Graduate School of Education in Massachusetts. The film, "Starting at Zero: Reimagining Education in America," was funded by the Saul Zaentz Charitable Foundation. It featured successful pre-K programs and explained the importance of early childhood education.



Pre-K classrooms at DAR have fiber internet through NHTC, which enables interaction with online activities using tools such as a smartboard.

Elliot G. Steinberg, a director of the foundation, and the team from Harvard visited pre-K programs at schools in Alabama in 2017. Jeana Ross, secretary of the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education, accompanied them. Steinberg pointed out during his visit that the state has a program the rest of the country can learn from. "The whole idea is a level playing field for all children," Steinberg says. "That needs to be the goal of education in America."

Alabama's first pre-K program started in 2000 with one classroom, and now there are more than 1,000 classrooms. "It's expanding based on the results of its success," Steinberg says. "Everyone can learn from Alabama's model," and the documentary is one way to spread the message.

While prekindergarten students sometimes learn to identify letters and numbers, the Alabama pre-K program focuses on social and emotional skills like learning how to line up for lunch, how to keep one's hands to oneself and how to get along with other children. "It's not teaching in a conventional way," Steinberg says. He explains that it's about executive functioning, which is teaching mental control and self-control.

A child's brain isn't fully developed until the age of 5, so Steinberg says reaching the 4-year-olds is important. "If they haven't learned these things by then, they fall behind," he says.

The state's Early Childhood Education department administers the pre-K program and operates separately from the Alabama Department of Education, which is responsible for kindergarten through grade 12. Pre-K teachers must have a bachelor's degree in early childhood education.

New Hope Elementary School principal Jamie Burton credits strong leadership at the state level for the success of the state's pre-K program.

Starting school for the first time can cause anxiety for a child. "Pre-K helps not only academically, but it helps boost a child's confidence as they head to kindergarten," Burton says. "They're already familiar with the school, and that makes it so much easier."

Statistics show students attending a pre-K class do better in kindergarten and the first few years of grade school. They learn how to get along with others, play fairly and solve problems. "Kids are learning important social skills, and that is critical for their success in kindergarten," Burton says.

The pre-K classes help to better prepare children for kindergarten. Research shows that the earlier a child's brain interacts with literacy, the more the child can learn. "This prepares the children so that they are ahead of the curve for kindergarten," says Adam Hampton, principal at Owens Cross Roads School. "That's why pre-K plays such an important role for our students." 🗨️



Chanda Dunaway, a pre-K teacher at DAR, leads a class session.

WHY HIGH-QUALITY PREKINDERGARTEN?

Numerous studies have shown that students who participate in high-quality prekindergarten programs:

- Are less likely to repeat a grade, require remedial education or be placed in special education.
- Score higher on achievement tests.
- Are more likely to graduate from high school and go on to college.
- Get higher paying salaries as adults.
- Are more likely to stay out of prison and off welfare.

Pre-K programs in Alabama are funded through a grant from the state Department of Early Childhood Education. Class sizes are limited to 18. Student selection is random — similar to a lottery drawing — and a requirement of the grant. Only 28% of Alabama's 4-year-olds were able to participate in 2018-19 because of space and funding constraints.

For information about the state's pre-K programs, go to the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education's website at children.alabama.gov.

For information about the local pre-K programs, call:

Kate Duncan Smith DAR School — 256-857-5140

New Hope Elementary — 256-851-3260

Owens Cross Roads Elementary — 256-851-3240



Rachael Brothers, an auxiliary pre-K teacher at DAR, works on alphabet skills with a student.

Fall squash

Enjoy a versatile, beautiful taste of the season

Trees tower over the two-lane road, its dividing line faded with wear and age. As you approach Granddaddy's Farm, however, the road widens and a rainbow of colors appears in hues of the autumn season — orange pumpkins, gourds of green, golden butternuts and the red-dish tinge of One Too Manys.

"The farm is beautiful in the fall," says Andrew Dixon, who lives on the property once owned by his grandfather, Charles Dixon. "The fields are dying back and giving way to the colors of all the different winter squash varieties."

Hayrides are one of the most popular activities the Estill Springs, Tennessee, farm offers, taking families afield to pick the perfect pumpkin. Since the Dixon family became involved in agritourism, this is one of several things visitors can now do to learn more about farm life and growing in the Volunteer State.

But offering pumpkins and winter squashes for decorating is just one thing Granddaddy's Farm does. The Dixons also encourage folks to cook with them by offering free recipes at the farm store. "You can use them as table decorations, and then you can turn around and use the same ones for cooking, so you're not throwing it away," Dixon says, adding that it's only been in the past six or seven years that he's seen more people in the South



Granddaddy's Farm is made possible with the help of family, including, from left, Philip Dixon, Ann Thomas, Lacey Thomas, Nancy Dixon, Karen Dixon, Steve Dixon and Andrew Dixon.

interested in cooking with winter squashes.

"Before that, it was more of a Northern thing," he says. "It's taken us a little longer when the only squash we grew up with was yellow squash — and we fried that."

The farm offers 15 varieties of squash and gourds. Winter squash planting takes place in late June. Harvest begins in early September, and the farm opens to the public later that month on Fridays from 1:30-9 p.m. and Saturdays from 9 a.m.-9 p.m.

Dixon's personal favorite squash is butternut, a versatile variety that can be used in place of pumpkins for pies. "Butternut squash is so much easier to use," he says. "Pumpkins have so many seeds and



stuff. There's so much to hollow out. A butternut squash is all meat. It's much more efficient to cook with."

Butternut squash is also a good choice in casseroles, smoothies, soups and salads. "Any winter squash can be used for cooking, but some are better than others," Dixon says.

Here are some recipes from Granddaddy's Farm.



FOOD EDITOR
ANNE P. BRALY
IS A NATIVE OF
CHATTANOOGA,
TENNESSEE.

GRANDADDY'S FARM SPEEDY SPAGHETTI SQUASH

- 1 spaghetti squash
- Butter
- Parmesan cheese

Wash squash and place it on a cutting board. Cut squash in half lengthwise and scoop out seeds. Place squash halves cut-side down on a plate with a little water in the bottom and microwave on high 5-8 minutes or until tender. Fluff the insides of the squash with a fork, and it will begin to resemble spaghetti. Place "noodles" on a plate and top with butter and parmesan cheese to taste.

Note: Meat sauce also goes well over the squash noodles, and the noodles go well in a mock pasta salad with the addition of zesty Italian dressing and your favorite pasta salad ingredients (onions, green pepper, hard salami, capers, etc.).



APPLE-STUFFED ACORN SQUASH

- 2 apples, peeled and cut into slices
- 2-3 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 acorn squash
- Honey

Add apple slices to frying pan with melted butter. Saute apples until fork tender. Set aside.

Place squash on cutting board, slice it in half lengthwise and scoop out seeds. Place halves cut-side down on a plate with a little water in the bottom. Microwave on high for 3-6 minutes until the inside is tender.

Place squash halves on plates, fill with sauteed apples and drizzle with honey.

PUMPKIN (SQUASH) PUREE

- 1 large butternut squash

Wash squash and place it whole in an ovenproof pan. Roast squash at 350 F for 1 to 1 1/2 hours or until you can insert a fork easily into the squash. Remove squash from oven and let cool. Slice the squash lengthwise and scoop seeds out gently, taking care to leave the meat intact. Scoop out all of the meat, place it in a blender or food processor, and puree until smooth. Use the puree as the base for pumpkin pie, smoothies or any other recipe that calls for pumpkin.

Tip: You can freeze the puree for several months. At Grandaddy's Farm, the Dixons freeze puree in quart bags in the amount called for in their recipes, and they thaw it as needed.

'PUMPKIN' PUREE SMOOTHIE

- 1 frozen banana
- 1/2 cup vanilla Greek yogurt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
- 1/2 cup skim milk
- 2 tablespoons pure maple syrup
- 2/3 cup butternut squash puree
- 1 cup ice

Add all of the ingredients to a blender in the order listed. Blend on high for at least 3 minutes or until smooth. This may take longer if your blender isn't very strong. Scrape down the sides of the blender as needed. Add more milk to thin out if the mixture is too thick. Add a couple more ice cubes for a thicker texture if desired. Add more spices to taste, if desired. Makes 1 smoothie. ☞



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