



ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS

NEWS AND ISSUES IN ALABAMA PUBLIC EDUCATION, K-12

OCTOBER 2007



Alabama Leads the Nation in Gains Made in 4th Grade Reading

WE'RE #1! That's what dozens of signs read in the hands of Alabama Department of Education employees during a news conference to announce the results of the nation's report card. The 2007 data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows a historic gain of eight points in fourth grade Reading for Alabama public school students – the largest gain in the nation, and an indication that Alabama is closing the

achievement gap. Alabama is only four scale score points from the national average (220) in fourth grade Reading.

“Of all the things I have done since I've been Governor, whether it is economic development or anything else, there has never been a press conference I have been more excited about,” said **GOVERNOR BOB RILEY** as he began the news conference. “Alabama is poised to lead the nation in so many things, but the one that is most important is that we lead in education.”

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In 2005, the scale score for fourth grade Reading was 208 and in 2007 the gain increased significantly to 216 – resulting in a net gain of eight points. That’s almost triple the national average in gains.

“This is a marathon, not a sprint,” observed STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION JOE MORTON. “When we started the Alabama Reading Initiative nearly a decade ago, we knew it would take time to get full funding and implement it statewide. We had to prove ourselves and we are doing so. The same is true for the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI). In grades and schools where we have these state initiatives, we have seen improvement. Now we must continue to work to expand both programs to higher grades and all schools.”

MARK SCHNEIDER, Commissioner for the National Center for Education Statistics said Alabama’s gain in fourth grade Reading scores is higher than any other state between 2005 and 2007. “This gain stands out for this year’s assessment, and in the history of NAEP’s state-level Reading assessment,” Schneider said.

For the first time in Alabama history, Alabama public school students in grades K-3 had completed the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) training before the 2007 NAEP assessment was administered to fourth graders. And the dramatic increase in NAEP reading results points out the need for ARI training in the middle grades. The ARI will expand to Grades 4 through 8 by 2009.

“We’re number one and Alabama will never be the same!” exclaimed ASSISTANT STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION KATHERINE MITCHELL.

Alabama also made significant gains in the *Advanced* category in fourth grade Reading. In 2005, 4 percent of Alabama students scored at the *Advanced* level. In 2007, that percent nearly doubled to 7 percent of the students scoring at the *Advanced* level. That percentage equals the national average of students scoring at the *Advanced* level.

“The impact ARI has had on our school has been unbelievable,” said MS. SHERRY CALVERT, Principal of FE Burleson Elementary in Hartselle. “When I asked my faculty what they attribute our positive change in performance, the answer was, ‘The training ARI provides in reading comprehension.’”

The good news continues from NAEP with data that shows Alabama posted significant gains in fourth grade

Mathematics, and gains in eighth grade Mathematics. In 2005, fourth-graders in Alabama scored 225 points and in 2007 the score rose to 229. The national average improved by two points while Alabama’s score showed a four point gain. The percentage of students who performed at or above the NAEP Proficient level was 26 percent in 2007, up from 21 percent in 2005. Alabama’s eight-graders improved NAEP Mathematics score from 262 in 2005 to 266 in 2007 while the nation only rose by two points over 2005 scores.

“The people we owe all of our appreciation to are the teachers of Alabama who have done a fantastic job,” said Gov. Riley.

“We’re now beginning to see the results of our efforts,” said DAVID BYERS, vice president of the state Board of Education and District 6 representative. “Investments in our Alabama Reading Initiative and Math, Science, and Technology Initiative demonstrate increases in teaching and learning.”

In addition, the 2007 scores reflect the first time that the NAEP test was administered to students enrolled in schools that participated in AMSTI. Those schools that have implemented AMSTI continually see increased test scores on all levels. Currently, only 25% percent of Alabama’s schools have implemented AMSTI; however, that number could grow to more than 40 percent if additional funding is approved in FY 2009.

“AMSTI training requires students to think, question, and find answers they are able to support and defend,” said MRS.

CAROL BROUGHTON, Principal Fairhope Intermediate School in Baldwin County. “Such critical thinking skills are beneficial for learning and testing.”

Approximately 12,000 students from approximately 230 schools in Alabama participated in the NAEP Reading and Mathematics assessments in January – March 2007. Nationwide 338,100 students took the NAEP Reading test and 337,100 students participated in the Mathematics Assessment. These assessments are required by *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB).

Reading and Mathematics results are reported by average scale scores (on a 0-500 scale), and by achievement levels (*Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced*). NAEP assesses a representative sample of students in Grades 4 and 8 from each state in Reading and Mathematics every two years.

2007 NAEP Reading and Mathematics results can be viewed at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>.

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings sent an e-mail to Gov. Riley the morning of the big announcement.

“I want to be the first to congratulate the state of Alabama for leading the nation in 4th grade Reading gains,” said Spellings. “Combining proven methods of instruction with hard-working students and dedicated teachers has paid off with reading scores rising eight points in just two years.

It’s phenomenal.”



October is Parental Involvement Month in Alabama

OCTOBER is Parental Involvement Month across Alabama, but what exactly is parental involvement? Under the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, parental involvement is defined as the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities. This includes ensuring that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning; that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school; that parents are full partners, and are included in their child's education in decision making; and that parents are included on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child.

Usually it is not lack of interest that keeps parents from becoming involved in their children's education. Often there are barriers in the way.



For parents to become involved, schools must develop and maintain a commitment to a parent involvement program. Listed are several ideas suggested by the Alabama PTA on what schools, teachers, and principals can do to get parents to play an active role in their child's education and school.

Tips to Help Your Child Succeed

As a parent, you are the most important influence in your child's success. Below are 10 ways you can help your child succeed in school and life.

1. **Let's talk** – Talk with your child
2. **Reach for the sky** – Set high but realistic expectations
3. **I'm OK, you're OK** – Build your child's self-esteem and confidence
4. **An apple a day** – Keep your child healthy
5. **Parents, the first teachers** – Support learning at home
6. **Getting connected!** – Communicate with your child's school
7. **Oh, the places we'll go!** – Encourage exploration and discovery
8. **Circle of friends** – Help your child develop good relationships
9. **Stayin' alive** – Keep your child safe
10. **Can I help?** – Participate in community service

(source: Alabama PTA)

SUGGESTED PARENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES FOR SCHOOLS:

- Welcome parents in a positive and friendly manner. Send a welcoming letter to parents at the beginning of the year to establish rapport and start the year on a positive note.
- Schedule parent-teacher conferences at times convenient to working and non-working parents; e.g., early morning; before, during and after lunch; late afternoon; and nights.
- Survey parents for their opinions about school services, programs, and specific needs.
- Publish a school newsletter in which parent, student, and staff contributions to the school are regularly recognized.
- Offer parenting classes, workshops, and support groups at flexible times and provide child care.
- Create a parent resource room for activities, meetings, get-togethers, and materials to assist them in helping their children.
- Provide messages pertaining to student accomplishments, coming events, and parent involvement opportunities for recording to parents' answering machines.
- Equip staff with developmental training that will assist them in knowing how to best work and communicate with parents.
- Develop a plan for regular teacher-to-parent communication.
- Encourage parents to communicate with their child's teacher on a regular basis.
- Maintain a forum for parents to share their ideas and/or concerns in a non-threatening atmosphere.

INSIDEOUT

Turning Prisoners Into Teachers:



The InsideOut Story

ROUGHLY half the people who hear the noise of door number two coming to a close at Holman prison will never hear that sound again for as long as they live. It's a sound that countless numbers of prisoners have heard over the years and the sound that most would like to hear at least one more time – as they regain their freedom. However, on this day the sound is heard not by a prisoner, but by a man on a mission to reduce the high school dropout rate and promote literacy in Alabama. And he wants those who have made the wrong choices in their lives to help him reach the thousands of young people at risk.

72%
of dropouts are more likely to be unemployed compared to graduates

DR. SHELLEY STEWART, CEO of the Birmingham-based marketing firm O2 Ideas, is also the Founder and Board President of The Mattie C. Stewart Foundation, a non-profit organization named after his mother whom he witnessed being killed by his own father at the age of five in 1939 in Rosedale, Alabama. The purpose of the foundation is to provide the tools and resources needed to help educators, community leaders, and other interested parties to motivate young people to stay in school while promoting the importance of getting a good education.

Inside Out is an emotionally gripping and motivational documentary film that goes behind the prison walls to deliver a powerful message of hope from

people who are suffering the consequences of their decision to drop out of school and lead a life of crime. It's a stark look at prison life – with inmates telling their personal stories of regret for not pursuing an education and graduating. Stewart compassionately interviews the inmates and unveils their genuine hope to give others the chance they no longer have, to avoid the pitfalls of dropping out of school. All of the inmates interviewed are either serving life sentences or life without parole. “Think about the impact of 1,000 voices – or even the 27,000 voices inside Alabama state prisons – teaching our children that they can avoid this horrible consequence if they will only get an education,” said Stewart. “Who better to teach than the one that has learned? Who can show the right road but those who have come down the wrong road?”

The documentary, along with a shorter classroom version and a supporting teachers guide, is being made available to all principals and counselors in Alabama as part of “Dropout Awareness Day” September 21, 2007.



THE
MATTIE C. STEWART
FOUNDATION

“Each day we keep our children in school and increase their formal education skills, we are making an investment in all of our futures,” said **JOE MORTON**, Alabama Superintendent of Education. “The teaching message in *InsideOut* is clear: A life lost to prison is a life lost to a family, to relatives, to friends...to all of Alabama. We must do all we can to stop the loss of these lives. This documentary has application for everyone who sees it, regardless of age or social position.”

As part of an early preview tour in May, *InsideOut* made its debut to educators and community leaders in Huntsville, Mobile, Birmingham and Montgomery to overwhelmingly positive reviews. Based on the success of those previews, the statewide distribution and classroom showing of *InsideOut* on September 21st was put into motion. The success of this initiative will then be used to launch a national campaign through The Mattie C. Stewart Foundation with the goal of reaching educators, students and community leaders in Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Mississippi before the end of the year.

To learn more about The Mattie C. Stewart Foundation and *InsideOut*, visit www.mattiestewart.org.

75%
of America's state prison inmates are high school dropouts

70%
of inmates cannot read or write





Donna Kirkendoll teaching positive behavior at Sumter/Greene Counties

You've heard of the 3 Rs –
reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic,
but what about the other 3 Rs –
respectful, responsible and resourceful?

The 3 Rs of Positive Behavior

These are the 3 Rs being taught at 298 schools including 29 systems across Alabama as part of the Positive Behavior Supports program (PBS). The program takes a proactive instead of a reactive approach to discipline in schools systemwide, and equips schools with the ability to:

- Reduce office discipline referrals
- Reduce suspensions/expulsions
- Reduce the number of students referred to the Bulding-based Student Support Team.
- Reduce the number of students referred for Special Education testing
- Increase consistency/morale among staff

Teachers, administrators, parents, and other school personnel are trained in effective strategies to improve student behavior and discipline. They in turn implement this strategy across the board to increase consistency among staff when invoking discipline. The schools also reinforce positive behavior with rewards and recognition programs.

“The key is having a proactive plan in place for what you are going to do when a certain behavior occurs and then knowing how to follow through with the discipline,” said DONNA KIRKENDOLL, coordinator for the PBS Training Program.

The PBS program is a proven success at University Place Elementary in Tuscaloosa where office referrals decreased 50% from the 2005-06 school year to 2006-07. UNIVERSITY PLACE

PRINCIPAL DERON CAMERON said, “Our faculty has immersed themselves in the program as we consistently recognize students who follow our rules and procedures after having been taught appropriate behaviors.” Cameron added that students are able to recite the 3 Rs and they know what each one entails.

VAN NELSON, principal at Marion County High School, said PBS keeps teachers, staff, and students on the same page regarding negative and positive behaviors. “The climate of the school is different. It’s making people look at people differently and encourages them to do the things you want them to do in a positive manner.” said Nelson. “Teachers have a better rapport with students.”

Office referrals at Elberta Elementary (K-3) in Baldwin County declined from 652 to 47 since implementation in 2001. “Our major office referrals come from kindergarten. By the time the children are in the 2nd grade they already know the expectations for behavior,” said Principal Hope Zeahan.

The number of office referrals in Childersburg Middle School declined from 1,971 in the 2002-03 school year to 1,109 for the 2005-06 school year.

Another factor of the PBS Program is the increase in time dedicated to teaching. Taking a proactive instead of reactive approach alleviates taking time

“The key is having a proactive plan in place for what you are going to do when a certain behavior occurs and then knowing how to follow through with the discipline.”

Donna Kirkendoll,
PBS Training Program Coordinator

away from classroom instruction.

“One of the most powerful things we teach our teachers is to use a problem-solving model – system data and practices. We teach them to use the data to make decisions on what type of intervention they need schoolwide,” said Kirkendoll.

The PBS training program is administered by the Alabama Department of Education. It was first implemented in 2001 in select schools and began systemwide in 2002.

If you are interested in developing a Positive Behavior Systems program in your school system, call Donna Kirkendoll at the Alabama Department of Education at 334-242-8114.



Good News in Alabama Schools

Fayetteville Educators Selected to Participate in 2007 Microsoft US Innovative Teachers Forum

*Microsoft Education
Program Recognizes and
Rewards Exemplary
Learning Teams
Demonstrating
21st Century Skills*

August 15, 2007 – Jennifer Barnett, Amanda Spurling, Karen Pemberton, and Patsy Lagen of Fayetteville High School were selected from a national pool of candidates to participate in the 2007 Microsoft U.S. Innovative Teachers Forum. The U.S. Innovative Teachers Forum is one of a series of regional events hosted by Microsoft around the world as part of the Microsoft Innovative Teachers Program. The forums are designed to recognize and reward outstanding examples of educators

collaborating and sharing expertise to build collective knowledge.

The Fayetteville High School team was one of 20 learning teams invited to the U.S. Forum. In recognition for their outstanding efforts Microsoft will pay for their travel to the Microsoft Corporate Campus in Redmond, Washington, to participate in the event on September 27th and 28th. A subset of the U.S. Forum participants will be selected as ambassadors for the United States at the worldwide Microsoft Innovative Teachers Forum in Helsinki, Finland, in October 2007.

Since 2002 the Microsoft Innovative Teachers Program has connected a community of educators who share a common interest in enhancing teaching and learning through the use of technology. The program provides classroom learning and professional development resources, and recognizes and rewards teachers who demonstrate exemplary use of technology in the classroom, with their peers, and for their own professional development and productivity.

For more information on the Microsoft Innovative Teachers Program, please visit:

www.microsoft.com/education/innovativeteachers.mspx



\$200,000 Grant Announced for Cullman City Schools

CONGRESSMAN ROBERT ADERHOLT (R-Haleyville) recently announced that the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) recently awarded a \$200,000 grant to Cullman City Schools. The money will be used to aid in the acquisition of laptop computers and Smart Boards for the schools' Get SMART program. The grant will underwrite the acquisition of 500 laptop computers and 25 Smart Boards for classrooms that will directly benefit ninth and tenth grade students and approximately 50 teachers. The computers will permit the schools to offer enhanced online educational programming to students and continuing educational opportunities to the teachers and parents of the students. It is estimated that 300

students in the community will also benefit from computer literacy training programs that will be offered by the schools.

CULLMAN CITY SCHOOLS SUPERINTENDENT DR. JAN HARRIS said, "The Cullman City School System is thrilled to receive a \$200,000 ARC grant for Smart Technology. Our students will be the beneficiaries of this innovative grant that will provide 21st Century technology for their use. Appreciation is extended to Congressman Aderholt, Governor Riley, and the ARC for approving this Smart Technology grant. We are grateful for the enriched opportunities this funding will provide for our students."



Alabama's 2006 Teacher of the Year Ready to Run in NYC Marathon

CAMERON MCKINLEY prepares to “tie one on” for kids’ fitness. The former Teacher of the Year is passionate about the health and fitness of Alabama’s kids, and she will tie up her orange shoelaces to run 26.2 miles in the New York City Marathon on November 4th in support of her passion. “I am running this to promote kids’ fitness. Alabama is 4th in the nation in child obesity so I wanted to do something to help people be aware that we need to get our children interested in running or some other form of fitness,” said McKinley.

McKinley is running as part of the *Run for Something Better* Campaign sponsored by ING. “Anyone can donate ten dollars and receive a pair of orange shoelaces as part of ING’s ‘Run for Something Better’ campaign, said company spokesperson Joseph Loparco. “The orange shoelaces show you’re tied to running and kids’ fitness,” added Loparco. ING sponsors the National Teacher of the Year and the NYC Marathon. Kids participating in ING’s *Run for Something Better* program have run enough miles to reach the moon (approximately 238,000 miles)! Wow, that gives new meaning to the phrase “...to the moon!”

McKinley says she ran marathons years ago to raise money for leukemia and was asked at a Teacher of the Year conference last year by ING to run in this year’s NYC Marathon. “It doesn’t matter how busy you are or how long it’s been, you can always pick yourself up and do it again,” said McKinley. “I wanted to get back into getting involved in being an example of fitting in



fitness,” she added.

The 2006 Teacher of the Year is also working to build fitness into her curriculum. Since McKinley is an Integrated Technology teacher at Riverchase Elementary, she is working to combine technology with fitness. “There are things we can create to put on i-pods so these kids can be learning and walking at the same time,” said McKinley.

McKinley says her students will also produce Public Service Announcements on staying fit and healthy. The students will also track the minutes used

while performing fitness activities using spreadsheets. The results and the PSAs will be posted on a newly created website <http://camruns.wikispaces.com>. McKinley hopes this Web site will help spread the message across Alabama about the importance of kids’ fitness.

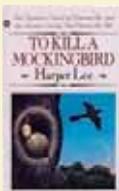
“We want to get kids to have good habits now. Whether it be running or gardening or soccer, we need to make fitness a priority,” said McKinley.

Awards, Opportunities, and Professional Development



The 2007-2008 Alfa Teacher of the Month Program honors outstanding K-12 public and private school teachers and principals with \$1,000 cash awards (not grant awards) and \$1,000 to their schools. For more information, contact Ann Starks at 334-242-9702 or astarks@alsde.edu. **DEADLINE: Oct. 19** (for teachers in State Board of Education Districts 6, 7, and 8)

Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network and National School Boards Association Award recognizes a local school board for outstanding support of the arts in education. Award includes a cash prize of \$10,000 to use for arts education programs. Contact Susan Butler at sbutler@nsba.org or 703-838-6711 or Adriana Cutler at acutler@kennedy-center.org. **DEADLINE: Dec. 3**



The seventh annual To Kill a Mockingbird Essay Contest is open to Alabama students in Grades 9-12. The essay’s theme should reflect the writer’s perception of how life has changed in the South from the time period depicted in the novel. The statewide student winner and the student’s school each receive \$500. Contact Dr. Lesa Shaul, The Honors College, The University of Alabama, at 205-348-5557 or lshaul@bama.ua.edu. **DEADLINE: Dec. 14**

High School Teachers – Express Yourself! The University of Alabama’s Honors College wants your take on reading and/or teaching Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The Honors College invites Alabama high school teachers to share a singular experience or memory of reading and/or teaching Lee’s novel. Prose or poetry submissions will be accepted. The Honors College expects to include selected essays in a published volume. Contact Dr. Lesa Shaul, The Honors College, The University of Alabama, at 205-348-5557 or lshaul@bama.ua.edu. **DEADLINE: Dec. 14**



2008-2009 Alabama Teacher of the Year application is online. For more information, contact Ann Starks at 334-242-9702 or astarks@alsde.edu. **DEADLINE: Jan. 28, 2008**

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BOARD BRIEFS

O C T O B E R

- ✦ Resolution Proclaiming October as Statewide Parent Visitation Month in Alabama
- ✦ Resolution Recognizing the Family of Teron Dukes, Cleburne County Schools, as the Statewide Winning Family in the 2007 Poster Contest on Parental Involvement
- ✦ Receive Recommendations of the State Textbook Committee for Adoption of Textbooks for Reading/Literature and Driver and Traffic Safety Education

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.

O C T O B E R

*Statewide Parent Involvement Month · School Bus Safety Month
 Child Mental Health Month · Computer Learning Month*

October 7-12 –	National Fire Prevention Week
October 8 –	Columbus Day
October 11 –	State Board Meeting
October 15-19 –	National School Lunch Week
October 22-26 –	Red Ribbon Week, Safe Schools Week
October 25 –	State Board Work Session
October 28 –	Statue of Liberty Birthday

N O V E M B E R

*Child Safety and Protection Month
 Adoption Awareness Month*

November 8 –	State Board Meeting and Work Session
November 11-17 –	American Education Week (NEA)
November 12 –	Veterans Day Observed
November 20 –	Universal Children's Day
November 22 –	Thanksgiving Day

PAID
 POSTAGE
 PERIODICALS