



ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS

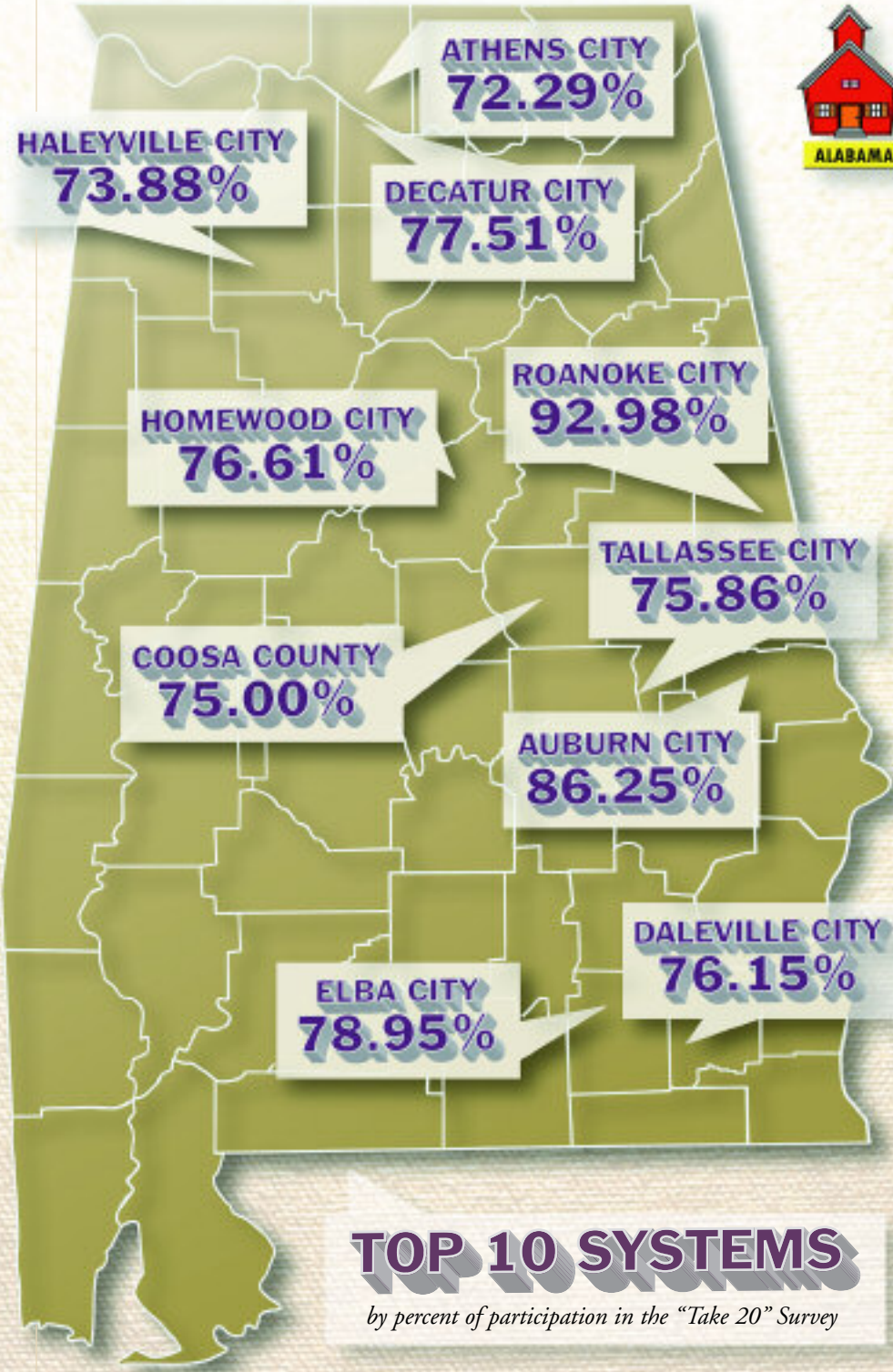
NEWS AND ISSUES IN ALABAMA PUBLIC EDUCATION, K-12

APRIL 2008



ALABAMA TEACHING AND LEARNING CONDITIONS SURVEY

Survey Results Give Insight



TOP 10 SYSTEMS

by percent of participation in the "Take 20" Survey

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS, the voices of Alabama teachers and administrators were heard as tens of thousands of educators participated in the Alabama Teaching and Learning Conditions "Take 20" Survey. The first such survey to ever take place statewide in Alabama drew impressive results as more than 28,400 people went online to voice their opinions about working conditions, teacher support, school environments, leadership concerns and a plethora of others topics facing teachers in Alabama today.

TONY THACKER, project administrator for the Governor's Commission on Quality Teaching, said overall teachers are positive about their working conditions in Alabama schools. He said the fact that almost half of the teachers in the state

continued on next page ...

Among educators who responded to the “Take 20” Survey about teaching conditions:

77% agree that their school is a good place to work and learn

77% believe their school leadership is effective

79% report having sufficient access to instructional materials and resources

84% agree that teachers and staff work in a school environment that is safe

85% agree that school leadership facilitates the use of data to improve student learning

89% want to continue working in their school

(approximately 48%) took the time to complete this survey is an indication of teachers’ commitment to doing their part to improve education.

ERIC HIRSCH, director of special projects at the New Teacher Center, at the University of California at Santa Cruz, is the statistician who chiefly conducted survey evaluation. To his credit, Hirsch is scheduled to conduct similar surveys in Maine, Kansas, West Virginia, Massachusetts, Virginia, North Carolina and Illinois in 2008 – a total of more than 400,000 educators. In a presentation to the Alabama State Board of Education in February, Hirsch

school. “It’s critical,” Thacker said. “When discussing the most important facets that play into a teacher’s decision of whether or not to continue in the teaching profession – leadership is by and large the most important component.”

“There’s a direct correlation between perceived quality of leadership and teacher influence in the school, which highlights our need to really work on distributing leadership in the school,” Thacker said.

He said schools that have distributed leadership are schools in which teachers feel as if they have ample

Professional development, particularly in the area of technology, was also a key factor in teacher satisfaction. The survey reveals most teachers felt they had adequate access, but lacked the training to make optimal use of the technology available to them. A lack of sufficient time to collaborate with other teachers was also of enormous concern.

Of Alabama’s 132 school districts, 88 met the threshold of a response rate of 40% to receive individualized school level data. That totals 959 of the state’s 1,476 schools. Most of the responses, about 505, came from educators who have been in their school six years or less. About a fourth of respondents have been in education for more than 20 years. The following are some of the findings from the Take 20 survey:

ABOUT FEELING TRUSTED AND EMPOWERED

- 63% believe teachers are centrally involved in important educational decision making (and report being engaged in classroom decisions but playing less of a role in school decisions)
- 62% believe the broader community recognizes and respects teachers as professionals

The goal of the Alabama Teaching and Learning Conditions “Take 20 Survey” is to ensure that every Alabama student has a great place to learn from educators with great places to teach.

said the questions in the survey focused on the areas of time, facilities and resources, decision making, professional development and mentoring.

Thacker said of the aforementioned areas, the subject that parallels Alabama’s results with national data the most is how teachers feel about the support they receive from the leadership in their

support and are more likely to stay. The survey, which is totally anonymous, shows teachers want some input in the decisions that directly affect their ability to perform at high levels in their classrooms. Thacker said having a form of shared leadership, “... speaks to the fact that great leaders in school can do *anything* – but they can’t do *everything*.”

Log on to www.Take20Alabama.com to view system and individual school data.

AMSTI Gets New Director and 219 New Schools

- 75% agree that they receive feedback that can help them improve teaching

ABOUT FEELING SUPPORTED

- Most new teachers receiving mentoring (85%) believe it is effective, particularly in providing general support and modeling behavior
- 59% report spending at least one hour per week working with their mentor, providing the most help on addressing classroom behavioral issues, reflection and developing lesson plans
- 63% agree that mentoring has been important in their decision to remain teaching at their school

ABOUT TIME

- Only 36% report having adequate time during the day to collaborate, and 42% say they get sufficient non-instructional time
- About half of teachers report having less than three hours of time in an average week to plan and work with colleagues
- More than half of teachers work, on average, an extra hour per day and more than ten additional days beyond their current contract on professional responsibilities

Concerning teacher mentoring, Thacker said nationally, between 10% and 12.5% of first-year teachers leave the profession. But in Alabama, less than 2% (of the respondents to the mentoring survey) indicated they plan on leaving the teaching profession. The survey was the first of a series to be conducted every other year. According to Hirsch, if the past is an indicator, participation in the "Take 20" Survey can be expected to increase in the coming years. For more information on the results of the survey, [CLICK HERE](#).



THE ALABAMA MATH, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVE (AMSTI), the Alabama Department of Education's initiative to improve math and science teaching statewide, is delivered regionally through partnerships with local universities that house and staff the local AMSTI site. Launched as a pilot program in 2002, it was designed by the Alabama Department of Education using a blue ribbon committee of business leaders, K-12 educators and university representatives.



On March 13, the State Board of Education named **STEVE RICKS** as AMSTI director. Previously the AMSTI state coordinator, Ricks joined the Alabama Department of Education in 1999 and has overseen the development of AMSTI since its inception.

During his 30 years in education as a classroom teacher and an administrator, Ricks co-founded the Alabama State Teacher Forum (ASTA), a state organization devoted to giving teachers a voice in educational policy and currently serves on the Board of Directors for the McWane Science Center in Birmingham. His honors include Alabama State Teacher of the Year, Presidential Awardee for Excellence in Science Teaching, Alabama Teacher Hall of Fame, National Teacher Hall of Fame top five finalist and the Outstanding Alumni Award from the University of Montevallo.



Steve Ricks

From Blount County in north Alabama to Wilcox County in the Black Belt, 219 new elementary, middle and high schools will participate in AMSTI in summer 2008. These schools join 364 previously trained schools as official AMSTI Schools.

Schools must apply to become official AMSTI Schools. The schools' math and science teachers must agree to attend two weeks of training at Summer Institutes for two consecutive summers. In return, they are provided, without cost, all of the math and science equipment and materials needed for hands-on classroom activities. AMSTI sites provide follow-up training and support to the trained teachers in their classrooms as they implement the new teaching methods learned at Summer Institutes.

"Students in AMSTI Schools are making tremendous gains in math, science and reading. In every case, on every standardized test, AMSTI Schools outperform non-AMSTI Schools. AMSTI is now being recognized as a national model for improving math and science education, and plans are in place to expand AMSTI to serve every school in Alabama by 2011," said Ricks.

GOVERNOR BOB RILEY and the Alabama Legislature provided strong support for AMSTI with a statewide appropriation of \$35.5 million for Fiscal Year 2008.

"The best jobs of tomorrow will require a strong foundation in math and science," said Riley. "That's why we must continue to make the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative a top funding priority."

Governor Riley has recommended \$45 million dollars in his budget for Fiscal Year 2009. With the addition of 219 new schools this summer, 40% of all schools in the state will be participating in AMSTI.

For complete list of AMSTI Schools, [CLICK HERE](#).

State Board Member, Education Pioneer Recognized

ALABAMA STATE BOARD OF Education member, DR. ETHEL HALL (District 4), was recently honored by the University of Montevallo's Office of Intercultural Student Affairs at an event dubbed "A Celebration of Diversity." The event commemorated the University's 40th anniversary of integration and specifically recognized Dr. Hall as the first African-American faculty member. Also recognized were the University's first student athlete, Dr. Lonnie Edwards, and Dorothy (Lilly) Turner, one of the three first African-American students.

years. "We are truly blessed to have such an accomplished individual and revered educator on our state board helping to shape education policy in the state of Alabama," Morton said. Dr. Hall has served on the State Board of Education since 1987. In 2004, Dr. Hall was named vice president emerita for the State Board of Education.

Dr. Hall began her career as a high school teacher in Hale and Jefferson Counties. Upon graduation from The University of Alabama, Dr. Hall accepted a position with the University of



State Board Member Dr. Ethel Hall is congratulated by Mrs. Junnie Williams Craig, also a former faculty member of the University of Montevallo.

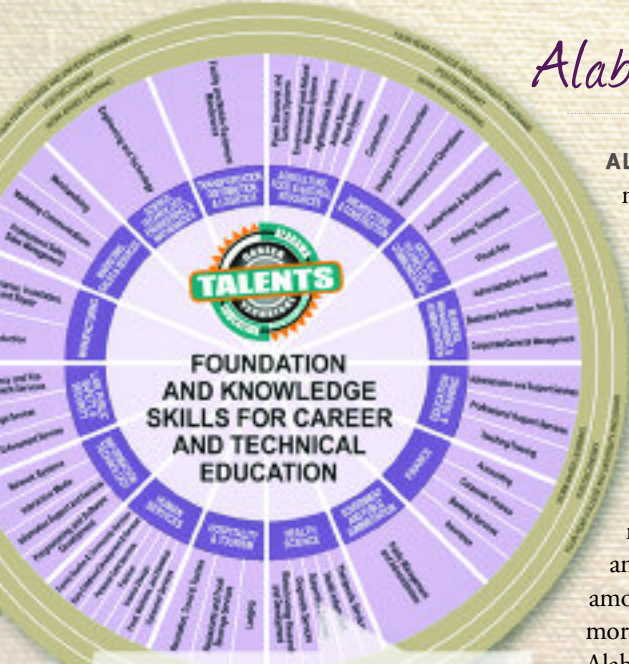
"We always look forward to having Dr. Hall on our campus. Our "Celebration of Diversity" on Feb. 27 would not have been complete without her participation. Dr. Hall was the first African-American faculty member at Montevallo, and we wanted to honor her for her service to UM, to the State of Alabama and far beyond. All of the honorees hold significant places in the 112-year history of this school. Feb. 27 was indeed a day of celebration at Montevallo." - Cynthia Shackelford, University of Montevallo

ALABAMA STATE SUPERINTENDENT JOE MORTON said the acknowledgement of her contribution is warranted as Dr. Hall has been a pioneer in education and an advocate for students for many

Montevallo, where she remained until 1978. In 1979, she was a member of the first group of students to obtain a doctorate degree in Social Work from The University of Alabama. When Dr.

Hall left Montevallo, she went to the University of Alabama to serve as an Associate Professor. She later became Coordinator of Field Education.

The celebration, which took place in the Davis Music Building on the University of Montevallo campus, lasted more than two hours as well-wishers and colleagues of Dr. Hall's poured out to express their appreciation for the significant educational contributions she has made, not only to the University, but to the overall face of education. ●



Career clusters in Alabama's curriculum include courses that identify academic and technical knowledge and skills needed for students to pursue a wide range of career and postsecondary learning opportunities.

Alabama Has A New CTE State Plan!

ALABAMA EDUCATORS, BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS and even the state's four million-plus residents (through statewide public hearings) have worked hard to create a new state plan to lead Alabama's Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs further into the realm of 21st century learning.

The new State Plan for Career and Technical Education provides educators with a sound framework upon which to build strong and innovative programs focused on student achievement. This plan is especially important to the state's local school systems because it provides a rigorous and relevant set of academic standards directly tied to the "Alabama Educational Ruler."

Career-empowered students grow to become productive citizens. According to the National Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE), research shows that many of the country's fastest-growing careers now require the technical, communication and time-management skills taught in America's CTE programs. Research also shows that among high school graduates, those with a technical education background often earn more than those without it. Currently, one out of every two high school students in Alabama participates in a CTE program.

A draft copy of the new State Plan for Career and Technical Education can be found on the Alabama Department of Education Web site (www.alsde.edu). For additional information about Alabama's new State Plan, contact Sherry A. Key, CTE State Director, 334-242-9111, or Bethany Clem, Postsecondary Director of CTE, 334-242-2900. ●

Educators on the Front Line to Detect Child Abuse

APRIL is *Child Abuse Prevention Month*

AS AN EDUCATOR, did you know that you have abused students in your school? Chances are you may have one in your classroom. Research indicates an estimated 896,000 abused or neglected children live in the United States. That means nearly one in every 100 Americans is the victim of abuse, and when reduced to the K-12 age group, those numbers are higher (2002 results based on U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2004 study). In Alabama, more than 19,400 cases of child abuse were reported in 2007, and of those, 3,069 were reported by education personnel.

The *National 1974 Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act* (CAPTA) sets minimum standards for reporting child abuse. The law requires teachers to report suspected child abuse or neglect cases. Failure to do so could result in civil and criminal liability.

“Under Alabama law any person whose profession brings him or her into contact with children on a daily basis is considered a mandatory reporter. Therefore, educators are considered mandatory reporters,” said **SUE ADAMS**, Director of Prevention and Support Services at the Alabama Department of Education.

Do you know what signs to look for? Would you know what to do if a student in your school is a victim of abuse?

Here are a few simple tips to help teachers and administrators detect physical abuse:

- Excessive layers of clothing, even in hot weather
- Abrupt or extreme changes in a child's behavior
- Child states that injury was caused by abuse
- Injury is unusual for the child's age group
- There is a history of previous or recurring injury
- Bruising in an unusual area other than on shins, elbows or knees
- Parents show a lack of concern or blame is placed on a third party

“When teachers, caregivers and other members of the community who work with children, youth and families are made aware of the risk factors leading to abuse and neglect, a healthy, safe and loving environment can be created for children,” said **MARIAN LOFTIN**, Director of the Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Prevention. “The health and well-being of children will be enhanced and the costs of human services, delinquency, criminal justice services and the loss of work productivity in Alabama will be decreased when we adequately fund school-based prevention programs.” ●

ELEMENTARY

District I - **REGINA L. EVERETT**

Saraland Elementary School · Mobile County

District II - **DENISE DARK**

Jeter Primary School · Opelika City

District III - **AMBER L. TRANTHAM**

Alexandria Elementary School · Calhoun County

District IV - **LISA LITTLEJOHN**

Hall-Kent Elementary School · Homewood City

District V - **DORIS B. CURETON**

Albert Turner, Sr., Elementary School · Perry County

District VI - **ANNETTE M. PROTZ**

Cleveland Elementary School · Blount County

District VII - **STEPHANE SINGLETON**

Harlan Elementary School · Florence City

District VIII - **AMANDA H. EVANS**

Columbia Elementary School · Madison City

SECONDARY

District I - **MIRANDA G. HENDRIX**

Cranford H. Burns Middle School · Mobile County

District II - **LORI HOLLAND**

Eufaula High School · Eufaula City

District III - **DEEDEE S. ADAMS**

Oxford High School · Oxford City

District IV - **ROY HUDSON**

Shades Valley High School · Jefferson County

District V - **CHRISTINA V. STEELE**

Prattville High School · Autauga County

District VI - **TIM R. STULL**

Hewitt-Trussville High School · Trussville City

District VII - **DANA BAKER**

Winston County High School · Winston County

District VIII - **LAWANA J. WELT**

Liberty Middle School · Madison City

Making the Cut for Alabama's 2008-2009 Teacher of the Year

ALABAMA'S CURRENT Teacher of the Year (TOY) **PAMELA HARMAN** will soon step down and turn over the reigns to a new teacher to represent the state.

A total of 147 educators submitted applications to be the 2008-2009 Teacher of the Year, and 16 finalists have been selected to continue on in the process. The finalists are nominated from their respective districts and are named district honorees.

From this selection, four finalists will be named. Then, the Teacher of the Year and an Alternate will be announced at a ceremony in Montgomery on May 7th.

Harman said serving as the Alabama TOY has been humbling and challenging. “The experience has allowed me to grow

both professionally and personally as well as experience things that I would have never imagined myself doing,” said Harman. “By far, the most rewarding opportunity afforded to me over this past year was being able to work alongside and mentor a first-year teacher. I marveled as I was able to witness first hand her professional growth. I was recharged by witnessing her genuine enthusiasm for the profession I so dearly love.”

The Alabama State Board of Education and Alabama Department of Education are sponsors of the Teacher of the Year Program.

At left is a list of the 2008-2009 Teacher of the Year finalists. ●



*Pamela Harman
Alabama Teacher of the Year
2007-2008*

Tuscaloosa City School System Wins National Civic Star Award



THE TUSCALOOSA CITY SCHOOL SYSTEM is the 2008 Alabama winner of the National Civic Star Award for its pre-kindergarten program. This award “recognizes school districts that have teamed with local communities to develop and implement innovative programs to advance learning,” according to the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and Sodexo School Services.

SUPERINTENDENT DR. JOYCE LEVEY recently accepted the plaque on behalf of the school system at the AASA Conference and Civic Star Recognition in Tampa, Fla.

“We are thrilled to have been selected as Alabama’s winner for the Civic Star Award and to have received national recognition for our system’s Pre-K efforts. We are so proud of the

The National Civic Star Award program recognizes that the vitality of a community is intricately linked to the success of its schools in educating children to be productive citizens.

cooperative efforts in our community that have led to our successful pre-kindergarten program,” Levey said.

“The dedication of our outstanding Pre-K teachers, and the partnerships with institutions of higher education and the business community were integral parts of our school system being chosen for this award.” Levey said that by deciding to invest in the city’s at-risk children, the Board of Education, city officials and community members had a positive influence in the lives of many four-year-olds and their success in school.

The system’s efforts in Pre-K education have garnered state and national attention. The mission of the program is to offer the best education and health services available for all

academically at-risk children and their families. The program seeks to level the playing field for four-year-olds who are deemed academically at risk in the City of Tuscaloosa. This determination is based on a score below the 50th percentile in either the language or concepts portion of the Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning.

The current Pre-K program builds off its predecessors through partnerships with the United Way, the Alexis de Tocqueville Society, Success by Six, the City of Tuscaloosa and higher education.

The data offers a strong case for just how well Pre-K is working. The 2005 pre- and post-test assessments showed outstanding progress both cognitively and socially in most students. At the beginning of the program, students scored an average percentile of 24. Meanwhile, their average percentile on the post-test was 42. In 2006, the average percentile for four classes was 24; their post-test average percentile was 39. Currently, the program serves more than 300 students in 21 classrooms across the district.

*State Board Member: Sandra Ray
Superintendent: Dr. Joyce Levey*



85-Year-Old Still Helping People Learn to Read

LAURENA POLLARD WATKINS

THIRLKILL retired as a teacher in 1980 but she did not retire from teaching. Thirlkill is a volunteer reading teacher at the Colbert County Youth Center. She also helps adults improve their reading skills.

“I get enjoyment from helping people learn how to read. I’m going to continue doing it as long as I can,” said Thirlkill, who celebrates her 85th birthday Thursday. Thirlkill



Laurena Pollard Watkins Thirlkill

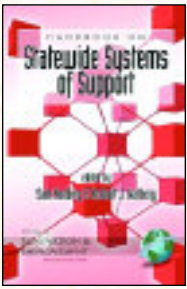
worked more than 30 years as an elementary school teacher in Florence and Sheffield.

“People stop me all the time and tell me that I taught them in first grade,” she said. “After all these years, they say they can still remember things I taught them.” **SHARON WARD**, director of the youth center, said Thirlkill’s enthusiasm for teaching is apparent.

“I can’t say enough good things about her. The children love her and appreciate her,” Ward said. “She teaches them how to read and she teaches them about life.”

“I’m going to stay active as long as I can. My only regret is that I can’t get around very fast anymore,” said Thirlkill, who walks with the aid of a walker. “I could do a lot more if I could get around more.”

Ward said Thirlkill is an amazing person who does many good things for the community. “I just hope I’m still going as strong as she is when I’m 85.”



Alabama's Education Support System Featured in National Book

ALABAMA IS ONE OF FOUR STATES featured in a 2008 book titled *Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support*, released by the Center on Innovation and Improvement. Chapter 7 features 23 pages on the Alabama Department of Education's

Accountability Roundtable (ART) and how it provides a system of support for school systems to impact school improvement and academic success.

The Accountability Roundtable has been so effective that Alabama has been asked to help develop roundtable systems for other states and organizations. The ART has also been profiled in a 2008 national policy brief from the Consortium for School Improvement.

National Advanced Placement Award Winner

OAK MOUNTAIN HIGH SCHOOL (Shelby County) has been selected to receive the 2007-2008 Siemens Award for Advanced Placement, given annually by the Siemens Foundation and the College Board. As one of 50 high schools nationally to win the award this year, Oak Mountain High School will receive a \$1,000 grant to support science and math education.

The Siemens Awards for Advanced Placement are awarded each year to students with the greatest number of scores of "5" on eight AP math and science exams, as well as to teachers and schools based on student participation and performance in Advanced Placement math, science and technology courses.

"In a pool of extremely strong applicants from your state, your school's commitment to providing your students opportunities to explore the AP program and your staff's dedication to student success were evident. We believe high schools like yours represent the best of American education," said **DIANE TSUKAMAKI**, Director of National Recognition and Scholarship Programs for the College Board, in a letter to **OMHS PRINCIPAL JOAN DOYLE**.

"The faculty and staff at Oak Mountain High School are so excited to have received this award. This just confirms our idea that together we can accomplish great things," said Doyle. "We have incredible students with

supportive parents who rise to the high expectations of our AP program each year. All our teachers work collaboratively to create an environment that prepares our students for these classes. Our AP teachers put in many extra hours planning and implementing the AP curriculum. This would not have been possible without their hard work and dedication."

Oak Mountain High School currently offers six math and science AP classes. They include two Calculus courses, AP Physics, AP Environmental Science, AP Biology and AP Chemistry. Additionally, five AP classes in English, Government, Economics, U.S. History, and Studio Art are offered for a total of 11 AP courses.

Established in 1998, the Siemens Awards for Advanced Placement exemplify the strong partnership between the Siemens Foundation and the College Board to expand and strengthen the pool of math, science and technology talent in the United States.

Other schools in Alabama to recently be recognized with the prestigious award include Virgil I. Grissom High School in Huntsville for 2006-2007 and Vestavia Hills High School in Vestavia Hills for 2005-2006.

*State Board Member: David F. Byers
Superintendent: Mr. Randy Fuller
Principal: Mrs. Joan Doyle*

Awards, Opportunities and Professional Development

FREE! Picturing America is designed to promote the study, teaching and understanding of American history and culture. For more information, [CLICK HERE](#).

DEADLINE: Apr. 15

Alfa Teacher of the Month honors outstanding K-12 public school teachers. [Application instructions and eligibility criteria are available online](#), or contact Ann Starks at astarks@alsde.edu or (334) 242-9700. **DEADLINE: Apr. 16**

The fifth annual **2008 Preserve America History Teacher of the Year** (Grades 7-12) is sponsored by the **Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History**. [CLICK HERE](#). **DEADLINE: Apr. 18**

ING Unsung Heroes Awards Program. More information and the application are [available online](#). **DEADLINE: Apr. 30**

22nd Annual Human Anatomy and Physiology Society (HAPS) Conference, May 24-29, LSU Health Sciences Center, and The Westin New Orleans at Canal Place in New Orleans. [CLICK HERE for details and information](#). **DEADLINE: Apr. 30**

2008 Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST). Nominate K-6 math and science teachers by [CLICKING HERE](#). **DEADLINE: May 1**

School Leadership Grant Program [CLICK HERE](#) for details. **DEADLINE: May 2**

2008 Toyota International Teacher Program to the Galapagos Islands. Apply online [HERE](#). **Deadline: May 9**

U P C O M I N G E V E N T S



A P R I L

**Child Abuse Prevention Month • Mathematics Education Month
Keep America Beautiful Month**

April 10 - Alabama State Board of Education Meeting
April 13-29 - National Library Week
**April 24 - Alabama State Board of Education
Work Session**
April 28 - Confederate Memorial Day (state holiday)

M A Y

Teacher Appreciation Month

May 6 - Teacher Appreciation Day
May 8 - State Board of Education Meeting
May 22 - State Board of Education Work Session
May 26 - National Memorial Day (state holiday)

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Managing Editor
Mitch Edwards

Editor
Michael O. Sibley

Contributing Editors
Ed Crenshaw | Anne P. Graham | Edith Parten

Graphic Artists
Mary Nell Shaw | Charles V. Creel

EDITORIAL OFFICE: 334-242-9950

E-mail comments and story ideas to: aen@alsde.edu

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MARCH BOARD BRIEFS

- ⚡ Resolution approving the Alabama State Plan for Career and Technical Education
- ⚡ Resolutions for adoption of Career and Technical Education and Technology Education Courses of Study
- ⚡ Resolution in Recognition of Dr. Ruth Ash
- ⚡ Approval of Nominees for the Alabama School of Fine Arts Board of Trustees
- ⚡ Recommendation of Steve Ricks as Director of AMSTI

For a complete list of agenda items, visit the Alabama Department of Education's Web site www.alsde.edu under "Board of Ed."

ABOUT ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS

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