

ALABAMA EDUCATION *News*

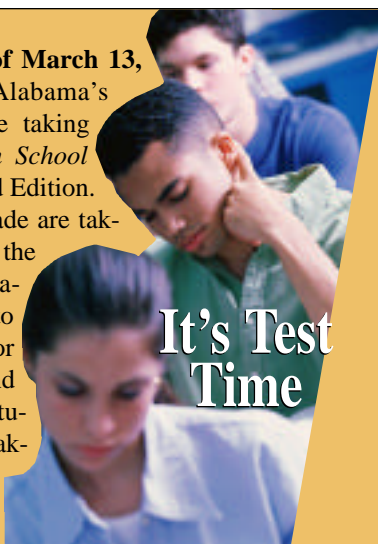
VOLUME 23 • NO. 3

NEWS AND ISSUES IN ALABAMA PUBLIC EDUCATION, K-12

MARCH 2000

Expect Great Things In Education

During the week of March 13, eleventh graders in Alabama's public high schools are taking the new *Alabama High School Graduation Exam*, Third Edition. Students in the tenth grade are taking the exam as part of the pre-graduation examination, which is intended to act as a checkpoint for students, parents and teachers to identify students' strengths and weaknesses on content of the exam. In all, Alabama high school students get up to six opportunities to pass the graduation exam.



It's Test Time

- It is written on the eleventh grade level (the first graduation exam, given in Alabama in 1983, tested knowledge all sixth-graders should have; it was later revised to an eighth-ninth grade level in 1990).
- It requires students to apply what they have learned in required high school course work, and emphasizes logic, problem solving and other thinking skills.
- The reading section requires students to read and understand articles, poems, editorials, manuals and other similar materials.
- The language section focuses on grammar skills, punctuation, word choice, sentence structure and organizational skills for writing.
- Most of the math section contains questions about basic Algebra I skills. It also covers some pre-geometry taught in middle school.
- Most of the science section includes biology questions. The rest is physical science.
- The Class of 2001 must pass the reading and language sections of the exam.
- The Class of 2002 must pass the reading, language, mathematics and science sections.
- A social studies section will be added beginning with the Class of 2003. It will deal with U.S. history.

"As the standards for education are raised in Alabama – and across the nation – we can all work together to provide our young people with the best possible education to meet future challenges."

– Ed Richardson, State Superintendent

Editor's note: For the second time since January, State Superintendent of Education Ed Richardson writes to educators about the new Alabama High School Graduation Exam and higher standards for the state's public schools. Administration of the new exam is happening the week of March 13.

Dear Friends:

Like you, I expect great things from our students. Working together – parents, teachers, school board members, business and community leaders – we can help provide a first-rate public education in Alabama that will better prepare our children to accomplish their individual dreams.

Whether students go to work, military or college after graduating, it's our job to challenge students to succeed by learning. That means providing the foundation and the tools needed to build a solid education for today's changing work environment. The most important element — desire — must come from within each student. Together, we can help in this area by constantly demonstrating the benefits of a quality education.

Our high school students already must take Alabama's 4x4 curriculum – four years each of required courses of study in mathematics, science, social studies and English. Students must also earn at minimum 24 credits in course work. Beginning with the Class of 2001, our state's graduation requirements will also include a new version of a graduation exam.

The charge to the various committees working with the development of the new graduation exam was to identify the *fundamental* skills and concepts that students who pass the required courses are expected to know. I believe this was a fair challenge.

(Continued on Page 2)

Commitment To Children Motivates Byrne

This is the first part in a series that will profile each member of the state Board of Education.

Few issues affect as many segments of society as education. It's an issue that stirs emotion in almost everyone, even though only 26.9 percent of U.S. households have school-age children.

"All polls of Alabama public opinion reflect that education is the No. 1 issue in this state," says state board member Bradley Byrne. "I am proud to be a member of a board with significant responsibility for educational policy and which makes its decisions by asking one basic question: 'is it good for our children?'"

Byrne represents state Board of Education District 1, which includes Mobile, Baldwin and Escambia counties. A lawyer whose background of legal and public policy studies gives him a unique perspective as a mem-



Bradley Byrne
District 1
State Board of Education

ber of the state Board of Education, Byrne was compelled to run for the state board in 1994. He is in his second term.

"My four children are Alabama public school students," Byrne says. "I want the best for them and for every child in the state. I felt that I

could make a difference for my children and the other children in the state through my service on the state Board of Education."

Since 1995 the board's agenda has been the most aggressive ever. In January, *Education Week* and the Fordham Foundation gave rave reviews to Alabama's higher academic standards and accountability measures. "The state board must stand strong for these standards and fight against efforts aimed against them," Byrne says.

The outside praise means reform efforts are heading in the right direction, but more work is ahead, Byrne says. Part of the effort now is to increase public support for higher standards. "The new higher standards are needed, but we must improve the quality of instruction and the level of local and state funding for needed programs in order for students to benefit from these standards," Byrne says.

Expect Great Things, Continued from Page 1

To ensure accuracy and fairness of our new graduation exam, the committees were instructed that the content of the subject-area tests should not be basic or advanced, but fundamental. Teachers from more than 100 school systems from across the state worked in various phases of test development and validity checks for more than four years to make certain this goal is met.

Development committees included teachers from a variety of high school programs from special education to career/technical courses to regular classes. In addition, some teachers of Advanced Placement (AP) courses served on committees, but these teachers were not in the majority and the test is not geared toward AP students.

In addition to constructing well-defined content, we also conducted preliminary testing of the exam. This testing took place in a majority of the state's public high schools over an 18-month period beginning in the spring of 1998. In all, more than 87,600 Alabama students took portions of the exam during this overall developmental phase.

As a result of these combined efforts, I am pleased our new graduation exam is one that meets real world challenges. Equally important, it is an exam that our students are capable of passing. These skills will be needed to succeed in an ever-changing marketplace.

A good exam is useless without proper instruction and

preparation. That's why we must continue to improve teacher preparation programs. Future teachers' exposure to Alabama's curriculum standards is vital. In addition, our *Pathways for Learning* material and workshops include creative activities teachers can use to teach the required skills.

Inside *Pathways* and at workshops, teachers will discover a variety of materials to inform them better on what the new graduation exam is and is not. Most importantly, we know they will find this guide useful, and a practical application to the classroom.

As the standards for education are raised in Alabama – and across the nation – we can all work together to provide our young people with the best possible education to meet future challenges. At the same time, we should not focus simply on passing the graduation exam. We also should look at the big picture and make sure our children and students are better prepared to meet the increased expectations and serve as citizens of this great country.

Ed Richardson,
State Superintendent of Education



Transition Program Seeks To Improve Lives Of Special Youth

Alabama's special education community are spending March focused on helping high school students with disabilities make a transition from school to work and community life. Transition refers to preparing high school students with disabilities for their lives after school.

Gov. Don Siegelman recently proclaimed March as Transition Awareness Month for Individuals with Disabilities. As part of a month of activities, the state Department of Education sponsored the 10th annual Alabama Transition Conference March 8-10. The department has also produced a public service announcement that has been provided to the state's major television stations to build public awareness about transition programs.

"The conference is a forum for all stakeholders to increase transition-related activities at the state and local levels to improve the lives of Alabama's youth with disabilities," said Mabrey Whetstone, director of Special Education Services for the state Department of Education. "This annual conference is one important way that we in Alabama can advance the preparation and opportunities for these students. The goal is to enhance their quality of life beyond school."

More than 700 teachers, service providers, students with disabilities and their parents attended the three-day conference. The conference featured 50 concurrent sessions, most of which were presented by consumers, parents, teachers, counselors and administrators



Gov. Don Siegelman, center, presents a signed copy of his order proclaiming Transition Awareness Month to Mabrey Whetstone, director of Special Education Services for the state Department of Education. A host of special education stakeholders attended the proclamation signing.

from within Alabama. Also, 39 transition demonstration sites located throughout the state displayed their unique and innovative programs of excellence.

The conference is an integral part of the Alabama Transition Initiative, the state's five-year initiative to improve the quantity and quality of transition programs and services. "The

conference has been a driving force behind Alabama's commitment to significantly improve the quality of life for its young people with disabilities," said Karen Rabren, director of the Alabama Transition Initiative.

For more information about the Alabama Transition Initiative, contact Karen Rabren at (334) 242-8114 or at krabren@sdenet.alsde.edu.

Is Your Mailing Label Correct?

If you are a working educator, you should receive your copy of *Alabama Education News* addressed to you at your school's address. If you are a retiree, you should receive your copy at your home address. Other recipients, such as education stakeholders in business, government and education-related organizations, should receive their copy at their business address.

Are there any problems with the way your name or address appears on the mailing label? If so, please complete this form and return to: *Alabama Education News*, c/o Alabama Press Inc., attention Sam Carnley, 2823 Central Avenue, Homewood, AL 35209.

Correct Name and Address

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Name and Address as it presently appears on mailing label

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

☐ Please check here if receiving duplicate copies and return both mailing labels.

E-mail address changes or address corrections to: tharris@sdenet.alsde.edu

Participation More Than Doubles In Alabama Reading Initiative

More Alabama school children and teachers will have access to a statewide initiative developed and managed by the state Department of Education that aims to significantly improve reading

instruction and ultimately achieve 100 percent literacy among public school students.

Gov. Don Siegelman, the state Board of Education and State

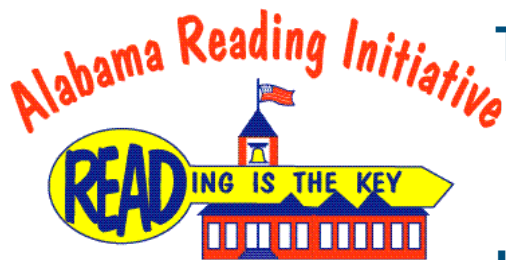
Superintendent of Education Ed Richardson announced this month that 180 schools will become new Literacy Demonstration Sites in the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) for the 2000-2001 school year. The ARI is currently in 81 schools across the state. Gov. Siegelman has asked the Alabama Legislature to provide \$10 million to implement the program in more than 400 schools by 2002.

"Reading is a gateway to knowledge, and this program helps Alabama students learn how to read or to become better readers," Siegelman said. "I am committed to providing the resources necessary for Alabama students to be prepared for the demands of the 21st Century. At schools where the Alabama Reading Initiative is already in place, circulation has doubled in libraries, discipline referrals are down, special education referrals are down and students are reading at or above their grade levels."

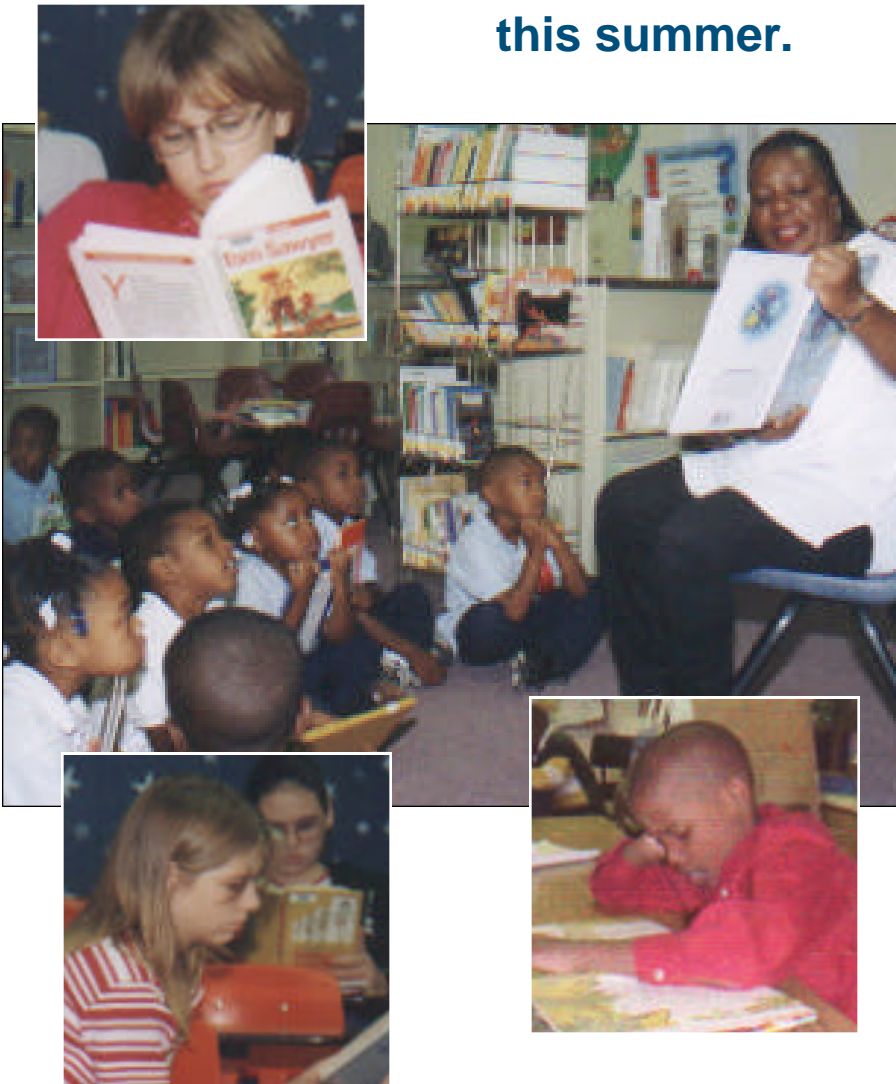
ARI schools must meet five criteria: setting a 100 percent literacy goal; a 10-day faculty training program that seeks to train at least 85 percent of faculty members; adjusting reading instruction to reflect research-based practices; modeling effective reading instruction from other schools; and undergoing outside evaluation.

Schools for the ARI are selected based on a scale that rates past actions and accomplishments related to reading instruction; faculty interest and commitment; knowledge of materials developed by the ARI; support of the principal, central office staff and higher education partner; and professional qualities of the faculty.

Teachers at the selected schools will be trained in the ARI this summer at regional in-service centers throughout the state. For a complete list of the new Literacy Demonstration Sites, go to Education News on the state Department of Education's Web site, www.alsde.edu.



Teachers at 180 schools will receive Reading Initiative training this summer.



Grants To Help Improve Reading In 50 Schools

More children from high poverty areas in Alabama will have a better opportunity for exposure to good reading skills thanks to federal funds and the work of local grant writers.

The state Board of Education announced this month that \$4.98 million in reading improvement sub-grants have been awarded to 18 school systems through the state Department of Education and the Alabama Reading Excellence Partnership. The grants will help each system have every student reading on grade level by the third grade.

The sub-grants will be used at 50 schools in the 18 systems to support reading instruction reform.

Alabama received a \$7.5 million grant through the Reading Excellence Act from the U.S. Department of Education. Thirty Alabama school systems were eligible for sub-grants targeting reading improvement and tutorial assistance.

The reading improvement sub-grants will be used to improve reading instruction in eligible schools selected by the school system. Those schools must be in either Title I school improvement status; or must have the highest or second highest number of children in poverty in the district; or must have the highest or second highest percentage of poverty in the district.

The Reading Excellence Partnership consists of the governor, members of the legislature, state education officials, representatives from the elementary and higher education, literacy advocacy organizations and literacy related businesses.

For more information and a complete list of the sub-grant recipients, go to Education News on the state Department of Education's Web site, www.alsde.edu.

fsBriefsBriefsBriefsE

FOR TEACHERS

Wondering where to find a good recipe for a tasty solar system snack? Contemplating a cosmic purpose for an unwanted compact disc (CD)? Trying to figure out how much yarn it would take to reach an asteroid?

Look no further than NASA's The Space Place web site <http://spaceplace.jpl.nasa.gov>.

Managed by NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Calif., this web site provides interesting facts, fun activities and exciting contests for students in grades K-6. By logging on, students become participants in NASA's exciting space exploration missions through the web site's five categories.

KUDOS

The Jasper City School system has received a \$20,000 grant to study its professional development technology programs. The system was one of only five school systems nationwide to receive a Goals 2000 Evaluation Partnership Project Grant. Other systems included the Oakland, Calif., system, and systems in Maine, New Jersey and Kentucky.

Susan Poling, technology coordinator for Jasper schools, and Jean Lollar, elementary supervisor, wrote the grant. The system was nominated to compete for the grant by the Office of Technology Initiatives at the Alabama Department of Education.

Two Alabama schools are taking advantage of a U.S. Department of Education grant to hire and train middle school drug prevention and school safety coordinators. The three-year grants are part of a \$35 million federal program to help school districts prevent drug, discipline and violence problems in middle schools.

DeKalb County and Lawrence County schools are among 97 school districts in 34 states that will be able to recruit, hire and train a specialist for drug prevention and school safety programs. The grants for the two Alabama districts are in excess of \$250,000.

Barry Wiginton, a science teacher at Mount Hope High School, has been named Alfa's Teacher of the Month for February. As February's winner, Wiginton receives \$1,000 from Alfa. His school also receives \$1,000. Wiginton teaches physics, chemistry, biology I and II, algebra I, physical science and integrated science at Mount Hope High School.

Alfa started giving the Teacher of the Month awards in 1998. They honor one outstanding public school teacher from each of the state's eight state school board districts, two private school teachers and two principals from public and private schools during the 12 months of the year.

For more information about the awards, call the state Department of Education's Communications Office at (334) 242-9950. See the department's Web site, www.alsde.edu, for Awards and Scholarships information in the Home Menu.

Alabama high schools are administering the *Alabama High School Graduation Exam*, Third Edition, for the first time this month. The state Department of Education's web site contains the Pathways for Learning teacher resource material and an educator's planning guide. To access that part of the state Department of Education's web site, go to www.alsde.edu, click Sections Within SDE in the Home Menu, click Classroom Improvement, and then click Alabama High School Graduation Exam – Pathways for Learning.



Beyond The Basics: Teachers Make The Difference

Students need to know the basics. Today's world, however, calls for them to know the basics and more.

The job market today's students are preparing for is different from the one their parents prepared for 30 years ago. Students now in elementary school will change careers an average of three to four times in their adult lives. They not only need to be armed with basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills; they need to know how to learn.

They need to have basic computer skills and be able to work in diverse groups. They need to be able to organize and analyze data and make decisions about what to do with the results. They need to know how to think and reason through problems and how to explain their reasoning to someone else orally and in writing.

Industry is crying for educated workers who not only have command over a certain body of knowledge, but who know how to think, reason and solve problems with the knowledge they have. Good teachers can make that happen.

Several recent reports including Quality Counts 2000 and Teaching and Learning: Meeting the Challenge of High Standards by the Alabama Task Force on Teaching and Student Achievement have brought the issue of teacher quality to the forefront. Research is confirming what we have known all along: Skilled and knowledgeable teachers make a huge difference in how well students learn.

As teachers, we have to keep learning along with our students. Thanks to several decades of research on how learning happens, coupled with now more recent findings about how the brain works, we know that good teaching is

By **Ann Dominick Hardin,**
Alabama Teacher
of the Year



not only an art. It is also a science. We have to know our subject matter and we also have to be knowledgeable about how learning happens and what we can do to facilitate it.

For professionals to keep up with what they need to know, it takes time, commitment and resources spent on quality professional development. There are many choices of how we can spend our continuing education time, but sustained and content-specific professional development is what makes a difference in the classroom.

We have to be choosy about what we spend our time on. A meeting about dealing with stress management can be helpful, but it won't help me improve my math teaching or learn strategies to help my students become better writers. Good university courses or other long-term studies can help us to examine our teaching and give us time to try out strategies in the classroom in light of what we are studying.

Meeting with like-minded colleagues who are also interested in specific growth areas can be an important push to keep current and continue to learn. Joining a young adult book club at the local library is a way to keep current about children's literature. Observing other colleagues and attending good professional conferences can be important learning experiences. We have to be diligent and persistent in our search for good professional growth.

Good teachers make a difference in the lives of students. We owe it to ourselves and to our students to be the best we can be.

Top Teachers Recognized

National Teacher of the Year Andy Baumgartner and Alabama Teacher of the Year Ann Dominick Hardin joined 53 other state teachers of the year and 60 program coordinators in Dallas, Texas, Jan. 20-23 at the National Teacher of the Year Program Conference. The conference theme, "Responsibility: It's Personal, It's Professional," focused on excellence in teaching. The program is the oldest and most prestigious honors program for America's public school teachers. The national teacher of the year for 2000 will be announced in May.



The state Department of Education publishes *Alabama Education News* monthly except for June, July and December. The newsletter is distributed to active educators, retirees and education stakeholders to provide information about the programs and goals of public education in Alabama.

Please take a moment to complete the following survey and fax your responses to (334) 353-4682 or mail them to Tony Harris, *Alabama Education News*, Alabama Department of Education, P.O. Box 302101, Montgomery, AL 36130-2101. Results will be used during the coming year by the state Department of Education's Communications staff in an effort to make this newsletter better serve your information needs.



S • U • R • V • E • Y

1) How thoroughly do you read each issue of *Alabama Education News*?

- ☐ Read all or almost all
 ☐ Read less than half
☐ Read more than half
 ☐ Only skim through it

2) How often do you find *Alabama Education News* articles useful or relevant?

- ☐ Often
 ☐ Rarely
☐ Occasionally
 ☐ Never

3) How do you rate *Alabama Education News* in these areas?

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
• Choice of subjects covered	—	—	—	—
• Quality of writing	—	—	—	—
• Depth of articles	—	—	—	—
• Credibility	—	—	—	—
• Quality of photographs	—	—	—	—
• Quality of graphics and design	—	—	—	—
• Timeliness of information	—	—	—	—
• Articles on standards and accountability	—	—	—	—
• Articles on success stories, best practices	—	—	—	—
• Articles on education-related legislative issues	—	—	—	—
• Emphasis on state goals and initiatives	—	—	—	—
• Value of information	—	—	—	—
• Interesting	—	—	—	—

4) What is your primary source of education news?

- ☐ *Alabama Education News*
☐ Local newspaper
☐ Local TV news
☐ Local radio
☐ Other education publications

5) What topics would you most like to read about in upcoming issues?

- ☐ State standards
 ☐ Student discipline
☐ At-risk students
 ☐ School facilities
☐ Intervention
 ☐ Instructional leadership
☐ Assessment programs
 ☐ Instructional methods
☐ School funding
 ☐ School reform
☐ Curriculum
 ☐ Professional development
☐ Cultural diversity
 ☐ Special education
☐ School safety
 ☐ Adult education
☐ Technology
 ☐ Parental involvement
☐ Education-related legislative issues
☐ Other _____

6) If you are an educator presently working in a public school, how would you prefer to receive your *Alabama Education News* in the future? If you are a retiree or are not presently working in a K-12 public school system, this question does not apply to you.

- ☐ Addressed to you and delivered to your school (as it is presently)
☐ Bulk shipped to your school and distributed without your name on it
☐ Addressed to you and delivered to your home

7) Please tell us how we could make *Alabama Education News* more valuable and informative.

8) Please use the following space to elaborate on any of the previous questions or for any additional comments about *Alabama Education News*.

Return completed surveys by April 12 to:

Tony Harris, *Alabama Education News*, P.O. Box 302101, Montgomery, AL 36130-2101 or fax to (334) 353-4682

SDE Forms Statewide Counselor Crisis Response Teams

The state Department of Education kicked off training for its new Counselor Crisis Response Teams the week of Feb. 28. Ironically, the training was held only days after a shooting at a Michigan school claimed the life of a 6-year-old girl.

"While Alabama fortunately has avoided a Columbine-like tragedy, we cannot fail to be prepared with a plan if needed," said State Superintendent of Education Ed Richardson. With that in mind, the state Department of Education created the crisis response teams as a resource bank of experienced school counselors and principals to render assistance to schools throughout Alabama if they experience a crisis.

The state Department's goal is to have regional teams of trained counselors who could drop everything at a moment's notice and travel to a crisis location anywhere in Alabama. Three teams — northern region, central region and southern region — have been formed, with each team consisting of 10 counselors and one principal.



Counselors were recommended by their local superintendents.

The initial training prepared the counselors and principals to respond to a variety of critical situations.

Birmingham's Amelia Center and state Department of Education staff members conducted the crisis training. Additional training will be ongoing, but the crisis response teams are ready now should they be needed.

"We hope we never have a tragedy in Alabama like the ones at Columbine High School in Colorado or in Pearl, Miss., but we must be prepared for any situation," Richardson said. "I believe we will be equipped to respond effectively if the need arises."

ALABAMA EDUCATION News

Volume 23, No. 3

March 2000

Ed Richardson, State Superintendent of Education and Secretary and Executive Officer of the Alabama State Board of Education

Members

Alabama State Board of Education
Gov. Don Siegelman, President

Dist. 1 - Bradley Byrne	Mobile
Dist. 2 - G. J. "Dutch" Higginbotham	Auburn
Dist. 3 - Stephanie W. Bell	Montgomery
Dist. 4 - Ethel H. Hall, Vice Pres.	Fairfield
Dist. 5 - Willie J. Paul	Montgomery
Dist. 6 - David F. Byers Jr.	Birmingham
Dist. 7 - Sandra Ray	Tuscaloosa
Dist. 8 - Mary Jane Caylor	Scottsboro

Editorial Staff

Managing Editor - Mitch Edwards	242-9950
Editor - Tony Harris	242-9950
Contributing Editor - Ann Starks	242-9950
Graphic Artist - Mary Nell Shaw	242-9957

The Alabama State Department of Education publishes Alabama Education News (USPS 387-290) monthly except for June, July and December. Editorial offices are located in the Gordon Persons Building, Montgomery, 36130-2101. Alabama Education News is composed by the Department of Education's Communications Section and printed by Alabama Press Inc. of Birmingham. Periodicals postage paid in Montgomery and at an additional mailing office.

This publication, authorized by Section 16-2-4 of the code of Alabama, as recompiled in 1975, is a public service of the Alabama State Department of Education designed to inform citizens and educators about programs and goals of public education in Alabama.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Alabama Press Inc., attention Sam Carnley, 2823 Central Avenue, Homewood, AL35209.

It is the official policy of the Alabama State Department of Education that no person in Alabama shall, on the grounds of race, color, disability, sex, religion, national origin or age, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program, activity or employment.

Copies available in Braille or other forms upon request.