

Our Priority:

CREATE A WORLD-CLASS EDUCATION SYSTEM

Alabama has experienced more success in the past four years than any time in our recent history. Our economy is rapidly expanding, our quality of life is rising like never before, and our education system has never been stronger. In order to ensure that our children will be able to compete in this global economy, it is imperative that we continue building a strong education system that has one mission—giving our children the tools they need to succeed.

During my first term, I am proud to have begun that process. By increasing the Education Trust Fund budget from \$4 billion to over \$6 billion, we have invested more money into education than any administration in Alabama's history. Nationally renowned programs like the Alabama Reading Initiative and the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative are revolutionizing the way our children learn. ACCESS, our distance learning program, is already connecting students from all across the state to the quality teachers and courses they deserve. Now, we are seeing the results. Just two years ago, around seven out of 10 Alabama schools *failed* to meet their adequate yearly progress goals under the *No Child Left Behind Act*. **This year, almost nine out of 10 succeeded in meeting 100 percent of their progress goals!**

In the past four years, we have laid the groundwork for success in education. Now it is time to make sure that our children **will be able to take advantage of every opportunity that Alabama's bright future will offer them.**

Our Goal:

By 2010, our education system will be able to prepare all Alabama students for the challenges of a new global economy.

Our Plan:

- **Invest in a bold and aggressive School Construction Program**
- **Expand the nationally renowned Alabama Reading Initiative and Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative**
- **Install an ACCESS Distance Learning Lab in every high school to provide better opportunities for all Alabama students**
- **Expand our Advanced Placement Initiative to provide a rigorous curriculum that prepares our students for college and the workforce**
- **Reward high-achieving schools with monetary incentives**
- **Raise our graduation rate by focusing on at-risk students**
- **Raise teacher pay and invest in a program that rewards results**
- **Protect our students and teachers with a School Discipline Program**
- **Provide our hard-working teachers with opportunities for advancement**
- **Continue to support our community colleges and universities**

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SAFE AND SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

School Construction Program

Many school districts across this state are still operating with buildings built in the early part of the last century that have cooling and heating systems designed 50 or 60 years ago and electrical infrastructure that has long passed its prime. Some of these schools are not just inefficient and inconvenient, they are dangerous.

Parents should never have to worry about their children's safety when they drop them off at school. That is why I proposed a \$500 million school safety and improvement plan during the last legislative session. Unfortunately, the leadership in the Legislature did not place school improvement as a top priority and blocked the proposal.

We must fight for these real needs that touch every school district in the state.

Next year, we will propose a bold and aggressive school construction program that will provide every school in the state with additional resources for safety improvements, new construction, and expansion of technology.

The proposal will **divide at least \$500 million among public K-12 systems, two-year colleges, and four-year universities.**

The funds will come from a bond issue, and funding levels for each school system will be set by a formula so there is no hint of politics involved in the distribution of the money. Each system will receive a minimum allocation and additional allocations will be based upon a system's student population.

PUTTING MONEY IN THE CLASSROOM

Expand the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI)

The Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) has been heralded as a premier reading program in the nation. That is because it uses small group settings and proven teaching techniques to help children learn to love reading.

Even though ARI has not yet been fully implemented, it is already showing great results. This year, students in grades K-3 scored **14% better in reading** than they did just two years ago. Because of these successes, we have fulfilled our goal of putting ARI in every K-3 school in the state by this fall. That's a total of **902 ARI schools, 29,508 teachers trained, and 274,215 students served.**

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One of the best examples of how ARI transforms schools is Calcedeaver Elementary School in Mobile County. About 95% of the students at Calcedeaver live in poverty. Some people made all the excuses in the world for them, but we knew that they were as bright as any students in the state. Just a few years ago, they were among the 10 worst schools in the state in reading. We put ARI in Calcedeaver in 2003, and now, just three years later, they rank **#4 in the state in reading scores, right behind a Mountain Brook school and two magnet schools.**

While ARI has already proven itself in elementary schools across the state, there is a world of opportunities for expansion into the higher grades.

It is time that we give all of our children the advantages of the Alabama Reading Initiative.

During the next four years, we will expand the Alabama Reading Initiative so every Alabama student receives the benefit of this proven methodology.

In grades K-3, ARI provides a solid reading foundation for all students. But **students cannot simply learn to read; they must read to learn.** Therefore, to protect the investment we have already made in our elementary schools, I will propose expanding ARI into our middle schools and high schools.

In the upper grades, ARI will ensure that all students are successful in reading comprehension, with a particular focus on intervening with students who need it most. Reading is the basis for all learning—you cannot teach a child social studies, science, or even math without a solid foundation in reading. It is imperative that we ensure that all of our students can read and comprehend what they are reading so they can take advantage of the high-paying jobs that are a hallmark of our new economy.

Expand the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI)

Math and science are becoming increasingly important in today's global economy. Just a few years ago, I attended a National Governors' Association Conference at which Microsoft founder Bill Gates told us that one university in China would graduate more engineers than all of the universities in America combined. In order to keep up with the rest of the world, we have no choice but to focus like never before on math and science.

That is why I have made the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI) such a priority. This program offers a hands-on approach to learning that makes math and science come alive.

A year and a half ago, I visited an elementary school in Mobile that had recently implemented AMSTI. In one of the classes, the students were studying electrical circuits. Instead of simply looking at the grainy diagrams that we used to see in our textbooks, they used batteries, wire, and bulbs to test how circuits worked. Some of the more curious students even found out that if you stack enough batteries together, the bulb will blow. These real life experiments allow students to develop learning skills that are almost impossible to develop through pure lecture or textbook lessons. AMSTI students truly understand what they are learning, and that is why this program has been improving test scores across the state.

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Last year we made the first major investment of \$15 million and doubled the number of AMSTI Schools in the state. This year we invested \$22 million, and by the end of this year, 320 schools and more than 7,000 teachers will be trained in this new method.

These investments are already showing results. Last year, new AMSTI schools scored up to **13% higher in science and math** than schools without the program. These types of increases are occurring around the state, and this is just the beginning. There is no doubt that AMSTI will better prepare our children for the technologically advanced jobs of tomorrow.

It is time that we fully implement this proven program.

During the next four years, we will expand AMSTI to every school in the state, revolutionizing our students' math and science education and preparing them for the future.

A skilled workforce with a strong background in math and science is a critical piece of our economic strategy, and we must build this foundation in our schools.

Expand Distance Learning

As I have already said, one of the initiatives I think holds the most promise for Alabama's underserved students is our ACCESS Distance Learning program (Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators, and Students Statewide). This program utilizes the Internet and videoconferencing technology to expand students' opportunities, especially in rural and underserved school districts.

Many students throughout Alabama do not have the access to many advanced courses that other, more affluent schools districts do. For instance, Mountain Brook High School offers 20 advanced placement courses. Clay County High School, where my family has gone to school for four generations, **offers only one AP course**. The other high school in my county **doesn't even offer one**, and there are many schools just like them throughout the rural areas of the state.

That is why ACCESS is so important. It gives children in these school districts the same opportunities for advancement that other students in the state are offered.

A few months ago, I visited Bob Jones High School, an ACCESS school in Madison. Students in one classroom were taking a Latin class by videoconference. The teacher was at Sheffield High School in Colbert County and was teaching her class in Sheffield, the class in Madison, and another class in rural Mobile County. **One teacher was teaching three different classrooms in three different regions of the state all at the same time**. Students were able to ask the teacher questions, work on assignments, and even interact with students at the other schools through this state-of-the-art videoconferencing technology.

These students would not have had the chance to take that Latin class without the ACCESS program, and Latin is just one example. This technology allows a wide array of classes to be offered—from Physics to Personal Finance to Mandarin Chinese.

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It is imperative that we give every school in Alabama the opportunity to utilize this program.

During the next four years, we will ensure that there is an ACCESS Distance Learning Lab in every Alabama high school so all of our students will have the opportunity to take the advanced courses they need to succeed.

This means that every high school student in the state, regardless of geography, will have expanded access to more than 50 different classes, including advanced diploma, advanced placement, foreign language, and new elective courses that will give them the competitive edge they need to succeed in the new global economy.

Teachers will also be able to use the technology to receive professional development without having to leave their school.

This program will offer more opportunities to more students and teachers than any educational reform in Alabama's recent history.

Advanced Placement Courses in Every High School

Of all of the courses high school students can take in Alabama, none prepares them for college any better than advanced placement (AP) courses. These courses increase the rigor of our curriculum and require our high school students to utilize the same higher level learning skills that they will use in college.

In fact, studies have shown that students who take an AP course have a **15% better chance** of graduating college than those who do not take an AP course.

The problem is that many of our schools in underserved districts don't have the resources to offer many AP courses. However, as noted earlier, we are giving many of these schools opportunities to offer AP courses through our ACCESS Distance Learning program, and every high school in the state will offer advanced classes through ACCESS by 2010.

We have already invested \$1 million into an AP expansion program for the 2006-07 school year. In its first year, this initiative will provide grants for 250 teachers to attend AP workshops and institutes. It will also provide instructional materials for 125 *new* AP courses and 125 *existing* AP courses as well the \$82 in testing fees for students taking an AP exam who are not eligible for the federal AP fee program.

We are off to a great start, but we must do more.

During the next four years, every high school will offer an AP course in English, math, science, and social studies.

With the expansion of our AP Initiative and the connectivity provided through our ACCESS Distance Learning program, the state will provide every high school student the opportunity to take an AP course in the four core subject areas and to take the AP exams that provide the opportunity for college credit.

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By offering these rigorous, high quality courses, we will provide our college-bound students a head start on their college work and increase their chances of success.

School Rewards & Incentives

We have some outstanding schools in Alabama. In fact, Jefferson County International Baccalaureate in Irondale was named the “**Best School in America**” by *Newsweek Magazine*. There are a number of schools in Alabama that can compete with any in America.

Unfortunately, there are also some schools in the state that have significant challenges. Many of our rural and inner-city school systems have real systemic problems.

We must support all of our schools in their push to increase student achievement and reward those schools that make exceptional gains. Our high-quality teachers and principals should be rewarded for rising to meet the challenge in these struggling schools.

That is why we are already providing \$2.4 million in rewards for schools that have raised test scores and proven their dedication to student improvement. The recognized schools have the freedom to invest these rewards in the areas they choose, such as **teacher bonuses, professional development, new equipment and technology, or even school repair**. Similar programs across the country have proven to be effective, and our students and teachers deserve no less. For example, North Carolina spent over \$90 million in 2005-06 on rewards and incentives. As their program has been implemented over the last nine years, they have increased the number of schools achieving or exceeding expected performance standards and decreased the number of schools classified as low-performing.

Providing tangible rewards to schools that produce strong gains in student achievement will help revolutionize underperforming schools across the state.

Over the next four years, we will provide \$50 million in monetary incentives to schools that demonstrate their commitment to improving student achievement.

GRADUATION PLAN FOR ALABAMA (GPA)

In order to maintain our economic momentum and offer our students a better quality of life, we must ensure our children are properly prepared to take advantage of the high paying, high-tech jobs that are already flowing into every region of the state.

These jobs have already helped put thousands of Alabamians to work and contributed to our **historically low unemployment rate**. Our success, however, has created a new challenge. With a workforce that is virtually at full employment, it is imperative that those people entering the job market for the first time are educated and trained for the jobs of the 21st Century economy.

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We only have one chance to prepare our students for success. Without a high school diploma, students will find it extremely difficult to achieve their full potential. The first and most important step in preparing our students is to do everything in our power to help them graduate from high school.

Currently, the Governor's High Hopes program provides remediation for those students who have failed one or more sections of the graduation exam, but we must do more.

During the next four years, we will raise our high school graduation rate with new and focused efforts to help students earn a diploma.

We will place an **At-Risk Advisor** in the 200 Alabama high schools with the highest dropout rates. **This advisor's only job will be to help these struggling students graduate.** These advisers will help troubled students understand the importance of earning their high school diploma by developing a graduation plan for each at-risk student, evaluating their progress twice a month, and making home visits to discuss students' progress with their parents. They will also work with community and faith-based organizations to ensure that every student has a solid support structure.

It is also of paramount importance that we couple our At-Risk Advisor program with after-school programs for remediation, tutoring, and mentoring students. In order to help these students make the transition from middle school to high school and beyond, we must identify them early. With this in mind, **I will propose increasing funding for High Hopes and expanding the program to focus on students in grades 7 through 12 that are identified as at risk for dropping out of school.**

We will also strengthen policies that give students a reason to stay in school. Under current Alabama law, **those students who choose to drop out of school lose their driver's license until they are 19 years old** or have satisfied certain requirements. We will ensure that this law is enforced, and we will tighten any loopholes that exist.

We must help students understand that a high school diploma is their ticket to a successful, productive life and help them to achieve their potential.

GIVING TEACHERS THE SUPPORT THEY DESERVE

Raise Teacher Pay and Invest in a Program that Rewards Results

Alabama is blessed with some of the best educators in the nation. Most of them are truly dedicated to seeing their students succeed both inside and outside of the classroom.

During our administration, teacher pay has increased **more than 14%** for all of our state's teachers because their job is one of the most important in the state. We will continue to raise teacher pay in a responsible manner as long as I am governor.

In addition to continuing our record of raising all teachers' pay, we must also begin to invest in those teachers who produce results. Many teachers in this state go above and beyond the call of duty every day

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to help their students achieve their fullest potential. They stay after school with struggling students, take extra professional development classes to learn new teaching methods, and invest themselves fully into our students' lives.

When I go into schools, these teachers are not difficult to spot. Their students are always interested, always engaged, and always achieve a higher level of success. It is time that we begin to reward these teachers who demand excellence from themselves and produce excellence in their students.

We will reward our most effective teachers by investing in incentive pay for educators that demand and achieve excellence in the classroom.

Protect our Teachers and Students

All parents want a safe learning environment for their children.

All parents also want teachers who are able to focus on teaching their children without spending time with disciplinary problems. One of the most challenging aspects of the teaching profession is dealing with problem students. Unfortunately, all too often, teachers are faced with unruly students that can be difficult to control.

That is why we have provided teachers with specialized professional development that has helped them learn how to better deal with problem students. In order to identify areas of need, we also track discipline problems on a state level. We have provided our teachers with a support structure from the State Department of Education all the way down to the local principals.

Many times, though, this structure is not enough. We must continue to be tough on those students who seek to ruin others' opportunity to learn and do everything we can to ensure that no teacher is ever put in a potentially dangerous situation.

We will allow for the suspension of driving privileges for consistently disruptive students in order to deter potentially dangerous problems in the classroom.

A driver's license is a privilege, and any student that consistently disrupts the classroom environment should have that privilege revoked. That is why I will propose legislation that allows for the **suspension of a disruptive student's license until the problem is corrected**. We will also provide our alternative schools with the support and resources they need to handle those students removed from the classroom so that they are able to correct these discipline problems and set these students on a path that leads to a fulfilling and productive life.

We must also make it completely clear and unambiguous that our teachers control their classrooms. They should be able to do what it takes to maintain order without fear of unnecessary repercussions. Unfortunately, the teaching profession, like others, brings with it some inherent legal risks. Currently, neither the state nor the local boards of education provide teachers with liability insurance to protect them from potential financial damages or loss of reputation that can occur if the teacher is sued over issues related to work. **The state provides this protection to all state employees except teachers.** For far too

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long, our hardworking teachers have been forced to pay for this insurance out of their own pockets. We must ensure that this necessary protection is extended to them.

We will provide educator professional liability insurance to ensure that every teacher is protected from the financial dangers of lawsuits.

Professional Teachers

Our teachers are some of Alabama's greatest assets. We could never even begin to prepare our students to compete in this global economy without the professional teachers who teach our children day-in and day-out. These men and women are not only dedicated to their profession, they are dedicated to the success of our children.

That is why we established the Governor's Commission on Quality Teaching. We asked some of the best teachers from across the state to become a part of this commission to help us define the future of their profession. The Governor's Commission is already proposing innovative programs that will prove to enhance every teacher's opportunity to achieve his or her full potential.

One of the Commission's best recommendations is to provide teachers with an opportunity for advancement. Currently, our teachers do not have a way to progress in their profession. With no real room for professional advancement, it is not surprising that **50% of new teachers leave the profession within five years**. In order to ensure that our teachers are given every opportunity to succeed, we must create a structure – a “professional pathway” – that supports and challenges them.

We will implement a Professional Pathways program to give our teachers more opportunities to advance within their field.

We will **redesign our teacher preparation programs** to reflect the strong reforms we have adopted, such as the Alabama Reading Initiative and the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative. Our colleges and universities must be held responsible for the teachers they prepare.

We will **create a mentoring program** that will pair new teachers with a trained mentor teacher for the first three years of his or her teaching career. Those new to the profession will no longer be left without support and direction from a proven professional.

We will **provide more opportunities for quality professional development** that focuses on new teaching methods that are proven to raise student achievement.

We will also **provide teachers opportunities for advancement in their field**. Teachers will be able to become specialists, or “Master Teachers,” in their area of expertise and will be eligible for pay raises based on their level of advancement. We must keep our best teachers in the classroom by providing opportunities for greater responsibility and increased rewards.

FOCUSED SUPPORT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Focused Mission for the Two-Year College System

Alabama's two-year colleges have played a key role in helping us build a better economy and a better quality of life. Now, with new leadership working to restore the public's trust in our community colleges, we must keep making focused and strategic investments in them in order to continue Alabama's progress.

The community and technical colleges' built-in infrastructure and statewide networks have given us extraordinary opportunities. When we consolidated our workforce development programs, the two-year institutions became the conduit for their success.

Today, the Alabama Industrial Development Training department (AIDT) has partnered with community and technical colleges to prepare more than **100,000 workers** for new jobs that have come into the state. This ability to train workers quickly and effectively is one of the reasons **Alabama leads the nation in economic development.**

One example of their effectiveness took place at a Mobile shipyard. A shipbuilding company that received a contract to build the next generation of Navy ships needed a very specialized welder. When they asked us for help, we were able to set up a training center at a local community college in a matter of weeks, and 450 people have been trained as a result. This type of focused training is taking place in communities in every corner of the state. Our new system has allowed us to work with local industry and local workers to bridge the training gap in a rapid and effective manner.

In order to continue our progress, we must keep making focused and strategic investments in our two-year college system.

We will continue to utilize our two-year institutions in preparing our students and workers for the jobs of our growing economy.

Increased Support for our Universities

No state in the nation has achieved greatness without its institutions of higher learning helping to drive the economy. Not only do our universities give our students the tools they need to take advantage of their potential—they also create new jobs and innovative ideas through research.

That is why we have made higher education a top priority by **fully funding every request made by higher education in the most recent budget.** In addition to the tremendous funding we gave higher education this year, we have also made some strategic investments in a number of research facilities around the state. We invested \$12 million in the world-class cancer research center at the University of South Alabama. This center will have a \$1 billion economic impact on the region, will create 700 new jobs, and, most importantly, will give residents of South Alabama a **state of the art healthcare facility in their back yard.**

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We also invested \$10 million in Auburn University's new Research Park. This investment will be used to develop new ideas and new partnerships, both public and private, that will give residents clean, high paying, non-exportable jobs.

The University of Alabama at Birmingham has truly become a shining star for our state. It has attracted some of the world's finest researchers and has gained an international reputation for the quality of its work. This year, I recommended investing \$50 million into biomedical research at UAB. Unfortunately, some politically motivated legislators killed the plan during budget negotiations. This investment could have strengthened Birmingham's position as a center for research excellence and forever transformed the area's economy.

The only way for us to continue to compete in the coming years is to continue creating a knowledge-based economy through our existing research infrastructure.

We will continue to expand investments in our institutions of higher learning, including comprehensive and strategic investments in our research institutions.