



ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS

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Graduation Rate Within One Point of Plan 2020 Goal

An Unprecedented 89% Grad Rate Sees More High School Graduates Than Ever Before!

Increasing the high school graduation rate

in Alabama is a primary objective of PLAN 2020, Alabama’s template for public education reform. The Alabama State Board of Education supported the ambitious goal of reaching a 90% graduation rate by the year 2020 – and the state is on course to meet that challenge.

The recently announced 2014-15 school year statewide graduation rate shows that 89% of high school seniors in Alabama graduated – on time. In fact, Alabama’s graduation rate has climbed steadily every year, from 72% in 2012 to 89% in 2015. To illustrate the practical impact on students, for every one percent increase in the graduation rate, approximately 600 additional students graduate from high school. More than 10,000 students are earning their high school diploma annually than just four years ago in Alabama.

Governor Robert Bentley expressed his support for the efforts made to achieve this milestone. “Graduating from high school is an important accomplishment for students and gives them opportunities for success in life,” Governor Robert Bentley said. “Today’s news that the Alabama graduation rate has increased

to 89% is a testament to hardworking teachers, principals, and other school staff who encourage and help our students meet their education goals and graduate. I commend Dr. Bice and the leadership of the State Board of Education for prioritizing this effort. I am confident that by working together we will continue to move our state forward.”

Dr. Tommy Bice, State Superintendent of Education, said although he is very pleased with the increases in the graduation rate, the state must continue its efforts to make sure students are not only graduating, but graduating prepared for the workforce and/or college after high school.

“These graduation numbers are a huge indicator that Alabama students and teachers are working harder, and doing so with higher academic standards than were previously used. This most recent graduating class completed most of it’s high school coursework under the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards; standards that are more aligned with the expectations of business and industry, as well as colleges and universities,” Bice said.



“In Alabama, graduating college- and career-ready means students will have the ability to move into a two- or four-year college setting without the need for remedial coursework, or move into the workforce prepared with the expected competencies and, in many cases, industry recognized credentials to start work on day one.”

There is no singular issue that addresses increased high

continued on next page...

Graduation Rate



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school graduation and no silver bullet fix. Bice said a variety of concerns – from the identification of barriers that impede student success and individualized solutions, to greater support and encouragement at school and in the home – all factor into successful educational outcomes. Also, the benefit of a high school diploma spills over into more than just the field of education. The social impact is one that benefits all of Alabama. High school graduates are less likely to end up on the wrong side of the criminal justice system, receive public assistance, or be unemployed.

Certain not to rest on his laurels, Bice said graduation rates are just one of many challenges public education faces today and just one component of PLAN 2020. Increasing proficiency for all students, closing the achievement gap between subgroups,

We are encouraged by movement in the right direction that shows Alabama's best days in public education are ahead. – State Superintendent Dr. Tommy Bice

making sure teachers are well resourced and supported, and providing adequate funding for schools and school systems are just some of the objectives that need to be met in order to fulfill the promise of PLAN 2020.

“We have a long way to go. But we are encouraged by movement in the right direction that shows Alabama’s best days in public education are ahead,” Bice said. “It is in the best interest of our state’s education, economy, and social structure to keep moving forward along the path that has been laid for public education in Alabama.” aen

Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards Annual Review Now Open

In our constant effort to continually improve outcomes for students in Grades K-12, the

Alabama State Department of Education is asking for public feedback

specifically related to the current Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards for English/language arts and mathematics.

This annual review

offers an opportunity for those who are genuinely interested in improving education to offer feedback related to each standard for English/language arts and mathematics by grade.

We hope you participate in the review process of the Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards for English/language arts and mathematics. Your input is highly regarded and invaluable as we seek to maintain the highest level of rigor and challenge for all students in Alabama’s public schools.

The public review will begin January 11, 2016, and conclude on March 14, 2016. [Click](#) to begin the review.

At the conclusion of the public review, the feedback generated will go to the state English/Language Arts and Mathematics Course of Study (COS) teams. The comments that will be considered for action by the teams are those of academic substance that are tied specifically to a standard. The COS teams may then provide recommendations to the Alabama State Board of Education. aen



Get the ALSDE app!



Alabama State Department Announces New App!

A new app will help users to navigate the Alabama State Department of Education website faster and with more ease. Obtaining directions, contact information, and calendar dates can all be found on the app. Quick access to the Education Directory, *Alabama Education News* magazine, press releases, links to social media, and more, are right at your fingertips!

State Department of Education “Celebrates Innovation” in Schools Across the State

The Alabama State Department of Education is recognizing the leadership and vision it takes to be a trailblazer in education through “Celebrate Innovation,” a months-long recognition of the new and inventive ways educators are delivering quality instruction – instruction that is preparing students for college and 21st century careers.

Since October, State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tommy Bice, State Board of Education members, ALSDE staff, and other state and local education stakeholders have been visiting school systems that are thinking outside the box and creating innovative courses and programs for Alabama’s students.

From extending the time of physical education instruction to promote healthier habits among students, to establishing a “Success on Saturday” program for learners who need extra academic support, to offering a career technical path diploma option for students ready to enter the workforce upon graduation from high school, these inventive and more rigorous instructional opportunities are helping students excel in the classroom and beyond.

For example, the Talladega County School System’s Munford schools have partnered with several organizations to help fund and provide students with innovative, hands-on learning. The U.S. Forest Service, Georgia Pacific, the Alabama Forestry Commission, Jacksonville State University, and Auburn University are just some of the organizations that help fund or donate items to aid with Munford schools’ Project-Based Learning (PBL). PBL is a teaching method where students work for an extended period of time to research

... these inventive and more rigorous instructional opportunities are helping students excel in the classroom and beyond.

and respond to a challenging question to gain knowledge and skills.

In the nearby Sylacauga City School System, the city’s school system has developed the “Success on Saturday” (SOS) program. A collaborative effort between administrators, teachers, different departments, and parents, SOS is an example of the school staff and the



community coming together in a unique way to support students in need. The program helps students who need extra work with different classes to improve their grades. Teachers work with the students during SOS one on one, and the work is individualized. Students also learn team building skills, and school bus transportation is provided along with breakfast, a snack, and lunch.

Many school systems on the “Celebrate Innovation” tour have established career academies that allow students to get on-the-job training in various business settings while completing requirements to earn a high school diploma.

The Boaz City School System’s H3 Academy integrates technical skills with academics in industries or occupations that are dominant in the local region. Those involved in the Boaz H3 Academy are given the opportunity to explore a future in the health sciences, human services, and hospitality and tourism fields.

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Innovation Celebration *continued from previous page...*

Other highlights of the tour so far also include the following:

- The **Fort Payne City School System** hosted a showcase of the system's career and technical education, STEM, and visual and performing arts programs. Visitors toured classrooms and heard presentations from culinary arts, welding, and video design students, and members of the Real World Design, Robotics, and Rifle teams, among others.
- The **Scottsboro City School System's** Learning Labs, which encompass teacher-led, teacher-driven professional development, are a shining example of school staff coming together to enhance instruction. This in-house professional development model incorporates "learning by doing," student evidence, and teacher collaboration among the participants.
- The **Trussville City School System** led guests on a tour of career and technical program classrooms at Hewitt-Trussville High School, where they heard presentations from EMS, Fire Science, and Pharmacy students. Afterward, visitors traveled to Paine Primary School to see the robotics curriculum in action.
- The **Pell City School System's** Nursing and Pharmacy Programs offer opportunities for students who are interested in exploring health sciences and human services careers. Students who complete the pharmacy curriculum can eventually work as a certified pharmacy technician. Those enrolled in the certified nursing assistant program can continue their education in nursing school or gain certification as a nursing assistant through a partnership with Jefferson State Community College.
- The **Phenix City School System's** administrators, teachers, and students participated in a panel discussion of the i3 Initiative, which stands for inquiry, innovation, and impact. In addition to the construction of a new STEM Academy, the initiative includes the \$750,000 the school system spent this year to equip each of the approximately 1,500 students and 100 teachers at PCIS (Grades 6-7) and South Girard School (Grade 8) with an iPad Air. The plan is to add Grades 9-12 to the 1:1 electronic device program next school year.
- The **Butler County School System** hosted a showcase of its AmeriCorps Program and Career Academy. The Career Academy, which offers courses from welding to nursing, serves students throughout the school system. AmeriCorps provides instructional support on every campus in the school system. There are currently 25 AmeriCorp volunteers working in the school system, many of which go on to become certified teachers.
- The **Montgomery County School System's** Montgomery Preparatory Academy for Career Technologies (MPACT) high school experience includes career technical education with an integrated math course and several majors from which students may choose. Majors include information technology, fire and public safety, medical science, and pre-engineering. The program is aimed to give students a high school diploma with a job built in.



Upcoming "Celebrate Innovation" tour visits include stops to the Jefferson County, Hoover City, and Roanoke City School Systems. For more information regarding the Innovation Celebration, visit the [Innovation Zone](#) on the [ALSDE website](#) or follow us on Twitter at [#ALInnovativeSchools](#). 

- State and local news publications contributed to this report.

PLU: Effectively Serving English Learners

With the passage of the reauthorization bill, it is vital for Alabama educators to update their knowledge and skills for effectively serving English Learners (ELs). Such is the focus for PLUACLD367. This Professional Learning Unit (PLU) entails a two-day School Leaders Academy in Orange Beach (February 12-13), an online book study (*Big Ideas for Expanding Minds*) (March-April), a three-point action plan for a participant's school or school district (May), and a half-day closing session (June). This PLU is being sponsored by the Regional In-Service Center at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) in collaboration with the Alabama-Mississippi Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (AMTESOL).

PLUACLD367 begins with the School Leaders Academy "Effectively Serving English Learners," which will take place at the Perdido Beach Resort concurrently with the 2016 AMTESOL conference. Featured speakers at this academy are Dr. Bill Lawrence, Principal of Foley Elementary, on *Supporting Equitable Learning Environments for all of our Children*; and Tery Medina, Associate Director of Southeastern Equity (Ft. Lauderdale), on *Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Instruction*. EL resource teachers and university faculty from across Alabama will deliver the other strand topics: *Second Language Acquisition, Difference vs Disability, How to serve SIFE (Students with Interrupted Formal Education) English learners, Federal Laws and Court Cases, Aligning Standards — Common Core and English Language Development, Preparing Heritage Language Students for College and Career Readiness, and Establishing an EL Newcomers Center*.

To participate in this PLU, administrators must register at both of the following websites:

1. <http://www.amtesol.org/#!conference/citr> - Register for the AMTESOL conference and its Workshop Session E
2. STI-PD portal – Register for PLUACLD367, entitled PLUASIL 4 ACLD, UAB Regional Inservice Center, *Effectively Serving English Learners*

PLUACLD367 "Effectively Serving English Learners" has been approved by the Alabama Council for Leadership Development (ACLD) for meeting the Alabama Standards for Instructional Leader, Standard #4-Diversity. As such, it will serve for renewing administrator certifications. It is anticipated that a similar PLU will be offered each year by UAB's Regional In-Service Center in collaboration with AMTESOL.

For additional information about this PLU and about the 2016 AMTESOL conference, please contact Dr. Susan Spezzini at spezzini@uab.edu.

Repayable Scholarship Applications Available

The Alabama Department of Archives and History is now accepting applications for the Stonewall Jackson Memorial Fund Repayable Scholarship.

In order to qualify, applicants must submit an essay of 1,500 - 2,500 words on a topic or issue that relates to the life of



Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson. A cover page and an annotated bibliography of sources must accompany the essay, but will not be included in determining the length of the

essay. Applicants must also submit an application form.

The scholarship functions as a repayable no-interest loan that must be repaid after graduation from college. One year after graduation, recipients will be contacted to repay the scholarship amount under a scheduled repayment system set up by the individual.

Scholarship recipients are selected based on the historical (80 percent) and literary (20 percent) quality of the essays. Plagiarized or copied essays will be disqualified.

The scholarship evaluation committee will evaluate and rank the essays and will award repayable scholarships of the following amounts: 1st place, \$3,000; 2nd place, \$2,000; and 3rd place, \$1,000.

Repayable scholarship recipients will be announced in May 2016 and monetary awards will be made to the recipients' colleges upon verification of registration. The application deadline is April 1, 2016. More information about the scholarship, as well as the application, can be found [here](#).

Two Montgomery Students Selected for United States Senate Youth Program

Senators Richard C. Shelby and Jeff Sessions recently announced the names of the two students who have been selected as delegates to the 54th annual United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) that will be held March 5 – 12, 2016, in Washington, D.C.

Deja Chappell of Montgomery and **Steven Higgins**, also of Montgomery, were chosen from across the state to be part of the group of 104 student delegates who will attend the program’s 54th annual Washington Week. The USSYP was created by Senate Resolution 324 in 1962 and has been sponsored by the Senate and fully funded by The Hearst Foundations since inception. Originally proposed by Senators Kuchel, Mansfield, Dirksen, and Humphrey, the impetus for the program as stated in Senate testimony is “to increase young Americans’ understanding of the interrelationships of the three branches of government, learn the caliber and responsibilities of federally elected and appointed officials, and emphasize the vital importance of democratic decision making not only for America but for people around the world.”

Each year this extremely competitive merit-based program brings 104 of the most outstanding high school students — two from each state, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Education Activity — to Washington, D.C., for an intensive week-long study of the federal government and the people who lead it. The overall mission of the program is to help instill within each class of USSYP student delegates more profound knowledge of the American political process and a lifelong commitment to public service. In addition to the program week, The Hearst Foundations provide each student with a \$5,000 undergraduate college scholarship with encouragement to continue

coursework in government, history, and public affairs.

Deja Chappell attends Loveless Academic Magnet Program (LAMP) High School. She serves as the National Honor Society president and a committee chair for LAMP’s Invitational Model UN Conference. She has served three terms as class president, and served for two years as a member of the Keep America Beautiful National Youth Advisory Council. Deja is a U.S. State Department National Security Language Initiative Arabic scholar and has received honors from the Southern Youth Leadership Development Institute and the



American Foreign Service Association. She is interested in social justice and the power of the pen.

Steven Higgins is a senior at Brewbaker Technology Magnet High School and serves as a Student Government Association class representative. He is also president of the Youth in Government Club at his school. In addition, he is an active member in Bridge Builders of Alabama, an organization that brings students from different backgrounds together to focus on team building, communication, conflict resolution, and leadership skills. Upon graduation from college, Steven wants to use his work as a means to support civic engagement among youth.

Chosen as alternates to the 2016 program were John Touloupis, a resident of Birmingham, who attends Indian Springs School, and Chase Holcombe, a resident of Florence, who attends Florence High School. [aen](#)

Virtual Alabama School Safety System 2016 Conference

The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE), Prevention and Support Services Section, supports the work of Virtual Alabama School Safety System (VAS3) as the tool used by local education agencies (LEAs) for school safety planning.

The Alabama Law Enforcement Agency will sponsor the annual VAS3 conference on February 29 – March 1, 2016, at the Embassy Suites Hotel and Conference Center, 300 Tallapoosa Street, Montgomery, Alabama 36104.

Registration for the conference must be completed at <http://info.nside.io/virtual-alabama-school-safety-summit-2016-hosted-by-nside>. [aen](#)

New Resources to Train Teachers in Civics and Government

The Alabama Center for Law and Civic Education is pleased to announce the receipt of a \$400,000 grant to provide professional development for middle and high school teachers in civics and government focusing upon the Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. The initiative, entitled the James Madison Legacy Project, is part of a nationwide professional development program directed by the Center for Civic Education, a nonprofit educational organization that was recently awarded a federal grant under the U.S. Department of Education’s Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) grant program.

The Alabama Center for Law and Civic Education is one of the organizations participating in the 46-state James Madison Legacy Project partnership. The funding received will be used to increase the number of highly effective teachers of high-need and other students through professional development and the implementation of an exemplary curricular program for students. The teacher institutes and workshops will focus on the research-validated We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution program, a nationally acclaimed curriculum that teaches upper elementary, middle, and high school students about the history and principles of the U.S. Constitution.

The James Madison Legacy Project will use an existing professional development model that is enhanced with online resources as well as a new blended-learning variation of the traditional model that will involve the use of new online resources to be developed by the Center. These resources will provide teachers rich academic content and a mastery of teaching methods useful in helping students develop the capacity and inclination to become competent and responsible participants in the civic life of their communities and the nation.

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The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in civics revealed that only about 25% of students performed at or above the “proficient” level. All the other students scored at “basic” or “below basic” levels, which leaves them ill-equipped to participate effectively in civic life. This clearly indicates the need for the James Madison Legacy Project to improve civic education.

“In order to help students become effective and engaged members of ‘We the People’ and further the goal of a nation that is supposed to be of, by, and for the people, it is critical that teachers have a sound background in civics and government and develop the skills required to bring the subject to life for their students,” commented Dr. Alan Stevens, Executive Director. “We are pleased to be able to offer this opportunity to our teachers.”

For more information, contact Alan D. Stevens at 205-726-2433 or asteven4@samford.edu. æn



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