

PA EdVentures



September's EdVentures: PA Blue Ribbon Schools, PennDOT Innovations Challenge, & More!

This September, as we began welcoming learners back into classrooms and encouraging all Pennsylvanians to sign up for a library card, we also highlighted the importance of [**both school bus safety and the current need for school bus drivers in the Commonwealth**](#). Acting Secretary Rowe drove a school bus while meeting with community members to discuss the critical role bus drivers play in education.

As we approach Digital Citizenship Week this October 20-24, we are encouraging all individuals to utilize the resources we've put together in our [**Information & Media Literacy toolkit**](#), which will better equip learners to thrive in an increasingly digital and media-saturated environment.



From the Secretary's Desk

As we settle into the 2025–2026 school year, I'm excited to share a few moments and milestones the Department has been celebrating and tell you about some of the work ahead.

- Over the past month, the Department joined in supporting [**Library Card Sign-Up Month**](#), which served as a reminder that our libraries are not just repositories of books, but vibrant community hubs, discovery centers, and safe spaces for learners of all ages.
- September was also Better Breakfast Month, which culminated in the [**Governor's School Breakfast Challenge celebration**](#). Through this initiative, championed by the Shapiro Administration, we are working to guarantee that all 1.7 million students in Pennsylvania have access to a free, nutritious breakfast each morning.

- I'm especially proud to share that in September we also recognized the inaugural class of 2025 Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Schools, honoring 13 schools across the Commonwealth for exemplary performance and closing achievement gaps. This recognition reflects the hard work of the entire school community and shines a light on the environments where learners are challenged, supported, and inspired to succeed.
- This October, we look forward to continuing our support for nationally observed themes like National School Bus Safety Week (Oct. 20–24). Last month, [I visited Rohrer Bus in Duncannon](#) to thank drivers for the critical daily work they do and to underscore the importance of safety and awareness when driving near buses and in school zones.
- We also look forward to joining schools in marking Digital Citizenship Week (Oct. 20–24), a time for educators to continue helping students build the knowledge and skills needed to use digital devices safely, ethically, and effectively. In today's world, this work is essential in teaching learners to think critically, engage responsibly, and develop social and emotional skills that extend into the digital sphere.
- Finally, during U.S. Media Literacy Week (Oct. 27–31), the Department will highlight the importance of critical thinking, responsible media consumption, and informed participation in civic life. As part of this work, we encourage educators to explore the Department's Information and Media Literacy Toolkit, which provides classroom-ready resources to strengthen students' ability to analyze and question the media they encounter. The toolkit is set up to support critical thinking and to enable learners to be more effective and responsible consumers and creators of information.

Thank you for all you do to uplift learners across Pennsylvania. I hope the new school year has energized you with fresh ideas and renewed purpose. The Department is here to support you, celebrate your successes, and partner with you in making this a year of strong outcomes for every student.



2025 Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Schools

Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Schools Announced

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) is proud to announce and celebrate the inaugural [2025 Pennsylvania Blue Ribbon Schools](#). Although the U.S. Department of Education recently terminated the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, the Pennsylvania Department of Education is celebrating thirteen schools for their recognition as an Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing School or Exemplary High Performing School.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education will recognize these schools at the annual PDE SAS Conference on December 9, 2025, in Hershey, PA.

The following schools were named Blue Ribbon Schools:

- Avona Elementary School, Wilson Area SD, Northampton County
- Charleroi Area Elementary Center, Charleroi Area SD, Washington County

- Hartman Intermediate School, Ellwood City Area SD, Lawrence County
- Highland Elementary School, Ephrata Area SD, Lancaster County
- James Burd Elementary School, Shippensburg Area SD, Cumberland County
- Lakeside Elementary School, Wayne Highlands SD, Wayne County
- Lionville Elementary School, Downingtown Area SD, Chester County
- Main Street Elementary School, Titusville Area SD, Venango County
- Parkside Elementary School, Penn-Delco SD, Delaware County
- Richland High School, Richland SD, Cambria County
- Saint Elizabeth Parish School, Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Chester County
- Southmoreland Middle School, Southmoreland SD, Westmoreland County
- Wrightsville Elementary School, Eastern York SD, York County



September 17 Celebrated Constitution Day

On September 17, we celebrated Constitution Day, which commemorates the signing of the US Constitution in Philadelphia on September 17, 1787. However, discussions about this important facet of US History can take place year-round, both in and out of the classroom. Check out the following highlights for guidance on supporting discussions and activities related to civics, history, and the Constitution.

- [**Center for Civic Education: Constitution Day**](#): Features a comprehensive collection of lesson plans, primary documents, and multimedia resources. Highlights include:
 - *The Constitution EXPLAINED* video series
 - Biographies of the Framers
 - Grade-level lesson plans
 - Primary documents & analysis tools
- [**Federal Depository Library Program: Constitution Day**](#): Offers lesson ideas, educational materials, and guides to help educators teach about the Constitution.
- [**Library of Congress Classroom Materials**](#): Features classroom-ready materials and professional development to help teachers effectively use primary sources from the Library's vast digital collections.
- [**National Archives: America's Founding Documents**](#): Provides access to original founding documents, including the Constitution, with background information and teaching resources.
- [**National Constitution Center: Constitution Day Resources**](#): Offers lesson plans, activities, and interactive resources for students of all grade levels.
- [**POWER Library**](#): Provides primary sources and educational materials, including resources like *Introduction to U.S. History: The American Revolution*, available statewide for Pennsylvania schools and libraries.
- [**Supreme Court of Pennsylvania Historical Commission**](#): Provides a deep dive into Pennsylvania's judicial history. Includes landmark decisions, gallery of photographs and paintings, profiles of past and current Justices, courtroom information, and ceremonies. A great resource for connecting Constitution Day to state judicial heritage and the real-world impact of constitutional law in Pennsylvania.

Field Trip Opportunity at the First Frontier Circuit Rodeo

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture is inviting school districts and students to the First Frontier Circuit Rodeo. This student-friendly performance connects education themes with agriculture, history, teamwork,

sportsmanship, and Pennsylvania heritage.

This event will be held on **Friday, January 16, 2026** at 11:00am at the New Holland Arena at the PA Farm Show Complex. For more information, please review the [**First Frontier Circuit Rodeo flyer**](#) or contact Brandy O'Neil at tickets@firstfrontiercircuit.com.

First Frontier Circuit Rodeo Flyer



PennDOT Announces Annual Innovations Challenge

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) announced its ninth annual [**Innovations Challenge**](#), which encourages students to use their problem-solving, creative and strategic-thinking abilities to solve real-world transportation challenges in a competition among their peers. The Innovations Challenge is open to all students in grades 9-12, regardless of their school's learning model.

For this year's challenge, students are asked to develop a concept for the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in work zones to dramatically improve safety for work crews and road users. The concept must outline how PennDOT can use smarter systems to prevent crashes and protect those who are working to build a better Pennsylvania. The concept should also take into consideration cost-benefit information, statewide deployment implications, as well as public outreach.

For complete Innovations Challenge details, visit www.penndot.pa.gov/innovation and click on the PennDOT Innovations Challenge link. The submission deadline is **January 30, 2026**.

Please share this information with all faculty members and encourage all eligible students within your school to participate.

For questions or more information, email PennDOT's Bureau of Strategic Business Operations at DOTInnovations@pa.gov.

Essay Submissions Now Open for 2026 National Civics Bee® in Pennsylvania

The application period is now open for middle school students to begin submitting essays for the [**2026 National Civics Bee® Pennsylvania State Finals**](#). Additionally, Pennsylvania Lieutenant Governor Austin Davis and PA Chamber Foundation President Luke Bernstein will again serve as competition co-chairs.

Students in grades 6-8 are now able to submit their entries using the prompt, ***"How can you make a difference in your community?"*** Entry is free and open to public, private, charter, and homeschool students.

Essays must be submitted online by **February 3, 2026**. For more information about this national program, please visit the [**National Civics Bee Essay Contest website**](#).



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