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ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS

The electronic newsletter of the Alabama State Department of Education

From the Superintendent



If you ask people what Thanksgiving really means to them, the responses you receive would follow along the lines of them being thankful for their health, their families, their country, their freedom – all of which would be at the top of anyone’s list. But just for

today let’s focus on those areas in education for which we all have great reason to be thankful.

Let’s be thankful that in Alabama . . .

- Fourth graders lead the nation in gains on the NAEP reading assessment.
- The graduation rate is increasing annually and is higher than it has ever been since records have been kept.
- Students experiencing academic difficulties, in large numbers, are deciding to remain in school instead of dropping out, thereby drastically increasing their possibilities of becoming productive and successful citizens.
- Students are being recognized with prestigious academic awards, both statewide and nationally.
- Teachers and education leaders are being recognized, both statewide and nationally, for exceptional teaching and commitment to educating their students.
- Schools are being recognized, both statewide and nationally, for providing healthier school environments, improving the academic success of their students, and creating learning environments that help students succeed in life beyond the classroom.

- Instructional initiatives developed in Alabama by Alabama educators are being pursued as exemplary models of best practice by other states and countries.
- Students who have overcome unbelievable odds are recognized as Young Heroes for excelling in academics AND giving of themselves through public service, overcoming adversity, and inspiring others through their deeds and strength of character.

The list could go on and on all due to the dedicated educators and leaders who stay the course each and every day despite obstacles and roadblocks occasionally thrown in at the most inopportune times. Alabama educators and leaders are unshakeable in their fortitude and resolve to keep on doing what they do regardless because they know it is best for the children we serve and for our great state of Alabama, and for that I am most thankful!



Alabama State Department Of Education And Microsoft Announce New Statewide Program

Students Now Have the Opportunity to Earn Professional Technology Credentials Before Graduating from High School

On November 20, the Alabama Department of Education and the Microsoft Corporation formally announced the official launch of the Alabama Microsoft IT Academy Program. This new initiative is focused on further developing the overall technology skills of students.

Alabama's Microsoft IT Academy Program will provide opportunities for students to earn certifications in Microsoft product areas, such as Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Word, and Microsoft PowerPoint. This program will be available in high schools statewide and will provide students with the valuable "21st century" technical skills they need to be successful in both college and their future careers.

Governor Robert Bentley said, "Offering industry certification to Alabama's students will help to ensure growth in our workforce. Adding qualified individuals to local businesses will improve economic success."

The Microsoft IT Academy Program will provide participating local school systems with access to Web-based instruction, software lab licenses, E-Learning, and official course materials. Course topics will range from computer basics to high-level programming and database management. Students will get hands-on experience with the latest Microsoft software and E-Learning resources. This program will also allow students to earn professional-level workplace credentials and technology skills before they graduate from high school.

"Through this program we can assure business and industry of a skill set in the area of technology and insure students entering college are equipped with the technical skills to succeed academically," said **State Superintendent of Education Tommy Bice**.

This is the pilot year for this initiative. Currently, one school in each local school system throughout the state has the opportunity to participate in this program. Starting during the 2013-2014 school year, the Microsoft IT Academy Program will be expanded to additional schools.

"The Microsoft IT Academy program makes education more relevant to students so they can move from learning to earning," said Cameron Evans, Chief Technology Officer for U.S. Education, Microsoft Corp. "Alabama

Through this program, we can insure students entering college are equipped with the technical skills to succeed academically. – State Superintendent of Education Tommy Bice

schools, teachers and students are now at an advantage in keeping pace with changing technology and curriculum demands. The program also gives students equal access to the IT skills and certification they need to both prepare for advanced studies and to improve career opportunities with higher earning potential."

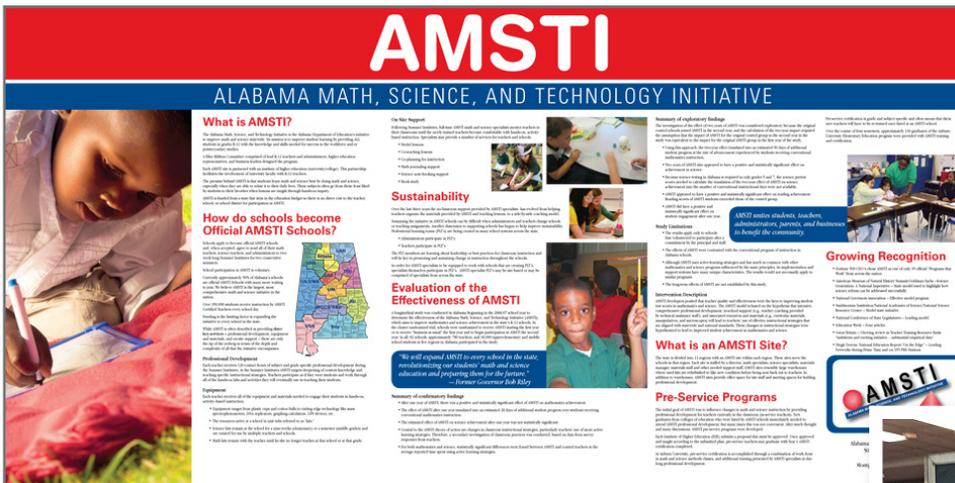


IT certifications are increasingly being recognized as valuable credentials nationwide. Many universities now ask that incoming students be proficient in technology areas, such as Excel and PowerPoint, before applying for admissions. This initiative is important because it will help Alabama's students to be better prepared for their futures.

The Microsoft IT Academy Program works to bridge the gap between education and the real-world-of-work, by equipping students with the technology-based skills needed for successful careers in today's highly competitive job market.

To learn more about Alabama's new Microsoft IT Academy Program, contact Alabama State Department of Education Career and Technical Education Administrator Dawn Morrison, at 334-242-9109 or dmorrison@alsde.edu.

AMSTI Wins National Outstanding Poster Award!



AMSTI-AU site director Beth Hickman was the recipient of the Outstanding Poster Award at the National Outreach Scholarship Conference, conducted by the Engagement Scholarship Consortium. The award was made from a review of "50 posters from an impressive field of national and international submissions." As a result, an abstract will be published in the Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship, (2013 publication).

The poster highlights how Alabama is improving math and science through the unique design of AMSTI, including partnerships, building sustainability, evaluation, and preservice programs.

Birmingham Students Participate in Orchestra

Heather Rittscher, the orchestra teacher at Birmingham's Carver High School, is no stranger to working with special needs students. Last school year, hearing impaired students signed along with the orchestra. So it was a natural thing for her to suggest to **Wanda Shorter**, teacher for autistic students at Carver, that an orchestra class for autistic students should be started. Music, after all, is good for all kinds of students.

Shorter and **Principal Darrell Hudson** agreed, and Hudson worked with the two teachers' schedules to make sure the class could happen. When school started in August, ten autistic students began learning to play the violin. Like any beginners, the students had to start by learning the parts of the violin and bow and which notes are on each string. They sometimes pluck the strings instead of using their bows but are playing with the bows as well.

When the class had its annual Thanksgiving luncheon Nov. 15, the students had a treat for their parents and others who attended. Dressed all in black like members of a professional orchestra, the students entered single file and took their seats. Rittscher asked them to introduce themselves.

The audience watched closely as the students played "The Switch" and "The Addams Family." As an encore, they played rhythms in a drum circle. "I am really proud of how much these students have learned," Hudson said. "When you put innovative minds together, this is what you get." Shorter, who tends to tear up when talking about her students' involvement in orchestra, said, "It has given the children a feeling of 'We can do it!' It is good when they feel that can do what the general population can do."



Mobile County Public School Principal Dianne Reynolds Presented the Terrel H. Bell Award For Outstanding School Leadership

Every year the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program invites nominations for the esteemed Terrel H. Bell Award for Outstanding Leadership. This year, seven principals of 2012 National Blue Ribbon Schools have earned this distinction.

Principals nominated for the Terrell Bell Award are school leaders committed to fostering successful teaching and learning at their schools. They are principals who do whatever it takes to help their students meet high standards; and have demonstrated that they understand that when it comes to educating America's children, failure, is not an option.

Spencer Elementary was close to a state takeover when **Ms. Dianne Reynolds** took the helm in 2004. In that first year, guided by a clear vision and strong sense of mission, she overhauled Spencer's ideals, expectations, and methods. She created processes to analyze all variables that may affect student achievement and inspired students, teachers, and families to set their sights high.

Through professional learning communities, regular data meetings, and professional development targeted to evidence-based strategies such as differentiated instruction and explicit direct instruction, Principal Reynolds helped teachers take ownership of their students' instructional strengths and needs. She championed grade-level competitions in reading and math and scheduled intervention and enrichment activities that contribute to students' enthusiasm to meet high expectations.

To strengthen school climate and safety, Ms. Reynolds revamped arrival and dismissal procedures. She also initiated character education for all students and a special program – Second Chance – which keeps students facing suspension in school, where they receive schoolwork help as they take "time out."

Workshops offer parents guidance to help their children at home, and parents have access to their children's assessment data through special presentations

and curriculum reviews. As a result,

parents have revived the once moribund PTO and Parenting Advisory Council, and attendance at school functions has grown from zero to about 70 percent.

Principal Reynolds has tapped community energy and expertise to support her teachers, students and families. The University of Southern Alabama has provided technology training for faculty and tutoring for



From left to right: Kathy Raber and Marianne Stephens (accepting for Tracey McDaniel, OK), James Mireles (KS), Dianne Reynolds (AL), Blaine Helwig (TX), Liana Szeto (CA), Angela Carter (accepting for Pam Camper, AR), C. Todd Hall (MD).

students. Community programs provide student mentors and financial support for uniforms, hot meals, and field trips.

On recent state assessments, Spencer Elementary students scored 96% proficient in reading and 98% proficient in math; the school has earned Alabama Torchbearer School status, awarded to high achieving, high poverty schools, for two years in a row.

Ms. Dianne Reynolds is indeed an outstanding school leader who inspires, guides and sustains others; she is a leader willing to do whatever it takes to meet students' needs. She demonstrates that with effective leadership and teaching and a conviction that all students can learn, schools can become powerful, joyful places that generate energy in their communities.

On recent state assessments, Spencer Elementary students scored 96% proficient in reading and 98% proficient in math.

Free Relationship Training for Teens

[Just The Facts](#) (JTF) is a **relationship education program that teaches the skills necessary for healthy, successful relationships in workshops throughout Alabama.**

JTF covers such topics as effective communication, conflict resolution, emotion management, characteristics of healthy versus unhealthy relationships, goal setting, and life planning for teens and other groups in Alabama. Just The Facts is a program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and workshops are offered at **no cost to participants.**

Since 2006, JTF has served over 18,000 people statewide through workshops. JTF offers workshops through schools, churches, rehab facilities, prisons, and other community organizations. JTF currently serves most of the city and county school districts in southeast Alabama, including the youth services and SPAN (CITY Program) populations, and some districts in the Mobile and Birmingham areas.

JTF tracks input with pre- and post-tests. The skill areas tracked are conflict resolution, budgeting/financial, abuse prevention, communication, general relationship, and overall attitude. JTF also does follow-up visits with the schools when possible to see whether students have been applying what they learned, and those visits are usually mind-blowing.

The workshops are led by trained facilitators who get the conversation started and using the curriculum JTF facilitators talk about relationships in a way relevant to the participants. The participants learn from each other and from the facilitators. To learn more about JTF, contact [Jason Williams](#) at 334-671-7774.

School Board Governance Act

Passed by the Alabama Legislature on April 20, 2012, the *School Board Governance Improvement Act* creates new policies for every local school board, including Codes of Conduct and training requirements.

Click [this link](#) for access to the following resources that will help school board members comply with the School Board Governance Improvement Act of 2012. The link gives direct access to:

- Act No. 2012-221
- Certificate of Affirmation for School Board Members
- Model Code of Conduct for Local Boards of Education
- An Overview of the School Board Governance Improvement Act
- Rules Adopted by the Alabama State Board of Education

Source: *Alabama Association of School Boards*



YOU'RE GUIDING ALABAMA'S FUTURE

You've helped Alabama students find their way. Now help them pay for it.
Introducing the CollegeCounts Scholarship.

SCHOLARSHIP DETAILS

- Awards of \$4,000 for four-year college enrollees.
- Awards of \$2,000 for community and technical college enrollees.
- Award is non-renewable and granted on a semester basis in the first academic year.

APPLICATION PERIOD

January 2, 2013 - 12:01 AM CST

March 7, 2013 - 11:59 PM CST

For more information and to apply for the CollegeCounts Scholarship, visit www.CollegeCountsAlabama.com.

ELIGIBILITY

Applicants must meet all of the following criteria to be eligible for this scholarship:

- Must be a high school senior or first-time college freshman.
- Must be a U.S. citizen.
- Must be an Alabama resident.
- Must demonstrate financial need.
- Must be enrolled or planning to enroll in an Alabama eligible educational institution.
- Must have a minimum GPA of 2.75.
- Must have an ACT score of 26 or below (applicants attending a two-year school will not be required to submit ACT scores).

SHARE THE WEALTH...OF KNOWLEDGE

Include a link on your website and in your school's newsletter to get the word out:

www.CollegeCountsAlabama.com

Alabama: Every Child a Graduate

Ensuring that every child becomes a high school graduate is a central objective of the Alabama State Board of Education. There is a dedication to creating innovative, yet rigorous programs that help our diverse student population to accomplish the goal of graduation. An effort to graduate every student in Alabama's public schools is the focus of a continuing campaign by the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE), *Every Child a Graduate*.

To continue this effort with innovation, the ALSDE has been selected to participate in a four-year research initiative and study that pairs Johns Hopkins University, the ALSDE and local schools. On November 7-9, principals, central office representatives and newly designated promotion coaches from nine districts and 10 high schools met for three days in Montgomery for workshops to learn more about the study and its potential impact for local schools. "We can't get to the goal of a high graduation rate without your help", said Sherrill Parris, Deputy State Superintendent for Student Learning, ALSDE.



Every Child a Graduate originated with a state law enacted in 2009, the *Dropout Prevention Act of 2009*. Designed to keep students in school, the core of this act is a change in the mandatory attendance age to 17. The law also instituted a student exit interview that all students who desire to leave school and their parents must

The high schools participating in the study as the dependent group are:

- ◆ Jackson High School (Clarke County)
- ◆ Greensboro High School (Hale County)
- ◆ Sidney Lanier High School (Montgomery County)
- ◆ Parker High School (Birmingham City)
- ◆ West Blocton High School (Bibb County)
- ◆ Ashville High School (St. Clair County)
- ◆ St. Clair High School (St. Clair County)
- ◆ Lee High School (Huntsville City)
- ◆ Murphy High School (Mobile County)
- ◆ Decatur High School (Decatur County)



The \$3.45 million federally-funded effort, "[Getting to the Finish Line](#)", will help identify the factors that interfere with ninth graders experiencing successes in school academically, as well as socially and behaviorally, as they maintain their journey to graduation on time. The "ABC's," absenteeism, behavior issues and course failure, serve as early warning indicators of dropping out and will be a central part of the study. January Taylor of Murphy High School said, "We will now go back and develop a plan to focus on the early warning indicators. The 'ABC's' are a huge problem."

The lessons learned will assist not only Alabama in raising graduation rates and reducing dropout rates, but hopefully will provide additional paths for other states with similar concerns. The Alabama State Board of Education and State Superintendent Tommy Bice have shared PLAN 2020 as the roadmap for "every student a graduate," which closely aligns to the impetus of this study.



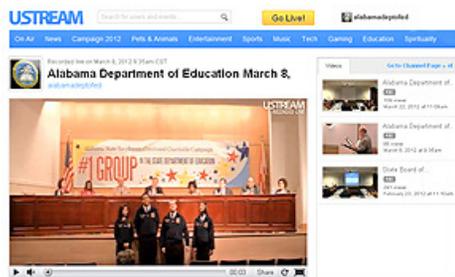
complete. This process requires a meeting with a team of student advocates to share alternatives to

"We will utilize the whole community and all school resources to show students that people care. We care that they graduate and make a good life for themselves."

– Sidney Lanier High School Promotion Coach, Jane Walker

dropping out that could provide an opportunity for a student to stay in school and graduate. In 2010, Alabama received national recognition in a report from America's Promise Alliance, Civic Enterprises and Johns Hopkins University's Everyone Graduates Center. The report, *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic*, showed Alabama battling the dropout crisis impactfully.

State Board of Education Meetings Now on Ustream.tv!



See your State Board of Education in action – Online at <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/alabama-department-of-education>. See LIVE video every second and fourth Thursday of the month or watch the archived videos anytime you want (different days in July, November, and December).

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Contact **Alabama Education News**
334-242-9950 (p) · 334-353-4682 (f)
aen@alsde.edu (e) · www.alsde.edu (w)

Alabama Education News
P.O. Box 302101
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Fiscal Year 2014 Legislative & Budget Priorities

The Alabama State Board of Education formally adopted the 2014 [Budget and Legislative priorities](#) at its November meeting. The adoption marks the first time the board has sent lawmakers a list of spending and policy priorities designed to give them detailed information about plans, goals and initiatives with budgetary and long-range implications.

Funding priorities include:

- A **three-year plan** to return spending for operational expenses (called Other Current Expense in the budget) to 2008 levels. The proposed increase is \$38.6 million each year, for a total increase of \$115.8 million.
- A **three-year plan** to return Foundation Program divisors, which impact funding for teacher units, to original levels. The plan calls for funding almost 459 more teachers each year until the state has recaptured 1,376.7 teacher units.
- An increase of \$7,975 in **fleet renewal funding** to reflect current costs, for a total of \$14 million in operations.
- Allocation of funding for **textbooks** and related resources at \$75 per student.

The board's reform and improvement priorities, to be funded with \$10 million repurposed from existing budget line items, include:

- **Working with the governor** to get an executive order creating a panel of K-12, postsecondary, higher education and business and industry representatives to develop a shared definition of a high school graduate. Once the definition is adopted, officials would expect students who meet the definition would also meet requirements for admission to two- and four-year schools, technical schools and entry-level jobs without remediation.
- Funding **Teach for Alabama scholarships**, each at \$5,000 a year, to recruit high school students who meet a set GPA and ACT score into the teaching profession. In return, recipients would have to commit to teaching for four years in a school greatly in need of improvement.
- **Creating a higher education connection** to Teach for Alabama whereby teacher preparation programs revamp their programs to include a clinical model with extended clinical experiences for teachers-in-training. The future teachers would be assigned to work with master teachers and leaders in systems that have proven effective at raising student achievement.
- Funding a **mentoring and induction program** for all first- and second-year teachers.
- Creating differing roles and **salary schedules** for successful teachers who do not want to move into the traditional administrative roles.

The priority list also includes a \$30 million state bond issue to equip career-tech programs, and proposals to increase AMSTI funding by \$10 million, ACCESS by \$5 million, Advanced Placement by \$3 million, and career tech by \$3 million.

Story adopted from Alabama Association of School Boards