

# ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS

NEWS AND ISSUES IN ALABAMA PUBLIC EDUCATION, K-12

FEBRUARY 2003

## WHAT'S INSIDE ...

- *No Child Left Behind*
- Career/Technical Education
- State Board of Education New Member Profiles and Inauguration
- Alabama Teacher of the Year



"We believe education is a national priority and a local responsibility..."

- President George W. Bush



## ALABAMA COMMITTED TO LEAVING NO CHILD BEHIND

As PRESIDENT BUSH'S sweeping plan for education reform, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), celebrates its one-year anniversary, states are preparing to meet the stringent guidelines. Questions from Congress about funding and setting such high standards to measure school success are fueling debates related to public support for education. However, most lawmakers agree states must be held accountable both academically and financially, and states are working diligently to bring their education programs up to speed. Alabama certainly is.

States were required to submit plans to the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) explaining how "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) and

accountability systems will comply with NCLB. States are addressing the NCLB requirements for school choice, supplemental education services, assessment indicators, school safety, and teacher quality. The challenges states face to measure up to NCLB requirements are enormous and without sufficient funding, states are struggling to meet those requirements. Sure, states are ratcheting up student achievement measures, but what is being done to ensure teachers are qualified to teach those measures? What are the real concerns facing educators?

Recruiting and retaining quality teachers in high-poverty, high-minority, and low-achieving schools is a major hurdle being addressed by states across the nation. Alabama has implemented a

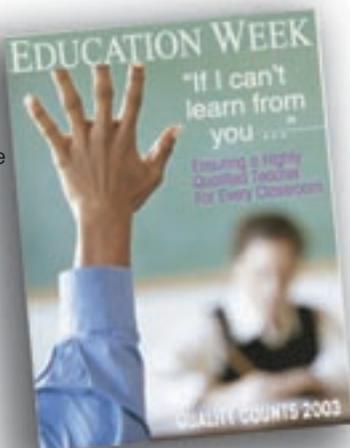
program that offers a financial incentive for teacher education students to commit to teach math or science for five years in high-poverty schools after graduation. The program had only 24 applicants in fall of 2002.

Alabama also issues teacher education report cards annually and has begun prospective teacher testing in basic skills after a 17-year hiatus. Subject-specific teacher testing should begin by 2005.

NCLB requires highly-qualified teachers for every classroom. Highly qualified means having an academic major or other measures approved by the USDE. Subject-specific tests are only one way to ensure all teachers meet the "highly-qualified" requirement by the 2005-06 school year. Additionally, NCLB requires that parents must be notified about the quality of their children's teachers.

*Education Week's 2003 Quality Counts* report indicates working conditions are a determining factor for keeping well-qualified teachers in the classroom.

- Alabama ranks 8th in the nation for beginning teacher salaries, when adjusted for cost of living.
- Alabama ranks 22nd in the nation in average teacher salaries.
- Alabama ranks 8th in the nation in the percentage of education expenditures devoted to the classroom teacher.
- Alabama's average elementary school classroom size is lower than the national average.
- Alabama is one of just five states that hold teacher preparation programs accountable, at some level, for a graduate's classroom performance.



Source: *Education Week's 2003 Quality Counts*

### THE R.E.A.C.H. FOR ACCOUNTABILITY CONTINUES

Sweeping changes in Alabama's student assessment program occurred in 2002 with the disaggregation of criterion- and norm-referenced test data. Students in various grade levels took the *Stanford 9* and *Alabama High School Graduation Exam*. Additionally, fifth- and seventh-grade students were tested in writing. Breaking apart test results by certain demographics, such as race, gender, limited-English

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proficiency, special education, migrant status, and economic status, presented specific details on different levels of student performance. In 2003, Alabama will continue to broaden its assessment program to better determine student performance (see chart). A new norm-referenced test (the *Stanford 10*) will be administered to students this spring.

ALABAMA'S LONG-RANGE NEW STUDENT ASSESSMENT PROGRAM						
(It is expected that all components will be in place by the 2007-08 school year.)						
C = criterion-referenced test    N = norm-referenced test    W = writing						
GRADE	READING	LANGUAGE	MATH	SO. STUDIES	SCIENCE	OTHER
K	C		C			
1	C		C			
2	C		C			
3	C/N	C/N	C/N			
4	C/N	C/N	C/N			
5	C/N	C/N	C/N	C/N		C/W
6	C/N	C/N	C/N		C/N	
7	C/N	C/N	C/N	C/N		C/W
8	C/N	C/N	C/N			
9						
10	C	C	C	C	C	C/W
11	C	C	C	C	C	
12						

Additional items closer aligned with Alabama's courses of study will be added to the *Stanford 10* for a pilot administration in the fall of 2003 prior to scheduled administration in the spring of 2004.

New Alabama courses of study in mathematics, physical education, and health are being considered by the state Board of Education. Content of all three addresses NCLB guidelines by making standards measurable on state assessments, having standards aligned with assessments and initiatives, and having no repetition of standards.

NCLB also requires that states participate in the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) testing program, directed by the USDE's National Center for Education Statistics. Alabama has participated in NAEP, also known as "the Nation's Report Card," testing since 1969. Since state-level testing began in 1990, Alabama students continue to show test score increases in reading, math, and science. NAEP testing provides a more accurate representation on a statewide level. Long-term trend assessments of NAEP are designed to provide information on the changes in the basic achievement of America's youth. Additionally, Alabama's courses of study committees consider NAEP standards as one of many resources when developing state standards.

## THE YEAR IN REVIEW



The first year of NCLB was filled with many accomplishments. For example, over \$412 million in Reading First grants were provided to 20 states, including Alabama, to support reading instruction in the classroom. Other NCLB one-year accomplishments include:

- **C**learing the way through the Supreme Court for school choice
- **H**olding states accountable for schools in need of improvement
- **I**mplementing preschool initiatives
- **L**aunching a State Scholars Initiative for high school students
- **D**ealing with school safety issues
- **R**esearching character education
- **E**ncouraging faith-based efforts
- **N**arrating policy-making sessions with key education leaders across the nation



## FOCUSING ON THE FUTURE



State education officials are hopeful **Gov. BOB RILEY** will be instrumental in helping K-12 education in Alabama. The state's education plan, called R.E.A.C.H. – which stands for Realizing Every Alabama Child's Hopes – addresses many NCLB goals. The plan being presented statewide to educators, business, and civic groups is designed to provide an adequate education to every Alabama student through a price tag of an additional \$1.6 billion over a five-year period.

Increased education funding is crucial if students are to succeed in the 21st century. The state legislature must address tax reform and constitutional issues if sufficient funding for education is to be found.

Overall, Alabama is on the right track toward meeting NCLB criteria but it's going to take additional funding – not only federal dollars – but state and local dollars as well.

### INCREASED FUNDING TO ALABAMA SCHOOLS WILL:

- \$ Help schools in need of improvement turn themselves around to provide every child a quality education.
- \$ Offer prospective teachers incentives to stay in Alabama instead of leaving for neighboring states.
- \$ Provide professional development to improve teacher quality.
- \$ Supply classrooms with textbooks, computers, and other equipment.
- \$ Sponsor after school and tutoring programs.
- \$ Continue the Alabama Mathematics, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI).
- \$ Eliminate social promotion.

Accountability is not being overlooked as Alabama schools seek new funds. A statewide committee will report to the state Board of Education on a new and improved accountability system for all public schools in May 2003. 🍏



# ALABAMA'S TOY IS NATIONAL FINALIST

MAKING A DIFFERENCE - SHAPING THE FUTURE

ALABAMA'S 2002-2003 TEACHER OF THE YEAR, DR. HELEN ELIZABETH (BETSY) ROGERS, has been selected as one of only four finalists for the prestigious National Teacher of the Year award. The announcement was made in January by representatives from the Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and Scholastic Inc., two of the national award sponsors.

Prior to being selected as the state's Teacher of the Year, Rogers taught first and second grades at Leeds Elementary School in the Jefferson County School System. Since being named Alabama Teacher of the Year, she has traveled statewide promoting excellence in the classroom and inspiring teachers across Alabama to pursue National Board Certification and participate in professional development programs.

Rogers also feels there is a need to raise awareness concerning the needs and perceptions of schools in less



Alabama Teacher of the Year, Betsy Rogers, cruises up Dexter Avenue in Montgomery during the State Inauguration Parade, Jan. 20.

affluent areas of the state and nation. "Many in our country would prefer that low-performing schools be closed and students in these neighborhoods be shipped off to other schools," explained Rogers. "Others feel students should have a choice in where they attend school rather than address the educational problems of their local communities. It is my belief

that all children deserve a quality school that not only serves as a place of learning, but a haven for safety."

The National Teacher of the Year Program is sponsored by CCSSO, a non-profit organization composed of public officials who head the education departments in the states, and Scholastic Inc., the global children's publishing and media company. Each year, the program designates an outstanding representative of the country's teachers from among the Teachers of the Year representing the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

PRESIDENT BUSH will announce the 2003 National Teacher of the Year in April.

Within the last three years, two outstanding Alabama teachers have been named as national finalists for Teacher of the Year. 🍏

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CLASSROOM RESOURCES

**Legacy Environmental Partnership Conference**, February 19-21, Marriott Grand Hotel, Point Clear, AL. The conference program includes hands-on training sessions for teachers, lectures, and environmental field trips. Contact Legacy Incorporation, Partners In Environmental Education, at (334) 270-5921 or [click here](#).

**Kick Butts Day – Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids**, April 2, is an annual initiative that encourages activism and leadership among elementary, middle, and high school students. [Click here](#) to download classroom materials.

**From Mountains to the Sea**, a two-day, all-expense-paid workshop for K-12 educators wishing to bring nature into the classroom. Five sessions are being held in June at Lookout Mountain, DeSoto State Park, and Little River Canyon National Preserve. For information, contact Bill Martin, Jacksonville State University Little River Canyon Field School, at (256) 782-8010 or [bmartin@jsucc.jsu.edu](mailto:bmartin@jsucc.jsu.edu). **Application deadline: April 15**

## AWARD AND GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

**Scholar Athlete Milk Mustache of the Year (SAMMY 2003) Award**, sponsored by America's Dairy Farmers and Milk Processors, recognizes outstanding senior scholar athletes. Winners receive a \$7,500 college scholarship, a weekend at Walt Disney World, and Milk Mustache advertising photo opportunities in national publications. [Click here](#) for SAMMY 2003 applications. **Application deadline: March 7**

**The Beaumont Foundation of America** is offering grants for free computers to qualified schools. [Click here](#) for applications and information. **Application deadline: March 31**

**The Presidential Awards For Excellence in Mathematics & Science Teaching** 2003 program is open to Grades 7-12 math and science teachers. [Click here](#) for applications or contact Cynthia Brown, Alabama Department of Education, at (334) 242-8059 or [cbrown@alsde.edu](mailto:cbrown@alsde.edu). **Application deadline: May 1**

# FORMER TEACHER APPOINTED TO STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION DISTRICT 1 SEAT

Former Department of Children’s Affairs Commissioner **PAM BAKER** is the new District 1 representative on the Alabama Board of Education. In December, then **GOV. DON SIEGELMAN** appointed Baker to fill the unexpired term of **BRADLEY BYRNE**, who was elected to the state senate. A former teacher in the Shelby and Mobile County School Systems, Baker shared her thoughts on education in a recent interview with *Alabama Education News* staff.

**AEN: Why did you decide to accept the appointment to the Alabama Board of Education?**

**BAKER:** I accepted the appointment because as a former teacher with a master’s degree in Early Childhood Education I feel strongly that issues critical to Alabama – economic growth, crime reduction, a well-prepared workforce – are all tied to our continued support for education. We must invest in our children, our schools, and our teachers.

**AEN: What are your major goals for your term?**

**BAKER:** I actually have the remaining two years of Bradley Byrne’s term and then plan to run for election because the District 1 seat will be up for election in November 2004. I am very excited about the new opportunities for Postsecondary to play a vital role in work force development, which is critical for Alabama and our new industries.

**AEN: What do you think are the main issues facing public education?**

**BAKER:** Continued student achievement. We have seen significant increases in student achievement but those will level off. We will have to focus on teachers, their professional development, and more opportunities for quality pre-kindergartens statewide to continue to see additional increases in student achievement.

**AEN: What is the best thing about public education today?**

**BAKER:** The best things are our teachers, our administrators, and our support personnel who work very hard with limited resources and limited support, and I think accomplish incredible things for our children, their families, and our state as a whole, and of course, our students.

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Baker, who earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees in early childhood education, is a founding board member of the Children First Foundation and a member of Leadership Alabama Class XII. She has served on the Governor’s Early Learning Commission and Governor’s Task Forces on Children’s Health, Domestic Violence, Teen Smoking, and Infant Mortality. Baker is also a member of the U.S. Department of Education Reading Leadership and Early Childhood Academies. 🍏

# STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION WELCOMES NEW MEMBER TO REPRESENT DISTRICT 2

The newest elected member of the Alabama Board of Education is **BETTY PETERS** representing District 2. Elected in November to a four-year term, the former accountant who resides in Dothan was officially sworn in during inaugural ceremonies in Montgomery on Jan. 20. In a recent interview with *Alabama Education News* staff, Peters expressed the following views.

**AEN: Why did you decide to run for the Alabama Board of Education?**

**PETERS:** I decided to run for the state Board because I felt our schools were reaching a financial crisis and that there is a lack of citizen confidence. In some localities, such as my hometown of Dothan, we have lost a tremendous number of students in the past decade, but it's not because we have fewer school-age children. I have an accounting background, which should be an asset with the first issue (the financial crisis). My public relations background should be a plus in working with school systems to restore the public's confidence.

**AEN: What are your major goals for your four-year term?**

**PETERS:** My major goals are (1) having stronger academic content in our curriculum; (2) restoring taxpayer and parental confidence in the public school system; (3) making it easier for teachers to teach by reducing paperwork and restoring discipline; (4) having better financial accountability so that money is not wasted or misappropriated, and more will reach the classroom; (5) having all children, except the profoundly disabled, master the fundamentals of reading, writing, and math in the early grades so that they will not be left behind; (6) having better qualified teachers and removing those who cannot teach well by improving the new exam for prospective teachers; and (7) having students who have a good grasp of our nation's heritage, system of government, and values so they will be good citizens and, when and if the time comes, good parents.

**AEN: What do you think are the main issues facing public education?**

**PETERS:** Controlling finances; dealing with disruptive students; handling outrageous lawsuits that waste financial resources; lack of faith in the educational system by what appears to be a growing number of parents as well as taxpayers in general; students who graduate from our schools but who still must be remediated before they are ready for college or employment; and losing so many excellent teachers each year.

**AEN: What is the best thing about public education today?**

**PETERS:** The best thing about education today is that students have such a wide range of choices available in most communities. The high schools of today offer a great selection in classes, from Advanced Placement courses to career/technical education. The dual enrollment option offers even more flexibility.



New state Board of Education District 2 member Betty Peters admires student artwork during the Board's inaugural reception, Jan. 20.

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Peters is a former substitute and volunteer teacher in public and private schools. For more information, [click here](#) to visit her Web site. 🍏

# CAREER/TECHNICAL EDUCATION



## *More Course Offerings = More Future Career Choices*

**T**he Career/Technical Education section of the Alabama Department of Education has come a long way from the days of “Voc-Ed.” In the old days, students learned to build birdhouses, repair lawn mowers, and do dozens of other things that required a generous application of Lava® soap. Today’s career/technical students are learning to network computers, prepare gourmet meals, save lives, and perform hundreds of other tasks, with only a few getting their hands dirty.

Today, there are over 215 different

course offerings available to career/technical students in Alabama’s schools. Of course, not every school is able to provide every course. Schools try to match the interests of their students and the skills needed by community businesses with the available resources to provide marketable skills.

“Most people still see us as only teaching students who can’t go to college, but that is not the case,” said **NANCY BEGGS**, Director of Career/Technical Education for the Alabama Department of Education. “Not only must our students meet the same high standards that every other high school student has to achieve, they also must meet the rigors of our specialized courses as well.” Beggs estimates that 75 percent of career/technical students go on to apprentice programs, or a two-year or four-year college after high school graduation.

In an effort to add additional accountability, and to instill confidence in students and their parents, all career/technical education programs were given five years to receive industry certification for their course offerings. This is the last school year to meet that goal. So far, 89% of all programs in the state are industry-certified.

Making people aware of the scope and challenge of the Career/Technical Education program is one of the section’s biggest hurdles.

“Surprisingly, students training in many of the careers for which we provide education make six-figure salaries,” said Beggs. Another difference in today’s career/technical education students is that many are bound for traditional college and professional careers. “Students interested in becoming physicians are taking our health science programs; those who want to be architects take CAD (computer-aided drafting), pre-engineering, and construction courses. There are practical application courses in career/technical education that support many careers that require advanced degrees,” Beggs added.

To promote career/technical education, the Alabama Department of Education has conducted research on public attitudes and has assigned a communication specialist to help spread the word to Alabama’s communities on the advantages of these programs.

**STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION ED RICHARDSON** is very excited about the future of career/technical education in Alabama. “We are working to improve the partnerships between our schools and the business community in our state. Career/technical education is an important element to prepare students for life, bring new industry to our state, and provide existing businesses with a quality work force in which they can be confident,” said Richardson. 🍏

### **PROMOTING CAREER/TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN ALABAMA**

Over the next several months, a concentrated effort will begin to promote career/technical education in the state. Some of the plans include:

- Educating students and parents on the benefits of career/technical programs in elementary and middle school grades.
- Providing more information on career/technical programs to teachers, counselors, and administrators.
- Using “success stories” from people who graduated from career/technical programs to promote the advantages of enrolling in classes.
- Strengthening the partnerships between postsecondary schools and local programs.
- Growing partnerships with the business community.
- Showing people the earning potential for graduates of career/technical programs when coupled with postsecondary and apprenticeship training.

## School System Highlight

# ELMORE COUNTY SCHOOLS

In Elmore County's Technical Center, a 16-year-old and a 28-year-old work side-by-side in one of the few precision manufacturing labs south of Birmingham. What makes this unique is they are both students.

"We have partnered with the Alabama Works adult training program and Trenholm State Technical College in Montgomery to make this a reality," said **ELMORE COUNTY'S DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL EDUCATION CARL THOMAS**. While many public schools can no longer offer precision manufacturing due to the cost of maintaining the program, Elmore County's new program is thriving. "We had the

facilities while Alabama Works had the money to hire an instructor," said Thomas.

Adult students are in class eight hours each day for a 32-week course. High school students attend class for two and a half hours each day. The adults often assist in helping the high schoolers in their training. "It is a win-win situation," said Thomas. "Our students get extra instruction and the adult students reinforce their learning by helping the others."

Trenholm State Technical College offers college credit to both groups for the training received in the class. High



school students who complete the course can enroll at Trenholm and complete an AA certificate in just one year.

For more information, contact Carl Thomas at (334) 567-1220. 🍏



West Central Alabama high school students soon will be offered the unique opportunity to participate in a newly created apprenticeship program that provides high-skilled training in automotive production. The Mercedes-Benz U.S. International (MBUSI) High School Apprenticeship Program will provide selected high school seniors in 14 West Central Alabama public school systems with the opportunity to learn and train for a three-year period.

Approximately 15 students will be selected to participate in the initial apprenticeship program next fall. Acceptance will be determined through an application and appraisal process. Participating students must be enrolled in school full time in one of the 14 eligible schools systems, maintain a minimum "C" grade-point average, live within a 35- to 40-mile radius of the Mercedes-Benz

production facility, and provide their own transportation. Apprentices will receive training wages from MBUSI while enrolled in the program. Students successfully completing the apprenticeship program may be hired as full-time MBUSI production team members.

The majority of classroom and industrial training will be conducted at the Mercedes-Benz Institute site in Tuscaloosa, beginning in the fall of 2003. During the three-year apprenticeship period, students will learn about the key elements of automotive production that are specific to MBUSI, such as Production Systems; Automotive Systems; Body, Paint and Assembly Shop skills and processes; and Continuous Improvement and Quality.

For more information on the MBUSI High School Apprenticeship Program, contact **NANCY BEGGS**, Director of Career/Technical Education, Alabama Department of Education, at (334) 242-9111 or [nbeggs@alsde.edu](mailto:nbeggs@alsde.edu). 🍏



### NEW HIGH SCHOOL APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM OFFERED

The 14 school systems invited to participate are:

Bessemer City	Jefferson County
Bibb County	Midfield City
Fairfield City	Pickens County
Fayette County	Shelby County
Green County	Tuscaloosa City
Hale County	Tuscaloosa County
Jasper City	Walker County



# INAUGURATION CEREMONY 2003

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our members of the Alabama Board of Education took the oath of office on the Capitol steps during inaugural ceremonies in Montgomery on Jan. 20. **DR. ETHEL HALL** (District 4), **DR. MARY JANE CAYLOR** (District 8), **DAVID BYERS JR.** (District 6), and **BETTY PETERS** (District 2) were sworn in by **ALABAMA COURT OF CRIMINAL APPEALS JUDGE SUE BELL COBB** as **GOV. BOB RILEY** and the first lady look on.

Dr. Hall, vice president, has served on the Alabama Board of Education since 1987. Dr. Caylor is beginning her third term. Byers also was elected to a third term in November 2002. Peters was elected to her first term in November.

Following the inauguration, board members were honored at an afternoon reception held at the RSA Plaza.

Members of the Alabama Board of Education serve the state's more than 1,540 public schools and more than 731,000 students. In 2002, the Alabama Board of Education accomplished the following benchmarks on behalf of the state's K-12 public education:

- Achieving the highest test scores in the state's history
- Attaining the lowest dropout rate in the Southeast
- Strengthening teacher preparation accountability
- Requiring background checks for all personnel with unsupervised access to students
- Implementing prospective teacher testing
- Approving the R.E.A.C.H. Plan to provide at least an adequate education for K-12 students
- Establishing the Alabama Mathematics, Science, and Technology Initiative Pilot Program
- Earning a \$102 million Reading First grant from the U.S. Department of Education
- Developing successful academic and financial assistance programs
- Designing major changes in the state's student assessment and accountability plan

## BOARD BRIEFS

### JANUARY AGENDA ITEMS INCLUDED:

- ❖ Passed Resolution in Appreciation of G.J. "Dutch" Higginbotham for State Board of Education Service
- ❖ Passed Resolution Commending Thomas Shelton, Oxford Middle School, Oxford City School System
- ❖ Passed Resolution Endorsing January 2003 as School Board Member Recognition Month
- ❖ Passed Resolution Endorsing February 2003 as Career/Technical Education Month
- ❖ Received Resolution for Adoption of Mathematics, Health Education, and Physical Education State Courses of Study
- ❖ Elected State Board Member David Byers Jr. Chairperson Pro Tempore for the Alabama Board of Education
- ❖ Scheduled a Board Member Mini-Retreat to work on long-range planning effects

## FEBRUARY



BLACK HISTORY MONTH		1	2
Feb. 13	State Board of Education Meeting		
Feb. 17	Washington/ Jefferson Birthday (State Holiday)		
Feb. 17	National PTA Founders Day		
Feb. 24-28	Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing: Grades 5 & 7 Administration (Grade 10 Pilot Test)		
Feb. 22	State Superintendent's Visual Arts Exhibit		
Feb. 24-	Alabama Occupational		
Mar. 14	Portfolio Assessment		
Feb. 27	State Board of Education Work Session		
Feb. 27	State Release of School Accountability Report Cards		

## MARCH



ARTS EDUCATION MONTH		1	2
NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH			
Mar. 1	Alabama State DECA Leadership Conference		
Mar. 3-	Alabama Alternate		
Apr. 11	Assessment Administration		
Mar. 4	State Legislative Session Begins		
Mar. 10-14	Alabama High School Graduation Exam Administration		
Mar. 13	State Board of Education Meeting		
Mar. 27	State Board of Education Work Session		



# ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS

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Alabama Board of Education Members

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- Dist. 2 - Betty Peters, Dothan
- Dist. 3 - Stephanie W. Bell, Montgomery
- Dist. 4 - Ethel H. Hall, Vice Pres., Fairfield
- Dist. 5 - Ella B. Bell, Montgomery
- Dist. 6 - David F. Byers Jr., Birmingham
- Dist. 7 - Sandra Ray, Tuscaloosa
- Dist. 8 - Mary Jane Caylor, Scottsboro

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State Superintendent of Education  
and Secretary and Executive Officer  
of the Alabama Board of Education

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## FEBRUARY'S TEACHER OF THE MONTH



**LOVIE DARLENE MONTGOMERY** is February's Teacher of the Month. Representing State Board of Education District 7, Montgomery teaches English and creative writing at Bradshaw High School in Florence. Teaching at Bradshaw was coming home for Montgomery. She now serves as faculty adviser to *Signatures*, the student literary magazine she helped originate 20 years ago when she was a student at Bradshaw.

"Students should be taught how to think, not what to think, and guided to an understanding of the relationships between the classroom and life," said Montgomery. This creative writing teacher bridges that

gap between school and real life by relating her students' coursework to a familiar event, song, or movie. For example, she guides her students to compare *Star Wars* character Han Solo to the epic hero Beowulf and to see Darth Vader as a Shakespearean tragic hero such as Macbeth. She inspires a love of learning and literature that goes beyond the classroom for her students. Many of her students return after high school to volunteer at the Alabama Renaissance Faire in Florence.

Montgomery is a national-level judge of literary-arts magazines and is the recipient of the *Huntsville Times* Excellence in Teaching Award. She has also been selected as school, system, and district Teacher of the Year.

Montgomery and Bradshaw High School each receive \$1,000 from ALFA Insurance Co. and the Alabama Farmers Federation. 🍏

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