

2021 Robert Morton Award District Nominees

AASBO is pleased to announce the 2021 district nominees for the Robert L. Morton Award. This award is named in honor of the late Robert L. Morton, former assistant superintendent of administration and finance for the Alabama State Department of Education. This award recognizes outstanding Chief School Finance Officers devoted to going above and beyond to do their job and to serve their community. AASBO seeks to recognize individuals who are trying to make a difference in the lives of their peers and subordinates and have set new standards for themselves and their colleagues in their profession. Congratulations to the district nominees.

District 1- Avery Ford, Thomasville City

Avery has been employed with the Thomasville City Board of Education for the past 3 years as the Chief School Financial Officer. Prior to his employment with Thomasville, he spent over 5½ years serving as the CSFO for the Conecuh County Board of Education and has worked as a Cost Accountant in the manufacturing industry. He is a graduate of both Huntingdon College and Troy University, where he earned a BA in Accounting and an MBA, respectively. In addition to being a member of AASBO, he is a member of CLAS, SSA, SASBO, and ASBO International. He currently serves as the Vice President of AASBO and a member of the Emerging Leader Committee for SASBO.

District 2-Alisa Benson, Chilton County

Alisa Benson has been employed as the Chief School Financial Officer with the Chilton County Board of Education for 4 months. Prior to her employment with Chilton, she served as CSFO in Autauga County for 6 years. Alisa worked at the Alabama State Department of Education for 9 years, on both the State Department side and the Local Education side. She graduated from the University of South Carolina with a Bachelor of Science in Accounting and Troy University where she earned her MBA. She has also completed the Certified Program Manager program at Auburn University and recently received the ASBO International SFO certification. She enjoys traveling and spending time with her family.

District 3- Jesse James, Dale County

Jesse James has been employed with the Dale County Board of Education for the past 8 years as the Chief School Finance Officer. Prior to his employment with Dale County, Jesse worked with the State of Alabama Department of Examiners of Public Accounts as an Accounts Examiner. He is a graduate of Auburn University with a bachelor's degree, double majoring in Accounting and Finance. He and his wife Liz have two boys, Sawyer age 4 and Raylan who is 7 months.

District 4- Arthur Watts, Montgomery Public Schools

Arthur Watts Jr. has been employed with the Montgomery Public Schools (MPS) for the past three years as the Chief School Financial Officer. Prior to his employment with MPS, he worked with Birmingham City Schools as CSFO for approximately fourteen years and as CSFO of Talladega City Schools for approximately two years. Mr. Watts first job in the field of Education was serving as CSFO for the Wilcox County BOE for approximately four years. He is a graduate of Barber-Scotia College (Concord, North Carolina) with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration, with a Concentration in Accounting.

District 5- Shelia Jones, Jefferson County

Sheila Jones has been employed with the Jefferson County Board of Education for 23 years and has been the CSFO for the past 15 years. Prior to employment with the Jefferson County Board of Education, Shelia worked with the State Department of Education as an LEA accountant. She is a graduate of Troy University with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration. She has been married to her husband William for 33 years and they have two children.

District 6, Melissa Lumpkin, Cleburne County

Melissa Lumpkin has been employed with the Cleburne County Board of Education for the past 18 years as the CSFO. She is a graduate of Jacksonville State University with a bachelor's in accounting. Melissa has earned the ASBO International SFO certification. Melissa and her husband have 1 son.

District 7, Julie Chaffin, Fayette County

Julie Chaffin has been employed with the Fayette County Board of Education for the past 20 years as the Chief School Finance Officer. Prior to her employment with Fayette County Board of Education, she worked with NTN Bower Corporation as a cost accountant. She is a graduate of the University of North Alabama with a Bachelor of Science degree in accounting and an MBA. Julie is a member of AASBO, CLAS and SSA. She also belongs to various women's organizations in her community. She is married to Greg Chaffin and they have two children, Tucker and Ella.

District 8-Serena Owsley

Serena Owsley has served as the Chief School Financial Officer for the last 6 years with Athens City Schools. She has been employed with Athens City Schools for the past 24 years where she has served as a Substitute Coordinator, Bookkeeper, Payroll Coordinator and Custodian of Funds/Accounting Supervisor. In 2019 she was named as Assistant Superintendent of Administration and Finance. Prior to her employment with the school system, Serena worked for an accounting firm as a tax accountant. She is a graduate of the University of Alabama in Huntsville where she earned her bachelor's degree in accounting. Serena received the ASBO Intl. SFO certification in 2018.

District 9- Karen O'Bannon, Madison County

Karen O'Bannon has been employed with the Madison County Board of Education since 2004 as the Chief School Finance Officer. Prior to her employment with the Board, she worked with the State of Alabama Department of Examiners of Public Accounts for 19 years as an auditor of governmental entities, including school districts across the State. She is a Certified Public Accountant and a graduate of Jacksonville State University with a B.S. Degree in Accounting. Karen is also a graduate of Leadership Huntsville/Madison County, Class 22. She is married to Randy O'Bannon and they have one son, Clark (age 17).