



# ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS

NEWS AND ISSUES IN ALABAMA PUBLIC EDUCATION, K-12

MAY 2008



## FIRST CHOICE

*the right choice for Alabama schools*

THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION has presented to the State Board of Education its proposal aimed at increasing the academic expectations of Alabama high school graduates and providing avenues that increase the number of graduates by reducing drop-out rates. Referred to as “First Choice,” STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION JOE MORTON has championed the cause of doing everything possible to make sure Alabama students are prepared for the rigors of college after high school while increasing their likelihood of graduation. This is a multifaceted approach, bringing together elements such

as academic flexibility, varying diploma options and revisions to the mandate that all five portions of the Alabama High School Graduation Examination (AHSGE) be successfully completed by all students. Under the First Choice plan all students are *automatically* placed on track for the Advanced Academic Endorsement.

Currently, students have to “opt-in” to receive an Advanced Academic Endorsement, and approximately 39 percent of students graduating from high school choose to do so.

*continued on next page ...*

*“This option taps into a base of unrealized potential that many Alabama students have. As educators and education policy makers, we owe it to our students to expect the most from them and to help them achieve it.”*  
– State Superintendent of Education Joe Morton

## ALABAMA HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA - 24 CREDITS

English  
4 Credits

Social Studies  
4 Credits

Science  
4 Credits

Math  
4 Credits

P.E., Health,  
Arts, Computer  
2.5 Credits

Electives  
5.5 Credits

## ADVANCED ACADEMIC ENDORSEMENT (FIRST CHOICE) - 24 CREDITS

English  
4 Credits

Social Studies  
4 Credits

Science  
4 Credits

Math  
4 Credits  
*(includes Algebra II  
with Trig)*

P.E., Health,  
Arts, Computer  
2.5 Credits

Foreign  
Language  
2 Credits

Electives  
3.5 Credits

*continued from front ...*

This advanced diploma requires one additional mathematics course (Algebra II with Trigonometry) and two years of foreign language courses instead of elective courses. Morton said he strongly believes many more Alabama students have the ability to complete the curriculum for the advanced diploma – unfortunately, not enough students are being challenged to do so. “There are many students, usually in poor and minority settings, who have the intelligence and work ethic to receive the Advanced Academic Endorsement, but they are seldom encouraged to reach beyond the standard diploma,” Morton said. “This option taps into a base of unrealized potential that many Alabama students have. As educators and education policy makers, we owe it to our students to expect the most from them.”

Under First Choice students have the option to “opt-out” of the advanced diploma if the student and his/her parents

The A+ Education Foundation, an education advocate that works toward advancing policies, programs and initiatives in Alabama’s K-12 education system, agrees that rigorous academic requirements are vital for life after high school. “Strengthening high school graduation requirements is an important step toward getting every student ready to succeed in college, in workforce training and in life,” said **CAROLINE NOVAK**, president of the A+ Education Foundation.

Although high expectations of Alabama students are essential, it is important to create academic policy that is in the best interest of all students. For those who “opt-out” of the Advanced Academic Endorsement, the High School Diploma, a Career/Tech Endorsement or a Credit-Based Endorsement Diploma options are available. The High School Diploma and Career/Tech Endorsement call for the exact same requirements as the

Diploma option, however, requires the same coursework as the High School Diploma, yet only requires passing three parts (3/5) of the AHSGE. This allowance gives struggling students, most often special education students, the opportunity to graduate with dignity and acknowledge all of the coursework they have successfully completed, despite not passing *all five* parts of the AHSGE. Currently, many students who fall into this category – who would otherwise become hard-working, tax paying citizens in respectable positions – drop out of high school altogether. This does not help the student, nor does it help our communities as a whole. Statistics already show that 85 percent of the inmates in Alabama prisons are high school drop-outs. It is imperative that we find ways to keep those students who try and complete the necessary coursework in school and have them graduate – preferably on time.

This is where tools such as Credit Recovery, Academic Flexibility and Graduation Coaches come into play. These are new policies used to help address the specific needs of students to help ensure graduation and guide them through the process as efficiently as possible. Credit Recovery allows students to demonstrate competency on a segment of the course and receive course credit or earn promotion without having to retake the entire course. Academic Flexibility gives students in-school and out-of-school educational opportunities

**85%** *of the inmates in Alabama prisons are high school dropouts. It is imperative that we find ways to keep those students who try and complete the necessary coursework in school and have them graduate – preferably on time.*

agree to do so. There is no penalty for opting out to receive the Alabama High School Diploma. Morton said this plan simply gives students an opportunity to reach their fullest potential.

Advanced Academic Endorsement *minus* the one additional mathematics course and two foreign language courses. All of these require passing all five parts of the AHSGE. The Credit-Based Endorsement

to make up time lost in the classroom due to extenuating circumstances. Graduation Coaches (available in some high schools) serve as counselors for “at-risk” students, advising them on course work and other issues to keep them on task and increasing their odds for graduation.

As the world becomes increasingly more competitive, it is important that our students not simply meet standards of the past but set their sights on higher goals. We must provide Alabama students with the tools they need to reach and exceed our expectations – and ultimately, even their own. The proposed changes regarding high school graduation puts into action these increased expectations with the belief that more students can successfully complete the rigor of the Advanced Academic Endorsement than are currently attempting to.

“I firmly believe what we expect from students has a profound impact on what they expect from themselves,” Morton said. “It’s a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

#### STATES WITH ADVANCED REQUIREMENTS AS DEFAULT DIPLOMAS

Arizona	New Mexico
Arkansas	North Carolina
Indiana	Oklahoma
Louisiana	South Dakota
Michigan	Texas
Mississippi	

#### STATES WITH ADVANCED REQUIREMENTS AS MANDATORY DIPLOMAS

Delaware	New York
Georgia	Ohio
Kentucky	Tennessee
Minnesota	

Advanced Academic Endorsement

## Teach in Alabama Revolutionizes the Education Job Market

### ONE YEAR INTO THE

**DEVELOPMENT** of Teach In Alabama (TIA), the state’s newest method of locating and hiring the best quality of teacher available, the results have been outstanding. By the end of April 2008, more than 20,000 educators had posted their applications on the TIA Web site, and school systems had already listed about 200 teaching positions for the 2008-09 school year.

TIA allows teachers to apply online to every school district they want in Alabama with one electronic application. Likewise, school systems can look on this site and find teachers seeking positions with specific qualifications and individualized criterion to suit their needs. [The web site](#) has been helpful over the last year at giving teachers (and prospective teachers) the convenience of showcasing their application information, resume, certifications, transcripts and other relevant credentials to prospective employers all across the state in one central database. This form of one-stop employment shopping has allowed schools to fill empty positions earlier and significantly cut down on unnecessary paperwork.

State Teacher Recruitment and Placement Coordinator **DEBRA WILLIAMS** was instrumental in the implementation of the TIA program. Williams said as of mid-April 2008, approximately 350 teaching and administrative jobs are currently available on the TIA job board, but added that these vacancies are for the 2008-2009 school year. This is one of the ways TIA is helping with efficiency in the education job market. Now school systems are filling positions for the coming year much faster. “Before (TIA) you had to wait until June to post vacancies, so now they can post them and begin to look at potential candidates,” said Williams. **PAM SCOTT**, Personnel Director for Tuscaloosa City Schools, agrees that TIA expedites the hiring process.

“Now we are posting earlier meaning that we are able to go ahead and fill our positions even before the summer starts. We’ve already started to post some of our positions of teachers that may be resigning or retiring that have already turned in their notification to us. So we’ve started posting positions right now and it’s March. That’s something that hasn’t happened before for our school district,” Scott said. “In the past, principals had to come into the personnel office, thumb through the file cabinets, make copies, fax and copy applications ... now they have all of that on their desktop where they can just search the application, post online and expand their recruitment area.”

Williams said the Web site, which was first implemented in March 2007, is already making a difference with Alabama’s teacher shortages. She said while TIA is not the sole solution for the teacher shortage felt in Alabama, just as it is nationally, it still helps to address the need to increase the state’s applicant pool. “It gives districts more of a choice of selecting qualified applicants,” said Williams.

For more information on Teach In Alabama, visit the Alabama Department of Education Web site or contact Debra Williams at (334) 242-9935.



## FEMA Stresses Preparedness for Upcoming Hurricane Season

### AS THE HURRICANE SEASON

**APPROACHES** (June through November), students, teachers and parents alike are encouraged to take heed to hurricane preparedness measures in the event of disastrous weather conditions. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is helping parents and schools better prepare for hurricane conditions by providing educational resources, both in print and online, for adults and children.

Although hurricane preparedness is not the responsibility of one agency, community, group or person, FEMA and the Alabama Emergency Management Agency are encouraging all families to take part in planning for future disasters. When it comes to being ready for the upcoming hurricane season, there is no substitute for knowing how to keep your family safe. Web sites like [FEMA Kids](#) is an age-appropriate, interactive Web site that teaches young children how to be prepared for and prevent disasters. They can also learn what causes disasters, play games and read stories. Resources are also available for teachers and parents such as activities, curriculum and safety information that can be used in the classroom or at home.

“State emergency personnel will respond quickly to the scene of a disaster, but all Alabamians should be prepared when a hurricane arrives,” said State Coordinating Officer **BRUCE BAUGHMAN**. “A family that plans ahead will be better prepared before, during and after a hurricane.”

While local, state and federal officials will respond quickly to the scene of a disaster, they cannot help every individual or family right away. Response time may depend on damage to roads and infrastructure, and if basic services like water, electricity or telephones are unavailable, your family should be prepared for self-sufficiency for at least 72 hours.

Go online for more about preparing for hurricanes: [CLICK HERE](#) or [HERE](#).



## Students Go West Every Week to Attend Classes in “Hollywood”

**TRAVELING MORE THAN 4,000 MILES** (roundtrip) to Hollywood, California, every week has really become an exciting adventure for students at Birmingham’s G. W. Carver High School. And one of the most exciting parts of the students’ experience is it only takes them about 60 seconds to get there!

These bright and energetic students are participating in an innovative career and technical education class, which utilizes technology, distance learning and a strong national partnership to teach them about the exciting field of animation. G.W. Carver High School is the only secondary school in Alabama, and one of the few in the Southeast, to have a fully functioning animation program. This program serves 150 students per school year.

Through a partnership with the ACME Network, G.W. Carver offers its students a great opportunity to gain experience and receive valuable tips from some of the nation’s top animation professionals. They have even received advice from legendary animator Chuck Jones, director of many of



*Students of G.W. Carver High School (Birmingham City Schools) enjoy an ACME Network presentation.*

the classic animated cartoons starring Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, the Road Runner and Pepe ‘Le Pew!

ACME Network is a nationally recognized organization that helps involve top animators and companies like Warner Brothers, DreamWorks, Pixar, Sony and Disney in the process of educating students. Each year, more than 85 percent of the students that complete this program go on to attend postsecondary institutions and to secure top internship opportunities. According to [www.salary.com](#), the average national salary for an animator in the 75th percentile of the pay scale is more than \$58,000 per year. ●

## Parental Communication on the Rise, Fewer Students Use Drugs

Results are in from the 2006-2007 PRIDE SURVEY

**DURING THE 2006-07 SCHOOL YEAR,** every Alabama public school system participated in a statewide survey on alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and related behaviors. The good news is, thousands of Alabama youth are moving away from regular use of alcohol, tobacco and marijuana. Compared to the 2003-04 school year 5,000 fewer students use alcohol, 6,400 fewer students use tobacco and 3,500 fewer students use marijuana.

This success should translate into fewer deaths, injuries, accidents, illnesses and academic failure among this student population.

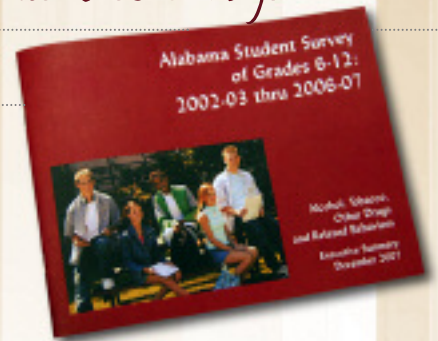
2006-07 survey findings also indicate parent-student communication is increasing because student awareness of parental disapproval of substance use is on the rise.

### OTHER SURVEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- Secondary school students in Alabama reported a lower rate of marijuana use compared to students in the same age group across the nation.
- Alabama's students feel safer at school, compared to previous years. Nearly 80 percent reported "never" being afraid of being hurt by a student in 2006-07 vs. 76 percent in 2002-03.
- Prevention, intervention and academic programs related to identified risks and protective factors are giving Alabama's students a healthy edge for safe development.

Every school system and all of the 885 participating schools have a comprehensive report, which means more than 95 percent of the state's schools with students in Grades 6-12 can review student risk and protective factors including substance use, bullying behavior and the attitudes and beliefs of its students. Additionally, participating school administrators can compare their outcomes to other schools in the system, the state and the nation.

View the complete report online [HERE](#).



## State Board Appoints New Deputy Superintendent

**DR. TOMMY BICE**, former Superintendent of the Alexander City Schools, is the new Deputy Superintendent of Education for the Alabama Department of Education. The state Board of Education unanimously accepted **STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION JOE MORTON'S** recommendation to

appoint Dr. Bice to replace **DR. RUTH ASH**, who retired March 31. Bice will oversee all aspects of instruction for the state's education department.

Dr. Bice has served Alabama public schools as a teacher, psychometrist, regional director for Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind, adjunct professor, career and technical education director, principal and superintendent. He is Legislative Chair and President-elect of School Superintendents of Alabama and



*Dr. Tommy Bice*

serves on the Standards Committee for the Governor's Congress on School Leadership.

Dr. Bice received his B.S. in Special Education from Auburn University, his M.A. in Special Education from the University of Alabama in Birmingham and his Ed.D. from Auburn University. He also attended the Harvard Institute for School Leadership and the National Academy for Superintendents at Ohio State University.

Under Bice's leadership, the Alexander City School System, in partnership with the Alexander City Chamber of Commerce, was awarded the National Civic Star Award in 2007 by the American Association of School Administrators.

Alexander City was the first system in the state to have all schools designated as demonstration sites for the nationally recognized Alabama Reading Initiative. For the 2007-08 school

year, an Engineering Academy was implemented at Benjamin Russell High School in partnership with Auburn University's College of Engineering. A Freshman Cohort will be implemented during the 2008-09 school year to become a four-year academy program for engineering.

The Alexander City Schools Education Foundation has recently completed a \$1 million fund-raising campaign to make all core academic classrooms 21st Century Classrooms equipped with the most current and applicable technology. Two schools are in the training and implementation stage of this project with all schools slated to be equipped and operational by 2010.

"We are very fortunate to have an educator of Dr. Bice's caliber," said Morton. "His strengths and expertise, along with our dedicated staff, will help us continue to focus our efforts on improving the overall quality of K-12 education in Alabama."

**U.S. DEPARTMENT AWARDS \$11 MILLION TO 39 STATES TO HELP PAY FEES FOR ADVANCED PLACEMENT TESTS**  
**→ ALABAMA GETS \$63,114**

**U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION MARGARET SPELLINGS** recently announced the award of \$11 million in grants to 39 states to help them pay the fees for advanced placement tests for low-income students.

The department will make awards to state educational agencies to enable them to cover part or all of the test fees for low-income students who are enrolled in an Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) class and plan to take an AP or IB test. The program aims to encourage low-income students to take AP or IB tests and obtain college credit for high school courses, reducing the time and cost required to complete a postsecondary degree.

“These grants will help more low-income students take advantage of the rigorous coursework they need to succeed in college and the workforce,” Spellings said. The grants also complement the President’s fiscal year 2009 budget request to increase funding for AP and IB programs to \$70 million in order to help prepare more educators to teach these challenging classes and encourage more students from high-need schools to take and pass AP courses and tests.

Awards may be used only to support AP test fees for low-income students. Tests administered by the College Board and the International Baccalaureate Organization are covered. Traditionally, 11th- and 12th-graders take an AP exam after completing the corresponding AP course. However, participation in an exam is open to any student regardless of course participation or grade level.

In the United States, more than 90 percent of colleges and universities have a policy of granting incoming students credit, placement, or both, for qualifying AP test scores.

*Russell County Celebrates Education with its “Big E.C.”*

**THE RUSSELL COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT** held its Education Celebration 2008 or the “Big E.C.” in March. The event was held to celebrate the children of Russell County and their accomplishments during this year, in addition to motivating students prior to testing. Many community members, families, school district employees and children participated in this fun-filled, family-oriented celebration. A variety of local businesses and agencies were on hand to share information with those present as they waited for the program to begin. There were approximately 500 people in attendance.

The Russell County High School JROTC began the program with the Presentation of Colors and a Moment of Silence. **JAFON FEARSON**, a senior at RCHS, made an appeal to the students to use their talents and brilliance to make this world a better place and to show the world the great minds that are right there in Russell County.

Those present were treated to a slide show developed by **DENISE SHIELDS** that showcased the school district. Students, teachers and even principals performed skits, songs, dances and cheers. All of the schools did a wonderful job as they came together to celebrate during the Education Celebration.

*BCN-TV Sweeps State Broadcast Journalism Competition*



*BCN-TV staff visiting The University of Alabama campus for the ASPA Convention & Competitions.*

**STUDENTS IN THREE** Alabama high schools joined their common interests in television journalism to achieve one major accomplishment. A story about rebuilding a small Mississippi town after Hurricane Katrina, coverage of the Central High School football championship, and a feature about the new Oakhill School pond led the Television Production students at the Tuscaloosa Center for Technology to receive a number of Alabama Scholastic Press Association (ASPA) awards.

Students from Bryant (B), Central (C), and Northridge (N) high schools participate in the Television Production program, which produces the weekly television show BCN-TV presents “Common Ground” each Friday at 8 a.m. on WVUA-TV.

BCN-TV staff members won 28 of 37 individual broadcast awards given at the 2008 ASPA Convention at The University of Alabama, plus the top journalism award, “All-Alabama.” The program has won nearly 120 ASPA awards in seven years.

## Four Teachers Vie for the Title of Alabama Teacher of the Year

**FROM THE SWEET 16** to the Final Four, the excitement builds as judges narrow the list of candidates for the next Alabama Teacher of the Year. One-hundred forty-seven educators were nominated for Alabama's 2008-2009 Teacher of the Year, and that list went from 16 in March to 4 in April and now the wait is on. All eyes are on May 7 in Montgomery to see who will represent Alabama as the state's 2008-2009 Teacher of the Year.

The four finalists selected now advance to the interview component of the judging process. The state judges will select Alabama's Teacher of the Year and an Alternate, then the winner will be announced at a reception honoring all of the district finalists on May 7, 2008, in Montgomery. Alabama's current Alternate Teacher of the Year **CHRISTINE SEALY** will serve on the committee to select the 2008-2009 Teacher of the Year.

"I congratulate the final four candidates for Alabama's Teacher of the Year. Each of the finalists represents the state's best and brightest teachers. It will not be an easy task for the judges to narrow the list further, but I'm sure any one of the candidates will represent Alabama with the utmost dedication and commitment to impacting public education and the teaching profession," said **STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION JOE MORTON**.

For more information on the Teacher of the Year program, visit the [Alabama Department of Education Web site](#) or contact Ann Starks, (334) 242-9700, [astarks@alsde.edu](mailto:astarks@alsde.edu).

### FINAL FOUR TEACHER OF THE YEAR CANDIDATES:

ELEMENTARY



**REGINA EVERETT**  
Saraland Elementary  
Mobile County - District I



**AMBER TRANTHAM**  
Alexandria Elementary School  
Calhoun County - District III

SECONDARY



**ROY HUDSON**  
Shades Valley High School  
Jefferson County - District IV



**LAWANA "JEANNE" WELT**  
Liberty Middle School  
Madison City - District VIII

## Awards, Opportunities and Professional Development

### Hooked On Fishing – Not On Drugs® Workshop, May 29, Tannehill Historical State Park

This one-day training session uses a mentor-based fishing program to teach fishing skills and positive life choices. Volunteers are invited. To register, *e-mail Maurice Jackson*, Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, or phone (205) 477-6301.

**DEADLINE: May 26**

**AP Summer Institutes** offer professional development opportunities for AP teachers and administrators:

[Auburn University](#), June 23-27.

[University of Alabama](#), July 8-12, July 14-18, and July 21-25.

**DEADLINE: June 2**

*Each session is limited to 30 enrollees.*

**The History Channel's Save Our History grant program** has awarded \$1 million since 2004 to historical organizations to fund hands-on, experimental educational projects that teach students about local history and actively engage them in preservation.

[Apply online](#) for the 2008-09 school year. **DEADLINE: June 6**

**FREE** (<http://www.free.ed.gov>) organizes more than 1,500 lesson plans from the Library of Congress, Smithsonian Institution, National Archives and other federal agencies.

[CLICK HERE](#) to locate resources grouped by subject area or alphabetically by topic.

**FREE** portrait of George Washington for your school from **Mt. Vernon Ladies Association**, which is working to promote our nation's first president by placing his picture back in schools across the country. To request a portrait, the principal should send a letter on school letterhead to:

Ann Bay

Associate Director for Education

George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate & Gardens

P.O. Box 110

Mount Vernon, VA 22121

*Letter should include a description of location where portrait will hang in the school and school's street address for UPS deliveries.*

For more information, [CLICK HERE](#).

### National Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Education Digital Library

Purpose: To establish a national network of learning environments and resources for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education at all levels. For complete information,

[CLICK HERE](#). **DEADLINE: June 27**

**Visit Historic Fort Mitchell National Landmark.** Located on Alabama Hwy. 165 South, 10 miles south of Phenix City and Columbus, GA, Fort Mitchell features a reconstructed frontier fort, originally built in 1813 during the Creek Indian Wars.

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



## 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)

## J U N E

- June 2 - Jefferson Davis' Birthday (state holiday)
- June 12 - State Board of Education Meeting
- June 14 - Flag Day
- June 26 - State Board of Education Work Session

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**State Superintendent of Education and Secretary and Executive Officer of the Alabama Board of Education** | Joseph B. Morton

### APRIL BOARD BRIEFS

- ✎ Resolution Commending Jean McCutchen, Recipient of the Robert L. Morton Award
- ✎ Resolution Commending ABC 33/40 for its Support of K-12 Education and the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI)
- ✎ Resolution in Recognition of Public School Week, April 21-25, 2008
- ✎ Approval of Deputy State Superintendent of Education for Instructional Services

*For a complete list of agenda items, visit the [Alabama Department of Education's Web site](#) under "Board of Ed."*

### ABOUT ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS

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