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SCHOOL BUS SAFETY BELT STUDY BEGINS



NOVEMBER 20, 2006 will stay etched in the memory of many across the state as one of the most horrific tragedies ever experienced on an Alabama school bus. On that seemingly normal afternoon in Huntsville, the unthinkable occurred when a bus carrying 43 students, lost control and plunged off an overpass onto the road below, killing four and injuring thirty-eight. Only one student was not injured.

Since that fateful day, the question of increased measures of safety on school buses, including safety belts, has been at the center of attention for many school officials. In an effort to look into the use of lap/shoulder belts on a limited number of school buses throughout the state, **GOVERNOR BOB RILEY** formed a seven-member study group of educators and transportation experts.

In November of 2007, a grant of nearly \$316,000 was awarded to The University of Alabama's University Transportation Center to spearhead the research. **JOE LIGHTSEY**, director of pupil transportation for the state department of education and study group member, said The University of Alabama has extensive experience in dealing with motor vehicle safety research which will be an asset to the research.

THIS YEAR, 10 SCHOOL SYSTEMS WILL RECEIVE NEW BUSES EQUIPPED WITH SAFETY BELTS

Beginning this year, the study group will conduct a seat belt pilot study over the next three years. A total of 12 new school buses equipped with safety belts will be distributed among 10 participating schools systems. The University of Alabama will produce an annual report

on the study and will ultimately produce a comprehensive report at the end of the third year. Lightsey said the study is obviously not looking for crash data (the study is not designed around that), but rather around other variables. Overall, the parameters of the study are going to include buckle up rates; parent, student, and driver attitudes on the usage of seat belts; how safety belts affect capacity on buses; and other variables concerning the

continued on next page...



the study, it was important that an outside organization conduct the pilot and present its findings without bias either for or against seat belts. On the subject of whether or not seat belts are needed, Lightsey said the best way to look at the subject is in a very methodical and research-oriented way. He said the Alabama State Department of Education (SDE) position has always

systems in school buses makes it impossible to compare relative safety of seat belts for the two modes of transportation.

“It’s not a question of whether or not the SDE is for or against seatbelts – we’re for whatever is going to make it safer for kids,” Holley said. “If that’s seatbelts – great; if not, we don’t want them on there.” Still, Lightsey and Holley emphasize the safety and durability of Alabama’s existing bus fleet – calling Alabama’s school buses the safest mode of student transportation. “Our position is that school buses are very safe – extremely safe. They’re the safest way to transport kids anywhere,” Lightsey said. “School buses are built for safety. They’re not necessarily built for beauty or comfort. They’re designed for safety from the ground up. The safety features on a school bus create a passive protection. All kids have to do is get on the bus and sit down and they’re safe.” The selection of the 12 buses purchased by the SDE for this study took into consideration previously placed bus orders and even geographical spread across the state.

“We were looking for a good cross section of school systems that would give us the data needed to apply the findings statewide. We picked school systems in numerous different areas of the state from north to south, the wiregrass, the Black Belt, and even city systems and county systems. We tried to balance it out the best we could,” Lightsey said. “But, the primary factor in determining whether a school was selected or not (in most cases) was the school systems that already had school buses on order.” It typically

takes six months to order a bus, so in order to receive the buses for the study sooner, schools that had already ordered buses were considered for selection.

perception and use of safety belts on school buses. In addition, the grant provided aides on 6 of the 12 buses purchased. Part of the study will focus on the effect a second adult or an aide on a bus might have on seat belt usage. “The aide will function just like an aide on any other Alabama school bus. They’re on the bus to monitor student behavior, safety issues, and ensure safety belt usage. Other responsibilities of the aides on these select buses will be determined by The University of Alabama and the local school system,” Lightsey said.

He said the responsibility of the study group is not to make a concrete decision on school bus seat belts, but rather to present findings to the governor. “At this point there are no requirements of the study group to come up with a recommendation at the end of the study as to whether or not Alabama should mandate safety belts,” Lightsey said. He said to maintain objectivity in

been that the introduction of seat belts on Alabama buses must be done in a totally objective manner with the primary focus on safety. **BRAD HOLLEY**, pupil transportation administrator for the SDE, said one thing is certain: the bottom line is providing the safest school buses possible for Alabama’s schoolchildren.

Some might ask, “If seatbelts keep you safer in a car, wouldn’t it make sense that the same is true for school buses?” To this, Lightsey said lighter, smaller school buses that are made like regular passenger vehicles do have seatbelts in them. But comparing these smaller passenger vehicles to a full-size school bus

is fundamentally wrong. He said everything from the weight; high-back, padded seats for compartmentalization; to the fueling, braking, and lighting

“SCHOOL BUSES ARE BUILT FOR SAFETY FROM THE GROUND UP. WHEN KIDS GET ON A SCHOOL BUS AND SIT DOWN, THEY’RE SAFE.”

→ **JOE LIGHTSEY, DIRECTOR OF PUPIL TRANSPORTATION**

There will be no cost to the school systems for the buses used in the study. The state will also pay for the cost of the aides on the buses. The seatbelt-equipped buses will come brand new from the manufacturer. Lightsey said retrofitting older buses is not cost effective and would undermine the structural integrity of the bus. "Retrofitting is something we would not even discuss. We know that would be unsafe and the only way to make it safe would be cost prohibitive," Lightsey said. "It would take \$25,000 or more per bus to retrofit an old bus with new safety belt technology. I also doubt you could find a dealer or manufacturer that would

retrofit and certify an older bus."

Even so, the cost of buying new school buses with seatbelts adds approximately \$12,000 to the \$70,000 currently spent per school bus in Alabama. Lightsey said an entire fleet of new buses with seatbelts would cost approximately \$35 million statewide. Another consideration is fuel. Adding seatbelt reduces the seating capacity of school buses. This would impact the fuel needed for the additional buses. In the midst of rising fuel costs, Lightsey said Alabama is

spending over three times the money for fuel for school buses than it did just a few years ago. "We're spending \$40 million a year now on fuel, where just four years ago we were spending \$13 million a year," Lightsey said.

Ultimately, the information will be provided to the governor who will determine if the findings warrant going to the legislature for further action on the matter. The pilot study will officially begin at the start of the 2008/09 school year; however, the new buses will be available and on the road in February or March. ●



New Graduation Coaches Making a Difference in the Classroom

STUDENTS IN 26 SCHOOLS across the state began the school year with the addition of a new coach. A coach whose one goal is not to win any sporting event, but a coach whose sole purpose is to help students win in the classroom by keeping them in school. The Graduation Coach Pilot Program (formerly Dropout Prevention Advisors) is one of two state-funded programs implemented during the current school year to help decrease the number of students who drop out of school and increase the number of students who graduate. The other pilot program is Preparing Alabama Students for Success (PASS) and is geared toward students in Grades 6 through 12, while the Graduation Coach Program is aimed at students in Grades 9 through 12.

The graduation coaches were employed and trained, and the program was implemented within three months, and already educators say they are seeing a difference.

"I am already seeing a decline in our number of dropouts. I think the graduation coach is helping to keep students from making a rash decision in one or two days that is going to affect them the rest of their lives," said **JACQUELINE KELLEY**, Carroll High School Principal (Ozark City School System). "I believe the program has already made a difference. If one kid stays in school, then I feel I have made a difference. I know for

sure that I have at least two students that would have been gone by now if it had not been for this position," said **VALERIE SCHROEDER**, Jemison High Graduation Coach (Chilton County School System).

Twenty-six schools in Alabama were identified in September for implementation of the pilot program. All schools with any combination of Grades 9 through 12 and a graduation rate lower than 95 percent during the 2006-07 school year were eligible to compete for more than \$1.7 million in state grants. The graduation coach is not a teacher during the day, but rather he/she works with school personnel, families, the community, and other agencies to ensure student success.

Carroll High School Graduation Coach **RACHEL WALKER** says her social services background and her age definitely are big pluses in her communication with students. "One of the main reasons I decided to become a graduation coach is because I can relate to the youth of today," said Walker. "At one time I was that troubled youth, so I know what they are going through."

"The networking among these 26 graduation coaches has been phenomenal. They communicate with each other, share ideas, and encourage each other," said **SUE ADAMS**, Director of Prevention and Support Services with the Alabama Department of Education.

If the state legislature approves the FY 2009 education budget, the funding would provide for 174 new coaches and sustain the existing 26 for a total of 200 graduation coaches in 2009. ●



SDE says Farewell to Alabama Reading Initiative Icon

STATE SUPERINTENDENT DR. JOE MORTON refers to her as “the godmother of reading.”

Now, after more than 28 years with the Alabama Department of Education, DR. KATHERINE MITCHELL steps down as Assistant State Superintendent of Education for the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) and she is going out at the top of her game.


“Mitchell will forever be remembered as the woman who turned around reading in Alabama,” said State Superintendent of Education DR. JOE MORTON. “I think she has given her love for reading to all of the children of the state of Alabama,” Morton added.

Mitchell spearheaded the ARI in 1998 for K-3 schools, and in 2006, the program celebrated success with its final phase of implementation in Grades K-3 in all public schools in Alabama. The goal of ARI is 100 percent literacy for all public school students. In 2007, ARI expanded to Grades 4-9 with the pilot program ARI-PAL (Project for Adolescent Literacy) and was implemented in 14 schools across the state.

Another indication of ARI’s success occurred in 2007 when Alabama’s fourth-grade students scored eight points higher in reading on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) test than on the 2005 test (NAEP is given once every two years).

This was the largest gain in fourth-grade reading in NAEP history, making Alabama number one in the nation in reading improvements at the fourth-grade level for 2007.

Family, friends, co-workers, and education dignitaries gathered for Mitchell’s retirement party in December at the Department of Education. “I feel it’s time to start the next phase of my life, and I look forward to that next phase,” Mitchell told the audience. “I am feeling grateful for a career that is a perfect fit: I love to teach, I love to help, and I love to solve problems.”

SHERRILL PARRIS, who directs the Alabama Reading Initiative, succeeds the retiring Dr. Katherine Mitchell as Assistant State Superintendent for Reading. 

Record Numbers of Alabama Teachers Earn National Board Certification

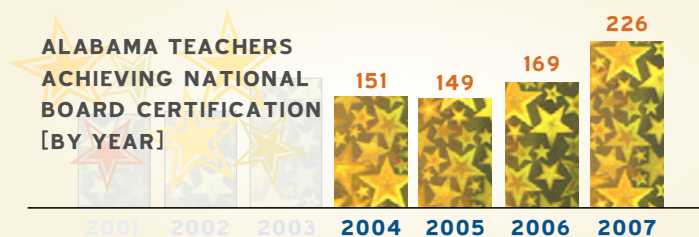
TEACHING QUALITY IN ALABAMA CLASSROOMS made a substantial gain in 2007 with 226 state teachers achieving National Board Certification – a 33 percent increase over last year according to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). Alabama ranks 12th nationwide in the number of new National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs).

The addition of the 2007 class brings Alabama’s total number of NBCTs to 1,329. They join Alabama’s 2007-2008 Teacher of the Year PAMELA HARMAN and nearly 64,000 teachers nationwide who exhibit the teaching profession’s highest standards as National Board Certified Teachers.


Alabama’s financial commitment to the program provides money to pay the \$2,500 application fee for candidates and a \$5,000 annual salary supplement. Also, first-year NBCTs receive a one-time \$5,000 classroom bonus.

“Achieving national board certification demonstrates a true dedication to the profession of teaching and most importantly dedication to students,” said State Superintendent of Education DR. JOE MORTON. “These teachers are making positive changes in the classroom, which results in better students that improve our school systems and education communities.”

National Board Certification, developed by teachers, with teachers, and for teachers, is a symbol of professional teaching excellence. Offered on a voluntary basis, it complements, not replaces, state licensing. While state licensing systems set entry-level standards for beginning teachers, National Board Certification has established advanced standards for experienced teachers.



The NBPTS, celebrating its 20th anniversary, was founded in 1987 as an independent, non-profit, non-partisan, and non-governmental organization. Its mission is to establish high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do and to raise the level of teaching excellence in classrooms across America. The NBPTS hopes to reach a goal of 250,000 NBCTs by its 25th anniversary in 2012.

For a listing of Alabama’s 2007 National Board Certified Teachers and more information on National Board Certification or the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, visit the NBPTS Web site at www.nbpts.org. 

Science Teachers From Across the Nation Flock to Birmingham for NSTA's 2007 Southern Area Conference



THE NATIONAL SCIENCE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION (NSTA), the largest professional organization in the world promoting excellence and innovation in science teaching and learning, held its Southern Area Conference on Science Education in Birmingham, December 6-8, 2007.

Held in conjunction with the Alabama Science Teachers Association (ASTA), the three-day, professional development conference was held at the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex and other local venues. Designed to enhance and expand professional growth and provide networking forums for science educators, the conference featured hundreds of hands-on workshops; presentations about the latest breakthroughs in

science; and demonstrations covering every discipline, grade level, and teaching focus. Teachers discussed popular issues, including the teaching of global climate change and evolution; the *No Child Left Behind Act*; virtual laboratory science; and science literacy.

In addition, attendees heard about the hottest topics in science education from renowned speakers, including **DR. KATHRYN C. THORNTON**, former NASA astronaut and associate dean for graduate programs at the University of Virginia, and **JAMES B. MCCLINTOCK**, endowed university professor of polar and marine biology at the University of Alabama, Birmingham. 🍅

Celebrate Black History Month in February

ALABAMA IS THOUGHT BY MANY to be the most historically significant state in America in terms of the plight for civil rights and human equality. As America recognizes Black History Month, museums, institutes, and other locations are available all across the state to help educate tomorrow's leaders on the struggles and achievements of yesterday. Below is a listing of just some of the locations educators might be interested in taking students next month.

Alabama Civil Rights Freedom Farm Museum | Mantua
Phone: 205-372-3446 | 205-826-6684

Birmingham Civil Rights Institute | Birmingham
Phone: 205-328-9696 | Toll Free: 866-328-9696 | www.bcri.org

Sixteenth Street Baptist Church | Birmingham
Phone: 205-251-9402

Rosa Parks Museum and Children's Wing | Montgomery
Phone: 334-241-8615 | Toll Free: 800-357-8843 xt.661
www.troy.edu

Civil Rights Memorial and Memorial Center | Montgomery
Phone: 334-956-8200 | www.splcenter.org

National Center for the Study of Civil Rights & African American Culture at Alabama State University | Montgomery
Phone: 334-229-4824 | www.lib.alasu.edu

The Dexter Parsonage Museum | Montgomery
Phone: 334-261-3270 | www.dexterkingmemorial.org

Edmund Winston Pettus Bridge | Selma
Phone: 334-875-7241 | Toll Free: 800-45-SELMA
www.SelmaAlabama.com

National Voting Rights Museum & Institute | Selma
Phone: 334-418-0800 | www.votingrightsmuseum.org

Slavery & Civil War Museum | Selma | Phone: 334-418-4889

Lincoln Museum | Marion
Phone: 334-683-9622 | www.marionalabama.org/lincoln

Lowndes County Interpretive Center | Hayneville
Phone: 334-877-1984

Murphy African-American Museum | Tuscaloosa
Phone: 205-758-2861

Oak Grove School | Rosenwald | Phone: 334-289-1952

Safe House Black History Museum | Greensboro
Phone: 334-624-4228

State Black Archives Research Center & Museum | Huntsville
Phone: 256-372-5846 | <http://my.aamu.edu>

Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site | Tuskegee
Phone: 334-724-0922 | www.nps.gov/tuai

Information obtained from: 2007 Alabama Bureau of Tourism & Travel

Civil Air Patrol's Junior Cadet Program Readies National Launch in Alabama

THE PROVEN character-building power of the Civil Air Patrol's Cadet Program for youth 12-21 years old has been expanded to include a Junior Cadet Program for elementary school-aged children nationwide. The inspirational message of the program is "Like the flight of the boomerang, the choices made today will come back to you tomorrow."

A "liftoff" celebration for the new Junior Cadet Pilot Program was held October 26 at Boaz High School's football stadium in Boaz. Approximately 300 teachers and 7,000 students in 20 public, private, and parochial schools in Alabama, Florida, Pennsylvania, Colorado, Georgia, Nevada, and Puerto Rico are field-testing the program this school year. The Junior Cadet Program will be available to all elementary schools in fall 2008.



The Junior Cadet Program will provide elementary students with an introduction to vital life skills – character education, academics with an aerospace emphasis, leadership opportunities, and physical fitness. Designed by educators, it incorporates fun, hands-on activities with national standards-based lesson plans that can be integrated throughout the curriculum.

As the official auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force, the Civil Air Patrol developed this new program to augment CAP's School Enrichment Program (SEP) for middle and high school students, as well as the Air Force Junior ROTC program. The Air Force Association's Montgomery, Alabama, Chapter 102 is providing partnership sponsorship while using the Junior Cadet Program and mascot as an outreach initiative for local elementary schools.

"The CAP SEP for America's middle and high schools is playing a major role in improving student opportunity and responsibility nationwide," said **COL. AL APPLEBAUM**, CAP SEP national director. "Teachers report better attendance, better test scores, and lower incidences of behavioral problems. With the addition of this elementary Junior Cadet Program, it is anticipated that these benefits will begin at the early ages and will only magnify in building better youth for tomorrow."

State Board Member:

David F. Byers, Jr. – District 6

Superintendent: Mr. Leland Dishman

Principal: Mr. Arnold L. Smith, Boaz High School

MYIA HATCHETT FROM BOAZ POSES WITH THE CAP CADET PROGRAM'S MASCOT.



2007 Preserve America History Teacher of the Year Announced



MARY BETH PUGH is Alabama's 2007 Preserve America Elementary (Grades K-6) History Teacher of the Year. Pugh, a fifth-grade social studies teacher at Bluff Park Elementary School in the Hoover City School System, has taught since 1992. She earned a BS and MS in Elementary Education from the University of North Alabama and The University of Alabama respectively.

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History sponsors this annual award to honor outstanding teachers of American history and to recognize the crucial importance of American history education. A History Teacher of the Year is selected from each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Department of Defense, and United States Territories. As a state winner, Pugh receives a \$1,000 honorarium and is a finalist for National Preserve America History Teacher of the Year. Bluff Park Elementary School receives an archive of history books and materials named in honor of their winning teacher.

Winners are chosen based on the following criteria:

- At least three years of classroom experience in teaching American history in elementary school
- A deep career commitment to teaching American history, which includes local and state history
- Evidence of creativity and imagination in the classroom that addresses literacy and content beyond state standards
- Close attention to primary documents, artifacts, historic sites, and other primary materials of history, including oral history
- Evidence of thoughtful assessment of student achievement

Pugh represented Alabama at the competition for National Preserve America History Teacher of the Year in Washington, D.C., last fall.

State Board of Education Member:

Dr. Ethel H. Hall – District 4

Hoover City Schools Superintendent:

Mr. Andy Craig

Bluff Park Elementary School Principal:

Dr. David Fancher

Celebration Highlights 21st Century Learning

SINCE 2004, teachers, students, and top business professionals statewide have come together each year to celebrate a new tradition – Alabama Career and Technical Education (CTE) Month, February 1-29.

SHERRY KEY, Director of Alabama Career and Technical Education, says, “Our students explore their career options in more than 300 courses offered statewide, earn advanced diplomas, and receive college credit while still in high school. CTE Month is a great time for Alabamians to visit our programs to see all of the hands-on learning taking place in our classrooms.”

According to the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE),

among high school graduates entering the workforce, 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

“Many consider our state’s CTE program to be one of the most forward-thinking in America,” said State Superintendent of Education **DR. JOE MORTON**. “Rapid changes in the structure, nature, and requirements of today’s work environment have placed new responsibilities on our nation’s educational system. Alabama’s career and technical program is committed to recruiting highly qualified and focused educators who are dedicated to ensuring

Brown, a National Board Certified teacher, was named the 2008 ACTE National Teacher of the Year. Raines was named this year’s national Outstanding New Career and Technical Teacher. This is the only time in recent history that two different teachers from the same state have been named ACTE’s national teachers during the same year.

To learn more about Alabama CTE Month or any of the special CTE Month celebration activities taking place in your community, contact your local Board of Education; [CLICK HERE](#); or contact CTE Information Specialist, **ED CRENSHAW**, at 334-353-5220. ●

CURRENTLY, ONE OUT OF EVERY TWO ALABAMA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS PARTICIPATES IN A CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

research shows that many of the country’s fastest-growing occupations now require the technical, communication, and time-management skills taught in America’s CTE programs. Research also shows that

that no child will be left behind.”

In December, two Alabama CTE educators, **JUDY BROWN** and **MARK RAINES**, both won two different prestigious national teaching awards.

Alabama’s CTE students participate in programs of study in the following areas:

- Agriscience Education
- Business/Marketing Education
- Family and Consumer Sciences Education (FACS)
- Health Science Education
- Technical Education
- Career Technologies Education
- Jobs for Alabama’s Graduates (JAG)

Future Fisherman Foundation’s Phys Ed National Fishing and Boating Grants Initiative provides \$2,500 grants to qualified PE teachers to implement fishing and boating units in their K-12 physical education (PE) classes. [Apply online](#) or e-mail [Anne Danielski](#) or call 703-519-9691, x254. **DEADLINE: Jan. 21, 2008**

Nominate a Young Hero for the **Alabama Public Television (APT) 2007 Alabama Young Heroes Awards**. Five students are selected for their courage, determination, volunteerism, and commitment to excellence. [Nominate a deserving student online](#) or call APT, 800-239-5233, ext. 152. **DEADLINE: Jan. 25, 2008.**

2008-2009 Alabama Teacher of the Year application is online. For more information, e-mail [Ann Starks](#) or call 334-242-9702. **DEADLINE: Jan. 28, 2008**

Alabama Elementary (K-6) and Secondary (7-12) Economics Teachers of the Year are classroom teachers who have made outstanding contributions to the teaching of economics. The Alabama Council on Economic Education awards \$1,000 to each teacher. [CLICK HERE](#) or call Toll Free: 866-326-0585. **DEADLINE: Mar. 14, 2008**

Nominate a Kid Who Cares. Kohl’s is offering youth volunteers ages 6 to 18 the opportunity to win a \$5,000 college scholarship. The scholarships are awarded to youth who have excelled as community volunteers. For more information, visit your local store or [CLICK HERE](#). **DEADLINE: Mar. 15, 2008**

The Legacy Project’s Annual Listen to a Life Essay Contest provides for meaningful conversations between youth and older adults that can result in positive experiences for both. The organization also sponsors several other contests and provides resources that encourage connections across generations. [CLICK HERE](#) for information. **DEADLINE: Mar. 31, 2008**

J A N U A R Y

Jan. 1	<i>New Year's Day</i>
Jan. 10	<i>Alabama State Board of Education Meeting</i>
Jan. 14 - 18	<i>Special Education Week</i>
Jan. 21	<i>Martin Luther King, Jr. / Robert E. Lee Birthday</i>
Jan. 24	<i>Alabama State Board of Education Work Session</i>

NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARD MONTH

F E B R U A R Y

Feb. 3-9	<i>National School Counseling Week</i>
Feb. 10-16	<i>Child Passenger Safety Awareness Week</i>
Feb. 14	<i>Alabama State Board of Education Meeting</i>
Feb. 28	<i>Alabama State Board of Education Work Session</i>

BLACK HISTORY MONTH
CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION MONTH



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DECEMBER BOARD BRIEFS

- ✎ Resolution Commending Selma City Schools, U.S. Department of Agriculture Best Practice Award
- ✎ Resolution in Honor of Dr. Ann Roy Moore, Huntsville City School System, 2008 Alabama Superintendent of the Year
- ✎ Resolution in Recognition of Bonnie Garrett, Edward White Middle School, Huntsville City School System, 2007 Milken Family Foundation National Educator Award
- ✎ Approval of Assistant State Superintendent of Education for Reading

For a complete list of agenda items, [CLICK HERE](#).

ABOUT ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS

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