



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Top Spellers to Compete in Arizona Spelling Bee on March 16, 2024

Phoenix, Ariz., February 26, 2024 – Yes, they are just like any other kid. They like to play video games, hang out with friends, play musical instruments, and participate in sports. However, when they are not doing those things, the state’s top 28 spellers – ranging from grades 3 through 8 – are dedicating time to studying and practicing for the upcoming 2024 Arizona Spelling Bee.

While Spelling Bees are a great American pastime, they are also tremendous tools for building written and verbal literacy skills. Spelling Bees begin at the classroom level and progress to grade level competitions, schoolwide, and then district Bees, with the final qualifier being a county or regional Bee. From county and regional Bees, 28 students emerge as finalists and move on to compete at the Arizona Spelling Bee.

As the official state coordinator of the Arizona Spelling Bee, [Arizona Educational Foundation](#) (AEF®) staff provides technical support and enrollment assistance to thousands of teachers throughout Arizona each year; additionally, AEF works with each coordinator leading district, county, and regional Bees statewide. AEF is also the main organizer of the Arizona’s State Spelling Bee, which is the final competition each year to determine who will represent Arizona in the Scripps National Bee.

2024 ARIZONA SPELLING BEE STATE FINALISTS:

- **Aliyah Alpert, 8th Grade, Age 13, Alpert Home School, Homeschool, Yavapai County**
- **Bhavyasri Balasubramaniam, 5th Grade, Age 10, Legacy Traditional School-Glendale, Independent Charter School, Maricopa County Region 4**
- **Bryant Banzhaf, 5th Grade, Age 10, Rattlesnake Ridge Elementary School, Marana Unified School District, Pima County**
- **Ricardo Cabrera, 8th Grade, Age 14, Dodge Traditional Magnet Middle School, Tucson Unified School District, Pima County**
- **Noah Clark, 8th Grade, Age 13, Flagstaff Home Educators, Homeschool, Coconino County**
- **Meridian Creath, 5th Grade, Age 11, Creath Academy, Homeschool, Maricopa Region**

- Landon Curtis, 8th Grade, Age 14, Fairbanks Middle School, Morenci School District, Greenlee County
- Onnie Estes, 6th Grade, Age 11, Alpine Elementary School, Alpine Elementary School District, Apache County
- Anthony Estrella, 8th Grade, Age 13, Legacy Traditional School-Surprise, Independent Charter School, Maricopa Region 5
- Isabelle Garcia, 7th Grade, Age 13, Kyrene del Pueblo Middle School, Kyrene Elementary School District, Maricopa Region 1
- Kavyadharshini Hariharan, 8th Grade, Age 13, Painted Rock Academy, Independent Charter School, Maricopa Region 4
- Alrick James, 5th Grade, Age 11, Estrella Foothills Global Academy, Laveen School District, Maricopa Region 3
- Ethan Knudson, 8th Grade, Age 14, Masada Charter School, Independent Charter School, Mohave County
- Aneesh Kulkarni, 6th Grade, Age 12, Desert Trails Elementary, Paradise Valley Unified School District, Maricopa Region 2
- Sihyun Kyong, 8th Grade, Age 13, BASIS Ahwatukee, Independent Charter School, Maricopa Region 1
- Aaliyah Magsano, 8th Grade, Age 14, Legacy Traditional School-Queen Creek, Independent Charter School, Pinal County
- Esha Marupudi, 6th Grade, Age 11, BASIS Chandler, Independent Charter School, Maricopa Region 6
- VenkataSuchith Nathani, 7th Grade, Age 12, Arizona College Prep Middle School, Chandler Unified School District, Maricopa Region 6
- Carlie Nguyen, 4th Grade, Age 9, Archway Trivium School, Great Hearts Charter School, Maricopa Region 5
- Kason Nunley, 8th Grade, Age 14, Safford Middle School, Safford Unified School District, Graham County
- Natalie Pinkerton, 5th Grade, Age 11, Dorothy Hall Elementary School, Yuma School District, Yuma County
- Finley Roberts, 8th Grade, Age 14, Dragon Claw Academy Middle School, Independent Charter School, Maricopa Region 2
- Jacob Schliekelman, 4th Grade, Age 9, Ehrenberg Elementary School, Quartzsite Elementary School District, La Paz County
- Alexis Simon, 8th Grade, Age 13, Little Red School House, Santa Cruz Elementary School District, Santa Cruz County
- Avery Smith-Hendricks, 6th Grade, Age 12, Leading Edge Academy-Maricopa, Independent Charter School, Pinal County
- Kaitlin Stephens, 8th Grade, Age 13, Veritas Christian Community School, Private Christian School, Cochise County
- Lathan Strom, 7th Grade, Age 13, Miami Jr/Sr High School, Miami Unified School District, Gila County

- **Shaunce' Yellowhair, 8th Grade, Age 14, Winslow Junior High School, Winslow Unified School District, Navajo County**



Arizona has one of the largest Spelling Bee participation rates in the nation, with over 500,000 students competing this year from public, private, parochial and homeschools statewide. For the two students who place first and second place in the Arizona Spelling Bee, AEF supports travel for the students and their chaperones to represent the state of Arizona as official champions in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in National Harbor, Maryland.

The [Arizona State Spelling is scheduled for Saturday, March 16th](#), at the Madison Center for the Arts in Phoenix, located at 5601 N 16th St. in Phoenix. The event is free and open to the public beginning with the first round of bee competition at 9:30 am with the final round of bee competition at 1:15 pm. The venue opens to the public thirty minutes before each round (9:00am and 12:45pm).

Leading up to the State Bee, AEF features each of the 28 student finalists on [its social media channels](#). A recorded copy of the spelling bee will be uploaded to the [Arizona Educational Foundation's YouTube channel](#) following the bee. The 2024 Scripps National Spelling Bee Finals will be broadcast live on ION the evening of Thursday, May 30, 2024.

For more information about the [Arizona Spelling Bee](#) and spellers, contact Emily Ramirez-Lara, AEF® Director of Programs at projects@azedfoundation.org or 623-565-0300.

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About Arizona Educational Foundation, AEF®

The mission of AEF is to celebrate excellence and cultivate equity in Pre-K-12th grade Arizona public education. This is accomplished through a variety of programs for teachers, administrators, and students. Some programs shine a spotlight on excellence; others provide a stepping stone to help support schools and educators on the road to awesomeness. In addition to the [Arizona Teacher of the Year®](#) program, AEF also coordinates the [Arizona State Spelling Bee](#), the [A+ School of Excellence® Award](#), the [Principals Leadership Academy of Arizona](#), [teachSTEM](#), [Our World](#), and [Take Your Legislator to School](#). AEF was founded in 1983, by then State Superintendent of Public Education, [Carolyn Warner](#), who felt a nonprofit needed to be established to champion public education and recognize the great work of public school educators. AEF annually reaches over 500,000 students, teachers and administrators throughout Arizona. **For more information visit www.azedfoundation.org, or contact info@azedfoundation.org.**

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