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Russellville City Schools jumps into 'A' grade range on latest state report card

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Fueled by near perfect scores in academic growth, graduation rate and college and career readiness, Russellville City Schools received an overall 'A' grade of 93 for the 2024-2025 school year on the Alabama Department of Education's State Report Card released November 13th.

The annual report card, done for each Alabama public school system and individual school, determines scores in six categories: academic achievement, academic growth, graduation rate, progress in English Language Proficiency, chronic

absenteeism and college/career readiness.

West Elementary School and Russellville Elementary School received 'A' scores of 93. Russellville Middle School earned a 'B' 86 and Russellville High School's grade was an 82, also within the 'B' range.

Significant to those grades was the fact that three of the system's four schools improved their overall scores from 2023-2024's report card, and one remained the same from last year.

"These scores are a testament to the hard work that our teachers, faculty and students have put in," said RCS Superintendent of Education Dr. Tim Guinn. "Any time you have

See 'RCS,' Page 4

Five of eight Franklin County Schools receive 'A' grades on 2024-25 State Report Card

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Report card day can either bring a smile to the face of a student or a sense of dread waiting to see mom and dad's response to a bad report.

For Franklin County Schools Superintendent of Education Greg Hamilton, today was a happy day when the 2024-2025 State Department of Education's State Report Card was reported.

Franklin County Schools received an overall score of 88, a B grade, the same number the system received on the 2023-24 state report card.

But the really good news came when five of the system's nine schools received scores of 90 or

above, an A under state criteria.

Red Bay High School and Vina High Schools received scores of 91. East Franklin Junior High School, Red Bay Elementary School and Phil Campbell Elementary School earned scores of 90.

Three county schools received B scores: 87 for Phil Campbell High School, 86 for Tharptown Elementary School and 85 for Belgreen High School.

Tharptown High School received the system's lowest score, a C grade of 78.

Six schools (East Franklin, Phil Campbell High, Phil Campbell Elementary, Red Bay High, Tharptown Elementary and Vina) improved their grade from 2023-24.

See 'REPORT CARD,' Page 4

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**Peter "Pete" Johnson, 94, of Red Bay, passed
away Sunday, Nov. 16 at his residence. Services
will be Wednesday, Nov. 19 at 2 p.m., at Deaton
Funeral Home Chapel in Red Bay. Visitation will
be Wednesday, Nov. 19 from 12-2 at Deaton. Bu-
rial will be in Red Bay City Cemetery.**

**Thomas Nathaniel Melton, 72, of Russellville,
passed away Thursday, Nov. 13 at his residence.
Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the family with
arrangements.**

**James Brent "J.B." Hooper, 21, of Russellville,
passed away Wednesday, Nov. 12 at his res-
idence. Spry Memorial Chapel assisted the
family with arrangements.**

**Therica Rochelle Boyles Mangino, 88, of Rus-
sellville, passed away November 11. Pinkard Fu-
neral Home of Russellville assisted the family
with arrangements.**



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Correction Policy

The Franklin Free Press strives for excellence and accuracy, and we will be pleased to correct any error in our newspaper. To request a correction or clarification, call or e-mail our office.

Letters to the editor

The Franklin Free Press is published by

hometown people, for hometown people. We urge contributions of all kinds, including guest columns, picture submissions, cartoons or letters to the editor. Send any letters to our office via U.S. Postal Service or e-mail, and we will gladly publish them. Letters must be signed and contain the hometown and phone number of the author. The Franklin Free Press reserves the right to edit letters for style, length and content.

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Back to the Bible by Larsen Plyler:

Matthew 9:9-13

Jesus called a tax collector named Matthew (the author of this account!) to follow Him. Tax collectors were despised by the Jews because they gathered taxes for the Roman occupiers. Some of them were corrupt and used their position for crooked practices to get rich.

But, even more tax collectors and people described as "sinners" came to Jesus.

The Pharisees could not believe that Jesus would eat with people like this. They were shaming these disciples for accepting Him as their teacher.

But, Jesus responded that sick people are the ones who need a doctor, not healthy ones. Jesus is not saying that the Pharisees are righteous (see 5:20). But, if they're as well as they think they are, He won't be of any use to them. But, if these others are as sick as they think, then that's right where Jesus needs to be.

Jesus quotes from Hosea 6:6, which says that God wants mercy and not sacrifice. God wanted people who showed compassion, not just go through religious motions. This is a phrase that shows emphasis. He commanded sacrifices, but wanted something deeper— people's hearts. They needed to learn that passage. They thought they were religious experts, but they didn't know the fundamentals of what God desired.

Jesus said He came to call sinners, not the righteous. That is, He wanted people who saw their need, not people who thought they were just fine as they were.

Lessons to Learn:

Jesus is the Great Physician. He welcomes the sickest. Sinners can come to Him. That's good news, because that is what we all are. We must be careful not to think of ourselves as righteous and miss the gift of forgiveness. God shows His love to us in giving Jesus for us even though we were sinners and His enemies (Rom. 5:6-11).

Remember that doctor's jobs are to heal. His time with sinners wasn't to condone their lifestyle, but to call them to repentance (Lk. 5:32). All are welcome just as they are, but Jesus will not have us stay that way. After listing sins that the Corinthians had been involved in, Paul says, "such were some of you, but you are washed, sanctified, and justified." That's who they were, but not who they were anymore nor who they needed to be.

Consider this with regard to sharing the gospel. Sometimes we reach out to the people who we think are basically on the same page. But, it is probably those who are "off the rails" who will see their need. We don't need to discriminate who gets the gospel based on who we already get along with.

Tune in to 100.7 WGOL Sunday at 8:30am for our Back to the Bible Radio Program.

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'RCS,' from Page 1

consistent success across the system, in all schools, it really shows the impact our teachers are making. I am very proud of our students' success. This overall 'A' is a reflection of what our system truly is."

West Elementary saw its overall grade jump six points, 87 to 93, from last year.

Elementary and middle schools are evaluated on academic achievement, academic growth, progress in English Language proficiency and chronic absenteeism, which measures the number of students who miss at least 18 days in a school year.

West's academic growth score was a perfect 100. The school also had a chronic absenteeism rate well below the state average. Those two factors helped propel the school into the 'A' grade level.

Russellville Elementary grade of 93 was a seven-point improvement from last year's 86.

Again, a perfect academic growth score, outstanding progress in English Language proficiency and an extremely low chronic absenteeism rate were significant in that improvement.

Russellville Middle School maintained its 'B' grade of 86 with a 100 on academic growth and improvement on its academic achievement score.

RMS saw its scores in English Language proficiency and chronic absenteeism fall from 2023-24, which kept the overall grade from increasing from 86.

Russellville High School's score of 82 was the lowest among the system's four schools, but was a five-point improvement from 23-24.

Strong scores in graduation rate and college/career readiness accounted for the improvement, while failing scores in academic achievement and English Language proficiency kept RMS from an even higher grade.

For more information on state reports for all Alabama public schools, visit <https://statereportcard.alsde.edu>.

'REPORT CARD,' from Page 1

Two (Red Bay Elementary and Belgreen) schools' scores were the same as the previous year and Tharptown High was the lone grade to drop from 2023-24.

"These scores represent tremendous successes in our schools," Hamilton said. "We are a woefully underfunded school system, so to achieve such a high level of success and seeing continued improvement within our schools is absolutely amazing.

"I encourage our board members to reach out to their schools and thank the administrators, teachers, staff and students for a job well done," he added.

The State Report Card grades every public school system and individual school on six accountability indicators: Academic achievement, academic growth, graduate rate, college and career readiness, chronic absenteeism and progress in English Language proficiency.

Bart Moss, Phil Campbell High School Principal, saw his school's score improve for the second straight year, going from a 77 in 22-23 to an 85 in 23-24 to this year's 87. Moss sees the steady improvement as a healthy sign for PCHS but realizes the job is not yet complete.

"I am very proud of our school and of our county. We have a great team of administrators and that's evident in the scores our county received," Moss said. "Mr. Hamilton does a great job in putting the tools in our hands to succeed and giving us the freedom to innovate and motivate our students and staff.

"We have improved for two straight years since I've been here. But our goal is an 'A.' The formula is really simple: show you care! As an administrator or a teacher, if you show you genuinely care, it will bleed over to your students and they will care too. Our students know we care because we emphasize academics and we reward achievement and improvement," Moss added.

Franklin County Schools' overall score in academic growth was 100. This is one of two criteria, along with academic achievement, that are given more weight in calculating a school's overall grade.

Academic growth tracks student growth in reading and math over time. Academic achievement measures whether students are proficient in English Language arts and mathematics based on standardized test scores.

The system's grade on academic achievement was 67.79, a D, but slightly higher than the 67.0 statewide score.

Franklin County Schools' 91.02 grade on graduation rate comes in slightly lower than the State Department of Education's overall score of 91.56.

The system's failing score of 45.32 on progress in English Language proficiency, which assesses the progress of ELL students in becoming English proficient, was slightly lower than the statewide score of 45.65.

Chronic absenteeism measures the percentage of students who miss 18 or more days of school in one school year. Franklin County Schools' 10.35 is lower than the statewide 12.056, a good thing in this category alone.

Franklin County Schools' 90.63 in college and career readiness is well above the statewide grade of 87.88. This indicator measures the percentage of students in 9th-12th grade who meet at least one college or career readiness indicator, such as AP exam scores or acceptance into a military branch.

Franklin County Schools' overall grade of 88, by comparison, is five points higher than Lawrence County Schools (83), the same as Colbert County Schools (88) and one point below Marion County Schools (89).

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Two lawsuits filed question legality of Russellville Water and Sewer Board's restoration policy

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Two lawsuits were filed earlier this month against the Russellville Water and Sewer Board alleging the board's policy for restoring water service violates Alabama state law.

William D. Ragan, Jr., and William V. Lawson, both rental property owners in Russellville, have separate lawsuits, both filed by Russellville attorney Evan Hargett with Rogers, Bowling & McReynolds, P.C.

Lawson filed a declaratory judgment action, asking Franklin County Circuit Court Judge Brian Hamilton to find RWSB's service restoration policy violative of state law and, as a result, unenforceable.

Ragan's case is a class action complaint, where he's asking the Court to certify him as a class representative and Hargett as class counsel to move forward with civil cases on behalf of all RWSB customers impacted by the policy.

At the heart of both cases is a policy approved by the Russellville Water and Sewer Board at its November 12, 2024, meeting, regarding restoration of water service.

The policy language reads: "The Water Works & Sewer Board of the City of Russellville does not provide or restore water service to an existing property with an unpaid balance."

The RWSB is not alone in having such a policy. In fact, a source told the FFP the policy was modeled after an existing policy of another Alabama utility.

While it's clear that if it's the existing account holder seeking to reinstate water service, the utility can refuse to restore the account until a past due balance is paid. The question raised in these cases, though, is whether a delinquent balance from someone other than the applicant for service may constitute grounds to deny service to a new applicant.

When contacted for comment last week, Russellville attorney Danny McDowell, who represents the Water and Sewer Board, said he had not seen the lawsuits yet and could not comment.

Lawson owns rental property located at Mills Trailer Park in Russellville. The case centers around Lawson's lot 6. Lot 6 was occupied by a former owner/tenant who received water and sewer service from the RWSB under a separate account in the previous owner/tenant's name.

That previous owner/tenant vacated the property, leaving an unpaid balance on the account. When Lawson attempted to open a new account for lot 6, the lawsuit alleges, he was told the unpaid balance on the prior account must first be paid in full.

"That policy conditions the provision of essential utility service upon payment by a new customer or property owner of a debt they did not incur or receive any benefit from," Hargett said in the complaint.

He maintains that, unless Lawson agreed, in writing, to assume the debt of the prior owner/tenant, he may not be compelled to satisfy that debt as a condition of service.

The fact situation in Ragan's case is similar, but relates to service at a residence on Stuck Street SW in Russellville.

His complaint cites Code of Alabama Section 8-9-2(3) as support for his argument that the policy violates state law. That code section outlines certain agreements in Alabama that must be evidenced in writing to be enforceable.

The legal question will be whether this provision prevents the Water and Sewer Board from enforcing its policy, and whether there existed an agreement that would trigger the language of the particular code section.

It's a bit legally complicated, but that's what lawsuits do—provide clarity in cases where there are genuine legal issues raised.

If certified as a class action by the Court, Ragan's case would move forward on behalf of all RWSB customers alleging similar claims. If the class action is tried or settled, Ragan would be entitled to a sum of money as class representative and Hargett, as class counsel, an attorney's fee from any judgment entered on behalf of all class members.

Alternatively, the Court could deny certification of Ragan's case as a class action, and he would move forward individually, or the case could be dismissed if a legal determination is made that Ragan isn't entitled to any damages and doesn't have a valid claim under Alabama law.

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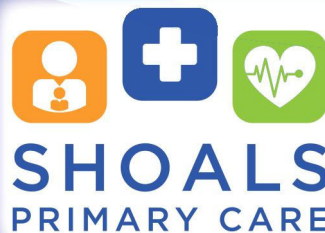
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Bids in sealed envelopes clearly marked "Lawn Care Service Bids", should be mailed to the Russellville Housing Authority, P.O. Box 966, Russellville, Alabama 35653, or delivered to 73 Flippen Street, Russellville, Alabama 35653, in time to be opened and publicly read aloud at 9:00 a.m. on December 3, 2025. Bids received after this deadline will not be opened and shall not be considered. Any questions, comments, or requests to schedule a site inspection can contact Omar Tompkins at (256) 332-1561.

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Holy Destiny from Clanton, Alabama will be in concert at Siloam Missionary Baptist Church on Sunday, November 23rd at 1:30 p.m. The church is located at 1657 Hwy 60 Russellville, near the old King Drive In.



Russellville Masonic Lodge #371 is selling Hams for Thanksgiving. Butts are \$35 each and may be pre-ordered by dialing (256) 810-1970. Pickup is Wednesday, Nov. 26 between 8-10am at the Lodge on Coffee Avenue.



The Northwest Regional Library is proud to announce audiobooks are now available through our Books-By-Mail program. This program is completely free to those that are medically homebound, live more than 10 miles from a town with a public library, or require large print or audiobooks only. Must be a resident of Marion, Franklin, or Lamar counties.



Bethsaida Missionary Baptist Church will hold a Live Nativity on Friday-Saturday, December 5-6, from 6-8 p.m. The church is located on Highway 48.



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Franklin County Commission approves \$598,820 loan for new garbage trucks for Franklin County Solid Waste Department

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

The Franklin County Commission approved a loan of \$598,820 from Valley State Bank for the purchase of two new garbage trucks for the Franklin County Solid Waste Department at its November 17th meeting.

Valley State Bank submitted the lowest interest rate of all bidders (2.95%) for the 60-month loan.

In other agenda items at the November 17th meeting, the commission:

- tabled consideration of a Delinquency Policy and Procedures for delinquent solid waste bills. Commissioners had an extensive discussion at the November 10th work session about the proposed policy but decided to allow County Attorney Evan Hargett to prepare a draft policy.
- approved a holiday schedule for the Franklin County Courthouse and all county offices. All county offices will be closed Thanksgiving Day and the following day (November 27-28), Wednesday-Friday of Christmas week (December 24-26) and New Year’s Day (January 1, 2026).
- tabled consideration of roof repairs for the Franklin County Courthouse Annex.
- approved payment of invoices for repairs to the emergency sirens in Mountain Star, Frankfort and Spruce Pine, which are all now in working order, and authorized Franklin County Emergency Management Agency Director Mary Hallman-Glass to obtain estimates for repairs to the remaining county sirens that need repair. They include East Franklin and Belgreen.

Sirens located in municipalities are the financial responsibility of the city where they are located.

- authorized Probate Judge Barry Moore and Hargett to workout access to a closed road off County Road 21 to Tammy O’Malley, who has a lease with the property owner to access the land for hunting. The access will be for one year.
- authorized advertising for bids for a storm water cross drain replacement project on Highway 90.
- approved the hiring of Tiffany Buchanan as a Corrections Officer/Dispatcher in the Franklin County Sheriff’s Office, hiring Justin Sharp, William Vickers and Chris Pierce as temporary Corrections Officers/Dispatchers, transferred Matthew Crum from courthouse security to patrol deputy, accepted the resignation of Corrections Officers/Dispatchers James Fleck and Caleb Tavares, authorized advertising for the same.

The next regular meeting of the Franklin County Commission will be Monday, December 15th at 8:30 a.m., in the Franklin County Courthouse Annex.

LEGAL NOTICE

In accordance with Chapter 1, Title 39, Code of Alabama, 1975, as amended, notice is hereby given that Mid-Western Commercial Roofers, Inc., Contractor, has completed the contract for Reroof of Russellville High School Main Classroom Wing, at

1865 Waterloo Road, Russellville, Al., 35653, for the State of Alabama and the City of Russellville, the Russellville City Board of Education, and have requested final settlement of said Contract. All persons having any claim for labor, materials, or otherwise in connection with this project should immediately notify Ward Scott, Morris Architecture, Inc., 1606 Paul Bryant Drive, Tuscaloosa, Al., 35401, (205)345-6110.

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Russellville City Council approves two alcohol sales applications

John Pilati

Franklin Free Press

The Russellville City Council approved alcohol licenses for two applicants at the council's November 17th meeting.

The first was an application to allow beer and table wine sales (for off-premise consumption) at the new Raceway, which opens this month at 14816 Highway 43.

There was no input either in favor of or against the application at a public hearing held before the council's vote.

The application was approved by a vote of 4-2, with councilmen Gary Cummings and Lonnie Freeman casting the two no votes.

The second license, this one for restaurant retail liquor sales, was approved for El Jefe Tex Mex, LLC, at 14204 Highway 43, Suite A. That's the location of a new Mexican restaurant, El Jefe Tex-Mex, which will now be able to add beer, wine and liquor drinks to its menu.

After a public hearing that also saw no one speak in favor of or against the application, the council approved the application by the same 4-2 vote, with Mayor David Grissom and councilmen David Palmer, Darren Woodruff and Jamie Harris voting yes.

In other agenda items at the November 17th meeting, the council: —approved a resolution honoring the Russellville High School varsity volleyball team for its outstanding season, that saw the team post its most wins ever, finishing 41-26, and host the area tournament for the first time in school history after finishing as regular season champions. The team's appearance in the volleyball regionals was Russellville's first in 11 years.

Team members include: Samantha Wilson, Kaylee Suggs, Laila Hill, Fatima Ramirez, Brookelynn Davis, Khristyan Huerta, Erin Grimes, Adaleigh Smith, Blevyn Sappington, Alexia Groce, Aubree Hyde, Bella Malone and Bri McCulloch.

Russellville is coached by head coach Madison Lamon and assistant coaches Lexi Lamon, Lee-Taylor Bishop and Chelsey Graves.

The council also approved resolutions honoring McCulloch for setting a 1,000 career dig record, the most single season dig total in school history of 894 and the most career digs in school history, 1,460.

Hill was honored for setting a single season school record with 450 kills and Ramirez for a school record single season assist total with 576.

—approved a letter of resignation from Russellville Street Department employee Dallas Hopkins.

The next regular meeting of the Russellville City Council will be December 1, 2025, with work session at 6 p.m., and meeting to follow.

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Academic growth, significant capital investments highlight Franklin County State of the Schools presentations

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

On a day when both Russellville City Schools and Franklin County Schools received some impressive scores on the Alabama State Department of Education’s annual State Report Card, both Superintendents Tim Guinn and Greg Hamilton had plenty of good news to share at the annual Franklin County State of the Schools.

The annual event, sponsored by the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, sees superintendents from the two local systems and the Northwest Shoals Community College President present updates on the status of their schools.

This year’s State of the Schools, held November 13th at the Tharptown High School gymnasium, also featured recognition for the outstanding employees of the year at each school and an update on host Tharptown High School from its principal Dr. Tyler Berryman.

Franklin County Schools has a 2025 enrollment of 3,390, a decrease of 107 students from last year, but it’s a number that still pushes the system’s facilities to the limit, Hamilton said.

The system has 68 daily bus routes, and six midday routes that transport students to the Franklin County Career Technical Center, where 439 students are enrolled this year. In the previous school year, students earned 243 hours of college credit.

“Our Career Tech Center is doing outstanding,” Hamilton said, “and it’s a vital part of our school system.”

Franklin County Schools’ FY25-26 budget is \$52 million, an increase of \$3 million from last year, but a decrease from the two previous years where the system received additional funding as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The system has invested more than \$22 million over the previous eight years in capital projects, including projects at every campus. Ongoing capital projects include the administration building at Red Bay High School and installation of turf on the Belgreen, Tharptown and Vina softball fields.

Hamilton gave an update on the system’s Section 16 land in Fayette and Walker Counties that was the subject of a statewide amendment last year. That property includes lucrative land at the intersection of Alabama 13 and the new Interstate 22.

Passage of last year’s amendment meant ownership and management of the property was transferred to the Franklin County Board of Education.

But Hamilton said the board has filed a lawsuit against the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources after its Commissioner, which manages mineral and timber rights on Section 16 lands.

The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has resisted transfer of the land since the amendment passed Hamilton said.

“We still do not have title because the Department of Conservation is playing Monday morning quarterback,” Hamilton said. “They have now seen what we have in that land and we have a pending lawsuit against the department.”

As for the system’s overall State Report Card grade of 88, and an ‘A’ grade for five of its eight schools, Hamilton said it was the result of the dedication of administrators, faculty, staff and students on each campus.

Russellville City Schools scored above the state average in 2025 mastery standards on Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program exam scores in seven of the eight grades it measures, second through eighth grades.

A score of Level 3 or higher indicates a student is proficient in subjects including English Language Arts, math and science.

Russellville City Schools earned a lofty 93 overall grade on the 2024-25 State Report Card, the third consecutive year that score falls in the ‘A’ grade range and a three point improvement from last year’s 90.

Russellville City Schools has 548 students enrolled in dual enrollment courses with Northwest Shoals Community College. That represents more than 610 courses and 1,800 college credit hours.

Student participation in the Career Technical Education Program continues to increase, with 87% of all students taking at least one CTE course.

An ongoing renovation of the Career Technical Education Center will add four new classrooms, renovation of shop areas and enhanced classroom spaces for 11 CTE programs.

The system received one of only a handful of Attorney General Safe Schools Awards last year, recognizing it as one of Alabama’s safest public school systems.

RCS’s \$4.9 million reserve fund represents nearly twice the state’s required one-month reserve operating fund, which averages between \$2.5-\$2.7 million, Guinn said,

“The state of Russellville City Schools is strong thanks to a resilient and dedicated faculty and staff and the continued support of our community and students,” Guinn said.

Dr. Jeff Goodwin, Northwest Shoals Community College President, updated progress on the \$30 million renovation and construction project at NWSCC’s Phil Campbell campus.

“The campus is still not ready. The interior demolition is complete, mechanical/electrical work is ongoing, the new volleyball floor in the gym has been installed and ravine stabilization behind the gym is nearly complete,” Goodwin said.

He expressed his appreciation to Rep. Jamie Kiel (R-Russellville) for his support of the \$30 million makeover.

“Rep. Kiel has been a huge advocate for Franklin County and for our Phil Campbell campus the entire time he’s been in office. We could not have done this without his support,” Goodwin said.

With three new sports underway this fall (volleyball, women’s flag football and men’s and women’s golf), that brings the total to six sports that have returned to Northwest Shoals.

Outstanding Employee of the Year Awards were presented to the following employees:
Franklin County Schools:

- Karen Jones, Belgreen High School.
- Elisha Mansell, East Franklin Junior High School.
- Trisha Humphres, Phil Campbell Elementary School.
- Kim Whitten, Phil Campbell High School
- Rhonda Scott, Red Bay Elementary School.
- Jarod Massey, Red Bay High School.
- Amy Smith, Tharptown Elementary School.
- Hulon Heath, Tharptown High School.
- Bryna Lawler, Vina High School.
- Melissa McHenry, Franklin County Career Technical Center.
- Carla Knight, Franklin County Schools Central Office.



Mandy Winstead, left, receives her Outstanding Employee of the Year Award for NWSCC’s Phil Campbell campus from Brooklyn Yancey with the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce. (Courtesy Photo)

Russellville City Schools:

- Leslie DeLeon Rivera, West Elementary School.
- Dana Crummie, Russellville Elementary School.
- Dennis Tackett, Russellville Middle School.
- Kim Egle, Russellville High School.
- Donnie Nichols, RCS Career and Technical Education.

Northwest Shoals Community College:

- Mandy Winstead, NWSCC Phil Campbell campus.



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Column: Goodwin, Golden Tigers winners before they even took the field at Briarwood

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

They didn't kick off their second round play-off game until 7 p.m., but the Russellville Golden Tigers varsity football team and its Coach Dustin Goodwin were already winners before even taking the field against Briarwood Friday night.

Goodwin and his coaching staff faced a tremendous obstacle before the season even started, with the loss of All-State running back Cam Phinizee after he was arrested on felony charges and later unenrolled from Russellville High School.

This year's Golden Tigers were already thin on experienced senior starters. The entire Russellville offensive line graduated last spring, but the Golden Tigers' 2025 offense would still revolve around its star running back until one fateful March night, it wouldn't.

That left only two returning offensive starters, a junior fullback and a sophomore quarterback.

Navigating a team of 15-18 year olds through the aftermath of these challenges could have destroyed the season before it even began.

But Goodwin, preparing for only his second season at Russellville, refused to let that

See, 'WINNERS,' Page 14

Turnaround season for Red Bay ends in second round of football playoffs

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

A turnaround season for the Red Bay High School varsity football team (9-3) came to an end at Fred Bostick Jr. Stadium on Friday night after the Tigers suffered a 28-21 home loss to the Southeastern Mustangs (10-2) in the second round of the AHSAA Class 2A playoffs.

It was a back-and-forth affair for much of the game. RBHS led Southeastern at halftime but the visitors took their first lead of the game in the third quarter. From there the two teams traded touchdowns. In the end, it was the Mustangs that had the last say, scoring a go-ahead touchdown that proved to be the game-winner after a Red Bay turnover late in the fourth quarter.

"Those were two good football teams Friday night. Unfortunately someone's got to win and someone's got to lose," first-year Red Bay head coach Tyler Jeffreys said.

"I thought our kids played extremely hard. I never walked off the field and thought one time that we didn't play hard," Jeffreys added. "Unfortunately we just made too many mistakes that you can't make in a playoff game against a team that's just as good as you. But that being said, we made those mistakes going wide open and playing as hard as we could, so super proud of my kids."

Red Bay drew first blood, taking an initial 7-0 lead over the Mustangs eight minutes into the game.

A 34-yard strike through the air from senior quarterback Jeremiah Thorne to sophomore receiver Davien Colburn set up a 16-yard touchdown run by the standout senior running back Jaxon Vinson with 4:50 left in the first quarter.

Vinson would finish the game with 146 yards rushing on 35 carries.

Southeastern answered on its ensuing possession with a drive capped by a short touch-

See, 'RED BAY,' Page 13

Russellville beaten at Briarwood, ending season in Class 5A second round

Kadin Pounders
Franklin Free Press

The 2025 season came to an end for the Russellville High School varsity football team (7-5) Friday night as the Golden Tigers fell to the Briarwood Christian School Lions (7-5) by a final score of 42-7 in the second round of the AHSAA Class 5A playoffs.

Briarwood had Russellville's number once again: the defeat dropped the Golden Tigers to 0-4 all-time against the Lions, all four games coming in postseason play.

In the matchup in Birmingham Friday night, the hosts dominated and controlled the contest from the opening kickoff.

After receiving the opening kick, the Lions needed just a couple of plays to open their account for the evening. Briarwood's John Campbell recorded the game's first touchdown of the night on a reverse that went 49-yards for the score, making it 7-0 with 10:40 remaining in the first quarter.

Russellville's offense—able to move the ball down the field in spurts throughout the night but couldn't finish drives in the endzone—however, got off to a disastrous start.

Sophomore quarterback Whit Goodwin threw his ninth interception of the season on the Golden Tigers' first drive. The pick was returned to the RHS 10-yard line, setting up an easy 10-yard touchdown rush for running back Eli Thompson.

Briarwood would add two more touchdowns in the first half—one late in the first quarter, the other midway through the second—to make it 28-0 at the break.

In the second half, the Lions scored twice more to take a 42-0 advantage before Russellville was finally able to get into the endzone on a 15-yard rush by sophomore Braxton Duncan—

See, 'GOLDEN TIGERS,' Page 12

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'GOLDEN TIGERS,' from Page 11

his first of the season—with 1:34 to play in the fourth.

Russellville's seven points were the fewest it scored all season and the final 35-point deficit made it the most lopsided defeat for the Golden Tigers in 2025.

"Looking back at it, I do think we missed some things that, if we had executed on them, the game wouldn't have gone quite as negatively as it did," Russellville head coach Dustin Goodwin said.

"Briarwood is a really good football team, and (Friday) night we weren't the best team on the field," he added, "but that doesn't take away from how we feel about our kids and our coaches—how proud of them we are."

The loss obviously ended Russellville's campaign, but Goodwin said his players should be celebrated for what they were able to accomplish up to that point.

"In the spring (the players) faced a lot of adversity. There was a lot of talk that they wouldn't win but one or two football games," he said. "Instead of cutting and running, these guys stuck together, believed in what we were preaching, came to work every day, and were able to be a region runner-up and win a playoff game. We're very proud of them for that."

Goodwin also credited his nine seniors for setting an example for what was a young roster.

"I don't remember a day when a single senior kid didn't show up for practice or didn't do what they were asked to do," he said. "I think they grew in their leadership roles and were encouraging to their teammates and tried to hold everyone accountable the right way. I think everyone on the team felt that."

"These nine young men are great people, and I believe they're going to be successful no matter what they decide to do," he added.

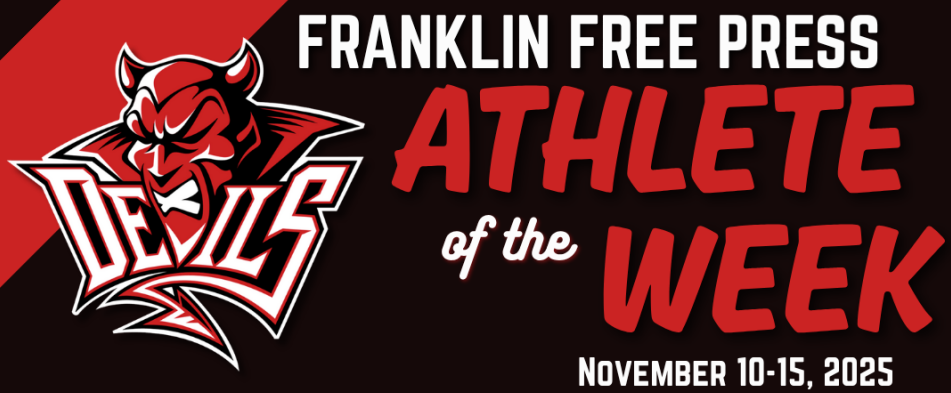
Looking back on the journey his team went on, Goodwin said the 2025 Golden Tiger football team will be remembered for its 'grit' and 'fight,' among other things.

"What the outside world thinks doesn't define you. Winning and losing football games isn't what's going to define these kids," he said. "The way they showed up, the way they bought in and prepared, the way they loved on each other; the effort they gave, their refusal to lose, their relentlessness and fight, their grit—all of those things are characteristics they have that are going to carry them far beyond the football field and sports in general. We're very proud of them."



VINA GIRLS BASKETBALL

LAYLA HESTER



The FFP Athlete of the Week for November 10-15 is Vina girls' basketball's Layla Hester. In four games last week, Layla Hester scored 67 points, recorded 12 assists, 18 steals and 15 rebounds as Vina went 3-1 and won the Vina Veteran's Day Tournament. Hester had 25 points in the championship win over 3A Oakman 47-35. The Lady Red Devils also beat Tharptown 26-25 and Sumiton Christian 45-31.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The Franklin County Commission is accepting applications for the following position(s):

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Applications will be accepted in the Franklin County Commission office until positions are filled.

An application and job description may be picked up, faxed or emailed upon request from the Franklin County Commission Office, located at 405 N Jackson Avenue, Monday – Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, by calling (256) 332-8852 or applications are available at www.franklincountyal.org under the Careers tab.

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'RED BAY' from Page 11

down run from the five. After the extra point, the game was tied 7-7 with 2:09 to go in the opening period.

After both teams traded fruitless possessions for the remainder of the first and most of the second quarter, the hosts went back up by a score thanks to a little trickery.

Lining up for a go-ahead 20-yard field goal attempt with 19 seconds to go in the first half, the Tigers faked it with the holder Jaxon Swann taking the snap, standing up and finding Colburn, who was brushing off defenders in the endzone, with the pass.

Lining up in the same formation for the extra point, the snap was low and the PAT was botched, so the half ended with the Tigers leading 13-7.

Coming out of the break, Southeastern received the third quarter kick and took advantage. The Mustangs drove down the field and ended the drive on a short touchdown run with 7:21 left in the third quarter. The extra point was good and the visitors took their first lead of the game, 14-13.

On third down and eight from the Southeastern 28-yard line, Red Bay found its reply to the Mustangs' go-ahead score with another of its own on the game's next drive.

Thorne hit his go-to target, Colburn, who finished the game with 84 yards receiving, on a wheel route from the backfield. The sophomore receiver, after making the grab, just needed to juke one defender to reach the endzone untouched. The two-point conversion was successful on an inside pass from Thorne to fellow senior Cayson Johnston, making it 21-14, Tigers.

A few minutes later, a 37-yard touchdown pass by Southeastern tied the game up at 21. With just over a minute to go in the third quarter, that was the score the two teams would take into a pivotal final 12 minutes.

After a couple possessions petered out for both teams to start the fourth quarter, it was Southeastern quarterback Jericho Pendleton who broke the deadlock on a 27-yard quarterback keeper with 4:07 left in the game. The touchdown rush by Pendleton and the ensuing successful extra point gave the Mustangs a 28-21 lead—but with just over four minutes to play it gave RBHS time to score, as well.

Unfortunately for the Tigers, their final possession would end in a turnover.

Vinson, after receiving the option pitch from his quarterback, coughed the ball up after being hit by a Mustang defender. The rare fumble from Vinson was recovered by Southeastern with about a minute to play, all but ending Red Bay's chances.

The 28-21 defeat eliminated the Tigers from the postseason, but it doesn't erase what the RBHS football program was able to achieve under its first year coach.

The Tigers won nine games compared to two victories last campaign, and captured their first region title since 2019 with a flawless 5-0 region record. RBHS also turned Fred Bostick Jr. Stadium into a fortress this campaign as they went unbeaten, 7-0, at home until the Southeastern contest.

While much of the praise for the Tigers' turnaround in 2025 has, justifiably, gone to the head coach, Jeffreys himself gave all the credit to his players.

"I can't thank our seniors and all our kids on the team enough for working as hard as they did," Jeffreys said.

"The turnaround was all them," he added. "They did a great job. They were bought in from day one, and I told them after the game that I was very appreciative of all that they did."

"This season's been a blur, but it's been very enjoyable. I didn't want it to end. I think of all the teams I've coached, this one has been one of the most unselfish groups that I've ever been around. That's the reason we've been successful."

The RBHS head coach said it was his group of seniors, a class that was 14-18 coming into the 2025 campaign, that were the first to latch on and follow his guidance. That, he said, was critical.

"These seniors were the very first ones to buy in, and they did a great job leading this team," Jeffreys said. "I think the biggest thing about this turnaround was their buy-in and the amount of effort they put in week in and week out."

"I think this group (of seniors) will hold a special place in my heart because they were the first ones to buy in and do the things that they needed to do to put us in the most successful situations," he added. "I'd love for them to continue to be around (the program). They've left their legacy here in terms of showing what you have to do to be successful."

Jeffreys told the Franklin Free Press that he doesn't know what the future will hold but believes that if his underclassmen continue to follow the example set by this year's upperclassmen, the Red Bay Tigers will continue to see their achievements stack up.

"I told the rest of the team, 'Don't let what these seniors have done this year go to waste. Let's keep building off this and keep working hard,'" he said. "If we continue to do those things, I know this program will be successful."

Have a tip or sports story idea? Want to share you local sports photos? Email sports editor Kadin Pounders at franklinfreepress.sports@gmail.com



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'WINNERS,' from Page 11

happen and never used it as an excuse for lowered expectations. And that's not an easy thing to accomplish.

In today's world of social media, empowered keyboard warriors, never afraid to blast others while hiding behind a cloak of anonymity, can poison the momentum of a young football team.

But the Golden Tigers, in large part due to their coach remaining positive, had a 7-4 record and reached the second round of the 5A playoffs.

I had the chance to interview Goodwin before the season the annual Football in the South Media Day in July. He remained genuinely positive about the coming season. It wasn't an act. It was a true example of character under fire.

I have interviewed Goodwin multiple times since his hiring in February 2024 after what was a very public coaching search.

But on a week-to-week basis during football season, it's our sports editor Kadin Pounders who hosts a radio show with Goodwin and interviews him after each game.

Same thoughts from Kadin—Goodwin remained focused on what his players could do on the field, while shelving any lingering concerns about things beyond his or their control.

Goodwin exhibits a calm demeanor but don't mistake that for a lack of competitiveness. He has his father's (former RHS Coach Doug Goodwin's) passion for winning. He came into this job with an understanding of the expectations for this program. And Goodwin's teams battle through the final whistle every Friday night.

The Golden Tigers finished 7-4 in Goodwin's first season, their same record before Firday's game. Russellville is 10-2 in Class 5A Region 7 games in Goodwin's two seasons, out scoring opponents 447-190.

Russellville's only Region 7 losses both came to region champion Fairview, last year by one point in triple overtime and a seven-point loss this season. The Aggies are 11-0 and travel to Jacksonville tonight for a second round playoff game.

After his team started 0-2 with losses to Deshler and Mars Hill, the excuses could have permeated the Russellville locker room and the 2025 season could have blown up. But Goodwin and the Golden Tigers' staff kept their team on track.

By the way, Deshler is 11-1 and will travel to Hamilton tonight in a 4A second round playoff game. Undefeated Mars Hill looks well on its way to back-to-back 3A state championships.

Russellville and Briarwood Christian are two well-respected traditional powers in Alabama high school football circles. Each has its share of championship blue maps.

But wins and losses are eventually forgotten as life moves on. Character, though, doesn't fade away. The character shown by this year's Golden Tiger team will have a positive impact in each player's life long after high school.

And that would not have happened without the character, maturity and quiet leadership displayed by Dustin Goodwin. That's a winning life lesson for these Golden Tigers, on or off the football field.

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44 of 44 Franklin businesses receive satisfactory health ratings

John Pilati
Franklin Free Press

Each of the 44 Franklin County establishments that received health ratings during the period of October 1, 2025 through November 13, 2025, had scores that fell into the "satisfactory compliance" range.

Health ratings are required to be prominently posted in all food/lodging establishments. Scores are graded by the Alabama Department of Public Health inspectors on a 100-point scale.

Establishments with scores of 85 to 100 are considered to be in "satisfactory compliance" and are routinely inspected. Establishments scoring between 70 and 84 will be inspected again in 60 days, and those scoring between 60 and 69 will have another follow-up within 48 hours. Any establishment scoring below 60 will be immediately closed.

Areas of inspection by ADPH include management and personnel; food storage, preparation and service; equipment; utensils; linen cleanliness; plumbing and waste; poisonous or toxic material storage and an inspection of the physical facility or property.

44 of 44 Franklin County establishments listed in the most recent food and lodging establishment ratings scored 85 or above, within the satisfactory compliance range.

The high score was 99, shared by 12 businesses.

The lowest score among the 45 establishments was an 89, received by Catfish Springs and More, 17901 Hwy. 43, Russellville and Jack's #136, 521 4th Ave. SE, Red Bay, although this score was within the 'satisfactory compliance' range.

Other inspection scores of Franklin County businesses, in alphabetical order, included:

- Bay City Nutrition, 910 4th St., Red Bay, 99.
- Bel Haven Heights, 107 4th Ave. SE, Red Bay, 99.
- Big Star of Russellville Market, 314 S. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 96.
- Big Star Deli of Russellville, 314 S. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 95.
- Blue Boys, 4141 Hwy. 24, Red Bay, 95.
- Bojangle's Famous Chicken and Biscuit, 13810 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 93.
- Burger King, 15455 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 97.
- CJ's Grocery, 14545 Hwy. 187, Russellville, 98.
- El Jefe Tex Mex, 14204 Hwy. 43, Ste. A, Russellville, 93.
- Hilltop Diner, 808 Ronnie McDowell Ave., Russellville, 94.
- Hodges Senior Center, 1942 Hwy. 172, Hodges, 99.
- Hotel Red Bay, 107 4th Ave. SE, Red Bay, 98.
- Ideal Mart, 503 Waterloo Road, Russellville, 94.
- Jack's Family Restaurant, 13640 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 87.
- Legacy Chevron, 13518 Hwy. 43 South, Russellville, 93.
- M & H Food Mart, Inc., 9224 Hwy. 243, Phil Campbell, 92.
- Mama Cortez dba Rancho Viejo, 11797 Hwy. 43 S., Russellville, 99.
- McDonald's #6564, 15254 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 91.
- Murphy Oil Convenience Store, 13669 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 99.
- Oliver Creamery Commissary, 1121 Hwy. 46, Russellville, 98.
- Panaderia Adonai, 311 S. Jackson Ave., Russellville, 98.
- Panda Buffet, 14633 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 94.
- Papa John's Pizza, 14520 Hwy. 43, Ste. 1, Russellville, 99.
- Piggly Wiggly Deli, 518 4th Ave. SW, Red Bay, 97.
- Piggly Wiggly Market, 518 4th Ave. SW, Red Bay, 94.
- Pistols Flaming Grill (Commissary), 706 8th St. SW, Red Bay, 99.
- Pizza Hut, 13450 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 99.
- Pollo Lo-Quillo, 115 Franklin St., Russellville, 91.
- Red Bay Hospital, 211 Hospital Road, Red Bay, 99.
- Red Bay Tiger Mart, Inc., 211 4th Ave. SW, Red Bay, 95.
- Red Bay Tobacco Mart, 908 4th St. NW, Red Bay, 95.
- Russellville Elementary School, 133 Chucky Mullins Drive, Russellville, 99.
- Smoke and Batter, 13670 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 93.
- Subway, 504 4th St. SW, Red Bay, 99.
- Subway #24292, 15300 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 99.
- Subway 37464, 13675 Hwy. 43 inside Walmart, Russellville, 96.
- Taco Bell, 13831 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 98.
- The Grind Cafe, 13760 Hwy. 43, Ste. 1, Russellville, 97.
- Waffle House #2186, 14005 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 93.
- Walmart #403 Deli, 13675 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 98.
- Walmart #403 Market, 13675 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 99.
- Walmart #403 Bakery, 13675 Hwy. 43, Russellville, 98.
- Wendy's of Russellville, 13679 Hwy. 43 South, Russellville, 98.

Health ratings are available at www.foodscores.state.al.us and may be viewed by city or county.



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Full November SNAP Benefits Being Released

Submitted

MONTGOMERY, Ala. – The Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) received notification this morning from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) that the federal government has reopened and that, “State agencies must take immediate steps to ensure households receive their full November allotments promptly.”

“It is about time Congress did their job to reopen the federal government. In Alabama, SNAP recipients were some of the most impacted during the shutdown period, and I am pleased that DHR will work to quickly provide normal, full benefits,” said Governor Kay Ivey. “Our state government in Alabama, as well as our local governments, do not operate in such a reckless way, and I hope Congress has learned from their failure to meet their responsibility to the people across the country.”

Today, DHR is transmitting the necessary files to the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card vendor to begin placing allotments on cards of clients whose regular issuance date has passed and to November approved applicants. Benefits should be available today after processing of the files is completed, provided there are no unforeseen problems. Recipients whose issuance date is November 14 or later should receive benefits on their regular issuance day of the month.

“DHR is thrilled to be able to provide full benefits to SNAP recipients and help get food on the table for these Alabama families, especially in time to prepare for the upcoming holidays. The DHR SNAP team began processing files shortly after receiving the FNS notification; as a matter of fact, some clients should already see benefits on their cards,” Commissioner Nancy Buckner said. “I am especially thankful to all the persons and entities that donated food and money to the many organizations across our state that stepped up to distribute food during this difficult time.”

DHR encourages those who are wanting to apply for SNAP to continue doing so and reach out to their local county DHR office with questions.

This serves as notice as required under 7 CFR 273.12(e)(1) that the suspension of clients’ benefits has been lifted as required by USDA/FNS memo dated November 13, 2025



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The Vina Lady Red Devils' varsity basketball team captured the Vina Veterans Day Tournament championship with a win over Class 3A Oakman last week. (Courtesy photo)



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