

ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS

NEWS AND ISSUES IN ALABAMA PUBLIC EDUCATION, K-12

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ALEX goes HOLLYWOOD!

On September 16, 2011, representatives from the Alabama Learning Exchange (ALEX) traveled to Hollywood, CA, to accept a national “Best of the Web” Award – the fourth time ALEX has received this highly-coveted and prestigious award!

EVERY TEACHER WOULD LIKE A LITTLE MORE HELP IN THE CLASSROOM. The Alabama Department of Education offers that and more through the Alabama Learning Exchange (ALEX). Professional development, lesson plans, podcasts, and digital content can all be found at <http://alex.state.al.us>. ALEX’s motto, “Quality for Every Facet of Learning,” is more than a slogan for a website. It represents a commitment by the ALEX team to provide only the best resources to meet the unique needs of teachers, administrators, parents, and students.

ALEX is designed to index and share many types of educational materials and information through a time-saving, one-stop resource for educators, parents, and students. The majority of these rich resources (lesson plans, podcasts, web links, and interactive activities) are located

“ALEX gives educators ideas about how to integrate technology in their classrooms to make learning real and relevant for their students.”

DR. SHANNON PARKS, ALEX STATE ADMINISTRATOR

and connected to the Alabama Courses of Study by National Board Certified Teachers. Many of the ALEX podcasts in the gallery360 section that are created by Alabama’s teachers and students are also shared on Apple’s iTunes U through a special partnership. By sharing the

wealth of expertise and knowledge now available through ALEX, Alabama’s best educators, and the youth of Alabama, are poised to benefit from the Best of the Web!

On September 16, the Alabama Learning Exchange (ALEX) won a national Best of the Web Award from the Center for Digital Education. This is the fourth year that ALEX has won this prestigious award. In designing the website for the exchange, the Alabama Department of Education made sure teachers could get where they wanted to go within three clicks. *continued on next page ...*



Dr. Richard Murphy, ALEX Instructional Technologist; Tiffany Davis, ASA Engineer; Dr. Shannon Parks, ALEX State Administrator; and Keith George, ALEX Education Specialist, accept the “2011 Best of the Web” Award at a ceremony in Hollywood, CA.

Best of the Web & Digital Education Achievement Awards
DIA WEB



“Quality for Every Facet of Learning” is more than a slogan, it represents a commitment by the ALEX team to provide only the best resources to meet the unique needs of teachers, administrators, parents, and students.

continued from front ... The department has recently added a new, dynamic professional learning community section called ALEXville, said SHANNON PARKS, the ALEX state administrator for the Alabama Department of Education, Technology Initiatives. In this community, educators who took the same professional development courses share what they learned about digital content and how they’re applying it. “The professional development piece, called the ACE Program (ALEX Certification of Excellence), is critical to implementing these resources in the classroom because it gives educators ideas about how to integrate technology in their classrooms to make learning real and relevant for their students,” said Parks.

Educators choose from a number of different training modules, including the following:

- ➔ **Alabama Learning Exchange Navigator training**
- ➔ **A two-day podcast camp**
- ➔ **Exploring ALEX and the web via group projection tools**
- ➔ **Professional social networking tools for educators**
- ➔ **Web-based 2.0/3.0 tools for teaching and learning**
- ➔ **Incorporating video into the classroom**

New modules on using mobile devices such as iPads and cell phones in the classroom are in the works as well. During each of these sessions, educators design a lesson plan, create a podcast or learning strategy, or develop another resource that

is based on state standards and emphasizes project-based learning. They then link these resources to standards and share them on ALEX for other teachers to use.

“If we can get teachers to actually create what they learn, then we know that it’s going to stick with them and they’re going to actually take it back to their classroom because they own it,” Parks said.

While much of the digital content in ALEX comes from teachers, Verizon Thinkfinity contributes a large number of stellar resources as well. The Verizon Foundation supports outreach and training programs created by the Alabama Department of Education’s ALEX staff in order to ensure the resources they share free of charge for Alabama’s educators are used effectively in the 21st Century classroom.

With the ALEX ACE Train-the-Trainer program, educators return to their schools and districts and train at least ten teachers. Based on teacher surveys, students are learning more through the engaging, relevant, and project-based lessons and digital content that their teachers create.

ALEX is a work in progress. It will continually improve and expand based upon teachers creating vital resources and submitting to the web portal. Communicating with other professionals through Listservs, finding lesson plans and

“We are pleased to work with the award-winning ALEX team and commend their digital content ACE Training Program as one of the best in the nation.”

**Al Browne, Vice President,
Verizon Foundation, Education & Technology**

interactive resources connected to Course of Study standards, benefiting from best practices in Professional Learning, and following links to bring quality learning to your students - Alabama’s finest!

ALEX is made possible through generous resources shared by the Verizon Foundation, support from the Alabama Supercomputer Authority and funding through the office of Technology Initiatives and the Federal Government (Enhancing Education Through Technology, Title II, Part D).



Advanced Placement Participation Continues to Increase in Alabama Public Schools



Alabama's public school Advanced Placement (AP) students continue to excel in participation according to The College Board's annual report. The number of participating students has risen from 7,110 in 2007 to 15,021 in 2011. All minority groups rose in participation except American Indian, with African-American students showing the largest gain in participation with 3,142 students, a gain of 29.7 percent more than last year.

ACCESS Distance Learning allows high school students all over the state to have the opportunity to take any AP class. The strong partnership between the Alabama Department of Education and A+ College Ready offers schools multiple resources to encourage and maintain AP classes.

The number of overall AP examinations, as well as the number of exams with a score of 3, 4, or 5 in Alabama continues to soar. In 2011, almost as many students earned 3, 4, or 5 as took exams in 2007. The number achieving a 3, 4, or 5 has risen from 6,732 to 10,968 - an increase of 120 percent. Exam participation increased by over 16 percent in 2011 since last year.



SAT SCORES			
	READING	MATH	WRITING
ALABAMA	546	541	536
U.S.	497	514	489



“The incredible gain in the number of students in AP is a real sign of success for ACCESS Distance Learning and the collaborative partnership with A+ College Ready and, of course, for students in AP classes who demonstrate the drive and desire to excel academically.”

LARRY E. CRAVEN, J.D., INTERIM STATE SUPERINTENDENT

Regarding the SAT, Alabama students outperformed the average student in the nation. Alabama had 2,569 students take the SAT in comparison, up 12.3 percent from last year. There was a 26.4 percent jump in the number of African-American test takers, with 641 African-American students taking the SAT.

Alabama gets an 'A' for Teaching Civil Rights History

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT is one of the defining events of U.S. history, and Alabama has scored an “A” in a first-of-its-kind study released by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

The study - Teaching the Movement: The State of Civil Rights Education 2011 - examined state standards and curriculum requirements related to the study of the modern civil rights movement for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. It was conducted by the SPLC's Teaching Tolerance program.



“Alabama prides itself on making strong progress in every form of public education. Although there is much work to do, the state is moving in the right direction in overall grades and scores in several forms of educational assessments. This most recent acknowledgement by the Southern Poverty Law Center is yet another testament to the quality of education available in our great state,” said LARRY E. CRAVEN, J.D., INTERIM STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION.

“Obviously, Alabama has been at the forefront of civil rights for many years. While the civil rights movement may have origins in Alabama, its effect has been felt across our nation and around the world. I hope this latest recognition is further proof that Alabama continues to strive to create a more tolerant, unbiased generation of leaders in our public schools.”

The study compared the requirements in state standards to a body of knowledge that reflects what civil rights historians and educators consider core information about the civil rights movement. It found that:

- Only three states received a grade of “A” - Alabama, New York, and Florida - and even these states have considerable room for improvement.
- A shocking number of states - 35 - received grades of “F.”
- Generally speaking, the farther from the South - and the smaller the African-American population - the less attention paid to the movement.

The SPLC issued the report to encourage a national conversation about the importance of teaching the civil rights movement. The report calls for states to include civil rights education in K-12 history and social studies curricula. It urges colleges and other organizations that train teachers to ensure that they are well prepared to teach it.

The study also found that when states teach the civil rights movement, they tend to perform well on teaching leaders and events. They are considerably less likely to include the obstacles that civil rights activists faced, like racism and white resistance, or to mention more than civil rights-related holidays to students before they reach high school. ●

Larry E. Craven Sworn in as Alabama's Interim State Superintendent of Education

ON SEPTEMBER 8, 2011, LARRY E. CRAVEN, J.D., was sworn in as Alabama's Interim State Superintendent of Education by JUDGE CHARLES PRICE. Mr. Craven previously served as the General Counsel for the Alabama Department of Education and takes over for DR. JOE MORTON, who served as superintendent for seven years.



Mr. Craven has served as legal counsel to the Department of Education for 14 years and earned his J.D. from Cumberland Law School at Samford University in 1977. He served as an Assistant District Attorney for Montgomery, Alabama, from 1979 until 1981 and previously served as Staff Judge Advocate for

“ I am honored by the Board's confidence in me. I will do my best to move the process forward to fill the shoes of Dr. Joe Morton. ” – LARRY E. CRAVEN

the Alabama National Guard until his retirement as Colonel from active military service in 1997. He is a former helicopter pilot having served as a Standardization Instructor Pilot for the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam from 1970-1971. He and his wife, Shiela, have been married for 42 years.

Prior Legal Employment: Associate General Counsel/Assistant Attorney General, Alabama Department of Education 1997-2007; Judge Advocate General, 1989-1997; Private Practice, 1981-1989; Assistant District Attorney, Montgomery County, 1979-1981; Assistant Attorney General - 1997-current.

Mr. Craven can be reached at 334-242-9700 or via e-mail at alstatesuper@alsde.edu.



Judge Charles Price with Larry and Shiela Craven.

Alabama's Action Plan for Literacy: Birth through Grade 12

EMPHASIZING THAT LITERACY IS EVERYBODY'S JOB, "Alabama's Action Plan for Literacy: Birth through Grade 12" was released to the State Board of Education this summer.

"Alabama's Action Plan for Literacy: Birth through Grade 12 is a joint effort because literacy truly is everybody's job. The literacy action plan is another important component for the Every Child a Graduate campaign. Literacy equals graduates, and graduates equal jobs for Alabama. This action plan assures that our citizens are literate, well-educated, and successful in school and in life. Alabama's children are the beneficiaries of this work and they deserve no less," said LARRY E. CRAVEN, J.D., INTERIM STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION. Since July, the ALSDE has distributed more than 5,000 Literacy Plan booklets.

Alabama's Action Plan for Literacy: Birth through Grade 12 includes a detailed booklet and a pamphlet especially for parents. The parent pamphlet offers tips to parents on how to recognize the signs of literacy development with their children and provides ideas and resources to enable parents to encourage and help their children to read at home.



SHERRILL PARRIS, ASSISTANT STATE SUPERINTENDENT, said, "Alabama's Action Plan for Literacy: Birth through Grade 12 really expands the tools for parents. Alabama has both a nationally recognized literacy program – the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) – and a nationally recognized Pre-K program. Alabama's Action Plan for Literacy: Birth through Grade 12 brings those efforts together with a framework for literacy partnerships to include parents, caregivers, schools, and communities. This action plan is the catalyst in a new decade to continue ARI's focus on improving literacy and to combine all available resources in our commitment to children."

Literacy skills begin to develop at birth and provide the foundation for all learning. Twenty-first century work skills require a strong literacy base. Alabama's Action Plan for Literacy: Birth Through Grade 12 is not a report but an action plan that emphasizes what will be done to achieve literacy and produce college- and career-ready graduates in Alabama's public schools.

Hollywood Documentary Features Alabama Educator

AN ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION Education Administrator, **DR. TONY THACKER**, has lent his experience as a teacher and education administrator to Hollywood A-list star actor **MATT DAMON** and Academy Award winning director/producer **VANESSA ROTH** in the creation of a feature-length documentary entitled **American Teacher**. Thacker, along with several other educators and policy experts, play a part in this groundbreaking film that examines America's education crisis as it looks at the careers of four teachers who tell their collective story concerning education issues. The film, narrated by Matt Damon, is part of a greater project -The Teacher Salary Project - that serves as an interactive online resource and a national outreach campaign that delves into the core of our educational crisis as seen through the eyes and experiences of our nation's teachers. This project is based on the *New York Times* best-selling book *Teachers Have It Easy* by journalist and teacher **DANIEL MOULTHROP**.

Through an interactive and evolving website and a feature-length documentary that brings together educational experts, student interviews, and a year of documenting the day-to-day lives and sacrifices of public school teachers, THE TEACHER SALARY PROJECT expects to bring an awareness to the real and imminent crisis in our educational system – how little many value our strongest, most committed, and most effective teachers, and the ripple effect this has on how our children learn and their potential for future success. Thacker said the documentary has the potential to help people get a better understanding of exactly what many teachers go through and the need for increased respect for the profession. He said those in a position to make the most difference should definitely watch this film.

"I would strongly suggest that everyone take the opportunity to go see it. Or, better yet, take a Legislator to see it. The movie details the lives of

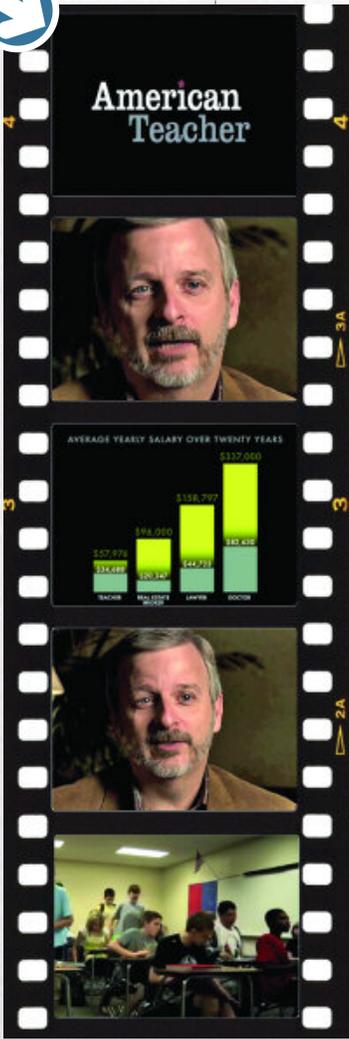


“The movie details the lives of four teachers and the struggles that they endure as they try to build a future for themselves in the profession they love.” – DR. TONY THACKER

four teachers and the struggles that they endure as they try to build a future for themselves in the profession they love. Unfortunately, not all of them remain in the classroom, or the profession, even though each says that is what they would prefer,” Thacker said. “This movie is not like other recent efforts where the ‘bureaucracy’ that inevitably gets in the way of educators is scoured and few possibilities besides ‘charter schools’ are provided as the answer. No, this movie is much more intimate, much more human, and much more to the point. Teachers are, and always have been, the key to education and you can see it in the eyes of these teachers’ students. As such, they deserve our respect, they deserve adequate resources, and they deserve appropriate support.”

Thacker said the message contained in **American Teacher** is we should do everything within our power to provide the support that allows teachers the opportunity to do what they do best: practice the art of teaching. His hope is that others who see the movie understand what that entails.

A trailer of the film, which opens up with Thacker, is available at www.theteachersalaryproject.org, along with more information about the documentary, the people involved, and the book upon which the movie is based. With screenings already premiering in several major cities including New York, Los Angeles, and Cleveland where the screening sold completely out, it is anticipated that this documentary will serve as a clarion call to those who are looking for ways to improve education and support one of the, if not the world's most valuable professions, teaching. 🍎



McDavid-Jones Students Give Gifts in Remembrance

In remembrance of the event of September 11, 2001, McDavid-Jones Elementary School's (Mobile County) entire student body participated in a *Week of Caring*. Each grade level recognized one of the many groups of service men and women in our community.

Each grade level brought donations of individually wrapped snack crackers, snack cakes, 6-pack of canned soft drinks, packaged cookies, small bottles of water, microwave popcorn, and individual bags of chips.

All students wore a *Week of Caring* sticker (provided by the school) to show their support for special groups of people who do so much. Goodie baskets of homemade desserts were delivered to the armory, the fire department, EMS groups, city hall, Public Works Department, and the pilots at Mobile Regional Airport.

The students received the unique honor of being shown the actual tents used by the National Guard staff while deployed.



Ms. Bryan, City Clerk for the City of Citronelle, accepted the donations on behalf of City Hall. At the

EMS office the students were welcomed by Ms. Charla Clarke and Mr. Craig McManus.

All donations were delivered by a special group of students: Chazz Creel, Landon Hester, Mattelyn Neighbors, Cailin Allen, and Madeline Agee. Third-grade teacher LAURA WALKER delivered snacks to the pilots at Mobile Regional Airport.

State Board Member: Randy McKinney, District 1
McDavid-Jones Elementary Principal: Ms Rebecca Smyly
Mobile County Schools Superintendent: Dr. Roy Nichols

Birmingham City Schools Get New "Green" School Buses



Bus driver Howard Powell and a new "green" school bus.

Six new school buses delivered to the Birmingham City School System this week are the usual yellow color – but they are "green"

as well. The buses run on compressed natural gas (CNG), the cleanest alternative fuel available. The Birmingham City School System is the first district in the state to purchase CNG buses.

"We decided to buy CNG buses for several reasons, but especially because they are environmentally friendly," said SUPERINTENDENT CRAIG WITHERSPOON. "Compressed natural gas also is a domestic fuel and costs about one third less than gasoline, and CNG vehicles require less maintenance."

District officials worked closely with officials at the Alabama Department of Education, which had to give a waiver to allow the district to buy non-diesel buses. Representatives of Energen also worked with the district, providing assistance in preparing the request for proposals the district used to select a vendor for the CNG buses.

The issues of fueling the buses and maintaining them were worked out with the assistance of the Birmingham Jefferson Transit Authority and Lawson State Community College. Drivers of the CNG buses will fuel them at the transit authority's CNG fueling station – which is near the district bus terminal. Lawson State trained the district's mechanics during the summer.

The purchase of the six CNG buses could be the first step in converting to alternative fuels. "We will do an assessment this year of our fuel costs and gather other pertinent information to determine our next steps in alternative fuel buses," said SAMUETTA DREW, the district's chief operations officer. "We also will be reviewing other forms of alternative fuel, their benefits to the environment, and cost benefits to the district."

State Board Member: Dr. Yvette Richardson, District 4
Birmingham City Schools Superintendent: Dr. Craig Witherspoon

Colbert Wins State Quiz Bowl

JEFF MCKINNEY, career and technical teacher at Colbert County High School, had a successful school year. The student organization of FFA won the State Quiz Bowl Competition at Auburn University this summer. For additional information, contact Mr. McKinney at 256-446-6576.

State Board Member: Gary Warren, District 7 · Principal: Mr. Melcha Satchel · Colbert County Schools Superintendent: Mr. Billy Hudson, Jr.

Colbert Teacher Inducted to Hall of Fame

JULIE COAN, business education teacher with Colbert County High School, was inducted into the Alabama FBLA Advisor's Hall of Fame. Mrs. Coan has more than 27 years' experience in career and technical education. For additional information, contact Mrs. Coan at 256-446-9617.

Julie D. Ramsay Writes Book on Technology-Supported Learning



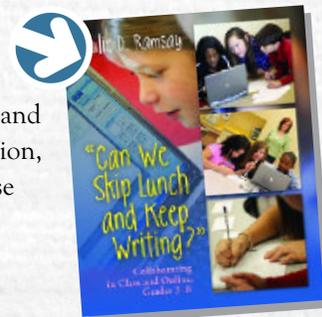
Publishing podcasts, writing digital stories with “choose your own adventure” endings, and collaborating with students around the country through wikis, Skype, and Voice Thread, Fultondale Elementary fifth-grade teacher **JULIE D. RAMSAY** never imagined that she and her students would be forging a new frontier using technology to support writing lessons. She does not teach grammar and writing skills in isolation and keeps originality constantly before her lesson plans. Realizing how hungry her students were for “real” writing activities allowing them to share and learn from peer students in other states, she creatively uses digital technology for thinking outside the box and has written a book, “*Can We Skip Lunch and Keep Writing?*”, to describe how digital her classroom has become and must continue to become for the future of the students she teaches.

The popular book shows teachers how to weave technology throughout the curriculum.

Ramsay’s students get so fired up about writing that they don’t want to stop at the end of the class.

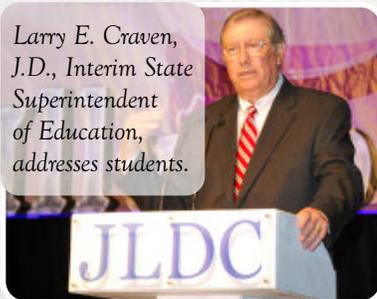
Readers of her book will learn how to select appropriate digital tools, guide and involve students, and differentiate instruction to meet individual needs. She uses stories and lesson plans to help intermediate and middle grade teachers discover how technology-assisted writing can foster innovation, global communication, and creative problem solving. Her ultimate goal is to develop responsible, productive digital citizens whose love of learning creates lifelong learners.

State Board Member: Dr. Yvette Richardson, District 4 · Fultondale Elementary Principal: Ms Cynthia Cornelius
Jefferson County Schools Superintendent: Dr. Phillip Hammonds



Alabama Students Attend the 2011 JLDC Leadership Conference

Larry E. Craven, J.D., Interim State Superintendent of Education, addresses students.



More than 3,500 Alabama high school students, from different communities across the state, are already working hard to prepare themselves for their futures. These students, their teachers, and parents traveled to Montgomery

for two days of rigorous leadership study at the 2011 Joint Leadership Development Conference (JLDC), September 26-27.

JLDC, which began twelve years ago, is focused on preparing students for top leadership opportunities. During this conference, Alabama’s seven different student organizations and Jobs for Alabama’s Graduates (JAG) program collaborate for one united event.

“We believe that every student must be fully prepared for a lifetime of success,” said Alabama Career and Technical Education Student Organizations (CTSO) Coordinator, **CRAIG COLLINS**. “Students attending this conference had an opportunity to participate in more than 20 different workshops and interactive activities.”

Each year, JLDC focuses on preparing students for leadership, career, and postsecondary learning opportunities. The organizations participating in JLDC this year were: DECA (Association of Business/Marketing Students); JROTC (Junior ROTC); FBLA-PBL (Future Business Leaders of America-Phi Beta Lambda); FCCLA (Family, Career and Community

Leaders of America); FFA; HOSA (Health Occupations Students of America); JAG; SkillsUSA; and TSA (Technology Student Association).

Some of the workshops that students had an opportunity to attend were:

- **Know What? Bullying Hurts!**
- **Thinking on Your Feet – Succeeding at Impromptu Speaking**
- **Finding Money for College**

Also, participants attending this year’s conference had a chance to take a glimpse into the future. Event sponsors, Alabama Power and Manufacture Alabama, displayed some of their newest technology-based equipment. There were over 40 different national and local vendors at this event.

Currently, two out of every three high school students in Alabama participate in a career and technical education (CTE) program. These students explore career options in more than 300 courses, earn advanced diplomas, and receive college credit.

To learn more about JLDC or any of the other great educational opportunities offered by Alabama CTE, contact Craig Collins, Alabama CTSO Coordinator, at 334-353-8387.



Craig Collins and JLDC students.

ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS

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ALABAMA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Participate in the anonymous AEN Readers' Survey!
Simply [CLICK HERE](#) and let your opinion be heard.

Board Briefs – September 8, 2011

The Alabama State Board of Education met Thursday, September 8, 2011, in the auditorium of the Gordon Persons Building, Montgomery, Alabama, to consider elementary and secondary education matters. Members present were: Mrs. Stephanie Bell, Dr. Charles E. Elliott, Mrs. Mary Scott Hunter, Mr. Randy McKinney, Mrs. Betty Peters, Dr. Yvette Richardson, and Mr. Gary Warren. Mrs. Ella B. Bell and Governor Robert Bentley were absent. Larry E. Craven J.D., Interim State Superintendent of Education, was also present.

NEW BUSINESS

- Announce Intent to Amend Alabama Administrative Code, Rule 290-3-1-.02.
- Resolution Pertaining to Certification Matters During the Term of Larry Craven, J.D., Interim State Superintendent of Education
- Resolution Proclaiming October 5, 2011, as International Walk to School Day and Month
- Resolution to Authorize Review of a Teacher Education Program, Alabama A & M University, Normal, Alabama
- Resolution to Authorize Review of Teacher Education Programs, Troy University, Troy, Alabama
- Resolution to Approve a Teacher Education Program, University of Alabama at Birmingham, Birmingham, Alabama
- National Association of State Boards of Education State Board Representative

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Alabama State Board of Education to consider K-12 matters will be Thursday, October 13, 2011, at 9:30 a.m., in the auditorium of the Gordon Persons Building in Montgomery, Alabama. Anyone who wishes to address the Board should register before the meeting by calling 334-242-9700.

Awards, Opportunities, and Professional Development

For a complete listing of awards and professional development opportunities [CLICK HERE](#)