



# ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS

NEWS AND ISSUES IN ALABAMA PUBLIC EDUCATION. K-12

FEBRUARY 2009

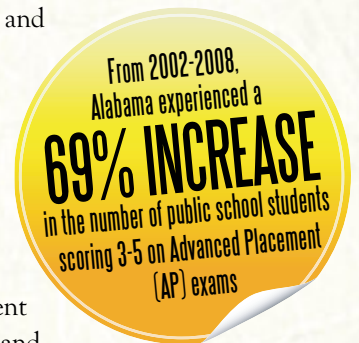


## What's **RIGHT** With Alabama Schools

There is no disputing the fact that education in Alabama is facing very difficult financial times. Yet, despite some of the most turbulent economic conditions in a generation – it is important to not lose sight of what’s working in Alabama classrooms. The gains being made in education today will outlast proration, and may very well help shape the minds that work to avoid financial turmoil years from now. Budget cuts in education are inevitable considering the state’s financial forecast. Still, the price for cutting programs essential to the unprecedented progress Alabama students have been making in recent years is too high to pay. Programs such as the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI); the

Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI); Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators, and Students Statewide (ACCESS); and numerous others are stellar examples of what works in education. More than just the optimistic opinion of education administrators, test scores and objective education assessments show concrete evidence that these programs improve students’ content knowledge and better prepare them for college and the workforce after high school.

STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION **JOE MORTON** said the concept of Alabama students losing ground due to fiscal restraints after showing such marked improvement in recent years is disheartening. Morton said state leaders and education administrators owe it to the students of Alabama to make every effort to invest in what’s important, what’s proven, and



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what will yield future positive returns.

“Programs like ARI and AMSTI are the cornerstone for increasing the quality of education in our schools. Reading comprehension is essential to success in any other area, and we know ARI improves that in students.

The United States Department of Education (USDE) published an entire publication simply called “Alabama” that praised the accomplishments ARI has made in our state,” Morton said. “Not in recent memory has Alabama served as a model for other states to emulate in educational programs. Now we are leading the nation in fourth-grade reading gains. We are seeing improvement never experienced by any other state according to the National Educational Assessment of Progress (NAEP).”

In addition to innovative programs to help teachers teach and students learn more effectively, other programs have been developed to prevent dropouts and keep students in school, assist students that need remediation to ensure graduation, provide financial assistance to those who chose to attend college and pursue the teaching profession, and provide support to those who, after joining the ranks as a teacher, reach further toward professional excellence to become National Board Certified Teachers. Support from the Alabama Legislature is vital for each of these endeavors. The following is a synopsis of just a few of the flagship programs that are so essential to Alabama’s continued progress.



## ARI

ARI continues to be the backbone of much of our educational structure and learning. On the decade anniversary of the ARI, the USDE praised ARI and the federally funded Reading First program for their combined accomplishments. We now have 793 school-based reading coaches and 102 regional support staff in the ARI, working almost exclusively in Grades K-3 statewide. The 2007 fourth-grade NAEP scores confirm that ARI works. But while fourth-grade students made historic gains, eighth-grade scores were flat. Alabama can’t afford not to expand ARI to the upper grades. Students who aren’t taught to comprehend increasingly challenging text eventually drop out of school. That costs Alabama much more money than the cost of expanding the Alabama Reading Initiative.

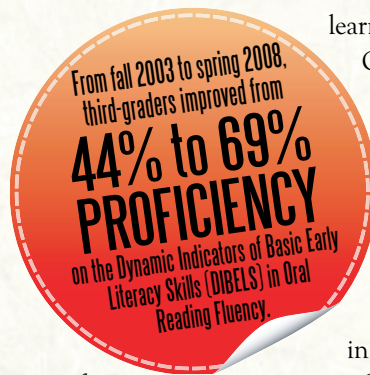
## AMSTI

AMSTI continues to deliver results and positive headlines. AMSTI has been lauded by the National Governors Association, the National Conference of State Legislators, and the National Science Resource Center of the Smithsonian. Most recently, AMSTI was the only state initiative presented as a model for needed reform at Science Generation: A National Imperative hosted by the American Museum of Natural History and Goldman Sachs. The national publication *Education Leadership* states that AMSTI provides substantial evidence that well-formulated and sustained professional development programs for teachers can significantly improve student achievement in science.

Alabama is leading the nation in math and science reform through AMSTI. Steve Ricks, AMSTI director, said on every standardized test given by the State Department of Education, AMSTI schools outperformed non-AMSTI schools – often dramatically. Ricks said, with adequate funding, AMSTI could expand services in all 11 regional sites and raise the number of participating schools from 600 to 900.

## ACCESS Distance Learning

ACCESS Distance Learning was piloted in 24 Alabama high schools in January of 2006. Since its inception, this statewide initiative has provided Alabama students with access to quality instruction and coursework; a statewide technical infrastructure to deliver courses; three regional support centers to hire, train, evaluate, and support e-teachers; and statewide coordination, scheduling, and support for distance learning. It has also provided 21st Century Classrooms containing \$85,000 in technology to each of 318 Alabama high schools. Remaining Alabama high schools will be provided with these classrooms by August of 2009. ACCESS has redesigned the model for distance learning in the state, taking into consideration a broad range of existing local initiatives and other state programs. Focusing on providing students throughout the state with a comprehensive curriculum that includes 21st century skills, ACCESS has been able to help students meet their individualized educational goals by providing them with equal access to foreign language, Advanced Placement, and dual enrollment courses; remediation and supplemental resources; and a number of electives.





## Graduation Coaches

The Alabama Graduation Coach Pilot Program (formerly known as the Dropout Prevention Advisor) was implemented with designated funds in September of 2007 to tackle Alabama's public school dropout crisis and to increase the number of students completing requirements for a high school diploma. In school year 2007-08

continued funding was provided for the selected schools for the continuation of a graduation coach at a reduced rate from the initial and previously funded 2006-07 school year.

However, data gathered during the initial FY 2007 year produced documentation that a graduation coach's role is vital in preparing all students for their high school and postsecondary careers by working to effectively reduce a school's dropout rate and to increase the graduation rate. The graduation coach further develops, sustains, and/or facilitates a comprehensive prevention and intervention program for all students in high school. Graduation coaches were employed by local school systems followed by ongoing training and continuous technical assistance/site visit opportunities provided by the SDE. A significant decrease, as much as 2.5%, in the number of student withdrawals calculated from official student enrollment reports to the SDE was evident from the SDE data collected from August 2007 to February 2008 and compared to previous data collected within the same seven-month period for 2005-2006. In addition, the number of minor discipline referrals decreased

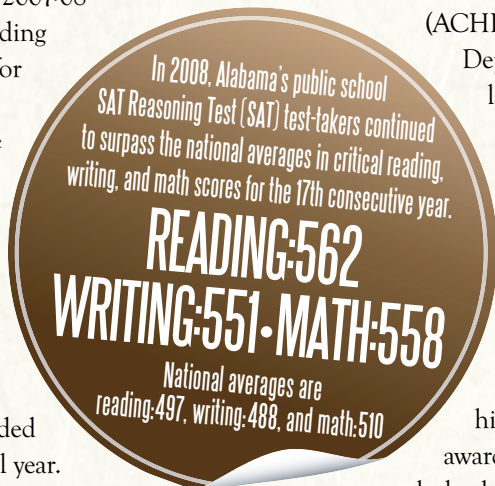
slightly more than 1,000 students for the ninth-grade, and safety offenses (serious discipline offenses) were reduced by as many as 36 offenses for which students are either suspended or expelled in the ninth grade.

## ATRIP

In the winter of 2007-08, the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE) and the State Department of Education launched the Alabama Teacher Recruitment Incentive Program (ATRIP) with more than \$2 million in teaching scholarship funding provided by the Alabama Legislature. This initiative is a huge success with 94 high school seniors being awarded four-year \$20,000 scholarships and 43 additional scholarships being awarded to professionals seeking an alternative degree in teaching at colleges and universities all across the state.

## AYP & Accountability

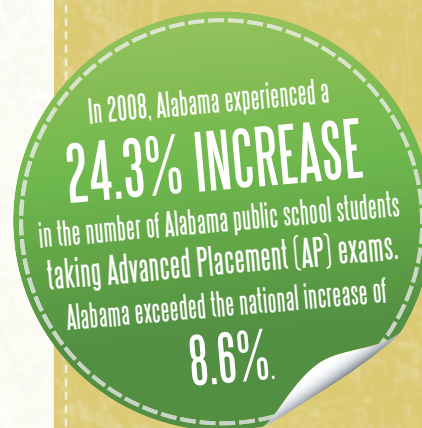
The combined efforts of all the aforementioned programs are paying off. Sustaining the successes we've achieved to date is showing up in our Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status. The *No Child Left Behind* law raises the bar each year. The percent of students who must make AYP goes up every year until we reach 100 percent, so it's not the same bar each year. This year, 1,143 of Alabama's 1,367 schools achieved AYP status. Despite tough criteria 83.61 percent of our schools successfully met 100 percent of their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals. Equally important, the state experienced a 10 percent reduction in the number of schools identified as needing "school improvement" (from 153 to 137).



## National Board for Professional Teaching Standards



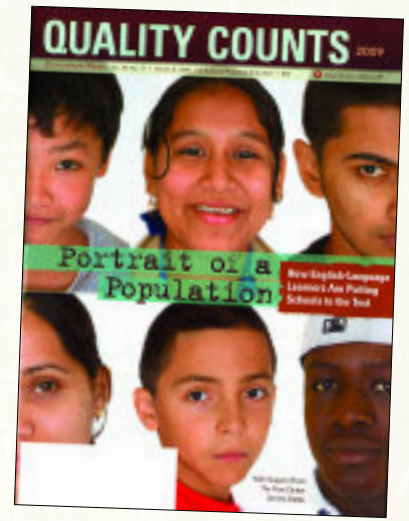
Teaching quality in Alabama classrooms took another leap forward with the addition of the 2008 class of 214 National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs), which brings Alabama's total number of NBCTs to 1,543. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards® announced the newest NBCTs in December. The 2008 class pushes the total number of NBCTs to more than 73,000 nationwide. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards improves teaching and student learning. National Board Certification is a voluntary assessment program designed to develop, recognize, and retain accomplished teachers. In a congressionally mandated study, the National Research Council recently recognized National Board Certification as having a positive impact on student achievement, teacher retention, and professional development. NBCTs are highly accomplished educators who meet high and rigorous standards. ●





# Quality Counts in Alabama

Portrait of a Population: English-Language Learners Are Putting Schools to the Test



EDUCATION WEEK released its 13th annual [Quality Counts report](#) in January. Although Alabama's overall grade did not change from 2008, it does meet the national average.

"I think Alabama's ranking of 'At the National Average' is pretty remarkable considering our state's ranking on funding is below the national average," said STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION JOE MORTON. "That says to me we have some remarkably hard-working people who daily put best practices and student achievement first in their jobs, regardless of the obstacles. It also underscores the need – even in this difficult economy – to maintain our momentum and the strides we've made through ARI (Alabama Reading Initiative), AMSTI (Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative), ACCESS (Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators, and Students Statewide), and other programs,"

"We've added students while funding has been cut 17.5 percent. My hat is off to all associated with ELL in Alabama for helping us maintain the current grades under the financial constraints of today. We are dedicated to teaching all students at high levels through our state initiatives (ARI, AMSTI, ACCESS) that work for ELL students as well as all other students," said Dr. Morton.

Alabama is successfully serving its growing and diverse ELL populations – from Vietnamese and Cambodian students in south Alabama to Hispanic students in north Alabama. Serving Alabama's ELL student population is a focused and collaborative effort with the ARI, AMSTI, ACCESS and other initiatives, and Alabama Public Television (APT).

"Through ARI, reading and language skills acquisition improves for all students – including our English-Language Learners," explained DR. GAYLE DEJONG, State ELL Coordinator, "and because AMSTI's hands-on learning is not dependent on

	Alabama	National Average
Standards, Assessments, and Accountability	A-	B
The Teaching Profession	B-	C
Transitions and Alignment Policies	C+	C

said Dr. Morton.

Alabama scored slightly above or below the national average in almost every category. Plus, Alabama outscored the nation on three of the report's six indicators.

## English-Language Learners (ELLs)

Quality Counts 2009 focuses on English-Language Learners (ELLs) in the nation's schools, highlighting efforts by state and local leaders to address the needs of this diverse and rapidly growing population – 5.1 million ELL students nationwide and over 19,500 in Alabama.

While nationwide ELL enrollment increased by 57 percent between 1995 and 2005, Alabama's ELL enrollment increased more than 200 percent. Yet, Alabama is closing the achievement gap with ELL students, plus those gaps are lower than the rest of the nation. This year's new and unprecedented examination of ELLs shows Alabama's ELL students are near the nation's average in making progress and attaining proficiency and outpace the nation in moving students out of ELL status.

language skills, ELL students can participate with the rest of the class."

## Other Examples of ELL Collaboration

The department's ELL and ACCESS/Technology Initiatives personnel have developed an online professional development course, which is provided FREE to school systems.

In the Boaz City School System, a Migrant Education Even Start Grant benefits students and their families. The grant supports family literacy projects and provides family educational activities. The grant award has helped to ease the overcrowding in the system's English language proficiency classes, as well as expand adult literacy and GED classes, parent education, early childhood education including children with special needs, and interactive parent and child literacy activities.

According to deJong, much of Alabama's ELL population is concentrated in large school systems, such as Shelby and Mobile Counties. Many refugee children in Mobile County have had no opportunity for education in their native country. Overall, local school systems report that the families of their ELL students are very supportive of the schools.

"They believe in education and want their children to succeed," said deJong.

For more information about ELL students and programs in Alabama, [contact Dr. Gayle deJong](#), State ELL Coordinator, at or 334-242-8199.

	Alabama	Nation
ELL students making progress	30.9%	34.4%
ELL students attaining proficiency	15.4%	16.9%
ELL students reclassified out of ELL status	15.4%	12.9%



# National Board Certification is a Family Affair

*Alabama ranks 13th nationwide in the number of new NBCT teachers.*

## DON'T TELL A TEACHER IT CAN'T BE DONE!

As if earning National Board Certification isn't enough of a challenge, four Alabama teachers attempted and achieved the national distinction with their spouses – on the first try, a feat achieved by less than half of teachers nationwide, according to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS).

The two married couples are **STEPHEN AND CHRISTY KEARLEY**, who both teach at Elvin Hill Elementary School in Columbiana (Shelby County School System), and **DAVID AND JENNIFER ALLINDER**, both Jefferson County teachers.



David Allinder is the band director at Shades Valley High School. His wife Jennifer teaches ninth-grade English at Jefferson County International Baccalaureate School.

The NBPTS doesn't keep records on National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) in the same family, but "we do hear about it from time to time," said **JIMMY MINICHELLO**, NBPTS Media Relations Director. Minichello said he's heard of one spouse then the next year the other spouse. One year, there was a married couple plus the mother-in-law. In 2007, a mother and daughter in North Carolina earned national certification together.

National Board Certification is a rigorous and time-consuming process for any teacher, and both couples say they were discouraged from going through it together. The Kearleys feel there were advantages, however. They were able to

"suffer" through it together, joked special education teacher Christy Kearley. The Allinders were not deterred either. Both couples agree there was definitely a large empathy factor going for them, and all four teachers believe it's worth it.

"We sent our materials and held our breath until we got our results," said Stephen Kearley, media specialist at Elvin Hill Elementary. "It's an incredible professional development experience.

You learn a lot about yourself as well as how to be a better teacher."

National Board Certification is a voluntary assessment program designed to develop, recognize, and retain accomplished teachers. For more information, visit the NBPTS Web site



*Alabama's growth rate in the number of NBCT teachers in 2006-08 outpaces the United States by more than 10%.*

[HERE](#), or contact **DR. EDDIE R. JOHNSON**, Deputy State Superintendent of Education, at 334-242-9960. ●

# Taking Action To Stop Dropouts in Alabama

**DID YOU KNOW** that the number one predictor of whether a child will be successful in life is whether he or she graduates from high school? Last year, 5,447 students in Alabama dropped out and significantly increased their chances of being unemployed, earning lower wages, and being a single parent. In an effort to help keep kids in school, Alabama Communities for Education along with the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives will host the Dropout Prevention Summit on **March 5, 2009**, at Embassy Suites Hotel in Montgomery.

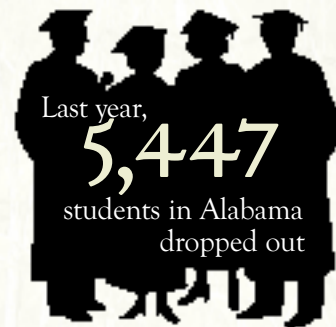
The summit brings together organizations willing to fight the drop-out

crisis and give extra support to at-risk students in schools. Together, faith-based and community groups will work and create action plans to catch Alabama's youth before they drop out. "The goal is to give wrap-around support from the whole



community", says **JENNIFER FAIR**, Community Outreach Coordinator. The summit will showcase the factors that affect the decision to drop out by students and best practices from dropout prevention groups. And the fight to prevent high school dropouts won't stop there. Alabama Communities for Education plans to "follow up in six weeks to provide individualized support," says Fair. They will meet with local and state groups via the Internet by using the capabilities of the State's ACCESS Distance Learning program.

Registration is available online but limited to 500 attendees. To register for the summit, [CLICK HERE](#). A sample agenda, video highlights for the Dropout Prevention Campaign, and a list of the task force are also on the Web site. ●



## Foley Middle School selected as one of only 10 in the nation to take part in innovative **Arts Education Program**

THE JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS, in partnership with Daimler Financial Services, selected Foley Middle School (Baldwin County Schools) as one of only 10 schools across the country for *On Location: Spotlight On Your Community*. The program is designed to allow students the opportunity to tell the story of the arts in their community, which will be shared worldwide on the Internet.

Each of the 10 schools selected will receive a media equipment package, and both students and teachers will be trained in storytelling, filmmaking, editing, and producing video stories. A customized bus was converted to a media studio on wheels and will visit each school for two weeks. A drama artist and media artist will work with the classes in storytelling techniques and media skills.

The teachers and students will work together to create a short video about an artist or arts group in the community. The completed video projects will be uploaded to the [onlocationproject.org](http://onlocationproject.org) Web site maintained by the Kennedy Center and shared around the world.

“We were impressed by the large number of outstanding applicants for the inaugural year of this program,” said DARRELL AYERS, Vice President for Education. “The students at these 10 schools will have a unique opportunity to learn new skills in storytelling and media development. We hope this program will also help students to appreciate the art happening in their own backyards and bring the arts from their community to the nation.”

### EACH SCHOOL WILL RECEIVE:


- A two-week visit by the “On Location” Bus
- Installed Media Lab consisting of a computer, digital editing software, camera(s), sound recording equipment, and accessories valued at approximately \$5,000
- \$1,000 for the school to support the project
- Curriculum materials and support to develop media projects about the arts in the community
- Training for teacher(s) and students on how to use the media equipment and development of storytelling skills by professional teaching artists in drama and media
- Ongoing relationship with the Kennedy Center’s Education Department and the opportunity to work on additional projects with the Kennedy Center through its online program, [ArtsEdge](#)

State Board Member: Mr. Randy McKinney – District 1  
Superintendent: Dr. Faron Hollinger • Principal: Mr. Branton C. Bailey

## AMERICA'S BEST HIGH SCHOOLS

### Loveless Magnet Named One Of The Top 5 Magnet High Schools in America

*A total of 54 Alabama high schools named America’s Best*

*U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT* recently released its second annual list of America’s Best High Schools and lists **LOVELESS MAGNET HIGH SCHOOL** (Montgomery County Schools) as the 25th best high school and the 5th best ‘magnet’ high school in the nation. A total of 54 Alabama public high schools are ranked among  America’s best. Known as one of the nation’s leading sources of news analysis and service journalism, the *U.S. News & World Report* lists Loveless as a Gold Medalist, three Alabama schools as Silver Medalists, and 50 as Bronze Medalists.

#### Alabama’s three Silver Medalists are:

- Mountain Brook High School  
Mountain Brook City Schools
- Vestavia Hills High School  
Vestavia Hills City Schools
- Virgil Grissom High School  
Huntsville City Schools

[CLICK HERE](#) for a total list of schools.

*U.S. News & World Report* analyzed academic and enrollment data from more than 21,000 public high schools in 48 states to find the very best across the country.

- **Gold Medalists** are the top 100 high schools nationwide with the highest college readiness index scores ranked numerically.
- **Silver Medalists** are the next 504 top-performing high schools nationwide based on college readiness index scores.
- **Bronze Medalists** are the next 1,321 high schools nationwide that passed the first two steps.

State Board Member: Mrs. Ella B. Bell – District 5  
Superintendent: Mr. John Dilworth  
Principal: Ms. Mary Elizabeth Norman



# NASA Partners With Alabama Schools To Prepare Students For Out-Of-This-World Careers

**ASTRONAUTS**, in the near future, will be riding to the outer-most-reaches of space in new and highly sophisticated vehicles, such as the Ares I. And one of the most innovative parts of the whole process being used to design this new vehicle is high school students from nine of Alabama's top Career and Technical Education (CTE) engineering programs.

This year, for a fifth consecutive year, NASA is partnering with local school systems from across the state to inspire more students to consider careers in engineering and technology-related fields. Last month, NASA officially announced the list of schools selected to participate in this year's High Schools United with NASA to Create Hardware (HUNCH) project, which is a collaborative effort between NASA's Space Operations and Exploration Systems and Marshall Space Flight Center's Academic Affairs, Training and Crew Operations, and Ares Projects offices.



## SCHOOLS PARTICIPATING IN THE 2009 HUNCH PROGRAM:

- Brewer High School, Somerville
- Huntsville Center for Technology, Huntsville
- Limestone County Career Tech Center, Athens
- Madison County Career Tech Center, Huntsville
- Lincoln County High School, Fayetteville
- Walker County Career Tech Center, Jasper
- Bob Jones High School, Madison
- Brewbaker Technology Magnet High School, Montgomery
- Dothan Technology Center, Dothan
- Hewitt-Trussville High School, Trussville



The primary goal of this year's HUNCH project is for students to assist NASA engineers in designing components for the Ares I's new J-2X engine and upper stage core segments. Each participating school will sponsor teams that will develop computer-aided design (CAD) prototypes for NASA's engineers to use in official Ares design meetings.

To learn more about the HUNCH program, contact Education Specialist for WILL Technology, Inc., supporting the NASA Marshall Space Flight Center (MSFC) Academic Affairs Office, **DR. CHERYL GUILBEAU**, at 256-961-0248 or Alabama CTE Information Specialist, **ED CRENSHAW**, at 334-353-5220.

## Awards, Opportunities, and Professional Development

[Panasonic National School Change Awards](#) recognize schools across America that have "significantly changed." Six winning schools' principals will be guests at National Principals Leadership Institute in July in New York City, and schools will participate in a national research project. **DEADLINE: March 4, 2009**

[Scholar Athlete Milk Mustache of the Year \(SAMMY\) Award](#) provides scholar athletes with an exciting financial assistance opportunity for college scholarships. **DEADLINE: March 6, 2009**

[Alabama Alliance for Arts Education Schools of Distinction in Arts Education Award](#) promotes implementation of a rich arts curriculum in schools throughout the state. The Alabama Alliance is eligible to nominate up to five schools for this year's John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Schools of Distinction in Arts Education Award. Call 334-269-1435 or e-mail [HERE](#). **DEADLINE: March 9, 2009**

[Siemens We Can Change the World Challenge](#) is a middle school (Grades 6-8) science competition for students and teachers to create sustainable, reproducible environmental improvements in their local communities. **DEADLINE: March 15, 2009**

[ING Unsung Heroes®](#) funds innovative classroom projects for full-time educators, teachers, principals, paraprofessionals, or classified staff members with effective projects that improve student learning at an accredited K-12 public or private school. 100 educators receive \$2,000. Three are chosen for the top awards of an additional \$5,000, \$10,000, and \$25,000. **DEADLINE: April 30, 2009**





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JANUARY BOARD BRIEFS

➤ Resolution Recognizing the Barbara Fannin Memorial  
Employee of the Quarter, Hannis Roberts

➤ Resolution in Recognition of Jennifer Lankford  
Dempsey, Wrights Mill Road Elementary School,  
Auburn City Schools, Carnegie Corporation of New  
York/New York Times I Love My Librarian Award

➤ Resolution in Honor of Trina Clark, Speake High  
School, Lawrence County School System, American  
Star of Teaching

➤ Resolution Commending the Madison City School  
System for Receiving the U.S. Department of  
Agriculture HealthierUS School Challenge Gold Award

For a complete list of agenda items, visit the Alabama  
Department of Education's Web site [www.alsde.edu](http://www.alsde.edu)  
under "Board of Ed."

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## F E B R U A R Y

Black History Month / Career and Technical Education Month

Feb. 2-6 - National School Counseling Week

Feb. 8-14 - Child Passenger Safety Awareness Week

Feb. 12 - Alabama State Board of Education Meeting

Feb. 26 - Alabama State Board of Education Work Session

## M A R C H

Arts Education Month / Women's History Month / National Reading Month  
Transition Awareness Month (Students with disabilities transitioning from high school  
into postsecondary)

March 12 - Alabama State Board of Education Meeting

March 26 - Alabama State Board of Education Work Session



### MEMORIAL PARK ELEMENTARY'S MORGAN ALFA TEACHER OF MONTH

It's a prescription for learning from **DR. HOLLY MORGAN**:  
First, get to know your student; and second, empower them  
to be life-long learners.

"Each day, 22 students enter the doors of my third-grade  
classroom. It is my belief that these students have been  
entrusted, from both their parents and the school system, to  
my daily care," says Morgan. "In order to maximize and

customize their learning, I must apply the two ideals of my educational philosophy:  
knowing my students and empowering my students."

It is that philosophy – and how Morgan utilizes it – that earned her recognition  
as Alfa's Teacher of the Month for February. As this month's winner, she will receive  
\$1,000 from Alfa Insurance, and her school – Memorial Park Elementary in Jasper  
– will receive a matching award from the Alabama Farmers Federation.

Morgan, who holds a master's in education and doctor of philosophy degrees  
from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, takes so seriously her quest to truly  
know her students that she surrounds herself with data about them. At the  
beginning of the school year, she takes "interest inventories" from both students and  
parents. These give her a better understanding of the students' reading preferences,  
interests, hobbies and learning styles.

Once she feels she knows her students, Morgan then uses the information to  
shape instruction on a daily basis. For reading instruction, she forms small groups,  
partnerships and literature circles that accommodate students' needs, learning styles  
and reading preferences. For math and science instruction, she utilizes hands-on,  
minds-on instruction with writing incorporated throughout.

"Learning is fun, not work, because learning throughout the day is connected  
with real-life experiences," Morgan says. "Students are empowered to continue  
learning because it is not a chore; it is a daily, exciting quest."

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