

# ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS

The Alabama Department of Education's bi-monthly newsletter

JANUARY 2012



## A Message from State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tommy Bice

On January 1, 2012 it was my pleasure to begin my service as your State Superintendent of Education. As we embark on this new journey together I want to first and foremost thank you for the

work you do to help prepare Alabama students for a bright future. The strength of public education is in its educators and community support of our schools. We ask much of our public education system with diminishing resources. However, we must remain focused that it is truly the last great public venture that is open to all, no matter the student's ability, economic background, cultural heritage, or geographical location. As long as we keep students as the central focus of our decision-making process we will continue to see the quality and excellence that Alabamians have come to expect from our public education system.

Based on the final statement above I want to assure you of three absolutes that have guided my decision making over the life of my education career that I will bring to the this position and to which you can always hold me accountable: (1) is it right for the children we serve, (2) will it enhance public education, our state and ultimately our economy and the greater good, and (3) is it aligned to the priorities of the Board of Education. I would hope that these three absolutes are ones upon which we can all agree and toward which we can work collaboratively in providing the

very best 21st century education our students deserve.

In just a few short weeks the 2012 Legislative Session will begin and decisions about the future funding of public education will be at the forefront of the legislative agenda. As you are aware we are entering this session with a known deficit due to the cap applied to the Education Trust Fund in the rolling reserve legislation. We have prepared a budget with that figure in mind but any other reductions to the Education Trust Fund would create a budgeting crisis for which there are limited if any viable solutions. It will be vital that the "education family" be as aligned a possible on our priorities during this time. I commit



to being a vocal and unapologetic advocate for our children and their futures throughout this process and welcome your input along the way.

As Charles Dickens wrote in *A Tale of Two Cities*, "it was the worst of times, it was the best of times..." Being an eternal optimist, I choose to focus on the latter and will work tirelessly with our state board members to help create an environment where innovation, creativity, and flexibility are the rule, not the exception.

### Follow the Alabama Department of Education on Facebook and Twitter!



Friend or follow the Alabama Department of Education and get access to the most up-to-date information, press releases, event photos, videos, links, and much more! Links to all social media sites can also be found on our [webpage](#).

### IN THIS ISSUE

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# February is Digital Learning Month!

BEGINNING FEBRUARY 1, the attention will be focused on the wonder of modern technology as we celebrate **Digital Learning Month**, and **tell**



**Alabama's digital story** by showcasing ways to use contemporary tools to ensure Alabama

students are college and career ready. From the success of [ACCESS Distance Learning](#) which made geographical boundaries limitless, to the wealth of online professional development readily available in [ALEX](#), Alabama has been a trailblazer at using technology for the purpose of advancing education.

The Alabama Department of Education (ADE), in partnership with the [Alliance for Excellent Education](#), is pleased to announce its participation in the first-ever [Digital Learning Day](#) campaign. This national campaign is designed to celebrate innovative teaching and highlight practices that make learning more personalized and engaging for students, exploring how digital learning can provide all students with the opportunities they deserve – to build the skills needed to succeed in college, a career, and life.

All education stakeholders – districts, schools, teachers, students, librarians, parents, and business and community partners – are encouraged to register to support and participate in Digital Learning Month. By signing up now for the campaign, participants will have access to targeted toolkits outlining ideas and ways to plan their Digital Learning celebration, as well as updates, informational videos, webinars, and other resources. This campaign will challenge education professionals and policymakers at all levels to start a conversation, make a proclamation, improve a lesson, and create a plan.

A new [Professional Learning Community blog](#) will open on February 1, where you can reply to interesting articles and broaden the discussion regarding technology in the classroom. You will log on to the blog using your Education Directory information.

Throughout the month of February, ADE encourages the sharing of ideas, creative lessons, and resources with others across the state and country. This is where you come in! Please send us your best practices, best videos, best podcasts – anything to do with digital learning. We want to spotlight you!



[Visit](#) and show off what you are doing. Just click on the [Contact Us](#) button. You may be spotlighted on the ADE website, social media sites, as well as other departmental websites, during the month. Schools, libraries, community programs, and classrooms are invited to showcase how they are using digital media to improve teaching and learning. “Like” [Alabama Digital Learning Day](#) on Facebook to see schools featured!

On **Digital Learning Day** (Wednesday, February 1) a national town hall meeting will be held to highlight and celebrate participants across the nation. Alabama is one of only five states that will present a video showcasing digital learning. This campaign is a movement that will help provide a quality education for EVERY Alabama child. Change is up to YOU; help build this wave for innovation, personalized learning, and great teaching by participating in Digital Learning Month!

## Immigration Law Compliance DOs and DON'Ts

Certain provisions of the **Beason-Hammon Act** affecting school systems went into effect January 1, 2012. During the implementation phase of the law, the ADE has received numerous questions about compliance with those requirements. In addition to the information contained on our website, the ADE is currently developing additional guidelines for school systems that will address those concerns. Continue to [consult our homepage](#) for updates in the near future.

One of the more frequent inquiries is in regard to the use of the E-Verify program, a major component of the immigration law. Now that your school system has enrolled, here are **twelve DOs** and **DON'Ts** to keep in mind when using E-Verify:

### DOs:

1. **DO** notify each job applicant and ALL employees of the employer's participation in the E-Verify program.
2. **DO** continue to timely complete and maintain on file a Form I-9 on all new employees.
3. **DO** safeguard your employees' personally-identifiable information.
4. **DO** allow only authorized users to use E-Verify.
5. **DO** establish and follow strict confidentiality/privacy protocols.

### DON'T's:

1. **DO NOT** use the E-Verify program to pre-screen an applicant for employment.
2. **DO NOT** use E-Verify to check the employment eligibility of an employee before you sign the E-Verify MOU.
3. **DO NOT** take any adverse action against an employee based upon a case result until E-Verify issues a FINAL “nonconfirmation.”
4. **DO NOT** take any adverse employment action based on an employee's decision to contest a “Tentative Nonconfirmation” (TNC).
5. **DO NOT** take any adverse employment action based upon a case result because a case is still pending with the Department of Homeland Security or with the Social Security Administration.
6. **DO NOT** use E-Verify to selectively verify the employment eligibility of employees.
7. **DO NOT** share your E-Verify user identification and/or password.



# Win a Trip to Space Camp for your Entire 4th Grade Class!

Enter 'Rocket City Pioneers Name the Lander' Contest

THE ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION is offering the chance to participate in an exciting, out of this world contest to name the **Rocket City Pioneers (RSCP)** Lander. RSCP are competing in the \$30 million **Google Lunar X PRIZE** to build a Lander that will go to the moon.

The statewide "Name the Lander" contest will kick off following the January 31st Press Conference at the **U.S. Space and Rocket Center** in Huntsville. Fourth-grade classrooms are encouraged to compete to name the RSCP Lander because it complements that year's science curriculum. The classes that choose to

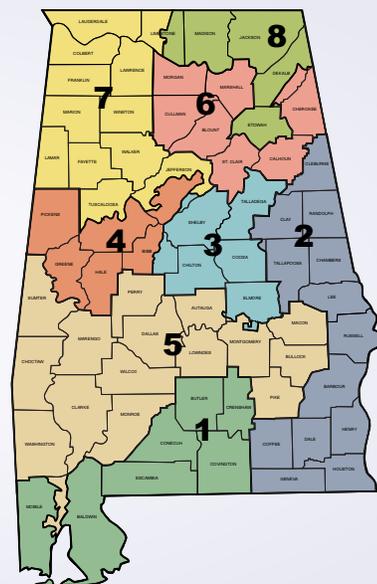
participate will [visit the website](#) to register, find instructions and rules regarding the contest, downloadable lesson plans, Lunar Lander cardboard assembly kits, and activity sheets for classroom learning and can submit their entries for the Lander name.

The entire winning class will receive a three-day 'Pathfinder' trip to **Space Camp** at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, a transportation voucher, and a stipend for the teacher of the winning class.

For more information, visit the [RSCP website](#). RSCP are excited about partnering with the state of Alabama in the "Name the Lander" contest. The Alabama Tourism Department is also a part of this endeavor, promoting the contest and the entire RSCP project.

## Alabama Legislature Draws New State Board of Education Districts

DURING THE LAST LEGISLATIVE SESSION, the Alabama legislature voted to redraw the district lines of the Alabama State Board of Education representatives consistent with population shifts indicated in the last census. In November 2011, the Alabama Department of Justice approved the revised district lines and made them official. As a result, each of the eight state school board districts in Alabama were reshaped to include different territories than in previous years. The newly redrawn district lines and the state board members who represent those districts are identified in the map at the right. Maps are also available on the [Department's web page](#) (School Info tab).



- District 1 – Randy McKinney
- District 2 – Betty Peters
- District 3 – Stephanie Bell
- District 4 – Yvette M. Richardson
- District 5 – Ella B. Bell
- District 6 – Charles Elliott
- District 7 – Gary Warren
- District 8 – Mary Scott Hunter

## Boaz High School Team Tests Cybersecurity



Left to right: Team Captain: Jacob Simmons, Nick Norwood, Cody Carroll, Nehal Patel, Ram Srirangam, Dhru Patel, Bhavik Patel

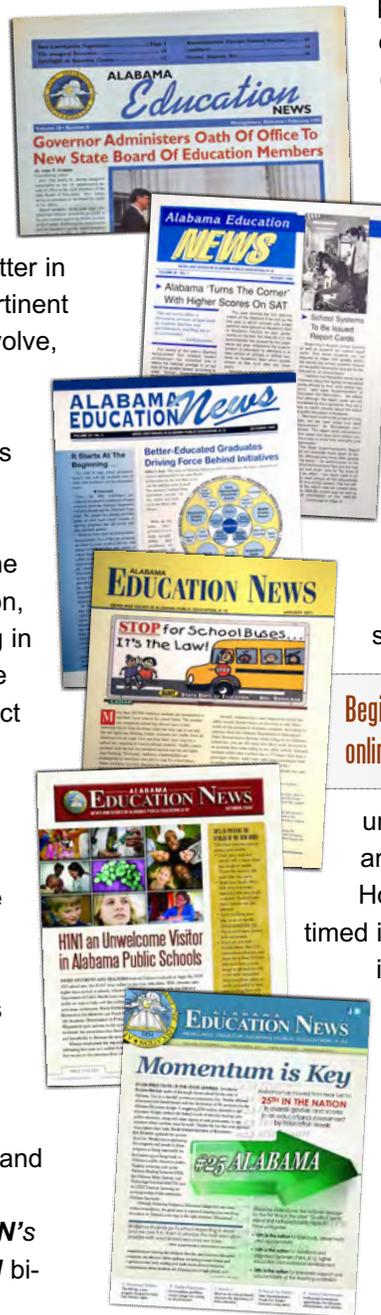
**CyberPatriot** is the premiere national high school cyber defense competition created to inspire high school students toward careers in cybersecurity or other science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines critical to our nation's future. In Boaz High School, they are pursuing CyberPatriot's mission. This is the first year BHS has had an Open Division Team. The team named themselves **Boaz High School Techno Hazard**. They scored in the top 30% in the first round with five students working on one computer finding vulnerabilities on Windows XP for 6 hours. They will be participating again next year.

# Last *Alabama Education News* Rolls Off the Press

FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS the Alabama Department of Education (ADE) has kept the public abreast of events going on in public education through the **ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS (AEN)** newsletter. Over the years the newsletter has taken on various forms – from a black and white newspaper format in years gone by to a more contemporary, slick, full-color newsletter in recent years. As the method of communicating pertinent information about public education continues to evolve, the ADE is taking every opportunity to make sure the news you receive is timely, accurate, and relevant. In order to accomplish that goal in today's 24-hour news cycle environment, it is important to communicate more often than we have previously. Before, the **AEN** was published monthly. Due to the increasing cost of postage, printing, and distribution, the frequency of **AEN** had to be reduced, resulting in a bi-monthly newsletter that did not always provide the most recent education news by virtue of the fact that it was only published six times a year.

With our immediate concern being a constant flow of significant education news, we are yet again keeping up with the times and adjusting the format, delivery, frequency, and accessibility of the ADE's flagship source of education news. Beginning in early 2012, **AEN** will become a bi-weekly report, serving as a snapshot of Alabama's education news. This exciting new form of delivering up-to-date information will come with a host of significant improvements and will change the way education news in Alabama is distributed and received.

Due to the same conditions that caused **AEN's** production to be reduced previously, the new **AEN** bi-weekly report will be available online only. This



publication will be available for download for those wanting to print copies, as well as viewable online in a new, informative, interactive format. This most practical and efficient means of sharing information serves two purposes – along with providing education news in a manner that is timely, it also saves an exorbitant amount of much-needed funding in today's sparse fiscal environment. Limited resources need not be a barrier to providing educators, policy makers, parents, and the general public with the news and information they deserve.

As the ADE moves forward with a spirit of progress and improvement it is

**Beginning in early 2012, AEN will become a bi-weekly, online-only snapshot of Alabama's education news!**

understood that, for some, there may be an adjustment to the new online format. However, the benefit of pertinent, well-timed information flow and significant savings in an already struggling financial setting makes this change necessary and sensible. We are certain the new online **AEN** bi-weekly report will continue to provide the public with the same valuable information concerning the people, policies, and programs in education that are making sure all students are college and career ready.

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District 5 –Ella B. Bell  
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District 7 –Gary Warren  
District 8 –Mary Scott Hunter

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and Secretary and Executive Officer  
– Thomas R. Bice

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