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ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS

The electronic newsletter of the Alabama Department of Education



Dr. Tommy Bice,
State Superintendent of Education

Message from the Superintendent

This past week I was pleased to be able to participate in the Business Council of Alabama's (BCA) meeting and release of a remarkable study on the value of Pre-K education. It is a well-documented fact that the achievement gap for children born into poverty begins at birth, and without quality Pre-K opportunities they often enter school with an achievement gap that is extreme and

often irreversible. BCA has made Pre-K education a priority not only from the perspective of what it means to the life of the children impacted but to the overall economic future of our great state. What an exceptional opportunity this is to rally education and business and industry around a common goal and partnership to serve our children in greatest need.

During the BCA board meeting, a research study from Rutgers University was shared that gave some startling but also encouraging facts about investment in Pre-K education. This study looked at a variety of states, including Alabama, and what the current investment in Pre-K was yielding in terms of students' readiness for school. The researcher shared the statistics of the number of Alabama students currently involved in a quality Pre-K program, and the numbers, while encouraging, were low compared to the number who could be benefiting from such services. The study went on to share a projection of the cost of comprehensive, quality, voluntary Pre-K for our state, which came to approximately \$125 million dollars. While this investment may sound extreme, the most impactful figure was one that is rarely shared in such studies, and that is the cost to our state if we DO NOT make the investment. Based on the fact that students with extreme achievement gaps who are unable to recover often become school dropouts, have greater than average medical needs, have a tendency to participate in criminal activity and, in extreme cases, end up incarcerated – we all know the trajectory – the long-term cost to our state for not making the investment is approximately \$2 billion dollars.

I left that meeting convinced more than ever that our efforts in Pre-K education must remain a priority if we truly want to remove the achievement gap among students, to be able to give every student an opportunity to graduate and have choices for his/her future, and to move EDUCATION into a position to be the vehicle to a new economy based on a \$125 million dollar investment – what a remarkable return on investment!

Did YOU Know?



Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number. "Other" includes Emergency Certificates, Alternative Baccalaureate Degrees, and "Not Specified."

Solving the High School Dropout Problem

- Emphasize achievement.**
- Emphasize preventative and corrective school programs.**
- Emphasize community responsibility.**

These are the approaches that a large group of Alabamians agreed are the actions that everyone involved in education should take to ensure students graduate college-, career- and life-ready.

Over 40 forums hosted by the David Mathews Center for Civic Life (DMC) offered poignant comments about the dropout crisis from citizens across the state. The findings were compiled and described in a recent publication and presentation—"Our Community, Our Future: The Role of Citizens in Solving the High School Dropout Problem."

"This was a citizen-led initiative," said Chris McCauley, DMC Executive Director. "No two dropout forum conversations looked the same, as each community uncovered tensions and dealt with tradeoffs. However, seven major themes emerged from the deliberations through the three approaches. When woven together these common threads reveal a statewide conversation with cross-demographic agreement. The seven themes are: defining achievement, home life and parental involvement, a culture that values education, career readiness, early intervention, community involvement, and wrap-around support.

The presentation of the report also featured two school districts that are changing the culture and doing big things to ensure graduation for all students. Three students from Phenix City's Central High School—Michael Bellamy, Shelley McMoy, and Taggert VinZant—presented their efforts as Phenix City Future Problem Solvers to address the dropout issue in their community through a variety of efforts. Bellamy said, "Helping with this puts into perspective what your position is on the issue."

Most notably, the three young people have produced a [documentary](#) highlighting some of the causes of dropping out and offering a number of possible solutions to the problem. They also recently launched a website



to provide resources on dropping out and to connect citizens, businesses, and organizations to those resources. The young people provided an overview of their project, screened their documentary, and exhibited their website at "Our Community, Our Future." The response to their efforts has been "much bigger than us," said McMoy.

Representatives from Alabama Public Television – Caroline Martin and Virginia Beale – spoke on APT's American Graduate initiative. American Graduate is a public media initiative of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, in cooperation with America's Promise Alliance and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, designed to raise awareness and coordinate community partners on the dropout situation. The Mathews Center will conduct a moderator development workshop with APT's American Graduate program at the end of March.

Keynote speaker Dr. Shelley Stewart, president and CEO of o2ideas and founder of the [Mattie C. Stewart Foundation](#), closed the presentation with the importance of relationships in helping students graduate from high school and become whatever they want to be. He encouraged audience members to "reach out" and take an interest in an individual who might need encouragement and support.

To read the full report, [click here.](#)



SkillsUSA Career Expo 2012
HOSTED BY AIDT

The banner features a photograph of a career expo with various booths and people. The text "SkillsUSA Career Expo 2012" is written in a large, stylized font, and "HOSTED BY AIDT" is written in a smaller font below it.

April 26, 2012
8am - Noon
Birmingham Jefferson
Convention Complex

Fourth-Grade Class in Pelham Wins Trip to Space Camp™



"**Spirit of Alabama**" will be the name of the Rocket City Space Pioneers (RCSP) lunar lander, thanks to some help from Karen McDonald's fourth-grade class at Valley Intermediate School (in Pelham). The students won the "Name the Lander" contest, earning them a trip to Space Camp™ in Huntsville and their teacher a \$500 gift card for classroom supplies.

State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tommy Bice said, "We are very excited to congratulate the students of Mrs. McDonald's fourth-grade class. They came up with a great name and had a lot of fun doing it!"

The RCSP is an Alabama-based team competing in the \$30 million [Google Lunar X PRIZE](#) competition that challenges space professionals and engineers from across the globe to build and launch to the moon a privately funded spacecraft capable of completing a series of exploration and transmission tasks.

The team partnered with Alabama Tourism and the Alabama Department of Education to enlist the assistance of fourth graders from across the state of Alabama to name its lander. Thousands of students in schools from as far south as Fairhope to as far north as Huntsville participated in the competition.

"We are excited about our lander's name," said Tim Pickens, RCSP team leader. "The word 'spirit' represents the collective enthusiasm, loyalty, and dedication of our Alabama team and our state relative to our going to the Moon to win this Google Lunar X PRIZE." Pickens added, "Our team name, 'The Rocket City Space Pioneers,' captures the spirit of Huntsville, but naming our lander 'Spirit of Alabama' will excite the entire state about our endeavor."

The RCSP offered a lesson plan provided by Space Camp and fun activity sheets the teachers could use in conjunction with the contest.

"We want to excite students about STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)," said Pickens. "We had an opportunity to visit a few schools and talk with the students about our mission, and we hope we inspired them in some way through our educational outreach efforts."

The RCSP is led by Huntsville-based Dynetics and comprised of businesses, educational institutions, and non-profit organizations.



Headquartered in Huntsville, the team's members are all either based in Alabama or have a presence in the state. The Rocket City group is among 26 teams from all over the world that are registered in the competition.

The team is developing a low-cost lunar lander/rover system for conducting commercial and scientific missions on the Moon and potentially other planetary bodies. The lander/rover system is capable of making a soft landing on a planetary body and deploying a rover. For more information about the Rocket City Space Pioneers, [CLICK HERE](#).

Alabama Schools Reach Out

For almost a year, on several occasions, severe weather and tornados have heavily affected our communities and left them in need of basic necessities and supplies. Alabama's public schools have answered the call and volunteered their time, money, and resources to aid those affected.

Shelby County Schools:

Chelsea Park Elementary started "Crayons for Center Point," with students collecting 300 boxes of crayons, which were delivered to the Jefferson County Board of Education in Homewood for distribution. Helena Intermediate School collected two truckloads of clothing and supplies for the victims of the January 23rd tornado in the Center Point area. Vincent Elementary collected school supplies for Center Point as well.

Russellville City Schools:

Russellville Middle School students raised money to help buy Phil Campbell students new ironing boards for their Family and Consumer Sciences department. They also made cards and shared how they felt about the destruction.

National Credentials Increases Opportunities for Alabama Students to “Stand Out in the Crowd”

A well educated and highly skilled workforce is exactly what America must maintain to remain strong and prosperous in the future.

According to current U.S. Department of Labor data, there will be 54 million new job openings in America this decade. New economic growth will lead to many of these openings and more than half – *exactly 61.6 percent* – will come from a need to replace veteran employees, who are either retiring from their current careers or permanently leaving the workforce.

An increasing number of high school students across Alabama are earning specialized credentials that will give them greater opportunities for being hired in high-skill, high-wage job markets, internships, and apprenticeships. Alabama Career and Technical Education (CTE) students who are enrolled in finance-related course, take rigorous career-based exams and earn highly respected national credentials.

Many national experts now believe that in order to remain competitive in the expanding global economy, America’s middle and high school students must have a more diverse education in business, finance, marketing, and entrepreneurship. *Credentialing* is focused on showing exactly what students have learned and can effectively demonstrate – *the advanced career skills and important competencies that business professionals must have to be successful.*



Fort Payne High School student Nicolette Stogner

National credentials add real value to a student’s resume.

“As a high school student who plans to pursue a career in the medical field, I feel that receiving my IC3 certification has definitely helped to prepare me for college,” says Fort Payne High School student Nicolette Stogner. “I also believe that through my Career Tech classes, and also by being a member of the Future Business Leaders of America-Phi Beta Lambda (FBLA-PBL) organization, I have a better understanding of how technology affects every job. My parents have always stressed that no matter what career field I plan to work in, I need to definitely have a business and technology background. I think IC3 at the high school level is a challenging way to prepare students for the real world.”

The “baby-boom generation” will move entirely into the 55-years-and-older age group by 2020, which will increase its overall share of the labor force from 19.5 percent in 2010 to 25.2 percent in 2020. “Prime-age” employees (ages 25 to 54) are projected to be about 63.7 percent of the 2020 labor force.

In June, Alabama CIT teachers statewide will have an opportunity to test for various national credentials at the upcoming Association of Career and Technical Education Professional Development Conference at the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex.

To learn more about national credential opportunities for both teachers and students, or to get additional information on how to participate in these specialized initiatives, contact Dawn Morrison, Alabama Career and Technical Education CIT Administrator, or Tina DeBruyne, CTE Administrator, at 334-242-9109.

Some of the specialized credentials available to students are:

- *Accounting Principles and Retail Banking Awareness and Terminology Exams* – offered by Expert Rating
- Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) 
- *Bookkeeping, Investment Concepts, Computer Literacy, Business Information Processing, and Microsoft Office, Word, Excel, and PowerPoint Fundamentals* – offered by Brainbench
- Internet and Computing Core Certification (IC3) 
- *Concepts of Finance* – offered by A*S*K Business Institute
- Computer Assessment and Tutorial Online (CAT1) 
- *Business Financial Management, Banking and Related Services, and Accounting - Basic* offered by the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) 

Online Professional Studies Offered at NO COST To The Participant!

ACLD-approved Professional Studies Available Online through Professional Development Your Way (PDYW) @ EDVANTIA



THE ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S LEADERSHIP AND EVALUATION UNIT, in collaboration with Edvantia, have partnered to offer Alabama Council for Leadership Development (ACLD) approved professional studies.

To register and participate in the EDVANTIA professional studies, participants must have an active STI PD account! If you need an STI PD account, please contact your school system's STI PD Manager. If you are not employed in an

Alabama public school, you must contact call Lori Newton, State Department of Education, Technology Initiatives Section, at 334-353-1112 or [send an email](#). Edvantia cannot create an STI PD account for you.

Shared Leadership

Standard 1 Planning for Continuous Improvement

STI PD Title Number: PLUACLD044

This ten-week online professional study will provide participants with the knowledge and ability to utilize knowledge to plan for and sustain continuous school improvement in classrooms, schools, and school systems/local education agencies (LEAs). This professional study is facilitated and supported through Edvantia's course management platform. Participants will earn 1 PLU upon successful completion.

Course Registration: March 21 - April 4, 2012

Course Start Date: April 19, 2012

Course End Date: July 12, 2012

Credit in STI PD: July 19, 2012

STI PD Registration Procedure:

- Go to <http://pdweb.alsde.edu> and enter your username and password
- Click the **PD Titles** tab
- Select the **Search the PD Title Catalog** link
- Enter the **PD Title Number** for the desired professional study (on the right of page)
- Then, **click the Search button** (scroll down the page, if needed) or **press Enter**
- Click the link, **List** (on the right)
- Then, find the appropriate session and **click the ENROLL NOW button**

If you have questions regarding the Edvantia professional studies, contact Margie Johnson, Edvantia, Program Specialist, at 615-565-0110 or [send an email](#). If you have questions regarding ACLD-approved professional studies or PLUs, contact Telena Madison, State Department of Education, Leadership and Evaluation, at 334-353-5230 or [send an email](#). **Note: Participants may only earn PLUs once for the Edvantia professional studies.**

BOARD BRIEFS

THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 2012



Resolution in Recognition of Suzanne B. Culbreth, Spain Park High School, Hoover City School System, as the 2011 Mathematics Presidential Award Finalist (State School Board District III).



Resolution in Recognition of Chandra W. Davis, Huntsville High School, Huntsville City School System, as the 2011 Science Presidential Award Finalist (State School Board District VIII)



Resolution in Recognition of Robert Patrick, Phil Campbell High School, Franklin County School System, 2012 National Band Director of the Year Award Recipient (State School Board District VII)

Resolution Recognizing Alabama's "Grow Our Own" Initiative and "Future Teachers of Alabama"

Resolutions to Authorize Review of Teacher Education Programs, Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Alabama, and Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama

[CLICK HERE](#) for a complete Board agenda.

Date and Place of Next

Elementary/Secondary Board Meeting:

March 22, 2012 – Work Session
Gordon Persons Building - Plaza 104
Montgomery, AL 36130

AWARDS/OPPORTUNITIES

EDUCATEAlabama (EA) Surveys Now Available!



Surveys for EA Reviewers, EA Evaluators, and EA Evaluatees

Purpose: To provide feedback to the State Department of Education (SDE) on EDUCATEAlabama.

Outcome: Survey results will guide SDE decisions in improving the EDUCATEAlabama online process for use in 2012-2013.

Who Should Complete? All EA Reviewers, Evaluators, and Evaluatees using EDUCATEAlabama.

Survey Length: The surveys consist of 13 questions or less, taking approximately five (5) minutes to complete.

Survey Availability - Timeframe for Completion: March 19 – March 31, 2012.

[EA Reviewer Survey](#) [EA Evaluator Survey](#) [EA Evaluatee Survey](#)

Register now for the Lure of the Labyrinth Challenge, April 1 – June 15!

The Education Arcade at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is pleased to announce the Lure of the Labyrinth Challenge – a free online math challenge for Grades 6-8. While playing Lure of the Labyrinth, students use mathematical thinking skills to progress through a compelling graphic-novel story.

Funded by a Next Generation Learning Challenges Grant, the Challenge invites groups of 4-6 students to collaborate in a safe, teacher-moderated environment to strategize and problem-solve with others. Students and educators have many chances to win regional prizes such as Lenovo ThinkPad Tablets, books, and technology tools like subscriptions to BrainPop just for playing. Ultimately, the Challenge will help us all learn more about the role of gaming in the instructional process.

There is no cost involved to participate in the challenge, which runs from April 1 – June 15. Since the game is web-based, students can play at home or at school, in the classroom, computer lab, library, or after-school program. Teachers have the option of integrating corresponding lessons into their classroom activities but it is not required. Students can play as little or as much as they want – and best of all, they will have continued access to the game over the summer to help avoid that inevitable “brain drain.”

The Education Arcade's own Scot Osterweil will run a free webinar on March 28 to talk more about the role of gaming in education and to give more information on the Challenge. [Sign up](#) to participate, and don't forget to [pre-register!](#)



Alabama Education 2011-2012 Quick Facts Now Available!



[CLICK HERE](#) to download a pdf copy

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