



What Did You Read Last Night?

March is National Reading Month

People in Cullman, Alabama, all seem to be asking the same question these days – “What did you read last night?” Whether it’s a romance novel or auto magazine, newspaper or classic literature, reading is all the rage in Cullman as a reading initiative developed by local educators has caught on and spread like kudzu across the city.

DR. JAN HARRIS, superintendent of Cullman City Schools, said the “What did you read last night?” reading initiative has been branded in Cullman to the point where it’s known simply by the acronym WDYRLN? Bracelets, billboards, banners, bookmarks, and t-shirts bearing WDYRLN? are worn by students and faculty alike to encourage reading on a daily or nightly basis.

Famed children’s book author **DR. SEUSS** once said, “The more you read the more things you will know. The more you learn the more places you will go.” He should know. The late Dr. Seuss’ birthday (March 2) is celebrated nationwide as “Read Across America Day” as well as the entire month of March is observed as National Reading Month.

It’s during this time that extra emphasis is placed on the need to read. Harris said an energetic group of teachers and library/media specialists fed off of each other’s creativity and came up with several ideas that have



Cullman Middle School students make time to read about time as they pose for ‘March’ on the Cullman City School 2007 calendar.

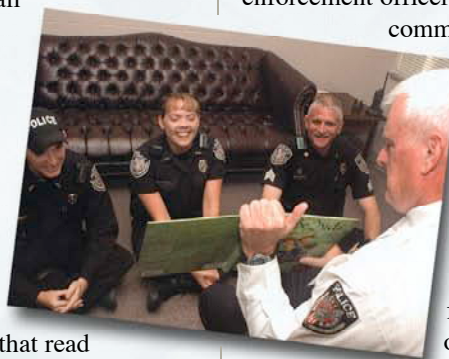
helped promote the WDYRLN? project. “We created a committee to come with a city-wide focus on reading for the school year,” Harris said. “I call the committee the Dynamic Reading Committee. They’re very fun, creative, and enthusiastic about the project – it was truly a team effort.”

To build anticipation before the launch of the project, teachers hung banners that read “WDYRLN?” without telling the students what it meant. As curiosity grew, the initiative was introduced to the

school and the city. Now, reading has become a community affair in Cullman as city officials, law enforcement officers, businesses, and community members

have joined in and started asking “What did you read last night?”

A 2007 calendar was developed that featured the chief of police reading to his officers, Lions Club members hamming it up, the



Club members hamming it up, the

(continued on page 2)

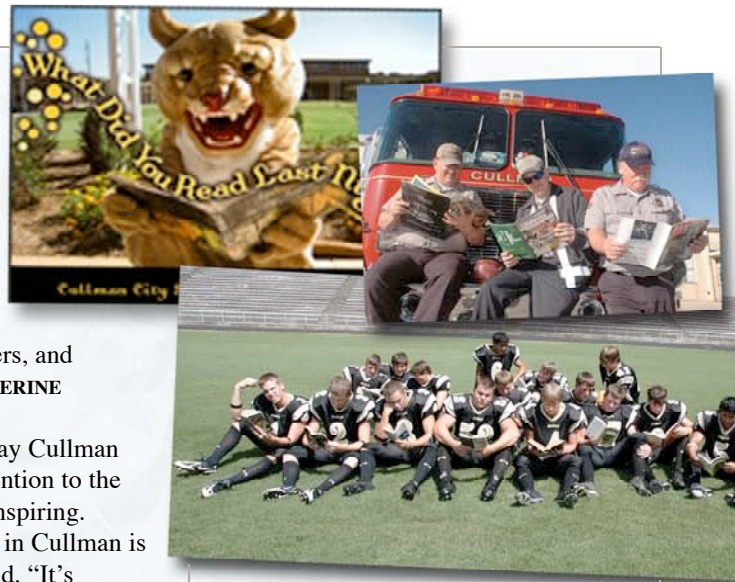
Cullman City School Board being read a bedtime story, local firemen reading – even the mayor and city council got in on the fun. Harris said the outpouring of community support was phenomenal, but not surprising. “Enthusiasm and excitement from our city leaders is nothing new to us – it’s one of the things that impressed me so much about this community. The priority the community places on education is great,” Harris said. “They were all thrilled to be a part of it.”

Even though the creativity and fun brought about by the WDYRLN? project has energized the city and serves as a great conversation starter, Harris said the bottom line to it all remains rooted in encouraging reading and improving education. “Every project that we undertake has an underlying theme of improving student

achievement and the focus is on learning and improving our skills,” Harris said. “There’s a renewed enthusiasm for reading. People in the community ask each other ‘What did you read last night – parents, teachers, and students alike.” **DR. KATHERINE MITCHELL**, assistant state superintendent, said the way Cullman has creatively brought attention to the importance of reading is inspiring.

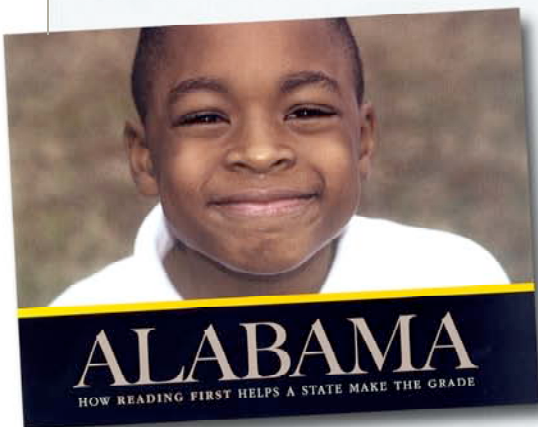
“The initiative shown in Cullman is encouraging,” Mitchell said. “It’s exciting to see the entire community get involved and model the importance of reading.”

The city of Cullman encourages other schools and communities to challenge themselves and ask the



question, “What did you read last night?” Be sure you have an answer though. If not, as one young student in Cullman put it, your follow-up question could use the same acronym ...

“Why Didn’t You Read Last Night?” 🍎



U.S. Department of Education Praises Reading Initiatives

“Unimaginable 10 years ago,” – that’s the sentiment of Dr. Katherine Mitchell, assistant state superintendent, as she sums up how many education stakeholders feel about the results of Alabama student’s reading proficiency these days.

That’s due in large part to the implementation of the state funded Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) in 1998 and the federally funded Alabama Reading First Program (ARFI) in 2002. Since ARI’s inception with 16 pilot schools in 1998, the initiative has grown and is achieving remarkable success as the state strives for its goal of 100 percent proficient literacy for public school students. To date, there are a total of 793 K-3 schools that have ARI as a part of their curriculum resulting in sky-rocketing reading scores and serving as a model for effective literacy initiatives.

With ARI blazing a trail of scientifically-based reading, it cleared the path for the supplemental initiative ARFI to come through with vigorous requirements and high expectations for all K-3 schools in Alabama. Together, the two initiatives have worked together to successfully turn around the reading scores of some of the lowest performing schools in the state. Between 2004 and 2006 the percentage of Reading First students reading on grade level increased 17 percent.

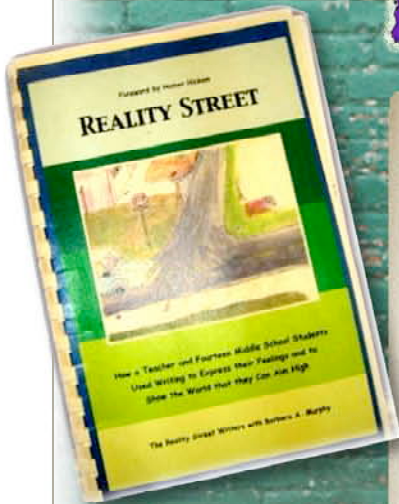
Alabama’s model for expanding literacy throughout the state has been so impressive that the United States Department of

Education recently produced a high quality, full color, 24-page publication entitled: *ALABAMA, how Reading First helps a state make the grade*. This beautifully photographed publication chronicles the challenge Alabama faced 10 years ago with student literacy. The booklet addresses the early stages ARI/ARFI and shows how the program took root, developed, and began contributing to unprecedented strides in student achievement. There’s even a detailed timeline illustrating the change in reading instruction in Alabama.

In addition to the K-3 ARI and ARFI programs, **SEN. JEFF SESSIONS** and **GOV. BOB RILEY** recently called on Congress to pass legislation called the *Striving Readers Act*. This would provide funding for states and districts to create literacy programs for middle and high schools students as well. The call for this legislation was validated by the success of ARI and ARFI.

Everyone from teachers and reading coaches to administrators and elected officials are feeling the momentum of a successful reading program, poised to make the next generation of Alabama readers one of the most proficient in the country. 🍎

REALITY STREET WRITERS REALIZE DREAM



Academy award winner Hilary Swank is now starring in *Freedom Writers* – a major motion picture about the writings of inner-city youth that reflected their reality and changed their worlds.

For a group of inner city students in Huntsville, a similar role is being played out in real life and the only credits rolling are hard work, discipline, and creativity.



Four years ago, inspired by the best-selling book, *The Freedom Writers Diary* by Erin Gruwell, an 8th-grade Advanced English teacher **BARBARA MURPHY**, at R.L. Stone Middle School in Huntsville, decided to have several of her gifted, yet ‘at-risk’ students take a literary approach to explaining their reality. She had the students use journaling as a means of self-expression and self-exploration. The result of that endeavor became far more than Murphy expected and more than her students ever dreamed.

The compilation of student writings and poems entitled *Reality Street* tackles issues from racism and poverty to gang violence and school problems, and gives readers a glimpse into the world as the students know it. The intriguing pages of *Reality Street* provides unfettered access into a world usually not visited by those who do not live there. The book serves as a reflection of varying communities with unique struggles, encouraging triumphs, and students with a will to overcome their circumstances.

And overcoming they are – now, four years after the book’s initial publication, all 14 of the *Reality Street* writers either have graduated or are about to graduate from high school and embark upon careers that are sure to be enhanced, both personally and financially, by the book. Upon the book’s release, a trust fund was established by which the proceeds from book sales are earmarked for the college education of the authors. Two of the writers are already attending college; the others plan to attend upon graduation.

Murphy said reading the students’ journals was an eye-opening experience that brought her closer to and gave her a better understanding of her students. “I had no idea how much of a difference there was between what I thought their lives were like and what it actually was,” Murphy said. “A lot of the students had to cope with poverty and racism, and

they developed pretty thick skin to protect themselves from the outside world where they thought people didn’t care about them or care about how they felt.”

The outpouring of praise from all walks of life in support of the book made it clear that these students did indeed have a voice – a voice that was heard by congressmen, former United States Secretary of Education Rod Paige, civic organizations, the media ... even over seas. *Reality Street* was purchased by a high school in Germany and is being used in their English classes.

U.S. REP. BUD CRAMER (D-AL) said the book was a terrific accomplishment for a group of young students who give others a glimpse at their families, friends, victories, and challenges. Over the years, the authors have been recognized by countless television and radio shows, newspapers, schools, and the director of education for the Holocaust Museum.

One of the authors, **JONATHAN RICE**, said the book gave him and the others a chance to be heard. “The real point of our book is us telling the world what we wanted to say and share. We choose not to remain silent, but speak out against injustice in the world and to prove that just about any hardship can be overcome,” Rice said.

By becoming the *Reality Street* writers, Murphy said the students were motivated to write and developed a new enthusiasm for learning and school in general, as well as a better understanding of tolerance.

KAILA WARD, another of the writers, said through reading each other’s work they realized they’re not the only ones dealing with adversities. “Writing this book made me think of people in different ways. When I started reading other people’s writings I realized that no one’s life is sugar-coated – everyone has problems,” Ward said. “This book really opened my eyes [and taught me] not to be judgmental of others.” 🍎

Birmingham Cultural Alliance Partnership BCAP Receives National Award

The Birmingham Cultural Alliance Partnership (BCAP), which offers unique experiences for

Institutional Programs, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, and **CURMESHIA FELISHA DORSEY**, a youth participant in the partnership.

the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute's community partners in a program that uses the arts and humanities to reinforce classroom learning, promote student achievement, nurture personal development, and increase parental involvement in education. Banks Middle School, Hudson K-8 School, and Bush Middle School in Birmingham take part in the program.

The Coming Up Taller Awards recognize and support outstanding community arts and humanities programs that celebrate the creativity of America's youth and provide them with new learning opportunities and the chance to contribute to their communities. The awards also highlight the contributions that historians, scholars, librarians, and

The program was developed in 2000 by the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute with a National Leadership Grant funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. BCAP was awarded a 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant from the Alabama Department of Education in 2002. The grant totals \$874,000 over a four-year period.

visual and performing artists make to families and communities by mentoring children.

Annually, the BCAP connects 200 inner-city youth and their families with



educational and personal growth, was nationally recognized as one of 17 youth arts and humanities programs to receive the 2006 *Coming Up Taller Award*. Representatives of the program received the \$10,000 award at a White House Ceremony in January. **FIRST LADY LAURA BUSH** presented the award to **PRISCILLA HANCOCK COOPER**, Vice President of



State Board Member: Dr. Ethel H. Hall – District 4
Banks Middle School – Jesse S. Daniel, Principal
Bush Middle School – Aurlinda Hagler, Principal
Hudson K-8 School – Carolyn J. Denson, Principal

Darden Presents At International Conference

The K-1 Center in Fairhope is in full swing of its first year of the Alabama Reading Initiative and its new reading coach, **LORA DARDEN**, will present some of the school's reading techniques to an international audience. Darden has been selected as a presenter at the prestigious International Reading Conference in Toronto, Canada, in May 2007, where she will speak on her research in the area of teaching reading and writing. Darden, who's completing her coursework for her Ph. D. in language and literacy at the University of Texas at Austin, has performed literacy research examining influences that cause teachers to embrace change, with a focus on reflective teaching. Her research also analyzes the types of talk

teachers use to influence one another and the role of fluency and comprehension as a criteria for monitoring placement of children in texts, as opposed to being a by-product of rehearsal and practice. In the short time Darden has been at the K-1 Center, teachers have learned to employ a strategies-based model in which they take their teaching cues from the students as developing readers and writers. This type of staff development, and other initiatives such as a literacy book study Darden is leading, is already beginning to open learning opportunities within the K-1 Center that spills over into the center's sister school Fairhope Elementary (Baldwin County).



State Board Member: Randy McKinney – District 1
Superintendent: Dr. Faron Hollinger
Principal: Mrs. Patricia Murphy Carlton

AN ALABAMA EXHIBITION OF PHOTOGRAPHS AND
POETRY BY MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

eyes of the storm

A Community Service after Katrina

Kids on a Bus

"Hey, what're those numbers?"
The driver told us they were the
number of how many people
Died in that house.

And for the first time
That I can remember
A bus full of thirteen-year-old kids
Went silent.

— Devin Shaffer

Katrina's Pain

My house crowded with relatives
Who lost their homes in the Bayou.
We sat in the heat
With no power or water for weeks.

My house wasn't damaged much,
But homes all around us were destroyed.
Pets were lost.
Trees blocked the road.

The aftermath was devastating.
Stores were closed for a long time.
Gas went way up
And tempers flared in the heat.

— Jada Davis

"Eyes of the Storm" On Exhibit at Oklahoma City's International Photography Hall of Fame

Students from Alba Middle School (Bayou La Batre) and Alma Bryant High School (Irvington) have been invited to present their work at the International Photography Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City. This is a continuation of the *Eyes of the Storm* Project, a photography and poetry exhibition, that began in October of 2005.

Four students will present the exhibit March 9 to local schoolchildren and tell stories about their experiences during and after Hurricane Katrina. *Eyes of the Storm* is a collection of 50 black and white photographs and poems chronicling the hurricane's wrath in south Mobile County. The exhibit has traveled to Chicago, San Francisco, Boston, and Nashville.

SHELIA HAGLER, one of two professional photographers who teaches photography at Alba Middle School, spearheaded the project as a way for students to cope with the aftermath of Katrina. "It amazes me when you give a child a camera that doesn't even have a light meter, that they can come back with such amazing images," said Hagler.

Hundreds of Oklahoma schoolchildren are expected to visit the museum and meet the Bayou La Batre and Irvington students this month. The museum is housed in a facility that also includes scientific and historical data. The exhibit will run through May.

State Board Member: Randy McKinney – District 1
Superintendent: Dr. Harold W. Dodge, Mobile County
Principal: James C. Gill, Peter F. Alba Middle School
Principal: Larry Phillip Mouton, Alma Bryant High School

Alabama Learning Exchange Adds New Dimensions

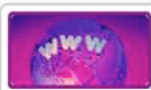
alex



Quality for Every Facet of Learning...



Courses of Study



Web Links



Lesson Plans



Search



Personal Workspace



Professional Learning



Distance Learning



Help

www.alex.state.al.us

The Alabama Learning Exchange (ALEX) is now new and improved with innovative features. Educators, parents, and students can easily locate resources for difficult subjects and frequently tested concepts all aligned to Alabama's standards. ALEX also provides a free, user-friendly Web page for teachers. The Web site was developed with the latest in Web 2.0 technology and is hosted by the Alabama Supercomputer Authority (ASA).

ALEX offers assistance for all

schools in a variety of different areas. Special Education, Leadership, and English Language Learner (ELL) are some of the areas where assistance is available for teachers, administrators, and parents. "No other state in the nation has all these features in a Web portal that is designed exclusively to address teaching, learning, and leading the way with the specific goal of improving student achievement," said **DEPUTY STATE SUPERINTENDENT DR. RUTH ASH.**

This spring, the Teacher Lesson Plan will be reactivated enabling teachers to

create lesson plans, save the plans in their own personal workspace, or submit plans to be evaluated for inclusion in the "best practices" lesson plan library. These plans then will be accessible to other teachers so knowledge and experience can be shared. Local Education Agencies (LEA) can also use the ALEX/ Thinkfinity (previously MarcoPolo) training to meet a majority of the new Technology Professional Development Standards requirements, for the 2006-2007 school year. 🍏

New Features Available with ALEX



- ▶ New State Web Portal Redesign
- ▶ A Web Page for Every Teacher
- ▶ Abundant Resources for Teachers of ELL Students (students and parents)
- ▶ New, Free ALEX and MarcoPolo Training Program for Your School!
- ▶ Over 10,000 Online Resources and Lesson Plans
- ▶ 5,621 Online Resources Linked to State Standards
- ▶ 38,151 Alignments to Thinkfinity (previously MarcoPolo) Resources, Provided by the Verizon Foundation
- ▶ Digitized, Printable Alabama Courses of Study
- ▶ More Interactives in each core subject area to: Improve "Achievement Gaps," Provide Extra Resources for "Frequently Tested," as well as "Difficult to Teach/Learn" Subject Areas and Concepts as Identified by an Exclusive Panel of Alabama's National Board Certified Teachers
- ▶ Online Professional Development Resources
- ▶ And more...

For ALEX training, contact the Technology in Motion trainer in your area.
www.technologyinmotion.state.al.us



“What if pandemic flu closed every K-12 public school in Alabama?”

pan-dem-ic *adj.* epidemic over a large region [from the Greek *pÇn* meaning all + *dimos* meaning people]

Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) officials recently posed this question to educators, media representatives, civic and church groups, law enforcement, emergency management, and health officials at a Tabletop Exercise in Montgomery called “School Closing as a Potential Means to Counter Pandemic Influenza.”

The theme of the day’s exercise was

“*Prepare, Not Panic.*” “Local

educators already have in place School System and Individual School Safety Plans. If a pandemic event does occur, communication will be key at all levels to ensure everyone’s safety and well-being,” said **DEPUTY STATE SUPERINTENDENT DR. RUTH ASH.**

At a Pandemic Planning Summit at the University of

Alabama Birmingham in 2006, Gov. Bob Riley told participants, “We are not here to panic or alarm people, but we want Alabama and its citizens to be prepared for whatever may happen.”

IF it became necessary, the Governor would issue an emergency declaration for the statewide closure of schools based on information from the State Health Officer and the State Superintendent of Education and coordinated with local officials. If a Presidential Declaration is issued, it would supersede any state orders.

STATE HEALTH OFFICER DR. DON WILLIAMSON said, “The UAB summit was a first step in building a coalition of business and community leaders, school officials, and average citizens. Today’s exercise has provided us with some answers as well as some new questions. What would be the trigger(s) for closing schools? What is the threshold for reopening schools?”

“When it comes to preparing our school community, there are three key steps to take: One, talk to your local health officials and work together to develop a plan. Then, secondly, train your teachers and administrators to implement the plan. And finally, teach students and parents so they understand what to do in the event of a pandemic,” advised **U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION MARGARET SPELLINGS.** 🍎

– See back page for a list of helpful resources. –

Awards, Opportunities, and Professional Development

8th Annual Black College Expo (BCE) returns to Atlanta on March 3 to give thousands of students and parents an opportunity to meet with historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Attendees will be able to submit college applications and acquire pertinent information about the college admission process, college preparation, SAT and ACT prep, financial aid, and scholarships. Some high school seniors who bring their transcripts and test scores may possibly be accepted on the spot at one of the participating colleges. There is also a “hot careers” component with professionals from around the country dispensing advice to students on how to break into these “hot careers.” BCE events include exhibits, workshops, scholarship presentations, and entertainment. For more information, call 877-427-4100 or visit Web site at www.blackcollegeexpo.com.

Young Playwrights — An off-shoot of the Southern Writers’ Project, the Alabama Shakespeare Festival’s Young Southern Writers’ Project One-Act Play Competition was created to give a voice to a new generation of Southern authors and encourage Southern high school students to hone their writing skills. Prizes will be awarded to the first-, second-, and third-place writers and their teachers. Prizes include play readings of first-, second-, and third-place prize winners in fall 2007 at Barnes & Noble Booksellers throughout Alabama, tickets to an ASF production, and an opportunity to meet Southern Writers’ Project playwrights, receive Barnes & Noble Booksellers gift certificates and receive publication on the ASF Web site. Rules: <http://www.asfeducation.com/playwrights/yswpguidelines.html>
Application: http://www.asfeducation.com/playwrights/YSWP_info_sheet.pdf **Deadline: March 6**

Home Builders Scholarships — The Alabama Home Builders Foundation is offering scholarships to qualified students across the state. To qualify for a scholarship, a student must be an Alabama resident who is pursuing a degree in a construction-related field. Applications will be accepted from high school students, as well as students attending community or junior colleges, technical or trade schools, or four-year universities in the state. Call the Home Builders Association of Alabama at 800-745-4222 or download the application at www.ahbfoundation.org. **Deadline: March 15**

First Annual Southern Regional Middle and High School Step Competition will be held in Destin, FL, April 27-28. For more information, contact Keisha Thomas at thomaske@mail.okabosa.k12.fl.us. **Deadline: March 27**

2007 American Stars of Teaching — The U.S. Department of Education is currently accepting nominations for its 2007 American Stars of Teaching awards, which honor exemplary classroom teachers who are using innovative teaching strategies to improve student achievement and positively shape their school environment. One teacher will be recognized from each state and the District of Columbia as representatives of the many teachers who are making a difference in the lives of students. Anyone can nominate an American Star of Teaching at <http://www.t2tweb.us/AmStar/Nominate.asp>. **Deadline: April 1**

2007 All-USA Teacher Team — Nominations are open for USA TODAY’s recognition program for outstanding K-12 teachers. Licensed, full-time teachers with at least four years of K-12 teaching experience are eligible. Each nomination requires a letter of nomination and two letters of recommendation. Up to 20 individuals and instructional teams will be featured in USA TODAY as representatives of all outstanding teachers. Winners and their schools share \$2,500 cash awards. For nomination forms and more information, go to: <http://allstars.usatoday.com>. **Deadline: April 30**

RESOURCES

- School System and Individual School Safety Plans, Alabama Department of Education Prevention and Support Services, 334-242-8165.
- Free materials, such as Flu Planning Checklist and bilingual posters, are available from **Alabama Department of Public Health** <http://www.adph.org/pandemicflu/>.
- “Pandemic Flu: A Planning Guide for Educators” and “CDC Flu: Stop the Spread of Germs: Actions for Schools” are available from **ED.gov** to <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/pandemic/index.html>, plus other checklists and ways to prevent flu from spreading in schools.
- **PandemicFlu.gov** <http://www.pandemicflu.gov/> provides one-stop access to all federal information related to pandemic and avian flu and includes comprehensive information for community planning.
- **World Health Organization** http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/avian_influenza/en/

MARCH	TRANSITION AWARENESS MONTH <i>Students with disabilities transitioning from high school into post-secondary education, workforce, adulthood.</i>						
	8~Alabama State Board of Education Meeting						10
	NATIONAL READING MONTH						
	22~Alabama State Board of Education Work Session						23
APRIL	ARTS EDUCATION MONTH WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH						
	MATHEMATICS EDUCATION MONTH CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH						
	8~Easter						12
	12~Alabama State Board of Education Meeting						13
	15	16	NATIONAL LIBRARY WEEK			20	21
	22	23~Confederate Memorial Day (State Holiday)					
			25~Administrative Professionals Day				28
			26~Alabama State Board of Education Work Session				

MORTON NAMED TEACHER OF MONTH



Alfa's Teacher of the Month for February, **TAMMY B. MORTON** of University Place Elementary School in Tuscaloosa, said her overall goal of education is to give students the tools to become participating, contributing members of society. As an educator, she believes that quality education supports three important areas: social development, emotional development and the ability to construct knowledge.

Morton's success with her students and others earned her the Alfa Teacher of the Month award for February, which includes a \$1,000 cash award from Alfa and a matching award for her school from the Alabama Farmers Federation.

“As a teacher, I model respect, acceptance and responsibility in our school and community. I provide students with many opportunities to participate in a variety of experiences such as peer tutoring, being responsible for taking care of classroom pets and plants, caring for our environment through recycling and community events such as canned food drives,” she said.

During 2007, Alfa Insurance and the Alabama Farmers Federation will honor one outstanding teacher from each of Alabama's eight state school board districts, as well as two principals and two private school teachers.

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Joseph B. Morton

BOARD BRIEFS

M A R C H

- Resolution in Recognition of Huxford Elementary School, Escambia County Schools, National Title I Distinguished School
- Resolution in Recognition of Evergreen Elementary School, Conecuh County Schools, National Title I Distinguished School
- Resolution in Recognition of Michelle Gay, Foley Intermediate School, Baldwin County Schools, 2006 Science Presidential Award Finalist
- Resolution in Recognition of Hope Sawyer, Fairhope K-1 Center, Baldwin County Schools, 2006 Mathematics Presidential Award Finalist
- Resolution in Recognition of Kathy Ann Self, Trace Crossings Elementary School, Hoover City Schools, 2006 Science Presidential Award Finalist

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

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Copies available in Braille or other forms upon request.