

Department of Finance  
State Business Systems  
Division (SBS)

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## From the Project Director's Desk

We are now entering our sixth week of User Acceptance Testing. Although many agencies have been actively testing the software, we have seen very little activity from some agencies. I cannot stress enough how important it is that *all* agencies actively participate in testing STAARS. We understand that for some agencies the chart of accounts and cost accounting procedures have not yet been finalized, but we are doing everything we can to expedite their completion. At the same time, it is critical that you—our agency partners—do all you can to help us complete these two important project activities. I encourage agencies to work closely with their liaisons to complete these and other critical activities as soon as possible.

To ensure the best results from your agency's efforts in testing a new area of STAARS, I recommend that you reserve one of our test labs. We will ensure the test lab is supported by experts from the project team for the area of the software you will be testing. Contact [staars@finance.alabama.gov](mailto:staars@finance.alabama.gov) to reserve time for your agency.

### Reminder: Newsletter Format Change!

After this issue, we will be converting this newsletter from its current format to a series of articles that will be published directly to the STAARS website. Once we make this change, you will no longer receive a monthly newsletter. Instead, we will send an e-mail notification as each individual article is published to the website. We believe this will improve the quality of the information we provide by removing the space limitations of our current format and allowing us to focus more on article content. We will also be able to make articles and information available to you more quickly.

## Experiences from UAT and Implementation



Implementation and User Acceptance Testing are well underway for Track 1 agencies. Knowing this, you may wonder: "How is this going from the agencies' perspective? What will we need to anticipate for Implementation and UAT?" The STAARS team sat down with Amanda Rollan from the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources – Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries to get her thoughts on how things are progressing. Amanda has worked as an accountant for the state of Alabama for over four years.

### April Events

**April 1, 2015 - Executive Steering Committee Meeting**  
(ESC Members Only)

**April 7, 2015 - Change Management Advisory Team Meeting**  
(CMAT Members Only)

**April 17, 2015 - AGA Conference** (Performance Budgeting and Reporting Presentations)

**STAARS** – What is your role as it pertains to Implementation and UAT?

**Amanda** – I am one of the testers for Conservation and will be testing all aspects of Conservation's accounting functions.

**STAARS** – During UAT, what have you learned about STAARS and the testing process?

**Amanda** – STAARS is very user-friendly; however, we found that a few of the test scripts didn't contain the steps to create certain types of documents. Also, I encourage the testers to write down document IDs because each test script tends to build off the previous script.

**STAARS** – Were you aware that the test scripts are being modified to be more useful to the agencies?

**Amanda** – I was not. That will be very helpful to all of us.

**STAARS** – When you begin using STAARS, what is one thing you are looking forward to?

**Amanda** – The ability to track a document through the approval process allows you to see, in real time, all of the changes that have been made to the document. You can see who has (or has not) approved, modified, or rejected your document. You can then contact that person and discuss what occurred and why.

## Experiences from UAT and Implementation (continued from page 1)

**STAARS** – If you could let other state agencies know one thing about UAT, what would it be?

**Amanda** – It is really helpful to get away from your office to do the testing. Reserve one of the UAT classrooms. There are STAARS team members available to guide you and answer your questions. If you limit yourself to testing at your location, you have the distractions of daily work on top of testing and no one is available immediately to provide assistance if you need it.

**STAARS** – Do you have any final thoughts or experiences you would like to share about STAARS, UAT, or implementation?

**Amanda** – You don't have to wait to begin testing. The existing CAS chart of accounts is in the UAT environment. We look forward to when our chart of accounts information is loaded, so we can test charging items out to the program code level.

## Meet the Business Intelligence Competency Center (BICC) Team

The Business Intelligence Competency Center (BICC), a team of six experienced professionals, can best be described as the “STAARS reporting gurus.” One of their key responsibilities is to develop the statewide reports that will be used by all agencies. They also develop and deliver “train-the-trainer” sessions for the agency staff responsible for creating agency-specific reports. The training they provide doesn't end in the classroom—the BICC is also available to help state agencies as they create their reports. On an ongoing basis, the BICC is responsible for developing and maintaining STAARS forms and managing the scheduled processes that take STAARS data, transform it into the format needed for reporting, and load in into the reporting database.

**Let's meet the BICC team members!**



Pictured from left to right: Les Abernathy, Christie Stephens, Rick Pitts, Curtisene Taylor, Lisa Varden, and Melody Hicks.

### *The STAARS BICC team...*

- *Develops the statewide reports*
- *Prepares agency staff for creating the agency-specific reports*
- *Develops and maintains the STAARS forms*
- *Maintains the STAARS reporting data*
- *Supports the STAARS users as they develop and run reports*

**Melody Hicks** is in charge of the BICC team. Melody is a Certified Business Analyst Professional (CBAP) with over 15 years of experience. She joined the project team in May of 2014. Previously, she worked with the Department of Mental Health as a project manager for their data warehouse conversion. Melody has worked with seven different state governments on various projects, primarily involving child support. Melody is married and has 12 dogs and two cats.

**Lisa Varden** joined the BICC team in April 2014. Lisa brings over seven years of experience in business analysis to the team. She has worked as a business analyst for HP's Medicaid contract and as an enterprise architect on Gunter Air Force Base. Lisa holds Bachelor's degrees in Psychology and Applied Computer Science, as well as a Master's degree in Human Resource Management. She is married and has two children.

**Curtisene “Curt” Taylor** has worked for the state of Alabama for over a year. Before joining the STAARS team, she worked in GHRS as a programmer. Curt brings over 35 years of experience as a technology professional to the team. Curt has a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science. She is married and has three children and five grandchildren. She enjoys baking and cake decorating.

## Meet the Business Intelligence Competency Center (BICC) Team (continued from page 2)

**Rick Pitts** has worked for the state of Alabama for 21 years in various programming roles for the Department of Public Health, the Administrative Office of Courts, the Secretary of the State, and the Department of Finance. Rick retired from the United States Air Force as a Master Sergeant after serving 20 years and three days. Rick has been married for 28 years and has two daughters and two grandchildren.

**Christie Stephens** retired from the state of Alabama after 30 years with the Department of Education. She was an accounting manager with a primary focus on budgeting. Christie has been married for 28 years and has three wonderful children. She enjoys spending time at the beach.

**Les Abernathy** has worked for the state of Alabama for 15 years. Les has had various roles in the Department of Revenue, Department of Human Resources, Medicaid and the Department of Finance. In the past six years, Les has worked as a programmer analyst. In his spare time, Les enjoys reading and fighting crime as a sidekick.

### Straight talk from the BICC

We asked members of the BICC what they felt was the most important feature of infoAdvantage (the STAARS reporting solution):

**Les** – The change to infoAdvantage is for the better; it will allow users to get information they need more quickly.

**Christie** – Users can retrieve their specific data for reports without waiting and having to dig through numerous other reports.

**Rick** – The ability for functional users to obtain reports instead of waiting on IT staff to pull them is tremendous. It reduces the time to get a report.

**Curtisene** – It allows the users the ability to be more proactive in data gathering and analysis.

**Lisa** – Ad hoc reporting is a great feature. If users have questions about specific data, they will have the ability to query the data to create their own report instantaneously.

**Melody** – Agencies will have access to data they currently cannot access for reporting. They will have additional control over their information and getting reports created.

## BICC Training

From November 2014 to March 2015, the BICC provided Track 1 agency trainers with instruction on report development using the STAARS reporting solution, infoAdvantage. The training equipped the attendees to take what they learned back to their agencies and train the appropriate staff.

The response to this training has been decidedly enthusiastic. For many, this was their first opportunity to see the STAARS Financial system and experience the reporting power available via infoAdvantage. Trainees expressed excitement not only about the potential for in-depth analysis via ad hoc reporting, but also the flexibility to customize statewide reports to fit their specific agency needs.



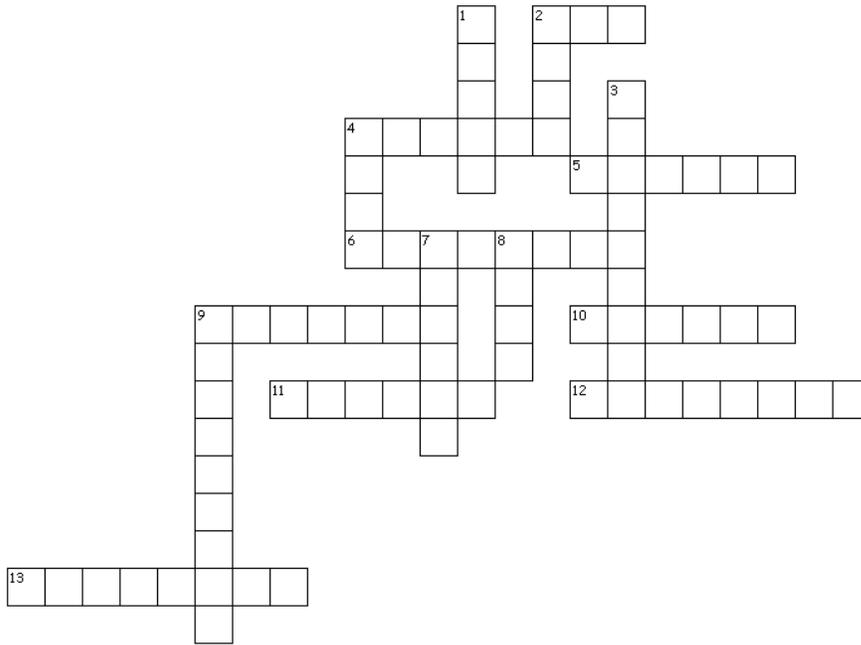
Upon implementation of Track 1, all agencies in Track 1 and Track 3 will access statewide reports through infoAdvantage. (“Statewide” reports are the reports that agencies currently retrieve from the FRMS website.) Prior to Track 1 implementation, STAARS will provide all agencies, regardless of their track, with online training modules that explain how to access and retrieve reports. For Track 3 agencies interested in modifying statewide reports or developing custom reports, the BICC will offer report development training classes in late summer and early fall of 2015. In early summer, we will be reaching out to determine each Track 3 agency’s interest in these sessions. We look forward to providing you with the skills you need to satisfy your agency’s reporting needs.

## March “Word Search” Winner!!!

Congratulations to the winner of the March “Word Search” contest, **Deborah Brazell** from the Dept. of Forensic Sciences! She received a \$20.00 gift card to Subway.

## Crossword Puzzle — Do You Know Your Newsletter Spotlight Subjects?

Using the January through April 2015 STAARS newsletters (archived on the STAARS website), find the first names of 16 people spotlighted. The information in the clues comes from the articles. Copy the completed puzzle into an email, and submit to [staars@finance.alabama.gov](mailto:staars@finance.alabama.gov) by **5 PM on April 19**. If you are the lucky winner, you will receive a \$20 gift card to Baumhower's. One entry per person, please. Winner will be chosen at random from all correct entries submitted. Good luck!



**Across**

- 2. Crime fighter
- 4. Likes to RV in her free time
- 5. Audited for Revenue
- 6. Soccer mom
- 9. Promoted to Accounting Manager
- 10. Has a lot of pets!
- 11. Worked for DOT
- 12. Loves the beach
- 13. Recent newlywed

**Down**

- 1. New dad-to-be
- 2. Was business analyst for Medicaid
- 3. Worked for the Comptroller
- 4. Programmer & Air Force veteran
- 7. Enjoys developing websites
- 8. Retired Air Force Master Sergeant
- 9. Cake decorator

### STAARS Project Management Office

- Thomas Nola, Project Director**  
thomas.nola@finance.alabama.gov
- Kathleen Baxter, Administrative Director**  
kathleen.baxter@finance.alabama.gov
- Brian Woika, Technical Director**  
brian.woika@finance.alabama.gov
- Leigh Ann Fletcher, Training Director**  
leighann.fletcher@finance.alabama.gov
- Gary Hood, Support Services Director**  
gary.hood@finance.alabama.gov
- Sonya Bryan, Project Communications Coordinator**  
sonya.bryan@finance.alabama.gov

### STAARS Contact Information

Department of Finance  
 State Business Systems Division (SBS)  
 100 North Union St., Suite 500  
 Montgomery, AL 36130  
 Phone: 334-353-4200  
**website:** [staars.alabama.gov](http://staars.alabama.gov)

**Do you have a question, suggestion, or concern?**  
***We Welcome Your Feedback!***  
[staars@finance.alabama.gov](mailto:staars@finance.alabama.gov)