THE CYBERSENTINEL

The official newsletter of CyberPatriot – AFA's National Youth Cyber Education Program

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CyberPatriot 17 Coach & Mentor of the Year

Congratulations to the CyberPatriot 17 Coach of the Year and the Mentor of the Year! There were many deserving candidates, but these two stood apart for their support and dedication to CyberPatriot.

Coach of the Year | Kavidha Ingole
BSA Troop 261 – Frisco, TX

"CyberPatriot transforms learning into action, asking students to defend systems and solve problems in real-world scenarios, while also giving them skills that last a lifetime such as confidence, teamwork, leadership, and a deeper understanding of cybersecurity. I feel truly honored for the opportunity to coach students as they grow into the next generation of STEM leaders, and I thank Scouts BSA Troop 261 and the Air & Space Forces Association's CyberPatriot program for making this journey possible."

Kavidha introduced CyberPatriot to Troop 261 four years ago, led a team to nationals, and has consistently earned state awards. Her leadership, ethical mentorship, and dedication to youth STEM education make her truly exceptional. Kavidha creatively uses open-source platforms, free labs and hands-on challenges to provide high- quality, zero cost training to the scouts. She adapts content to training- making learning interactive, fun and deeply impactful. Scouts are taught that doing the right thing, especially under pressure, is more important than winning. She consistently weaves cyber ethics, scout ethics and responsible citizenship into her coaching.

Kavidha mentor's multiple teams, coaches and leads free cybersecurity camps and serves as an Eagle advisor - all while working as a cybersecurity professional and raising two scouts of her own. Her time, energy and passion are freely given, week after week, not out of obligation but because she believes deeply in what this program can do for young people. She is focused on building ethical leaders and not just competitors. Due to Kavidha's contributions, she has created a culture of learning, cyber ethics, and leadership in her troop and the community. Congratulations Coach Ingole!

Mentor of the Year | Xinle Yang
Westview High School – Portland, OR

"CyberPatriot opened a big door to the world of cybersecurity for middle school and high school students. Many students from our team were introduced to the fantastic world of cybersecurity and continued their college studies in cybersecurity-related areas. CyberPatriot created a wonderful community where people stay connected far beyond the competition itself. Many CyberPatriot alumni became friends, helping each other years after graduation. Even coaches from other teams, such as Coach Paul and Coach Allen, gave us huge help with coaching, competing, and beyond. CyberPatriot gave us, the coaches and mentors, a big passion beyond our regular routine lives. Many times, the highlights of my week were our cyber meetings. You wouldn't believe the amount of euphoria I felt when we were joking about the pizza toppings during the competition rounds. As for coaching or mentoring style, I don't have a lot of my own. But I will quote what our Coach Pei
said: 'We don't fear failure – only the regret of not trying.' I will also quote what our Mentor Sean said: 'The real learning is in the struggle.' And, of course, I will quote Ted Lasso: 'For me, success is not about wins and losses. It's about helping these young fellas be the best versions of themselves on and off the field.'"

Mentor Xinle Yang empowers students to research, study and share knowledge with peers. He gives clear roles and responsibilities to students and believes there is nothing too small to be improved. Xinle has sacrificed an extensive amount of time to design every club meeting and research the latest topics in cyber. He sets the standard and dreams for the students to succeed and use their cybersecurity capabilities for good.

Xinle has transformed his program by developing a reward system called Turtle Dollar, which systematically encourages students to put rigor and precision into learning. He encouraged students to set up an ESXI server and overcome equipment challenges for low-income student families. His advising does not end with the competition, as Xinle also encourages students to network with other top students and professionals, and get various certifications to further their education. With his dedication, one of his teams became the first ever from Oregon to place at CyberPatriot National Finals.

Mentor Yang 's vision, technical capability and commitment to bringing the best out of every student has surely brought the TitanTurtles team to new heights. Congratulations Mentor Yang!

CyberPatriot 18
CP-18 Registration Dates:

- **October 1 – Team Registration Deadline:** The last day a coach can register a new team to compete in CyberPatriot 18. Teams do not need to have completed any other registration tasks by this date. Directions on how to register teams can be found on the [CyberPatriot website](#) and questions regarding registration can be directed to info@uscyberpatriot.org. *If you are a returning team, you must re-register for the new season. Team registrations do NOT carry over each year.*
- **October 22 – Competitor Registration Deadline:** The last day to register competitors and finalize team rosters.
- **November 5 – Payment Deadline:** The last day to pay the registration fee, request a fee waiver, submit a Purchase Order, or request a payment extension.

CyberPatriot 18 Changes and Clarifications:

Change 2 of the CyberPatriot Rules Book has been published on the website. Changes include USNSCC team competing in the All Service Division (but without guaranteed advancement to the National Finals) and several other clarifications.

Image answers will be released for Rounds 1 & 2 (including the Middle School Introductory Round). This change is meant to foster critical thinking and learning. The goal is to help teams understand the logic behind solutions and not just make a checklist of fixes. Some of the answers released this season can help guide teams to solve more complex problems in later round images. Fixes in the images become more complex as the season advances. Answers that are basic in the early round become more complex in the State Round and Semifinals.

- Round 1 and Round 2 – answers will be available strictly on the Coaches' Dashboard
- State Round and Semifinals – only vulnerability categories will be released

No sharing between teams. Teams cannot share scripts, scoring reports, or how-tos with other teams - even within the same school or organization. This reinforces that CyberPatriot is a team-based competition, and each team must earn its score independently - even if they are from the same school, organization, or have the same coach or mentors. This rule aims to prevent unfair advantages and maintain a level playing field.

CP-18 Competition Requirements:

Cisco Content Training Course Access
- Coaches should use their CyberPatriot-registered email address to access Cisco Training Materials and add competitors, so they have their own access.
- Coach Cisco NetAcad credentials will only work if they match the CyberPatriot volunteer account email

Cisco Competition Course Access
- Each team must have a unique email address
- Emails from previous seasons CAN be used again
- No required format. Choose any format for the email address
  - Tip: Coaches with multiple teams can use Gmail aliases to simplify setup and save time. (you can find more info [online](#))
  - *For example: JonesHS+Dogs1@gmail.com, JonesHS+Dogs2@gmail.com*
- Coaches will need to enter team emails into the Coach Dashboard when instructed

A Cisco NetAcad Challenge email will be released before September 15 with more details.

CP-18 Training Opportunities:

Training Round: September 4 – October 22
The Training Round is a great resource for teams since it comes with answer keys for each image. This is also the best training opportunity for new teams. Scores do not count towards the competition. The CP-18 Training Round will have three practice images: Ubuntu 22, Windows 10, Windows 2019 Server.

Sneak Preview: Coming Soon! September 2025
The Sneak Preview is a practice/test of new software. This is a one day only event – there will be no alternate dates. Scores do not count toward competition. All registered teams may participate. Only Coaches must be registered at the time of the Sneak Peak.

Practice Round: October 6 – October 20
Windows 11, Server 2022 and Mint 21 will be used in the Practice Round. This is also a test of the new CCS software for host computers and networks. It is critical for teams to participate with at least one connecting image to troubleshoot any problems prior to the competition round.

Training Round 2: October 28, 2025 – January 20, 2026
Season 18 will have a second Training Round to allow teams access to practice intermediate level practice images. The training images will have answer keys available.

CyberPatriot Alumni Spotlight

Derek Haber | CyberPatriot XI, XII, XIII

What are you up to now?
I am an Application Security Engineer at O'Neil Digital Solutions, part of Data Analysis Incorporated. I am responsible for monitoring and securing our application source code, host servers, and anything else that touches our applications. This includes performing SAST, DAST, and SCA scans, Penetration Tests, and regular patches of our servers.

How did participating in the CyberPatriot competition influence your plans for your future?
I had an interest in cybersecurity since I was 12 and participating in CyberPatriot helped solidify that desire. CyberPatriot drove home my love of Linux systems and helped my technological understanding branch out from there.

What was the most valuable lesson you learned from CyberPatriot?
One of the best things I learned that translated to the real world and my professional journey was the importance of triaging security issues. Deciding what issues deserve immediate attention, versus what can be done last or even accept the risk. These are situations that every single person will encounter while working professionally, regardless of whether they are in cyber or not.

What is your advice for the next generation of CyberPatriot?
I would tell the next generation to try to understand why you are doing what you are doing. Our biggest downfall as a team was trying to go off a checklist and leaving out details. We didn't understand what we were doing and didn't understand the importance of it either. By our second year we had more success and were able to see improvement due to the stronger understanding.

Fun Fact: I farm and do some cowboy work on the side!

> ***Do you want to be featured in an issue of the CyberSentinel?***
> ***Complete the*** [survey](#) ***and your story could be in the spotlight!***

National Cyber Signing Day 2025 Nominations

Do you know an outstanding high school student committing to a career in cybersecurity?

Submit your nomination now for them to be considered for the 2025 National Cyber Signing Day event, taking place on December 8, 2025, at the NICE K12 Cybersecurity Education Conference in Nashville, TN.

For more information on National Cyber Signing Day, nomination qualifications and the nomination form, visit:
https://www.nationalcybersigningday.org/

2025 CyberCamps Highlights

The final week of the 2025 CyberCamps wrapped up on August 15th. One of the most anticipated aspects of CyberCamps is the competition, where campers are provided with competition images that are similar to the real CyberPatriot competition images. Campers gain points for finding and fixing the vulnerabilities that are built into virtual images and can lose points for making the operating system less secure. For individuals new to CyberPatriot, a Standard CyberCamp provides them with curriculum and competition images that will prepare them to compete in the National Youth Cyber Defense Competition. For individuals that have already competed in the competition, an Advanced CyberCamp can improve their skillset. We can't wait to hear how much everyone has learned this summer!

CyberPatriot in the News

This Alabama Teacher Is Forging the Future of Cybersecurity Education

Extraordinary K-12 educator from the Madison County Career Tech Center in Huntsville, Ala., is being honored as the second-place winner of AFA's 2025 Thompson-Mallett National Teacher of the Year Award. Grice-Dobbins' innovative teaching methodologies are a cornerstone of her success. She developed a full-year cybersecurity curriculum, blending coding, digital literacy, and real-world applications, initially building it from the ground up using the AFA's CyberPatriot competition as a foundation.

CyberPatriot camps inspire next generation of cybersecurity leaders

Over the summer, 230 students from across the CSRA attended the annual CyberPatriot camps hosted by the CSRA Alliance for Fort Gordon and held at the Georgia Cyber Innovation and Training Center at Augusta University.

Two APS MCJROTC Programs Earn Prestigious Recognition

La Cueva High School MCJROTC, led by Gunnery Sgt. Oliver Rodriguez, has averaged 75 cadets each year for the past three years. Cadets have competed in drill competitions, academic bowls, marksmanship contests, CyberPatriot, StellarXplorers and physical fitness challenges in multiple states.

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