



Alabama Sees Record Participation in 2024 ACT Testing: Number of Test Takers Surges 15%

Alabama students are demonstrating their commitment to college and career readiness, with the number of students taking the ACT seeing a significant rise for the third consecutive year. **In 2024, more than 12,000 Alabama students participated in the ACT, up from 10,400 in 2023. This represents a 15% increase in participation over the past year, reflecting the state's ongoing efforts to support its students' future success.**

The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) acknowledges that an estimated 100% of Alabama graduates took the ACT, with 94% participating at least once as part of school-day testing. In their continued efforts to further support students, the Alabama State Board of Education made it possible to offer waivers that allow students to take the ACT for free, as well as provide transportation assistance to testing sites on weekends in many instances. These initiatives have contributed to an

In 2024, more than 12,000 Alabama students participated in the ACT, up from 10,400 in 2023.

This represents a 15% increase in participation over the past year!

additional 44% of students taking advantage of weekend testing opportunities in 2024.

Dr. Eric Mackey, Alabama State Superintendent of Education, emphasized the importance of reducing barriers to access when it comes to students preparing for life after high school by taking the ACT.

"Since 2014, Alabama has ensured that every student has the opportunity to take the ACT. We celebrate the strides we've made in reducing barriers to testing, which has helped open doors for countless students to either

pursue postsecondary education or enter the workforce – whatever path they feel is right for them," Mackey said. "Although we've made progress, we're committed to addressing the remaining challenges and ensuring every student has the opportunity to get a holistic view of their college and career readiness."

The benefits of taking the ACT go beyond simply receiving a score; it provides students with vital feedback on their readiness for college-level coursework.

Students who take the test more than once see a notable improvement in their scores, with Alabama students



averaging a composite score of 21.0 on subsequent tests, compared to the statewide average of 18.0.

Despite the increase in the number of students taking the test since the COVID-19 pandemic, Alabama has maintained its steady average ACT score. This consistency is particularly remarkable, as more students taking the test typically leads to a drop in average scores.

However, Alabama students have proven resilient, maintaining high performance while broadening access.

With an ACT score in hand, students unlock a world of opportunities, from college admissions to scholarships and career certifications. Alabama's commitment to providing free access to the ACT and supporting students with the resources they need to succeed is paying off, with the number of test-takers increasing every year since the pandemic.





Red Ribbon Week in Alabama Schools is October 23 - October 31

Red Ribbon Week is an annual event celebrated across the United States to raise awareness about the importance of living a drug-free lifestyle. In Alabama, our schools actively participate in this initiative, focus on educating students about the dangers of drug use and empower them to make healthy, responsible choices.

The Origins of Red Ribbon Week

Red Ribbon Week started in 1985 to honor Enrique "Kiki" Camarena, a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agent who was killed in the line of duty. His death sparked a movement across the country, where people began wearing red ribbons as a symbol of their commitment to a drug-free life. The initiative was formalized in 1988, and since then, Red Ribbon Week has become the largest drug prevention campaign in the United States, observed in schools, communities, and organizations nationwide.

Celebrating Red Ribbon Week in Alabama Schools

In Alabama, schools are required to take an active role in Red Ribbon Week. This includes engaging students in various educational and fun activities that promote a drug-free lifestyle. The event is typically held during the last week of October, with schools organizing themed days, assemblies, and contests to involve students, teachers, and the community. This year, most schools will observe from October 23 - October 31, 2024.

Partnerships and Community Support

In Phenix City Schools, Assistant Superintendent, Nathan Walters and Mental Health Coordinator, Vita Lewis are both known for putting extensive effort into Red Ribbon Week.

"I have a passion for making sure that there is equity and making sure there's a fair playing field for all students," stated Mrs. Lewis. "We want to put awareness out to our students to know they can make better choices. We even have a community organization coming in to discuss fentanyl awareness with our 6th -12th grade students."

This year, the national theme is "**Life is a Movie, Film Drug Free.**" Activities include dress up days, themed activities, and law enforcement presentations.

Many schools partner with local police departments, health agencies, and parent-teacher associations to enhance the effectiveness of their Red Ribbon Week programs. These partnerships help provide resources, such as pamphlets, educational materials, and even drug prevention programs that extend beyond the school walls and into the broader community.

Local businesses and organizations often show their support by sponsoring Red Ribbon Week events, donating prizes, and volunteering their time. This collaborative effort ensures that the message of a drug-free lifestyle is reinforced both at home and in the community.

Educational Programs and Assemblies

Throughout the week, Alabama schools are encouraged to host assemblies and invite guest speakers from law enforcement, healthcare, and recovery communities to share their experiences with students. These talks focus on the risks associated with drug use, including the physical, emotional, and legal consequences. Some schools also screen educational videos and organize classroom discussions to help students better understand the impact of drugs on individuals, families, and society.

Theme Days and Activities

Many Alabama schools choose a different theme for each day of the week to make the message of drug prevention more engaging and memorable for students. Some of these themes may include:

- **"Team Up Against Drugs"**: Students and teachers wear their favorite sports jerseys, symbolizing teamwork in the fight against drugs.
- **"Sock it to Drugs"**: Participants wear crazy socks to highlight the importance of standing out and making positive choices.
- **"Hats Off to Being Drug-Free"**: Students wear hats as a playful way to show their commitment to staying drug-free.

These themed days are designed not only to be fun but also to drive home important lessons about resisting peer pressure and making good decisions. As shared by Mrs. Lewis, students are often introduced to drugs by their peers, making it even more important to discuss resisting peer pressure.

The impact of Red Ribbon Week on students in Alabama schools is significant. By engaging students in meaningful activities and discussions, schools are helping to equip young people with the knowledge and skills they need to make informed choices about drugs. It also creates a supportive environment where students can openly discuss peer pressure, mental health, and the importance of seeking help if they are struggling with substance abuse.

While Red Ribbon Week is just one part of Alabama's broader efforts to prevent drug use among young people, it serves as a vital reminder each year of the importance of staying drug-free. Through the continued participation of schools, communities, and families, the state can continue to make progress in the fight against drug addiction and foster healthier futures for our students.

For more information and guidance on establishing an effective Red Ribbon Week at your school, visit: www.redribbon.org.





Get to Know the State Board

Representing District 7 is Alabama State Board Member Belinda McRae



A Life Devoted to Education, Family, and Service

Elected in 2021, Mrs. Belinda McRae is one of the more recently elected members of the Alabama State Board of Education, and her rise to being one of the top education policy voices in the state came with both challenges and triumphs. Originally from the small

town of Hamilton, AL, Mrs. McCrae has dedicated her entire life to serving the family, community, and institutions she has been around since day one. In fact, Mrs. McCrae proudly says of her small town Alabama experience, “I was born here, and I hope to die here.”

Although she jokes about her dedication to Hamilton County, the love, hard work, and dedication she has shown to her hometown is no laughing matter. This small-town native brings with her a wealth of experience in education and a voice that carries warmth and wisdom. She spent her life dedicated to education, from her early years as a classroom teacher to her current role on the Alabama State Board of Education. Yet, behind her impressive professional journey lies a deeply personal story; one that includes her enduring 40-year marriage to the love of her life, her husband Jim, and their struggles and accomplishments along the way.

Mrs. McRae’s roots run deep in her hometown nestled in Marion County. It’s where she found her calling, inspired by an English teacher during her high school years. She said when she was young there were not as many career options for young ladies as there are nowadays, but she always wanted to be a teacher – and that was a viable options for her. After graduating from Hamilton High School and attending the University of North Alabama, Mrs. McRae spent 25 years teaching in the Marion County school system, guiding generations of students through the school doors. Even now, she said she is constantly met by young people

who she has taught over the years, and she is impressed with that fact that they remember her; and even more so by what they have done with their lives. From doctors and nurses to mechanics and other people who have made good choices with the lives they have led, she is proud of her former students and misses the role they played in her life.

“The kids, no doubt, are what I miss the most,” she says, thinking about her time in the classroom. Her passion for teaching led her to the local community college, Bevill State, where she worked part-time for another decade after retiring from K-12 education.

But her dedication to education didn’t stop at teaching. In 2004, she ran and was elected to the Marion County Board of Education, where she served for 16 years. For her, the opportunity to serve on the Alabama State Board of Education was the ultimate chance to fulfill a goal that she once thought was unattainable. Once she realized she could make a difference on a statewide scale, she admits her ideas to influence Alabama’s educational landscape may have been a bit idealistic.

“I thought I could change education in Alabama, that I had the answers,” she said. “But over time, I realized that the challenges facing education are more complex than I’d anticipated,” she said. “It’s much more complicated than I ever imagined.” Still, she realizes her voice made a

difference in important education policy. Although she hasn’t accomplished everything she set out to do, she is grateful for the experience to serve on the State Board.

Though Mrs. McRae’s professional life has been a journey of discovery and growth, her personal life has seen its share of challenges, especially in recent years. Her husband, Jim, has suffered medical issues that have profoundly changed their lives.

“He has always been my rock,” she said. “He ran my campaigns when I ran for the local and state board. I couldn’t have done it without him.” She said Mr. McRae spent years as chairman of the Tombigbee Electric Cooperative Board,

Story continues on next page.

Mrs. McRae spent 25 years teaching in the Marion County school system, guiding generations of students through the school doors.

Next issue: Alabama State Board Member District 8 Representative Wayne Reynolds, Ed.D.





A Life Devoted to Education, Family, and Service from page 3...

...serving his community with pride. Now, though, their roles have shifted. She has become his primary caregiver, navigating the difficult journey of watching her husband's health fade.

However, what does not fade is the memory of their glory days together and that defining moment when, on the occasion of a blind date, Mr. McRae quite literally drove into her life like a knight in shining armor! Well, maybe not armor, but just a good in the 1980s – a Corvette! Their love story started with a date arranged by a mutual friend, former representative Mike Millican. Mrs. McRae remembers waiting outside on a dirt road, and when he arrived in his blue Corvette, kicking up dust! She knew this was something special.

"He stepped out, tall and imposing, wearing boots, jeans, a western-style shirt, and a big cowboy hat. He's 6'4" so he unfolded himself and got out of that Corvette. As he approached, he took off his hat, bowed slightly, and said, 'You sure are a pretty little thing.' From that moment, we've been inseparable," Mrs. McRae said.

Mr. McRae raised soybeans and wheat back in the 80s and is an Auburn graduate with a degree in agricultural administration. "He was stylish," BeLinda says, laughing about the combination of a Corvette and cowboy boots. Their life together has been filled with adventure and shared values, which makes the tough times more bearable.

Although she has always wanted to be an educator,

amendment threatened to do away with the board altogether, she knew it was something she wanted to do eventually.

"I just couldn't get peace about not doing it," she said. Her husband warned her about the difficulty of raising money for a statewide race, yet he supported her every step of the way. "If you really believe this is something you're

The beauty in life is in the imperfection.

supposed to do, then I'll back you," he told her.

One thing that is an obvious theme when it comes to Mrs. McRae, she follows her heart. Whether it's caring for her husband, serving her community, or advocating for Alabama's students. Her dedication to her work on the board has not wavered, even as she navigates the personal challenges at home. With the support of her fellow board members, and State Superintendent of Education, Dr. Eric Mackey, she is making through her term successfully.

Although she has decided not to run for reelection in order to more effectively take care of her family, she is optimistic about the future of education in Alabama. Reflecting on her time working with Dr. Mackey, Mrs. McRae says, "He is intelligent, kind-hearted, and stands firm when he needs to. I don't think we could ask for anyone better."

She believes that history will look kindly on this period in Alabama's educational history and that Dr. Mackey's leadership will be recognized for moving the state forward.

Despite the trials she's facing at home, her hope for Alabama's students is unwavering. She acknowledges the growing fears surrounding school safety, especially in rural areas where concerns about violence are concerning to many parents.

"I don't know how to stop that," she said. "But kids will excel no matter what. I have great faith in young people."

It is clear that Mrs. McRae is a woman whose life is a testament to love, service, and the power of education. Her story is one of enduring commitment – both to her family and to the students of Alabama. In a world that often feels uncertain, she remains optimistic, proving that the beauty, as she always tells her students, truly is in the imperfection.

"If you can just help one young person, it's worth it" – a mantra that guides Mrs. McRae both in the classroom and in her role on the board.

Mrs. McRae initially looked into majoring in art. Her love for art hasn't faded, either. Even in retirement, she taught two art classes at the Ramp School of Ministry last fall and continues to find joy in sharing the creative process with students. "The beauty is in the imperfection," she often tells her students. It's a lesson that one of her former students, now a successful husband and father, told her made a lasting difference in his life. "If you can just help one young person, it's worth it," she says, a mantra that guides her both in the classroom and in her role on the board.

When asked about her transition from local board work to the State Board of Education, she shares that it wasn't an easy decision. Encouraged by a friend in 2010 to run, she hesitated, waiting for the right time. When a statewide





Alabama’s National Blue Ribbon Honorees

In September, the U.S. Department of Education officially recognized 356 schools as 2024 National Blue Ribbon Schools, including five top performing schools in Alabama.



This highly respected national recognition highlights schools excelling in academic achievement and making significant strides in closing achievement gaps. The Alabama schools recognized as National Blue Ribbon Schools this year are:

- [EPIC Alternative Elementary School](#), Birmingham City School System
- [East Elementary School](#), Cullman City School System
- [Carver School of Mathematics, Science & Technology](#), Dothan City School System
- [Crestline Elementary School](#), Hartselle City School System
- [Brookwood Forest Elementary School](#), Mountain Brook City School System

CLICK on each school’s name above for MORE!

“The [2024 National Blue Ribbon Schools](#) are raising the bar for our nation’s students, serving as models for effective teaching and intentional collaboration in their schools and communities. As we celebrate their achievements, let us look to these schools for inspiration as we champion education as the foundation of a brighter future for every child.” said U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona.

While awardees represent a wide array of schools, they also share common leadership and education-focused traits.

National Blue Ribbon Schools are led by leaders who articulate a clear vision of instructional excellence and uphold high standards. They showcase effective teaching methods and offer robust professional development for their staff. Data-driven instruction is also a hallmark.

A National Blue Ribbon School award banner, displayed in a school’s entryway, is a widely recognized symbol of exceptional learning and achievement.

Congratulations to Alabama’s five outstanding and newly named National Blue Ribbon Schools!

Impactful Mentoring

What’s Going on with Reggie White
2022-2023 Alabama Teacher of the Year

Serving as the 2022-2023 Alabama Teacher of the Year has been one of the most remarkable experiences in my career as an educator. My greatest accolade, following selection, was having the opportunity to meet educators, staff, and students across the state. I became even more committed to my role when I witnessed the daily sacrifices that administrators, teachers, specialists, and staff make in supporting the success of all students. I knew at the end of my term that the Teacher of the Year title does not outweigh the impact that we have as champions for education professionals and students.

My role as a member of the Alabama Teacher of the Year alumni has been to offer support and strategies that foster well-managed classrooms that help students learn, feel safe, and achieve excellence. Also, I conduct workshops for new teachers eager to advance



Reggie White
2022-2023 Alabama Teacher of the Year

professionally and assist veteran educators through research-based and effective classroom management practices. I have witnessed teachers influence the future of our state and nation through student engagement, innovation, and multidisciplinary instructional activities.

In addition to collaborating with professional educators and staff, I have supported schools of education as they serve as architects for the future of Alabama’s classrooms. I look forward to continuing to serve as a voice for teachers and students in my role as Birmingham City School District Mentor Teacher as we address the challenges of education and the power of stakeholder support in transitioning challenges into opportunities.

I extend my sincere gratitude to all who lead, teach, and inspire Alabama’s future, our students.

**THANK YOU,
ALABAMA
TEACHERS.**

#THANKALTEACHERS WeTeachAlabama.com





October: Dyslexia Awareness Month Illuminating the Path for Struggling Readers



October is Dyslexia Awareness Month, a time dedicated to increasing understanding of this common yet often misunderstood condition. **Dyslexia affects an estimated 1 in 5 individuals**, which means roughly 20% of the population is impacted by this learning difference. Dyslexia does not stem from a lack of intelligence or effort but from a neurological variation in how the brain processes language. As we mark this important month, it is vital to bring attention to the need for early identification, proper intervention, and ongoing support for dyslexic students in schools and communities.

In an enlightening interview, **Mrs. Roshelle Carden**, an education specialist with the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) and a passionate advocate for dyslexia intervention, shared her personal and professional journey. As the mother of a child with dyslexia and an expert in the field, Mrs. Carden provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by dyslexic students and the programs in place to support them in Alabama.

A Personal Journey That Fueled a Passion for Advocacy

For Mrs. Carden, dyslexia is more than just a professional focus – it’s personal. Her daughter, one of her twins, struggled with reading from an early age. “I always had an equal comparison there,” Mrs. Carden shared, referring to her twins’ developmental milestones. Her daughter’s difficulty in learning the alphabet and recognizing letters became apparent early on, but like many dyslexic students, she used coping skills that allowed her to fly under the radar for years. It wasn’t until her daughter was in the fourth grade that she was formally tested and diagnosed with dyslexia.

“I was a teacher, and I was ashamed that I hadn’t already picked up on it,” Mrs. Carden admits, reflecting on how even as an educator, she missed the signs. Despite being bright and resourceful, her daughter had to work twice as hard to keep up with her peers. This experience deepened Mrs. Carden’s commitment to helping other students like her daughter receive the support they need to succeed in school and beyond.

What Exactly is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a learning disability that is neurological in origin. It affects the way the brain processes language, particularly in areas related to reading, spelling, and sometimes math. Mrs. Carden explains dyslexia as the brain “taking the scenic route” to process language, which means it takes longer for information to travel through the brain’s pathways when a dyslexic child is learning to read or spell.

It’s important to note that dyslexia is not a vision problem, as many people believe. One of the most persistent myths about dyslexia is that people with the condition see letters or words backwards. Mrs. Carden

explains that this misconception likely came from early observations of children reversing letters like “b” and “d” or “p” and “q,” which is something all children do up until a certain age. Research has since shown that dyslexia is not about seeing things incorrectly, but rather about how the brain processes phonological information.

Alabama’s Initiatives for Dyslexia Support

In Alabama, significant strides have been made to support dyslexic students, largely due to initiatives like the *Alabama Literacy Act* and the Certified Academic Language Therapist (CALT) Program.

While schools in Alabama do not formally diagnose dyslexia, they provide support for all struggling readers, ensuring that students with dyslexia-specific needs are not left behind. Early intervention, such as the use of multisensory teaching methods, is crucial to helping students overcome the challenges posed by dyslexia.

The Emotional Impact of Dyslexia on Students and Families

The struggles of dyslexia extend beyond the classroom. Mrs. Carden emphasizes the emotional toll dyslexia can take on students and their families. Many dyslexic children spend hours



on homework, working much harder than their peers, only to achieve lower grades. This can lead to feelings of frustration and a sense of failure, despite their best efforts.

“Parents often feel the weight of their child’s struggles just as much as the child does,” Mrs. Carden notes. “It can be heartbreaking to see your child working so hard and still not succeeding, especially when you know they are capable.”

Dyslexia Awareness Month: A Call for Education and Action

Dyslexia Awareness Month serves as a reminder that struggling readers need not struggle their entire lives. Awareness is the first step toward action. Educators, parents, and policymakers must work together to ensure that all students

Story continues on page 10...





Alabama on Cutting Edge of Transportation and Technology

New Electric School Buses Bring BIG Savings to Local Economies and Communities

Alabama is now a real leader in the areas of technology and transportation. Our standards are improving national efficiency, lowering local costs, and increasing transportation safety.

[Our state has become a hub](#) for the world's leading transportation manufacturers, who all are blazing exciting new paths – Mercedes-Benz US International, Austal USA, Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Alabama, Polaris, Honda Manufacturing of Alabama, Airbus U.S., Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama, and many others. Now with a greater focus on advancing efficiency, Alabama's local school systems have also entered a new phase of technological innovation.

Our local schools are now utilizing electric vehicles and alternative fuel resources. In 2020, [Fort Payne City Schools](#) became one of the first school systems in our state to acquire electric school buses. Removing just four older school buses from its fleet has already catapulted this district's vision to significantly lower environmental emissions within its community.

Earlier this year, it was also announced that 51 new school buses were approved by local school districts in Alabama, to begin routes to transport K-12 students for the academic year - [source](#).

Real synergy has grown nationally to lower overall vehicle emissions to zero levels. The U.S. [Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) started the *Clean School Bus Program* to assist with this effort. This program provides specialized resources to help update existing school buses to zero-emission transportation. Electric school buses run fully on electricity and often use lithium-ion batteries to store needed power. They are reliable and have zero emissions.

"We are proud of the genuine commitment our school systems make each day to increase the efficiency and safety of their local school bus fleets," said Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) Pupil Transportation Administrator **Chad Carpenter**. "Providing the safest and most reliable transportation for local students and families is a top priority. Alabama school buses are built to very stringent specifications and are maintained by incredibly skilled mechanics and technicians."

According to online information, the key benefits of today's new electric school buses are:

- Electric buses often run quieter than traditional buses.
- Electric buses may be cheaper to operate.
- In some cases, electric buses may help to significantly reduce local fleet cost.
- School buses are statistically still one of the safest ways to transport students.

Some leading manufacturers for today's innovative electric school buses are Thomas Built Buses, IC Bus, the Volvo Group, Lion Electric, Blue Bird, Proterra, BYD, Gillig, and many others.

Alabama School Bus Safety Week is also being celebrated this month on October 21-25.

This annual event promotes school bus safety statewide and recognizes the amazing efforts of Alabama's school bus drivers and local transportation personnel. The Alabama State Board of Education annually endorses this event



with an official resolution and actively encourages all Alabamians to travel safely, especially around school buses and in school zones. National School Bus Safety Week is also celebrated during this same time.

Drivers in the immediate area of a stopped school bus should always pay more attention and be on the lookout for students crossing the street and intersections. Parents and caregivers can also use the following tips to make the school bus experience safer for students:

- Arrive at the bus stop five minutes early.
- Stand at least 5 giant steps (10 feet) away from the edge of the road.
- Wait until a bus stops, the door opens, and the driver says it's okay, to step on and enter the bus.
- Be careful that all clothing or objects do not get caught on handrails or doors when exiting.
- Walk in front of, and never behind, a bus.
- Be sure the bus driver can always see you, and you can see the bus driver.
- Before crossing the street, stop and look left-right-left before crossing. [Source](#)

Learn more about local school transportation initiatives and statewide safety procedures by contacting the ALSDE Pupil Transportation Section at 334-694-4545.



SCHOOL LUNCH WEEK 2024: CELEBRATED FROM OCTOBER 14–18

Healthy school meals are an essential part of the school day. They help to get students ready for success, both in and outside of the classroom.

To recognize the National School Lunch Program’s amazing efforts in serving nearly 30 million students nationwide and over 750,000 students in Alabama, schools and educators statewide will be celebrating National School Lunch Week October 14-18.



The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) serves millions of students every school day. President John F. Kennedy created National School Lunch Week (NSLW) in 1962 to promote the importance of providing a healthy school lunch to children and the impact it has on local communities.

This year’s fun and creative campaign, “School Lunch Pirates: Find Your Treasure,” highlighted the lasting impact of healthy school lunches to student classroom success.

Current research shows many students are now getting their healthiest meals of the day, at school.

National School Lunch Week highlights the nutritious foods available daily at local schools. “School lunches offer students fruits and vegetables, whole grains and milk, and meet federal nutrition standards limiting fat, calories and sodium,” said **Alabama Child Nutrition Program Director Angelice Lowe**. “National School Lunch Week helps us educate parents and students about all of the wonderful benefits of the Alabama lunch program.”

According to recent data, over 83 million school meals were served in our state in school year 2022.

Balanced nutrition throughout the day contributes to student success in and out of the classroom.

According to the USDA, today there are many great ways to offer delicious and nutritious school lunch and breakfast trays.

Today’s school lunch menus often look different from one community to another. They are normally based on both local and regional food preferences and sometimes seasonal preferences.

The federally funded NSLP has now been fueling student success for 77 years.

School meals must meet federal meal requirements and local school districts can choose exactly what foods go on their daily menus. Research indicates school lunch programs play an important role in overall student health in the following ways:

- Children receiving school lunches often consume fewer empty calories and more milk, fruit, vegetables and fiber than their peers.
- School lunches can be healthier than a packed lunch and contain fewer calories, fat, saturated fat and sugar, than lunches brought from home.
- Local school lunch programs are helping to reduce food insecurity, which is linked to negative health outcomes and lower classroom performance

[Source](#)

The “School Lunch Pirates: Find Your Treasure” campaign is also made possible by the national nonprofit, School Nutrition Association. Parents and students can follow the fun on social media this year by using #NSLW24, #SchoolLunchPirates and #SchoolLunch. For more information on National School Lunch Week 2024, click [HERE](#) and [HERE!](#)





Alabama Educators! We Need You!

Did you know that Alabama educators have a voice in every aspect of the development of the ACAP Summative and ACAP Alternate assessments? You can be that voice. Use the below QR code to submit an application to participate on one of our assessment development committees. The only requirements are an Alabama teaching certificate, experience in the classroom in the tested grades and content areas, and approval from your supervisor to participate.

Your active involvement ensures the assessment process is informed by educators and content experts who know our students, our standards, and what is needed to set each student up for future success.

Interested?
Email [HERE](#) or scan below for an application!



Alabama Success Story!

Tharptown High School in Russellville, Alabama, is home to an award-winning rocketry program. Since the program began in 2018, it has sent a team to the national finals six times, been in the top 10 four times, and won 2nd place in 2023. This year, the team is the National Champion and won 2nd place in the international competition!

This year's team members are team captain Kylee Bears, Angie Chavez, Shyla Martinez, Angel Franco, Frank Guitierrez, Jessie Mitchell, Adrionna Ashley, and Isabella Hall.

As the 22nd Annual American Rocketry Challenge National Finals winners, the Tharptown Rocketry Team beat a record-breaking 922 teams



from across the country. At the National Finals, the top 100 teams designed, built, and launched model rockets carrying a large egg to an altitude of 850 feet. The rockets had to remain airborne between 43-46 seconds before landing safely for 60% of their score. The teams also had to give presentations to industry experts on their rocket designs and lessons learned. The Tharptown Team won for having greater precision than any other team in the nation. The team won \$20,000 for their engineering skill and another \$1,000 for the school in recognition of the team's accomplishments. The win also sent them to the international competition to represent the United States. The International Rocketry Challenge was held in late July at Farnborough International Airshow in London.

The U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville hosted a special day of recognition and learning for the team and their sponsors before they departed for the international competition. The team toured several area facilities, and had the opportunity to speak with engineers. The Tharptown Rocketry Team practiced their presentation in front of the audience to prepare for the next stage of their journey.

According to the team's coach and sponsor, Areanna Orozco, the team practiced in June and July getting ready for the event, explaining they met around 5:15-5:30 a.m. to practice in temperatures similar to what was expected at the international competition in London. Orozco said that only allowed about an hour and a half to two hours for practicing at the correct temperatures and humidity, factors she said matter because they affect what must be done in order to manage the desired type of rocket launch.

Tharptown Rocketry Team placed second in the International Rocketry Challenge, with only ten points separating them from the first-place team from the United Kingdom. This was the closest scoring in the competition. They also competed against teams from Japan and France.

Congratulations, Tharptown Rocketry Team, and keep up the great work!

Article courtesy of The Advisor



Help Saks High School Win the T-Mobile 5G Lights Upgrade Grant!

Out of 1,700 schools that applied, Saks High School is in the Top 16 FINALS!

Support Saks High School in its effort to win a stadium and sports facilities makeover from T Mobile! Saks has been chosen as one of 16 national finalists, and as a result has received a \$25,000 award!

Winning the [T-Mobile 5G Lights Upgrade Grant](#) would transform the Saks stadium, which is used by high school teams and youth leagues throughout the community. Upgrading it would boost pride and unity. Investing in the stadium is an investment in the community’s future.

HOW TO HELP: [Watch the Saks video](#) about why this 5G upgrade would be a game-changer for the community. Then, like and share to show your support - and watch the scoreboard as Saks vies for the top spot! Every “Like” counts (through November 12), so vote for Saks High School!

Opelika High School Produces Impactful Suicide Prevention Video

September was Suicide Prevention Month – a time to raise awareness of this urgently important crisis. This month is observed to shift public perception, spread hope and share vital information to people affected by suicide. The goal is ensuring that individuals, friends and families have access to the resources they need to discuss suicide prevention and to seek help.

A group of Opelika High School students, along with their teacher, Mr. Tidwell and the support of the OHS Administration Team and School Counselors, recently produced the [988 Jason Flatts Suicide Lifeline Video](#). The video was introduced at the homecoming football game on the jumbotron and has since rendered a great response from students, parents and educators.



[View the video HERE](#)

Dyslexia Awareness Month

from page 10...

receive the tools and resources they need to succeed and overcome dyslexia and other reading challenges.

“The more we learn about dyslexia, the better equipped we are to help these students,” Mrs. Carden says. “Knowledge is power, and with the right interventions, we can change the trajectory of a child’s educational experience.”

Looking Ahead: The Future of Dyslexia Support in Alabama

The journey for better dyslexia support in Alabama is far from over. Mrs. Carden is excited about the future, particularly with the recent influx of funding for dyslexia-specific interventions and the growing number of trained dyslexia

therapists in the state.

Her ultimate goal? Early identification and timely intervention for all dyslexic students in Alabama. “We know that early intervention is the key,” Mrs. Carden asserts. “If we can catch dyslexia early and provide the right support, these students can thrive.”

For more resources, visit the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) or The Reading League. These organizations offer a wealth of information for parents and educators seeking to better understand and support students with dyslexia.

As Mrs. Carden concludes, “Research suggests that we can teach 95% of children to read. It’s up to us to make sure every child has the tools they need to get there.”





Alabama State Board of Education



AENN CONTACT INFORMATION

334-694-4688 · 334-694-4990 (f)

aen@alsde.edu

www.alabamaachievers.org

Alabama Education News & Notes

P.O. Box 302101

Montgomery, AL 36130-2101

ALSDE COMMUNICATION STAFF

Director: Dr. Michael O. Sibley

Administrative Assistant: Rita Smith

Training Specialist: Laila Mathis

Public Information Officer: Ed Crenshaw

Recognition Programs: Ann Starks

Videographer: Shane Gillis

Graphic Artist: Charles Creel

THE ALABAMA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Standing: State Superintendent of Education, Dr. Eric G. Mackey, District 5 Representative Tonya S. Chestnut, Ed.D. (Vice President), District 6 Representative Marie Manning (President Pro Tem), District 7 Representative Belinda McRae, and District 8 Representative Wayne Reynolds, Ed.D. **Seated:** District 1 Representative Jackie Zeigler, District 2 Representative Tracie West, Governor Kay Ivey (President), District 3 Representative Stephanie Bell, and District 4 Representative Yvette M. Richardson, Ed.D.

Contact a Board Member

Watch Meeting Videos

Browse Meeting Photos

October Board Meeting Agenda

- a. Fiscal Year 2026 Foundation Program Appropriation Request
- b. Alabama State Board of Education Resolution Establishing a Cut Score for the Lowest Level in Reading for the Alabama Comprehensive Assessment Program (ACAP)
- c. Announce Intent to Adopt Amended Alabama Administrative Code Rule 290-3-1-.02, Pertaining to Regulations Governing Public Schools
- d. Adopt Amended Alabama Administrative Code Rule 290-2-1-.01, Pertaining to Annual Apportionment of Foundation Program Funds
- e. Resolution to Name Alabama's 2024 Science of Reading Spotlight Schools
- f. Approval of Nomination for Vacancy, Alabama School of Fine Arts Board of Trustees
- g. Resolution in Recognition of Mr. Charles Longshore, Assistant Principal, Dothan Preparatory Academy, Dothan City School System, as Alabama's 2024 Secondary Assistant Principal of the Year, State School Board District Two
- h. Resolution in Recognition of Mr. Alan Keith York, Principal, Opelika Middle School, Opelika City School System, as Alabama's 2024 Middle School Principal of the Year, State School Board District Two
- i. Resolution in Recognition of Ms. Michele Hewlett, Assistant Principal, Chickasaw Elementary School, Chickasaw City School System, as Alabama's 2024 National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) National Outstanding Elementary Assistant Principal, State School Board District Five
- j. Resolution in Recognition of Dr. Gregory Deval Moore, Jr., Principal, Springville High School, St. Clair County School System, as Alabama's 2024 High School Principal of the Year, State School Board District Six
- k. Resolution in Recognition of Mrs. Shannon McCaskey, Principal, Frances Nungester Elementary School, Decatur City School System, as Alabama's 2024 National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) National Distinguished Principal, State School Board District Seven
- l. Resolution in Recognition of Mrs. Mindy Walker, Holt High School, Tuscaloosa County School System, as Alabama's 2024 History Teacher of the Year, State School Board District Four
- m. Resolution of Distinguished Recognition of the 2023 Alabama School Counseling and District Counseling Programs of Distinction
- n. Resolution Proclaiming October 2024 as "Principals Month"
- o. Resolution in Recognition of October 2024 as Dyslexia Awareness Month
- p. Resolution Proclaiming October 2024 as Manufacturing Month
- q. Resolution Proclaiming October 2024 as Statewide Parent Engagement Month in Alabama
- r. Resolution Proclaiming Alabama School Bus Safety Week, October 21-25, 2024



Alabama State Department of Education, Eric G. Mackey, State Superintendent of Education

The Alabama State Board of Education and the Alabama State Department of Education do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, disability, sex, religion, national origin, or age in their programs, activities, or employment and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups. The following person is responsible for handling inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policies: Title IX Coordinator, Alabama State Department of Education, P.O. Box 302101, Montgomery, AL 36130-2101, telephone (334) 694-4717.

