

Reading, reading, reading!



Choctaw Sun photo by Dee Ann Campbell

Accelerated readers honored at SCA

TOXEY – South Choctaw Academy honored top accelerated readers in grades K-3 with a surprise party and an afternoon of fun and games. Each student received a prize for their accomplishments. Accelerated readers include Kindergarten and 1st graders (front row, left to right): Jack Miller, Emily Sikes, Zack Dees, Dylan Kennett, Marshall Manning, Ashley Carlisle, Alaina Carlisle, and Chay Rogers. Those honored in grades 2 and 3 are: Haleigh Tyson, Kassi Giles, Kellie Carney, Chloe Robinson, Bailey Manning, Carney Bradley, Caroline Wigley, Morgan Taylor, and Whit Wilkins.



Submitted photo

Naming parts in Spanish

GILBERTOWN – Mrs. Cyndi Merritt's "Spanish 2" class at Southern Choctaw High School made "bodies" to prepare for a recent test. Everyone named and labeled parts of the body in Spanish. That day in class everyone had to present their "body" and tell how they made them. (By Hope Ratcliff, SCHS Journalism Staff.)

Measuring quality of education in Alabama's public schools

■ Long list of studies dispute findings of Quality Counts 2007

By Dee Ann Campbell
The Choctaw Sun

MONTGOMERY — With the release of the Quality Counts 2007 report ranking the state as 45th in the nation in potential success for its children, Alabama has been under the gun for, among other issues, what is perceived to be problems associated with education in the state's public school system. However, other studies released in the past few years argue to the contrary.

According to studies from a wide range of organizations, including the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the National Center for Education Statistics, the National Council on Teacher Quality, and data from ACT and SAT assessments, to name a few — in many areas, the state is leading the nation in the quality of education.

Here is a list of some of the most recent statements from studies dealing with Alabama's public schools.

(Sources for the information are listed in parenthesis.)

- Alabama has the highest graduation requirements in the United States. Public high school students are required to pass a minimum of 24 credits, including four years of mandatory English, mathematics, social studies, and science —

known as the four-by-four curriculum. Students are tested on fundamental concepts of core courses using the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE).

- Since the four-by-four curriculum was introduced to Alabama high school classrooms in 1996, average student achievement has increased every year.

- Alabama ranks among the top 10 states with the most National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs). (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards)

- In 2004, a national report recognized Alabama as among the top ten states in meeting the highly qualified teacher requirements as mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. (Nat'l Council on Teacher Quality)

Standards and Accountability

- Alabama is one of only 21 states that have or will have high school exit exams based on standards. More states with "minimum competency" exit exams are "upgrading" these tests to reflect 10th-grade standards or higher. (2006 Quality Counts)

- Alabama was the first state to annually issue report cards for schools, school systems, and the state at large, which gives letter grades from A to F on five national education indicators.

- Alabama has the lowest 4-year projected dropout rate in the State's history — 11.18%. (Alabama Dept. of Education)

- In 2006, Alabama's Student Health Initiative was among the top scorers nationwide on the School Foods Report Card. (Center for Science in the Public Interest)

- The Thomas Fordham Foundation ranked Alabama as one of the top five states for setting and achieving high standards and accountability in public education. (Thomas Fordham Foundation)

- In 2003, The Thomas Fordham Institute ranked Alabama among the top states in the nation with the best U.S. history state academic standards. (Effective State Standards for U.S. History)

- In 2004, The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation ranked Alabama as one of the top five states in the nation for its English standards and one of the top six states for its math standards. (State of the State English and Math Standards 2005)

- Alabama is the only state that holds teacher education institutions accountable for the on-the-job performance of their graduates. (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education)

Job Related

- The Alabama Department of Educa-

tion's Business and Industry Certification (BIC) process, used to certify Career/Technical Education programs for industry compliance, was awarded certification from the International Organization of Standardization (ISO) in 2003. Alabama's Department of Education is the first state-level educational agency in the nation to receive this certification.

Safe Schools

- Each Alabama school has a comprehensive safety plan to keep students safe in the event of a crisis.

- Alabama has established a safe school hotline (1-888-SAV-KIDS) to report school safety related information on an anonymous basis 24 hours a day.

- Alabama enacted legislation requiring a criminal background check to be performed on all current teachers and educational employees having unsupervised access to children in schools.

- To ensure safety and security, more than 130 middle and high schools in Alabama now have video cameras provided under Governor's Private Eyes Education Program.

- Alternative schools are expanding across Alabama to remove disruptive students so teachers can teach and students can learn in a safe environment.

- Daily, at least 357,000 students are transported to and from

local schools by Alabama school buses and are involved in less than one half of one percent of all Alabama traffic accidents. (Alabama Department of Education)

Assessments and Achievement

- In 2005, Alabama's college-bound students outscored their counterparts in neighboring states on the ACT test for the ninth consecutive year. Students in Alabama averaged a score of 20.2. The Southeast regional average is 20.1. (ACT data)

- A record number of Alabama public and private school seniors (32,122) took the American College Test (ACT), representing 77% of the class of 2005, up one percentage point from last year's total of 31,548. (ACT data)

- In 2005, Alabama Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) test takers continue to beat the national averages in verbal and math scores for the 14th consecutive year. Alabama's average verbal score is 567 and 559 in math. National averages are 508 in verbal and 520 in math. (The College Board)

- Approximately two-thirds of Alabama high school students plan to continue their education after high school. (National Center for Education Statistics)

- When compared nationally, the state of Alabama funds its K-12 educational system at a D level, and gets B-

results. (NEA Ranking of the States and Stanford Achievement Test data)

- Schools participating in the Alabama Reading Initiative continually report decreases in discipline problems and decreases in special education referrals.

- There are 752 schools participating in the Alabama Reading Initiative. In 2002, the Alabama Reading Initiative received the Education Commission of the States (ECS) State Innovation Award.

- President George W. Bush gave accolades to Alabama's Reading Initiative stating that, "Alabama challenges the status quo..." (The Birmingham News 9/6/02)

- Alabama's was among the first three states to qualify for federal funding (\$15.8 million in 2002) under the No Child Left Behind Act due to its successful Reading Initiative Program. (Alabama Dept. of Education)

- For four years, outside evaluators have testified to the effectiveness of the Alabama Reading Initiative Program in raising schools test scores. It is a model for other states, including Massachusetts, Florida, and Connecticut. (Ala. Dept. of Ed.)

(Much of the data listed in this article was taken from a report by the Alabama Department of Education)

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