

YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



Student Handbook
2025 - 2026

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*"A character is a person's most valuable possession."
— Epictetus*

-Notes-

About Our Logo



Honorem Super Omnia— Honor Above All

Red - “the warm active color; suggesting passionate devotion, divine love; self—sacrifice; heroism and valor”

White - “spiritual achievement”

Blue - “the cool contemplative color echoing the light of heaven; symbolic of divine wisdom, profound meditation; enduring loyalty, eternity”

The **Gold Star** represents our reverent respect for the Medal of Honor and those who have earned it

Logo inspired by: Charles Connick

The Honor Code

Honorem Super Omnia— Honor Above All

7 Core Behaviors for Honorable Leadership

1. Tell the truth, even when it's difficult.

Avoid duplicity and deceitful behavior.

2. Treat others with dignity and respect.

Take the lead and show value to others.

3. Keep your word and your commitments.

Ask for relief sooner than later if necessary.

4. Be ethical.

Operate within the laws of the land, the guidelines of your profession, and the policies of your employer.

5. Act responsibly; do your duty and be accountable.

Own your mistakes, and work to do better in the future.

6. Live your values.

Be faithful to your spiritual core, your conscience, and your deepest intuitions.

7. BE COURAGEOUS.

Courage is at the core of all honorable behavior. Without it, doubts and fears will take you out.

The Youth Leadership Development Program

Program History and Introduction

Purpose:

The Youth Leadership Development Program (YLDP) offers a unique leadership experience for high school juniors and seniors. Unlike programs focused solely on academic achievement, YLDP selects students based on their demonstrated character, reflecting the program's core belief that character is the foundation of effective leadership.

History:

The story of the YLDP begins in September 2008, born from the vision of Dr. Kevin P. Walsh, a respected educator, noted speaker, and author of four books on character education. Dr. Walsh sought to create a program that would instill strong character values in high school students. The program launched with seven high school partners, each nominating ten students to participate.

A pivotal moment arrived in November of that year when Lawson State Community College and Jefferson State Community College joined as the first YLDP College/Operating Partners. These institutions provided not only volunteer leaders and student coordinators but also, through the commitment of Presidents Perry Ward of Lawson State and Judy Merritt of Jefferson State, groundbreaking Presidential Scholarships for YLDP students who exemplified exceptional character. This recognition of character as a vital attribute for future leaders set a powerful precedent.

The YLDP continued to expand its reach, welcoming Wallace State Community College, Hanceville, as an Operating Partner in 2013 under the leadership of President Vickie Karolewics. This addition extended the program's influence to three new counties and brought further personnel and scholarship opportunities.

By this point, the YLDP had grown to include 95 High School Partners, three College-Operating Partners (Lawson State, Wallace State, and Jefferson State), and twenty-five College Partners, collectively offering nearly \$2 million in scholarships for students of character. In its first 14 years, the YLDP proudly awarded \$10 million in scholarships, a testament to its impact. In 2022–2023, Calhoun Community College became the YLDP's fourth College Operating Partner under President Jimmy Hodges and Vice President Patricia Wilson, adding three counties and 20 new High School Partners, for a total of 115.

The YLDP continued to evolve, adding three additional chapters – Chilton, Jacksonville, and Marshall – in 2024-2025. Looking ahead to the 2025-2026 year, the program will welcome four more chapters: Shelby, Montgomery, Pike, and Tuscaloosa, bringing its statewide total of operating chapters to 13 and further extending its commitment to developing young leaders of character.

The YLDP Experience:

The YLDP curriculum, instructional process, and activities are built upon the Three Pillars: Faith, Character, and Patriotism. The program extends beyond monthly lessons and discussions to encompass the entire YLDP experience.

- **Faith:** Faith is emphasized in every meeting and activity, beginning with a group prayer that acknowledges a higher power and fosters a sense of community. The annual January meeting, held at the historic 16th Street Baptist Church, features speaker Liz Huntley, author of "More Than A Bird," who shares her inspirational story of faith.
- **Character:** Character is central to the YLDP. Students are selected for their demonstrated character and understand that YLDP success can lead to character-based scholarships from College Partners. The program explores the meaning of character through "universal morals" and "essential morals," which are reinforced in all YLDP lessons, activities, and service projects.
- **Patriotism:** Patriotism is woven throughout the YLDP experience. Meetings begin with the Pledge of Allegiance, led by a student. The National Anthem is played when appropriate, with traditional participation and respect. The Pillar of Patriotism is emphasized during the first quarter, with students assigned to "Companies" named after Medal of Honor recipients. October assignments focus on patriotism, the Medal of Honor, and Veterans. The pillar culminates in November with the annual "Walk For Warriors" and the YLDP Patriotism Program.

Description & Process:

The YLDP is designed to develop leadership skills in students selected for their demonstrated character. The program embraces diversity, with students from various backgrounds, and serves as a model for a diverse America.

The nine-month program runs from September to May, with monthly meetings that include a guest speaker, student group lessons on faith, character, and/or patriotism, and group discussions. Students also participate in staff-approved, student-created service projects, focusing on the morals and pillars involved.

College Partners provide scholarships to YLDP students, recognizing the importance of character in leadership. The YLDP encourages students to explore different colleges and arranges College Fairs and campus visits.

The YLDP evaluation process is based on a point system that rewards active participation. In March, qualified students can select up to three colleges for scholarship consideration, with recipients determined by point totals. The YLDP aims to instill responsibility, a strong work ethic, and the rewards of dedication.

Whether or not students receive scholarships, the YLDP provides valuable lessons and experiences, fostering an understanding that freedom requires bravery and that the greatest legacy is one of faith, patriotism, and character. The YLDP seeks to provide every American child with the "social inheritance" of faith, a moral foundation, and a patriotic passion for the United States.

The YLDP encourages students to attend YLDP College Partners because the colleges have demonstrated their support for students of character.

YLDP Administration

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Tips for Success

We are delighted that you will be a part of the YLDP this year, and we look forward to working with you. The YLDP is a Leadership Program, although scholarships are awarded, it is not a scholarship program. Be prepared to grow as a leader, student and citizen through what you will learn. As you prepare for your YLDP journey, here are some tips to keep in mind.

- Establish good habits like arriving early to all events. Do not forget to sign in when you arrive!
- Networking and registration is from 4:00 pm—4:30 pm. The meeting begins at 4:30 p.m.
- Listen attentively to all speakers. Listen actively by taking notes and DO NOT use your phone!
- Familiarize yourself with the YLDP Honor Code and commit to following it.
- Review the YLDP's absence policy and be sure to adhere to procedures for having an absence excused.
- Participate in as many extra activities - such as YLDP Service Projects - as possible.
- Study the YLDP's point system and think about how you can achieve the most points possible.
- Remember: If you want to earn a scholarship, the time to think about points is now!

Stay Connected

Email

Used often as a base of communication changes, therefore, you should check your email often. Also, provide any email changes to your Director. Do not use your school email for contact.

Website

Find all forms and information at www.yldp.us

YLDP APP

YLDP APPLE APP - Download YLDP APP for iPhone and iPad

YLDP Android App - Download YLDP App at Google Play for phone and tablet

***Being a member of the YLDP is a rare privilege. Prepare to enjoy every moment.
Take advantage of what is before you and have fun.***

WWW.YLDP.US

Scholarship Requirements

To be eligible for a YLDP diploma and scholarship, please note the following criteria:

- **Meeting Attendance:** Students must attend a minimum of six-monthly meetings to qualify for a scholarship.
- **Point Requirement:** A minimum of 75 points must be earned by March 1, 2026, to apply for a diploma and scholarship.
- **Eligibility:**
 - Juniors in the 2025-2026 year will be eligible to receive diplomas signifying completion of the YLDP program.
 - Seniors will be eligible to receive diplomas and apply for scholarships.
- **Scholarship Considerations:** Scholarship decisions are based on:
 - Total points accumulated
 - College preference
 - Academic requirements (if applicable)
 - Letters of recommendation
- **Scholarship Awarding:** Scholarships will be awarded at the graduation ceremony in May 2026.
- **Further Details:** The details of scholarship considerations will be explained further at the January meeting.

Excused Absence Policy

- **Absence Credit:** No homework credit will be given for missed meetings.
- **Excused Absence:** YLDP allows one excused absence for school-related commitments, provided it is properly documented.
- **Points for Excused Absence:** Students will receive 10 points for one properly documented excused absence.
- **Documentation:** Documentation from a school official verifying the dual commitment must be submitted to the Chapter Director *prior* to the absence.
- **Submission:** School officials should submit the documentation directly to the Chapter Director.

Point Evaluation for Scholarships

Activity	Points
Meeting Participation	
Arriving on time, signing in, and remaining until the meeting ends	10
Completing homework assignments	5
YLDP Office	
Running for a YLDP Office - written speech	5
Running for a YLDP Office - presentation	5
Being selected as a top 2 (two) finalist	3
Serving as a YLDP Officer and fulfilling all responsibilities	5
Serving as Captain – selected at October meeting during breakout sessions	5
Service Projects	
(Submitted to and approved by Chapter Director)	
Walk for Warriors	15
Participating in a YLDP Service Project (max 3 projects, 30 points)	10
OR Creating an approved service project (up to three projects)	5
AND Overseeing a successful project start to finish (Max 45 points)	10
Service projects should be a minimum of three hours and have a minimum of three YLDP participants. Service Projects must be approved by January 30, 2026. Service Projects must be completed prior to February 13, 2026	
Penalties	
Missing a service project that you have signed up for	-6
Service project sign-in sheet not submitted the day after the project	-10

Y L D P Service Projects

YLDP Service Projects: Requirements and Guidelines

Key Dates:

- Project Proposal Deadline: Three weeks prior to project date
- Latest Approval Date: January 30, 2026
- Project Completion Deadline: February 13, 2026

General Requirements:

- Projects must be available to all YLDP students.
- Projects must be a minimum of three (3) hours long and involve at least five (5) YLDP participants.
- Projects must be at a single location; travel between locations is not permitted.
- Projects cannot occur during school hours.
- Projects cannot involve donations or fundraising.
- If doing more than one project, they must differ in location and purpose.
- No card or letter-writing service projects.

Submission Requirements:

- Submit project information to your chapter director.
- Proposals must include all required information. Incomplete proposals will not be approved.
- Project flyers must include the location address, date, time, and your contact information.
- If the location requires a waiver or parent permission form, it must be submitted with your flyer, proposal, and steps. If not needed, state that in the proposal.
- Check-in sheets must be submitted the day after the project to receive project credit.

Projects NOT Approved:

- Projects submitted less than two weeks prior to the project date.
- Projects lacking a proposal.
- Projects lacking a flyer with all required information.
- Projects lacking required waivers or parent permission forms (when applicable).

Other Important Information:

- You are responsible for the ongoing management of your project.
- If your project is cancelled due to bad weather, you will receive five (5) points for developing an approved service project.
- Approved projects will be added to the website. If you do not receive an email confirmation, your project has not been approved, and you should follow up with your chapter director.

Project Creation: If no one registers for your project, you will receive five (5) points for creating the project. If you attend your project, you will receive 10 points, for a total of 15 points. Send an email with a photo of you at the service project to confirm attendance.

Break Out Sessions:

Maximizing Your Learning Experience

To gain the most from the Youth Leadership Development Program (YLDP), active participation in the break-out sessions is essential. These sessions offer a valuable opportunity to apply the knowledge and insights shared by our speakers and special guests to real-world scenarios, fostering a deeper understanding of key leadership principles.

Preparation is key to a successful break-out session. Prior to each session, all required pre-work materials must be accessed on the website. It is crucial to complete all assignments *before* the session, as this preparation will enable you to engage in informed discussions and successfully submit your homework.

During each session, active engagement is expected. Be prepared to discuss the pre-work, share your perspectives, and ask questions. Your participation not only enriches your own learning but also enhances the experience for your fellow YLDP participants. Remember to bring all completed homework for submission and/or discussion during the session. Finally, a key component of the YLDP is cultivating gratitude. At the end of each session, you will be expected to write a thank-you note to at least one speaker or special guest, demonstrating appreciation for their contributions.

By prioritizing preparation, actively participating in discussions, submitting assignments on time, and expressing gratitude, you will maximize the benefits of the YLDP break-out sessions and develop valuable leadership skills that will serve you well in the future.



Running for Office

Each YLDP Chapter will elect four student leaders: a President, a Vice President, a Secretary, and a Public Relations Officer. The responsibilities for each position are outlined below.

President

The President shall preside over all YLDP meetings, leading the Pledge of Allegiance, introducing guest speakers, and making announcements. The President will collaborate closely with program staff to ensure a positive YLDP experience for all students.

Vice President

The Vice President shall assist the President and preside in their absence. This role also involves working closely with program staff to enhance the YLDP experience for all students.

Secretary

The Secretary shall take minutes at all YLDP meetings and distribute them before the next regularly scheduled meeting. The Secretary will assist the President and Vice President and prepare the chapter's Annual Report in collaboration with the other officers while working with program staff to promote a positive YLDP experience.

Public Relations Officer

The Public Relations Officer shall manage communication through photos, social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), and emails to keep members informed about all YLDP activities. They will also publicize upcoming events and share results with the public. This role involves close collaboration with program staff to create a positive YLDP experience for all students.

Procedures

- Submit a completed application online at www.yldp.us by 8:00 PM on November 4, 2025.
- Deliver a speech not exceeding three minutes on November 18, 2025, from 4:30 - 6:30 PM at the chapter location.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Students are NOT to deliver campaign speeches highlighting their leadership qualities or suitability for office. Instead, speeches should focus on the given topic and avoid personal anecdotes or narratives.

Finalists will present their speeches to the entire YLDP chapter during the December meeting.

YLDP Scholarships

The scholarship opportunities are offered through our College partners.

Wallace State Community College
Calhoun Community College
Jefferson State Community College
Auburn University
The University of Alabama
The University of Alabama in Huntsville
Troy University
The University of Alabama at Birmingham
Jacksonville State University
Gadsden State Community College
Huntingdon College
The University of Montevallo
Samford University
Snead State Community College
Alabama A&M University
Alabama State University
Auburn University at Montgomery
Bevill State Community College
Lawson State Community College
Drake State Community College
The University of North Alabama
The University of South Alabama
The University of West Alabama
Marion Military Institute
Miles College
Tuskegee University
Shelton State Community College
Faulkner University