

# ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS

The electronic newsletter of the Alabama State Department of Education

September  
2013

Issue I

## Every Child a Graduate ... regardless of when it occurs

I receive hundreds of e-mails a day spanning a broad spectrum of topics and issues, but rarely do I receive e-mails from students. However, a very special e-mail arrived in early August that sparked my interest as it was a request from a student asking for more time to complete his required coursework in order to participate in summer school graduation from Florence City Schools. My first response was, "Of course, since our goal is that you become a graduate," and a call to Dr. Janet Womack, Superintendent of Florence City Schools, revealed that school system personnel were already making the needed accommodations to ensure the success of not only this young man but a number of other students who would graduate following their summer school program.

As a result of this inquiry, and my interest in the young man who sent the e-mail and the concept of summer school graduation (regretfully, not something that I held when I was a high school principal or local superintendent), I was invited to participate in the summer graduation ceremony to present the diplomas to Shawn and his fellow graduates. What I experienced was one of the most moving, personal, and inspiring graduation ceremonies I have ever attended because, as you might imagine, each of these graduates had *faced* significant challenges and each had *presented* significant challenges, but through the support of their administrators, teachers, and families the students had persevered and by doing so they now have a very different future before them.

I share this to challenge us to rethink how we "do school" and how when we personalize the learning experience for all children more children experience success. Because these students did not graduate "on time" in May with their class their school system held a summer graduation ceremony with caps and gowns, music, and all the pomp and circumstance as the traditional ceremony to

acknowledge that their accomplishments were just as noteworthy regardless of when they occurred. I understand that there could also be a mid-year graduation ceremony occurring in December for those who might have taken just a bit longer or even for those who have accelerated and are ready to move forward.

Stories like these are what lie at the core of public education ... successes that cannot be measured through traditional means but have lifelong impact in the lives of children. I envision the day when "graduation" is celebrated throughout the year as students

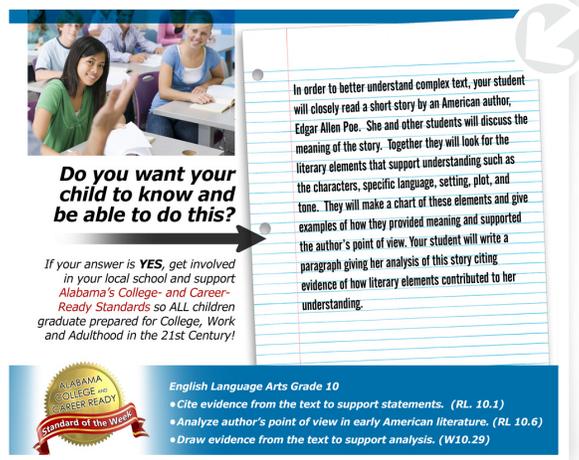
reach their individual goals – one more innovation toward our mission: *Every Child a Graduate – Every Graduate Prepared for College/Work/ Adulthood in the 21st Century!*

– STATE SUPERINTENDENT  
OF EDUCATION DR. TOMMY BICE



## Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards Real Learning for the Real World

The **Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards (AL CCRS)** are challenging our students to become prepared graduates. To help educate and inform parents and students of the value of these new academic standards,



**Do you want your child to know and be able to do this?**

If your answer is **YES**, get involved in your local school and support Alabama's College- and Career-Ready Standards so ALL children graduate prepared for College, Work and Adulthood in the 21st Century!

In order to better understand complex text, your student will closely read a short story by an American author, Edgar Allan Poe. She and other students will discuss the meaning of the story. Together they will look for the literary elements that support understanding such as the characters, specific language, setting, plot, and tone. They will make a chart of these elements and give examples of how they provided meaning and supported the author's point of view. Your student will write a paragraph giving her analysis of this story citing evidence of how literary elements contributed to her understanding.

**English Language Arts Grade 10**

- Cite evidence from the text to support statements. (RL.10.1)
- Analyze author's point of view in early American literature. (RL.10.6)
- Draw evidence from the text to support analysis. (W.10.2)

**Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards of the World**

the ALSDE is showcasing what real learning in the standards looks like with the "Alabama CCRS of the Week."

This is sent out each Monday to all districts, on the [ALSDE webpage](#), [Pinterest](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages and to our partners in education to include: School Superintendents of Alabama, Alabama

Association of School Boards, Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools and Alabama GRIT (Graduate Ready, Impact Tomorrow).

## A+ College Ready: Annual Celebration September 25th

**State Superintendent Dr. Tommy Bice** announced the annual results of Alabama's Advanced Placement Initiative, implemented in partnership with A+ College Ready, which is dramatically increasing the number of Alabama students taking and passing rigorous AP exams in high schools across the state. Senator Trip Pittman was also on hand to announce expansion of the program into 21 additional high schools. The celebration took place on September 25th at 9:30am at Daphne High School in Baldwin County. In 2013-14, the ALSDE and A+ College Ready AP Initiative supports 97 schools in 43 districts and includes open enrollment in AP math, science and English classes for all students. The program also helps facilitate and cover costs for increased time on task for students through special study sessions, intensive teacher training, support from master teachers and stipends for teachers, and students.



In other Advanced Placement news, Alabama is receiving over \$250,000 to expand AP access to more students. The U.S. Department of Education awarded grants to 42 states, including Alabama, to eliminate one of the financial roadblocks some students have to more rigorous AP courses that prepare them for success in college. These funds will be used by all Alabama public schools, including those participating in the A+ College Ready program, to help offset the cost of taking the AP exams administered by The College Board.

## Introducing... Alabama GRIT

**Alabama GRIT** is a team of Alabama parents, educators, business leaders, military personnel, and other civic leaders who work together to ensure all of Alabama's children have an opportunity to graduate from any of Alabama's schools prepared for real life.



The ALSDE is committed to assisting Alabama GRIT in all efforts to get out factual information on Alabama's College- and Career-Ready Standards and public education in Alabama.

### The GRIT Pledge

*I believe that every child should be able to attend a great school in Alabama that expects more from its students and ensures every graduate is prepared for life after graduation – whether one is starting college or a career.*

*Alabama has a plan to meet that goal beginning with the implementation of Alabama's College- and Career-Ready Standards – academic benchmarks designed to raise student expectations to higher levels, build upon the gains our students and teachers are making in the classroom, and keep our schools moving forward.*

*I pledge to stand with the many parents, military families, business leaders, educators, community advocates, and others whose GRIT and perseverance are ensuring that our students graduate with the life skills needed to succeed in their chosen career path.*

<http://www.alabamagrit.org/>

## Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth Announces New Award to Support Pre-College Math and Science Research

**Young scientists ages 13 to 18** with promising research ideas can now be awarded funding of up to \$600 through a new annual competition sponsored by the Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth (CTY). CTY is establishing the CTY Cogito Research Awards to help offset the costs associated with conducting research in math and science for selected middle and high school students.

Up to 10 award winners will be chosen this inaugural year. These students will receive grants to help cover expenses associated with their research projects and will be paired with a mentor to support them through the research process. This program is an important part of Cogito's mission to foster the development of the world's most promising young scientists and create a community that includes peers as well as working scientists and mathematicians.

"Many innovative projects never get off the ground because students don't have the funds to buy microscopes or travel to conferences where they can connect with experts," said Patricia Wallace, senior director of CTYOnline. "Some students might never even try to test their original hypotheses if they can't afford to carry them out. The CTY Cogito Research Awards address that gap by making funding available to bright students with solid research ideas."

The award is one of the benefits of membership to [Cogito.org](http://Cogito.org), CTY's online community and Website for middle and high school students interested in science and math. In order to apply for the award, students must be Cogito members. Learn how to sign up [here](#).

THE CENTER FOR TALENTED YOUTH COGITO  
RESEARCH AWARDS FUNDS BRIGHT  
STUDENTS WITH SOLID RESEARCH IDEAS

Students interested in the 2014 CTY Cogito Research Award can go to [Cogito.org](http://Cogito.org), download an application, and submit proposals up until 5 p.m. on October 31, 2013. The application must include summaries of the research idea, how the research will be conducted, the possible real-world impact of the research, and a statement of how the research funds would be spent. A signed parental consent form, available for download in the Cogito forums, is required for the application to be considered.

Winners will be announced on December 31, 2013.

Following their selection, each of the 2014 CTY Cogito Research Award winners will be paired with a mentor to support them through their research process. They will also blog about their projects on the Cogito site.



## Alabama Educators Receive Important Technology Certification

**CoSN recently announced** that Susan Polling, Shelby County, and Brian Phillips, Hoover City, are some of the first educators in the nation to pass the Certified Education Technology Leader (CETL)<sup>™</sup> certification exam. There are only 78 people in the nation to date to receive this distinction! This is a very difficult certification for Technology Leaders.

To take the CETL exam, the candidate must have demonstrated experience in the education technology field and pass a comprehensive two-part examination based on the 10 skill areas in CoSN's Framework of Essential Skills of the K-12 CTO. Once the CETL designation is earned, the education technology professional must complete 60 hours of professional development activities every three years to maintain the designation. Alabama offered its

first opportunity for testing during the week of the AETC conference last June.



We had five technology leaders sit for the online portion of the test. The second part of the test involved written essays.

To get the greatest educational benefits from our technology resources for the children of Alabama, it is critical that our technology leaders have the knowledge outlined in this Framework of Essential Skills.

## Prudential Seeks Applicants for the 2014 Spirit of Community Awards



Applications are now being accepted for the 2014 Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, the largest youth recognition program based exclusively on volunteer community service in the United States.

The program's goals are to applaud young people who already are making a positive difference in their towns and neighborhoods and to inspire others to think about how they might contribute to their communities.

Over the past 18 years, more than 345,000 young Americans have participated in the program, which is sponsored by Prudential Financial and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). More than 100,000 students have been officially recognized for their volunteer efforts.

The process begins at the school level. After students fill out applications online and submit them to their principals, schools select their top youth volunteers. The top applicants receive the President's Volunteer Service Award and are evaluated by a state-level judging panel, which selects the top middle-level and high school candidate in each state and the District of Columbia.



The online application form is available [HERE](#) and [HERE](#). Students must submit their application and accompanying materials to his/her principal or designated school official by November 5, 2013. Applications will be reviewed November 6-12, 2013, at the state level, and the top youth volunteers and distinguished finalists in each state will be announced February 11, 2014.

This year, six Alabama students were among those honored as the nation's top youth volunteers as part of the 18th annual Prudential Spirit of Community Awards.

**Kristen Ashley** of Hewitt-Trussville High School and **Emily Whittington** of Knollwood Christian

School were selected as the state's top youth volunteers. Each received a \$1,000 award; an engraved silver medallion; and a trip to Washington, D.C., for the program's national recognition events.

Four other Alabama students were named distinguished finalists and received bronze medals at local ceremonies:

- **Sarah Arwood**, Parrish High School
- **Eli Nafziger**, Hewitt-Trussville High School
- **Micah Smith**, Hoover High School
- **Caitlin Wall**, Florence High School

## ALSDE Begins Use of the ASSIST Program – Adaptive System of School Improvement Support Tools

The Alabama State Department of Education is partnering with AdvancED to develop and implement a statewide improvement planning and monitoring process that is streamlined and aligned to a common set of Standards for Quality Schools and School Systems. This web-based platform will be used by all the schools and the districts in the state to support the improvement planning and monitoring processes. To obtain more information regarding the use of ASSIST, go [HERE](#). The technical guides and a WebEx can be located under the Resources and Tools tab located on the left of the page.

Alabama schools and districts will receive the following benefits from the use of ASSIST:

- Clear linkage between school improvement and SACS CASI accreditation activities.
- Alignment between SACS CASI accreditation and state accountability requirements to eliminate duplication of effort.
- Access to a broad menu of valid and reliable program planning, diagnostic, implementation, and evaluation tools.
- One-stop access to relevant data, with tools for interpreting and understanding results.
- Wizard-like tools to eliminate the guesswork from planning and accountability processes.
- Common and consistent planning and reporting format across schools, districts, and the state.
- Barrier-free access to tools and resources for gathering stakeholder input.
- Single repository for all school improvement, accreditation, and accountability reporting requirements and documentation.

Districts and schools may contact Mrs. Logan Searcy at (334) 353-7211 or email at [lsearcy@alsde.edu](mailto:lsearcy@alsde.edu) for information or help.

## Lawrence County High School Teacher Selected for 2013 Outstanding Agricultural Educator Award

**Robby Vinzant**, an agricultural educator at Lawrence County High School in Moulton, AL., has been selected as the 2013 Region V Outstanding Agricultural Education Teacher by the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE).



Outstanding Agricultural Education Teacher award winners are agricultural educators who are at the pinnacle of their careers, conducting the highest quality agricultural education programs. The award program, sponsored by Toyota as a special project of the National Future Farmers of America (FFA) Foundation, recognizes leadership in civic, community, and professional activities. Award winners are innovators and catalysts for student success in agricultural education.

Vinzant, who teaches Agricultural Communications, AgriPower Mechanics, AgriScience 8, and Horticulture, has been a

member of the Lawrence County High School faculty since 2009.

"I am truly honored and humbled in receiving this award," said Vinzant, who is also thrilled about the accomplishments of Lawrence County High School's FFA Chapter and Poultry Career Development Events (CDE) Team. Both will go on to compete in their respective divisions at the National FFA finals in Louisville in October.

"I am most proud for my students, community, and AgriScience and FFA teachers in Alabama," he said.

Vinzant competed against Outstanding Agricultural Education Teacher award

winners from surrounding states – Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, and Georgia – for the opportunity to be named the 2013 Region V NAAE Outstanding Agricultural Education Teacher. As regional winner he will receive personal use of a Toyota Tundra pickup

truck for two years, an expense-paid trip to attend the 2013 NAAE convention, and an invitation to a special awards dinner held in his honor.

NAAE is the professional organization in the United States for agricultural educators. It provides its members with professional networking and development opportunities, professional liability coverage, and extensive awards and recognition programs.

## Madison City Schools Showcase Healthy, Local Foods

**As part of an effort** to serve more locally grown foods and to help the state economy, the Madison City School System is beefing up its use of foods from local farms. For example, in late August, Madison City schools began featuring roasted sweet potato wedges from Haynes Farm in Cullman.

In the next couple of weeks the school district will receive more sweet potatoes from Cullman, plus cherry tomatoes and watermelon from Gadsden, said Marty Tatara, Child Nutrition Program Supervisor for Madison City Schools.

The focus will involve all schools in the Madison school district. "We are doing this to enhance the nutritional quality of our meals and support Alabama farmers," she said.



Sweet potatoes are indeed nutritious. NASA chose the sweet potato as one of the crops for its Advanced Life Support Program because of its nutritional value, ease in growing in different environments, and regeneration capability. The sweet potato packs energy-thriving carbohydrates and is rich in protein, beta carotene, ascorbic acid, and other nutrients.

*"I am truly honored and humbled in receiving this award. I am most proud for my students, community, and AgriScience and FFA teachers in Alabama."*

*– 2013 Outstanding Agricultural Education Teacher Robby Vinzant, Lawrence County High School*

## Piedmont Middle School Named Verizon Innovative Learning School

**Piedmont Middle School** is one of only 12 schools in the United States chosen to take part in a technology initiative from Verizon.

The school received \$50,000 as part of its selection to the Verizon Innovative Learning Schools Program, according to a report from al.com. The money will be used to give teachers two years of professional development in how to use mobile technology in the classroom in teaching science, technology, engineering and math.

There were only three schools chosen in the south, and Piedmont is the only rural school system to receive the money, Verizon Vice President for External Affairs Julie Smith told al.com. The school had to go through an extensive, competitive application process, she said. One of the reasons Piedmont was selected was because students in the school system already have access to laptops, MacBooks, iPads and iPods.

"We value our rural communities," Smith said in the al.com story. "What we hope is that Piedmont will show other

school systems how to use this technology because the capabilities are there, network-wise, to do these things."

One tool open to teachers is the International Society for Technology in Education, or ISTE, the al.com story states. It allows teachers to trade information, teaching strategies and know-how. Part of the professional development will involve learning to use ISTE, Smith said.

One strategy Piedmont employs in the classroom is individualized education, which calls for the teacher to use technology in giving students as close to one-on-one instruction as possible. If students are excelling in math, for example, a teacher can use technology to accelerate their learning in preparation for high school. If a student needs a little more instruction, then their lessons can be geared toward shoring up problem areas.

Piedmont City Schools Superintendent Matt Akin said by "meeting students where they are," the educational experience can be both personal and engaging.

"Some problems for students won't be solved in a day or a school year, but this allows us to use every avenue available," he said.

## Congratulations to All Schools Honored With 2013 School Safety Awards!

In April, Attorney General Luther Strange announced that he is re-instituting the Attorney General's Safe Schools Initiative with a new emphasis on encouraging technological advances to deal with the challenges experienced by today's schools and students.

Nominations were received between April and June, and in August a panel of judges reviewed the nominations to determine a winner from each of the eight State School Board districts.

"Ensuring safe schools for our students has never been more important," said Attorney General Strange. "Special emphasis is being placed on the use of technology to ensure that our schools are safe. Every school that submitted a nomination will receive feedback from our panel of judges on how to enhance its school safety plan."

The Attorney General's Office, in coordination with the State Departments of Education and Public Safety, the Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center, the State Fire Marshal's Office, and the Alabama Association of School Resource Officers, will be releasing the "Alabama Safe School

Initiative: Best Practices" list.

"I took great pride in personally acting as a judge for the Safe School Awards, and I saw a lot of good

things happening in Alabama's schools. I believe that this is the perfect opportunity to share information on the newest and best practices being used in school safety," said State Superintendent of Education Dr. Thomas R. Bice.

Below is a list of the eight recipients of a 2013 Attorney General's Safe School Initiative Award of Excellence for each State School Board district:

- District 1:** Orange Beach Elementary School, Orange Beach
- District 2:** Pleasant Home School, Andalusia
- District 3:** Redland Elementary School, Wetumpka
- District 4:** Homewood High School, Homewood
- District 5:** Blountsville Elementary School, Blountsville
- District 6:** Eastwood Elementary School, Decatur
- District 7:** Leeds High School, Leeds
- District 8:** Challenger Middle School, Huntsville

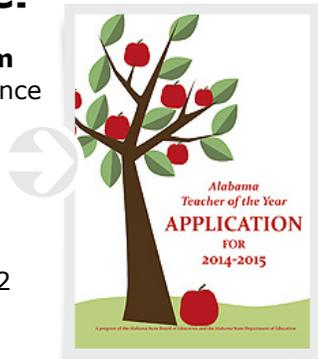


*Redland Elementary School*

## 2014-2015 Alabama Teacher of the Year Applications Now Available!

The **Alabama Teacher of the Year Program** seeks annually to honor and recognize excellence in the teaching profession by identifying outstanding Alabama classroom teachers at local, district, and state levels.

The program is open to any public school certified classroom teacher whose major responsibility is to work with children in a P-12 setting. **Click on the image at right** for the 2014-2015 online application.



## State Board of Education Meetings on Ustream.tv!



See your State Board of Education in action [HERE](#). See **LIVE** video every second and fourth Thursday of the month or [watch the archived videos](#) anytime you want (different Board meeting days in July, November, and December).

### ALABAMA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



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  - District 7 – Jeff Newman
  - District 8 – Mary Scott Hunter
- State Superintendent of Education and Secretary and Executive Officer – Thomas R. Bice

# GRADNATION

COMMUNITY SUMMITS

## SAVE THE DATE

### America's Promise Alliance GradNation Community Birmingham Summit

**WHAT:** Join America's Promise and the Birmingham community for a [GradNation](#) summit featuring Jeff Edmondson of STRIVE and panels on [Early Learning](#), [Parent Engagement](#), [Attendance](#) and more!

Hundreds of educators, business leaders and community organizations will come together to share, discover and inspire for a greater impact on our youth. This is the premier summit event of a nationwide GradNation campaign to end the high school dropout crisis and prepare young people for college and the workforce.

**WHEN:** Tuesday, October 15, 2013 from 8:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

**WHERE:** **Birmingham Southern College**  
900 Arkadelphia Road  
Birmingham, AL 35254

**PARTNERS:** America's Promise Alliance, Birmingham City Schools, Mike & Gillian Goodrich Foundation, The Mattie C. Stewart Foundation, United Way of Central Alabama

**CONTACT:** For more information, contact The Mattie C. Stewart Foundation at 205-212-6400



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