

# Dramatic words

Top spellers gird for Thursday's Cloverleaf

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HP Correspondent

**BENTON TOWNSHIP** — Fifty-two students from Berrien and Van Buren counties will duel Thursday in the Cloverleaf Spelling Bee for a shot at competing for national honors this spring in Washington, D.C.

Getting there will require contestants to call on all their vocabulary knowledge — and some steady nerves, said Berrien Regional Education Service Agency's student activities coordinator, Tonya Snyder.

"There's a couple of things I love about the bee: One is it's a celebration of an academic achievement," Snyder said. "Some of the great things that they (competitors) learn are public speaking and public presentation skills ... how to rise above, and find that calm, do something that is kind of a lost art, really, in these

days of spellcheck."

The event gives Synder — who's in her seventh year of managing the bee — a chance to connect with students on a different level, too.

"My favorite part is, year after year, I get some kids that have participated since they were fourth graders. I love seeing how they grow, and every 365 days, we get to see each other," Snyder said. "It's really awesome watching them mature as young adults."

This year's Cloverleaf competition begins at 8:30 a.m. in the Grand Upton Hall at Lake Michigan College, 2755 E. Napier Ave.

In case of bad weather, the spelling bee will be Friday, Snyder said. Berrien RESA will post any cancellation information on its website at [www.berrienresa.org](http://www.berrienresa.org) on the morning of the event.

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## CLOVERLEAF

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Each participating district's top students in school competitions earned the right to take the stage Thursday.

"All 52 spellers will be on the stage, and as they misspell a word, they will exit the stage," Snyder said. "One round is just a practice round for everybody to get the jitters out. After that round, we have seven more rounds of words that students will be familiar with."

Once the seventh round ends, the remaining spellers will take a vocabulary test. A score of 90 percent or higher is required for students to retake the stage and finish the bee, Snyder said.

The last two competitors will continue until one misspells a word. To win, the other contestant must spell that word, plus one more given by the judges.

Students will vie for numerous cash prizes, with the top one being paid admission to the Scripps Howard National Spelling Bee, which is on May

24-26 in the Washington, D.C., area.

All participants receive a "swag bag," while a variety of prizes await the top 20 finishers.

"Any prizes provided are 100 percent buyer-sponsored, and we're so grateful for that - and I love that we're able to at least reward our top 20 spellers with some kind of gift from our sponsors, in addition to the swag bag each contestant gets," Snyder said. "It's a nice way to reward them (for their effort)."

Berrien County schools participating in Thursday's contest include: Berrien Springs Middle School, Brandywine Elementary and Middle schools, Brown Elementary School, Buchanan Middle School, Christ Lutheran School, Grace Christian School, Lake Michigan Catholic Middle School, Lakeshore Lifelong Learners, Lakeshore Middle School, Lincoln Elementary, New Buffalo Middle School, Niles Extended School Community, Ring Lardner Middle School, Trinity Lutheran, Berrien

Springs, and Upton Middle School.

Van Buren County participants include Bangor and Lawton middle schools.

The event is sponsored by the Berrien Community Foundation, Cook Nuclear Plant/AEP, Berrien Regional Education Service

Agency and Lake Michigan College/Mendel Center.

Co-sponsors include The Herald-Palladium, Honor Credit Union, Hexco Academic, Pizza Hut of Michigan, Jay Sugarman (an individual donor), Merriam-Webster and Encyclopaedia Britannica.

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