



Education

County teachers exceed state in percent who have reached 'Highly Qualified' status

State, county nearing completion of NCLB requirements

By Dee Ann Campbell
 The Choctaw Sun

BUTLER – Teachers in Alabama's public schools are exceeding the state's goal of becoming 100% 'highly qualified', and those in Choctaw County are among them.

According to the state Report Card issued in early January, 90.8% of all classes in the state's public schools are now being taught by teachers who have received their 'Highly Qualified' certification as required by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). With 47,319 teachers teaching in public schools across the state, the Alabama Department of Education has been aggressively working to bring all of them up to NCLB requirements within the time frame allowed by the law.

In Choctaw County, the percentages are even higher.

Just over 92% of Choctaw County's teachers have already reached their Highly Qualified status. Out of 108 teachers in the four public schools, only 8 are still pending with some now waiting on the results of their certification assessments. The school system is nearing the goal of becoming 100% highly qualified by the end of the school year.

Although other states are much farther behind in reaching their goals, Alabama has exceeded its targeted goals set down each year and is also on track to reach 100% by the cut-off date at the end of this school year. In fact, Alabama has been ahead of its targeted annual goals for each of the past three years. In 2003-04, 76.7% of classes were already being taught by teachers with highly qualified status, while the goal for that year was 56.9%. By the 2004-05 school year, the state was up to 81.8% – a full 3.4% above the targeted goal of 78.4%.

While the original NCLB act listed the school year 2005-06 as the cut-off year for requirements

to be met by states, changes in the law during March of last year moved the date to the end of the current school year – 2006-07.

The state's successful quest for meeting NCLB requirements has garnered national attention. In 2004, the National Council on Teacher Quality cited a report that recognized Alabama as among the top ten states in the nation for its process of meeting the highly qualified teacher requirements as mandated by NCLB.

Breaking it down by grade divisions, last year Alabama reached 84.2% of classes taught by highly qualified teachers at the high school level, and 94.5% for elementary level teachers.

Locally, Southern Choctaw Elementary has already reached 100%, with all 30 SCES teacher now certified as Highly Qualified. Out of the 39 teachers at Choctaw County Elementary, only has one teacher who has not yet obtained record of certification.

For the high schools, Southern Choctaw High has only 3 of its 23 teachers still working toward their highly quali-

fied status. Twelve of Choctaw County High teachers have reached that status, with 4 still pending. Of those still pending in each school, some are now waiting on word from the state confirming that they have also reached Highly Qualified status.

Under NCLB, the term 'highly qualified' means that the teacher has obtained full state certification, has passed the state teacher licensing examination, holds a license to teach in that state, and meets other requirements set down for their particular grade level and subject area. Although some requirements differ according to grade level taught, others include teachers at all levels.

For elementary grade levels, a teacher must obtain full state certification, hold a license in that state, and meet other requirements including holding at least a bachelor's degree and passing a rigorous State test that demonstrates subject knowledge and teaching skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and other areas of the basic elementary school curriculum.

A middle or high

school teacher must meet the same requirements but must also demonstrate a high level of competency in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches by passing a rigorous state academic subject test in each of those subjects. Alternately, the teacher may reach highly qualified status through successful completion of an academic major, a graduate degree, or advanced certification in each of the academic subjects that the teacher will teach.

The NCLB definition of 'highly qualified' does not apply to teachers of driver education, health education, physical education, or JROTC.

States were mandated to put together the process for bringing teachers who are already in the classroom up to date on the new certification requirements, as well as those who would enter classrooms as new teachers. The process was required to meet the definitions of 'Highly Qualified' as set down by NCLB.

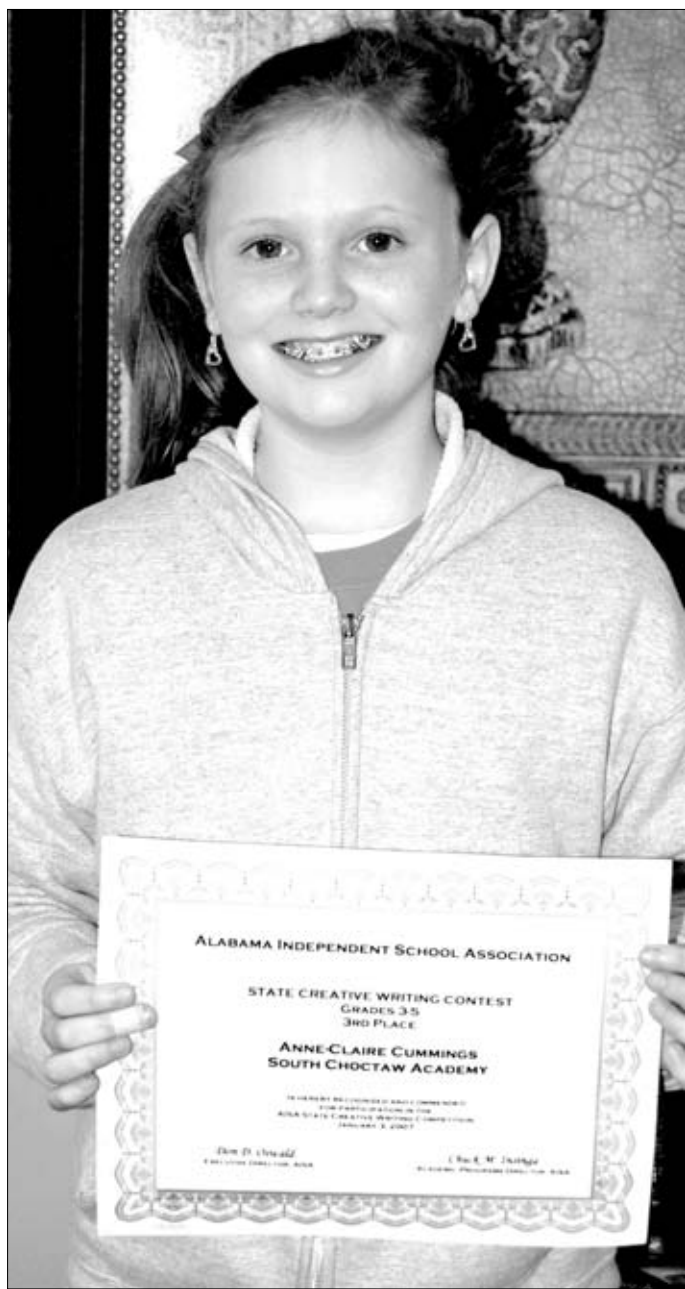
The State of Alabama developed and submitted its 'Model for Identifying Highly Qualified Teachers' in June, 2003.

According to state law,

teachers who were already in the classroom were allowed a limited amount of time to complete needed requirements. Some were able to gain their highly qualified status through HOUSSE (High Objective State Standard of Evaluation), which allowed some core academic subject teachers who met prerequisites as outlined by state law to submit portfolios through their superintendent's office. A state panel then reviewed the portfolios and, based on their qualifications, allowed the teachers to be given a letter from the State Superintendent stating that they were highly qualified.

Unfortunately, after consulting the U.S. Department of Education, the state determined that the HOUSSE method for gaining Highly Qualified status was no longer valid after August of last year.

Even without HOUSSE, less than 10% of Alabama's teachers – and only 8% of Choctaw County teachers – are still yet to gain their highly qualified status, and that percentage is expected to decline to near zero as the 2006-07 school year comes to an end.



Choctaw Sun photo by Dee Ann Campbell

Cummings takes AISA writing award

TOXEY – South Choctaw Academy's Anne-Claire Cummings took third place in the 3rd-5th grade division of the Alabama Independent School Association's creative writing competition. Her story was selected out of a long list of entries from schools across the state. Anne-Claire is the daughter of Terry and Merry Cummings of Needham.



Choctaw Sun photo by Dee Ann Campbell

Mastering Math Facts in a Flash

TOXEY – These South Choctaw Academy 2nd and 3rd graders have mastered all 44 levels in the computer program 'Math Facts in a Flash', a timed test that takes the students through addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, squares, and conversions of decimals and fractions. Pictured are: (front) Haleigh Tyson, 2nd grade; (Back, left to right): Taylor Hannah, 2nd grade; Bailey Manning, 3rd grade; Colton Clark, 3rd grade; Griffin Bryan, 2nd grade; and Chloe Robinson, 2nd grade.

Reynolds named to LEAD

LIVINGSTON – Courtney Reynolds, of Butler, has been named to Livingston's Early Alumni Development group, an organization formed to develop and strengthen relationships between University of West Alabama students and the National Alumni Association.

LEAD serves as a

leadership forum for students, providing them with opportunities for career development, networking and relationship building with UWA alumni.

LEAD members serve as ambassadors for the alumni association, helping plan, organize and host both on-campus alumni events and those

sponsored by area alumni chapters. These students also work with the alumni association's member services and affinity programs, learning how and why the alumni association operates.

Miss Reynolds is the daughter of Larry and Cathy Reynolds, of Butler, and a graduate of Patri- cian Academy.

McGrew graduates from UWA

LIVINGSTON – LaToshia T. McGrew, of Silas, graduated on Dec. 16, 2006 from the University of West Alabama with a Bachelor of Science degree in Sociology and Psychology. She is a 1998 graduate from Southern Choctaw High School.

LaToshia is the daughter of Brenda and Bobby Mitchell of Silas and the granddaughter of Annie Z. Mitchell of Millry, George McGrew and the late Marietta McGrew of Silas.

Tucker to vie for Miss UWA

LIVINGSTON – Ten students from Alabama and Mississippi will vie Friday, Feb. 2 for the title of Miss University of West Alabama.

The contestants include freshman natural science and mathematics major Jessica Tucker, a graduate of Southern Choctaw High School.

Admission to the annual program – to select a campus representative to the Miss Alabama Pageant in Birmingham – is free and begins at 7 p.m. in Bibb Graves auditorium.

Good luck, Jessica!

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