In November of 2007, a grant of nearly $316,000 was awarded to The University of Alabama's University Transportation Center to spearhead the research. Joe Lightsey, director of pupil transportation for the state department of education and study group member, said The University of Alabama has extensive experience in dealing with motor vehicle safety research which will be an asset to the research.

Since that fateful day, the question of increased measures of safety on school buses, including safety belts, has been at the center of attention for many school officials. In an effort to look into the use of lap/shoulder belts on a limited number of school buses throughout the state, Governor Bob Riley formed a seven-member study group of educators and transportation experts.

On the study and will ultimately produce a comprehensive report at the end of the third year. Lightsey said the study is obviously not looking for crash data (the study is not designed around that), but rather around other variables. Overall, the parameters of the study are going to include buckle up rates; parent, student, and driver attitudes on the usage of seat belts; how safety belts affect capacity on buses; and other variables concerning the

**Photography courtesy of SafeGuard. (c)2007 IMMI**

**SCHOOL BUS SAFETY BELT STUDY BEGINS**

**NOVEMBER 20, 2006** will stay etched in the memory of many across the state as one of the most horrific tragedies ever experienced on an Alabama school bus. On that seemingly normal afternoon in Huntsville, the unthinkable occurred when a bus carrying 43 students, lost control and plunged off an overpass onto the road below, killing four and injuring thirty-eight. Only one student was not injured.

Since that fateful day, the question of increased measures of safety on school buses, including safety belts, has been at the center of attention for many school officials. In an effort to look into the use of lap/shoulder belts on a limited number of school buses throughout the state, Governor Bob Riley formed a seven-member study group of educators and transportation experts.

**THIS YEAR, 10 SCHOOL SYSTEMS WILL RECEIVE NEW BUSES EQUIPPED WITH SAFETY BELTS**

Beginning this year, the study group will conduct a seat belt pilot study over the next three years. A total of 12 new school buses equipped with safety belts will be distributed among 10 participating schools systems. The University of Alabama will produce an annual report on the study and will ultimately produce a comprehensive report at the end of the third year. Lightsey said the study is obviously not looking for crash data (the study is not designed around that), but rather around other variables. Overall, the parameters of the study are going to include buckle up rates; parent, student, and driver attitudes on the usage of seat belts; how safety belts affect capacity on buses; and other variables concerning the

**continued on next page ...**
perception and use of safety belts on school buses. In addition, the grant provided aides on 6 of the 12 buses purchased. Part of the study will focus on the effect a second adult or an aide on a bus might have on seat belt usage. “The aide will function just like an aide on any other Alabama school bus. They’re on the bus to monitor student behavior, safety issues, and ensure safety belt usage. Other responsibilities of the aides on these select buses will be determined by The University of Alabama and the local school system,” Lightsey said.

He said the responsibility of the study group is not to make a concrete decision on school bus seat belts, but rather to present findings to the governor. “At this point there are no requirements of the study group to come up with a recommendation at the end of the study as to whether or not Alabama should mandate safety belts,” Lightsey said. He said to maintain objectivity in the study, it was important that an outside organization conduct the pilot and present its findings without bias either for or against seat belts. On the subject of whether or not seat belts are needed, Lightsey said the best way to look at the subject is in a very methodical and research-oriented way. He said the Alabama State Department of Education (SDE) position has always been that the introduction of seat belts on Alabama buses must be done in a totally objective manner with the primary focus on safety. Brad Holley, pupil transportation administrator for the SDE, said one thing is certain: the bottom line is providing the safest school buses possible for Alabama’s schoolchildren.

Some might ask, “If seatbelts keep you safer in a car, wouldn’t it make sense that the same is true for school buses?” To this, Lightsey said lighter, smaller school buses that are made like regular passenger vehicles do have seatbelts in them. But comparing these smaller passenger vehicles to a full-size school bus is fundamentally wrong. He said everything from the weight; high-back, padded seats for compartmentalization; to the fueling, braking, and lighting systems in school buses makes it impossible to compare relative safety of seat belts for the two modes of transportation.

“It’s not a question of whether or not the SDE is for or against seatbelts – we’re for whatever is going to make it safer for kids,” Holley said. “If that’s seatbelts – great; if not, we don’t want them on there.” Still, Lightsey and Holley emphasize the safety and durability of Alabama’s existing bus fleet – calling Alabama’s school buses the safest mode of student transportation. “Our position is that school buses are very safe – extremely safe. They’re the safest way to transport kids anywhere,” Lightsey said. “School buses are built for safety. They’re not necessarily built for beauty or comfort. They’re designed for safety from the ground up. The safety features on a school bus create a passive protection. All kids have to do is get on the bus and sit down and they’re safe.” The selection of the 12 buses purchased by the SDE for this study took into consideration previously placed bus orders and even geographical spread across the state.

“We were looking for a good cross section of school systems that would give us the data needed to apply the findings statewide. We picked school systems in numerous different areas of the state from north to south, the wiregrass, the Black Belt, and even city systems and county systems. We tried to balance it out the best we could,” Lightsey said. “But, the primary factor in determining whether a school was selected or not (in most cases) was the school systems that already had school buses on order.” It typically takes six months to order a bus, so in order to receive the buses for the study sooner, schools that had already ordered buses were considered for selection.
There will be no cost to the school systems for the buses used in the study. The state will also pay for the cost of the aides on the buses. Lightsey said retrofitting older buses is not cost effective and would undermine the structural integrity of the bus. “Retrofitting is something we would not even discuss. We know that would be unsafe and the only way to make it safe would be cost prohibitive,” Lightsey said. “It would take $25,000 or more per bus to retrofit an old bus with new safety belt technology. I also doubt you could find a dealer or manufacturer that would retrofit and certify an older bus.”

Even so, the cost of buying new school buses with seatbelts adds approximately $12,000 to the $70,000 currently spent per school bus in Alabama. Lightsey said an entire fleet of new buses with seatbelts would cost approximately $35 million statewide. Another consideration is fuel. Adding seatbelt reduces the seating capacity of school buses. This would impact the fuel needed for the additional buses. In the midst of rising fuel costs, Lightsey said Alabama is spending over three times the money for fuel for school buses than it did just a few years ago. “We’re spending $40 million a year now on fuel, where just four years ago we were spending $13 million a year,” Lightsey said.

Ultimately, the information will be provided to the governor who will determine if the findings warrant going to the legislature for further action on the matter. The pilot study will officially begin at the start of the 2008/09 school year; however, the new buses will be available and on the road in February or March.

**STUDENTS IN 26 SCHOOLS** across the state began the school year with the addition of a new coach. A coach whose one goal is not to win any sporting event, but a coach whose sole purpose is to help students win in the classroom by keeping them in school. The Graduation Coach Pilot Program (formerly Dropout Prevention Advisors) is one of two state-funded programs implemented during the current school year to help decrease the number of students who drop out of school and increase the number of students who graduate. The other pilot program is Preparing Alabama Students for Success (PASS) and is geared toward students in Grades 6 through 12, while the Graduation Coach Program is aimed at students in Grades 9 through 12.

The graduation coaches were employed and trained, and the program was implemented within three months, and already educators say they are seeing a difference.

“I am already seeing a decline in our number of dropouts. I think the graduation coach is helping to keep students from making a rash decision in one or two days that is going to affect them the rest of their lives,” said **JACQUELINE KELLEY**, Carroll High School Principal (Ozark City School System). “I believe the program has already made a difference. If one kid stays in school, then I feel I have made a difference. I know for sure that I have at least two students that would have been gone by now if it had not been for this position,” said **VALERIE SCHROEDER**, Jemison High Graduation Coach (Chilton County School System).

Twenty-six schools in Alabama were identified in September for implementation of the pilot program. All schools with any combination of Grades 9 through 12 and a graduation rate lower than 95 percent during the 2006-07 school year were eligible to compete for more than $1.7 million in state grants. The graduation coach is not a teacher during the day, but rather he/she works with school personnel, families, the community, and other agencies to ensure student success.

Carroll High School Graduation Coach **RACHEL WALKER** says her social services background and her age definitely are big pluses in her communication with students. “One of the main reasons I decided to become a graduation coach is because I can relate to the youth of today,” said Walker. “At one time I was that troubled youth, so I know what they are going through.”

“The networking among these 26 graduation coaches has been phenomenal. They communicate with each other, share ideas, and encourage each other,” said **SUE ADAMS**, Director of Prevention and Support Services with the Alabama Department of Education.

If the state legislature approves the FY 2009 education budget, the funding would provide for 174 new coaches and sustain the existing 26 for a total of 200 graduation coaches in 2009.
STATE SUPERINTENDENT DR. JOE MORTON refers to her as “the godmother of reading.”

Now, after more than 28 years with the Alabama Department of Education, DR. KATHERINE MITCHELL steps down as Assistant State Superintendent of Education for the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) and she is going out at the top of her game.

“Mitchell will forever be remembered as the woman who turned around reading in Alabama,” said State Superintendent of Education DR. JOE MORTON. “I think she has given her love for reading to all of the children of the state of Alabama,” Morton added.

Mitchell spearheaded the ARI in 1998 for K-3 schools, and in 2006, the program celebrated success with its final phase of implementation in Grades K-3 in all public schools in Alabama. The goal of ARI is 100 percent literacy for all public school students. In 2007, ARI expanded to Grades 4-9 with the pilot program ARI-PAL (Project for Adolescent Literacy) and was implemented in 14 schools across the state.

Another indication of ARI’s success occurred in 2007 when Alabama’s fourth-grade students scored eight points higher in reading on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) test than on the 2005 test (NAEP is given once every two years).

This was the largest gain in fourth-grade reading in NAEP history, making Alabama number one in the nation in reading improvements at the fourth-grade level for 2007.

Family, friends, co-workers, and education dignitaries gathered for Mitchell’s retirement party in December at the Department of Education. “I feel it’s time to start the next phase of my life, and I look forward to that next phase,” Mitchell told the audience. “I am feeling grateful for a career that is a perfect fit: I love to teach, I love to help, and I love to solve problems.”

SHERRILL PARRIS, who directs the Alabama Reading Initiative, succeeds the retiring Dr. Katherine Mitchell as Assistant State Superintendent for Reading.
## Celebrate Black History Month in February

**Alabama is Thought by Many** to be the most historically significant state in America in terms of the plight for civil rights and human equality. As America recognizes Black History Month, museums, institutes, and other locations are available all across the state to help educate tomorrow’s leaders on the struggles and achievements of yesterday. Below is a listing of just some of the locations educators might be interested in taking students next month.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Website</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama Civil Rights Freedom Farm Museum</td>
<td>205-372-3446</td>
<td><a href="http://www.almuseum.org">www.almuseum.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Birmingham Civil Rights Institute</td>
<td>205-328-9696</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bcri.org">www.bcri.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sixteenth Street Baptist Church</td>
<td>205-251-9402</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rosa Parks Museum and Children’s Wing</td>
<td>334-241-8615</td>
<td><a href="http://www.splcenter.org">www.splcenter.org</a></td>
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<td>Civil Rights Memorial and Memorial Center</td>
<td>334-956-8200</td>
<td><a href="http://www.splicercenter.org">www.splicercenter.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Center for the Study of Civil Rights &amp; African American Culture at Alabama State University</td>
<td>334-229-4824</td>
<td><a href="http://www.lib.alasu.edu">www.lib.alasu.edu</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Dexter Parsonage Museum</td>
<td>334-261-3270</td>
<td><a href="http://www.dexterkingmemorial.org">www.dexterkingmemorial.org</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>National Voting Rights Museum &amp; Institute</td>
<td>334-418-0800</td>
<td><a href="http://www.votingrightsmuseum.org">www.votingrightsmuseum.org</a></td>
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<td>Slavery &amp; Civil War Museum</td>
<td>334-418-4889</td>
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<td>Lincoln Museum</td>
<td>334-683-9622</td>
<td><a href="http://www.marionalabama.org/lincoln">www.marionalabama.org/lincoln</a></td>
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<td>Lowndes County Interpretive Center</td>
<td>334-877-1984</td>
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<td>Murphy African-American Museum</td>
<td>205-758-2861</td>
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<td>Oak Grove School</td>
<td>334-289-1952</td>
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<tr>
<td>Safe House Black History Museum</td>
<td>334-624-4228</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Black Archives Research Center &amp; Museum</td>
<td>256-372-5846</td>
<td><a href="http://my.aamu.edu">http://my.aamu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site</td>
<td>334-724-0922</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nps.gov/tuai">www.nps.gov/tuai</a></td>
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Information obtained from: 2007 Alabama Bureau of Tourism & Travel
Civil Air Patrol’s Junior Cadet Program Readies National Launch in Alabama

THE PROVEN character-building power of the Civil Air Patrol’s Cadet Program for youth 12-21 years old has been expanded to include a Junior Cadet Program for elementary school-aged children nationwide. The inspirational message of the program is “Like the flight of the boomerang, the choices made today will come back to you tomorrow.”

A “liftoff” celebration for the new Junior Cadet Pilot Program was held October 26 at Boaz High School’s football stadium in Boaz. Approximately 300 teachers and 7,000 students in 20 public, private, and parochial schools in Alabama, Florida, Pennsylvania, Colorado, Georgia, Nevada, and Puerto Rico are field-testing the program this school year. The Junior Cadet Program will be available to all elementary schools in fall 2008.

The Junior Cadet Program will provide elementary students with an introduction to vital life skills – character education, academics with an aerospace emphasis, leadership opportunities, and physical fitness. Designed by educators, it incorporates fun, hands-on activities with national standards-based lesson plans that can be integrated throughout the curriculum.

As the official auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force, the Civil Air Patrol developed this new program to augment CAP’s School Enrichment Program (SEP) for middle and high school students, as well as the Air Force Junior ROTC program. The Air Force Association’s Montgomery, Alabama, Chapter 102 is providing partnership sponsorship while using the Junior Cadet Program and mascot as an outreach initiative for local elementary schools.

“The CAP SEP for America’s middle and high schools is playing a major role in improving student opportunity and responsibility nationwide,” said COL. AL APPLEBAUM, CAP SEP national director. “Teachers report better attendance, better test scores, and lower incidences of behavioral problems. With the addition of this elementary Junior Cadet Program, it is anticipated that these benefits will begin at the early ages and will only magnify in building better youth for tomorrow.”

State Board Member:
David F. Byers, Jr. – District 6
Superintendent: Mr. Leland Dishman
Principal: Mr. Arnold L. Smith, Boaz High School

MARY BETH PUGH is Alabama’s 2007 Preserve America Elementary (Grades K-6) History Teacher of the Year. Pugh, a fifth-grade social studies teacher at Bluff Park Elementary School in the Hoover City School System, has taught since 1992. She earned a BS and MS in Elementary Education from the University of North Alabama and The University of Alabama respectively.

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History sponsors this annual award to honor outstanding teachers of American history and to recognize the crucial importance of American history education. A History Teacher of the Year is selected from each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Department of Defense, and United States Territories. As a state winner, Pugh receives a $1,000 honorarium and is a finalist for National Preserve America History Teacher of the Year. Bluff Park Elementary School receives an archive of history books and materials named in honor of their winning teacher.

Winners are chosen based on the following criteria:
• At least three years of classroom experience in teaching American history in elementary school
• A deep career commitment to teaching American history, which includes local and state history
• Evidence of creativity and imagination in the classroom that addresses literacy and content beyond state standards
• Close attention to primary documents, artifacts, historic sites, and other primary materials of history, including oral history
• Evidence of thoughtful assessment of student achievement

Pugh represented Alabama at the competition for National Preserve America History Teacher of the Year in Washington, D.C., last fall.

State Board of Education Member:
Dr. Ethel H. Hall – District 4
Hoover City Schools Superintendent:
Mr. Andy Craig
Bluff Park Elementary School Principal:
Dr. David Fancher

MYIA HATCHETT FROM BOAZ POSES WITH THE CAP CADET PROGRAM’S MASCOT.
**Celebration Highlights 21st Century Learning**

**SINCE 2004, teachers, students, and top business professionals statewide have come together each year to celebrate a new tradition – Alabama Career and Technical Education (CTE) Month, February 1-29.**

**Sherry Key,** Director of Alabama Career and Technical Education, says, “Our students explore their career options in more than 300 courses offered statewide, earn advanced diplomas, and receive college credit while still in high school. CTE Month is a great time for Alabamians to visit our programs to see all of the hands-on learning taking place in our classrooms.”

According to the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE), research shows that many of the country’s fastest-growing occupations now require the technical, communication, and time-management skills taught in America’s CTE programs. Research also shows that no child will be left behind.”

In December, two Alabama CTE educators, **Judy Brown** and **Mark Raines,** both won two different prestigious national teaching awards.

**Future Fisherman Foundation’s Physh Ed National Fishing and Boating Grants Initiative** provides $2,500 grants to qualified PE teachers to implement fishing and boating units in their K-12 physical education (PE) classes. **Apply online** or e-mail **Anne Danielski** or call 703-519-9691, x254. **DEADLINE:** Jan. 21, 2008

Nominate a Young Hero for the **Alabama Public Television (APT) 2007 Alabama Young Heroes Awards.** Five students are selected for their courage, determination, volunteerism, and commitment to excellence. **Nominate a deserving student online** or call APT, 800-239-5233, ext. 152. **DEADLINE:** Jan. 25, 2008.

**2008-2009 Alabama Teacher of the Year** application is online. For more information, e-mail **Ann Starks** or call 334-242-9702. **DEADLINE:** Jan. 28, 2008

**Alabama Elementary (K-6) and Secondary (7-12) Economics Teachers of the Year** are classroom teachers who have made outstanding contributions to the teaching of economics. **The Alabama Council on Economic Education awards $1,000 to each teacher.** **CLICK HERE** or call Toll Free: 866-326-0585. **DEADLINE:** Mar. 14, 2008

Nominate a **Kid Who Cares.** Kohl’s is offering youth volunteers ages 6 to 18 the opportunity to win a $5,000 college scholarship. The scholarships are awarded to youth who have excelled as community volunteers. For more information, visit your local store or **CLICK HERE.** **DEADLINE:** Mar. 15, 2008

The **Legacy Project’s Annual Listen to a Life Essay Contest** provides for meaningful conversations between youth and older adults that can result in positive experiences for both. The organization also sponsors several other contests and provides resources that encourage connections across generations. **CLICK HERE** for information. **DEADLINE:** Mar. 31, 2008
February

Feb. 3-9 National School Counseling Week
Feb. 10-16 Child Passenger Safety Awareness Week
Feb. 14 Alabama State Board of Education Meeting
Feb. 28 Alabama State Board of Education Work Session

Black History Month
Career and Technical Education Month

January

Jan. 1 New Year’s Day
Jan. 10 Alabama State Board of Education Meeting
Jan. 14-18 Special Education Week
Jan. 21 Martin Luther King, Jr. / Robert E. Lee Birthday
Jan. 24 Alabama State Board of Education Work Session

National School Board Month