



STATE OF ALABAMA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Joseph B. Morton
State Superintendent
of Education

January 5, 2009


Alabama
State Board
of Education

MEMORANDUM

Governor Bob Riley
President

TO: City and County Superintendents of Education
High School Principals

Randy McKinney
District I
Vice President

FROM: Joseph B. Morton 
State Superintendent of Education

Betty Peters
District II

RE: FIRST CHOICE Implementation Guide

Stephanie W. Bell
District III

On December 11, 2008, the State Board of Education adopted a resolution accepting the FIRST CHOICE Implementation Guide. A copy of the resolution and the Implementation Guide are enclosed for your reference.

Dr. Ethel H. Hall
District IV
Vice President
Emerita

As you are aware, the academic requirements within FIRST CHOICE become effective for the ninth grade class of 2009. The accompanying components of Credit Recovery, Credit Advancement, and the Credit-Based Endorsement to the Alabama High School Diploma are options for the local school system.

Ella B. Bell
District V

Also included within the FIRST CHOICE Implementation Guide is a focus on incorporating the Making Middle Grades Work framework in our middle school programs across the state.

David F. Byers, Jr.
District VI

Along with our other proven initiatives, I am confident that the goal of producing higher numbers of high school graduates who are college- and/or career-ready will be realized.

Sandra Ray
District VII

Should you have any questions as we move toward implementation, please direct those questions to Dr. Tommy Bice, Deputy State Superintendent of Education. Dr. Bice can be reached at 334-242-8154 or by via e-mail at tbice@alsde.edu.

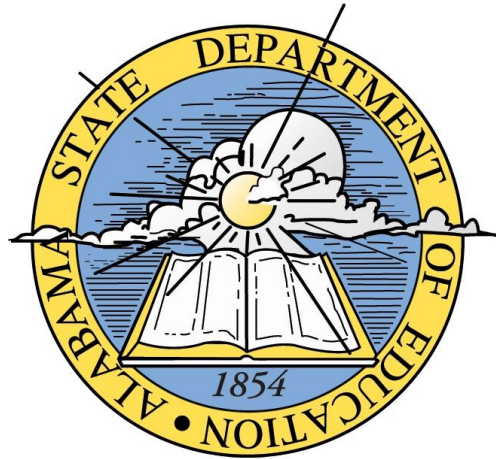
Dr. Mary Jane Caylor
District VIII
President Pro Tem

JBM:TRB:LAK

Enclosures

Joseph B. Morton
Secretary and
Executive Officer

FY09-2070



FIRST CHOICE

Implementation Guide

2009-2010

FIRST CHOICE Planning Committee Members

- Teresa Boody, World Language Teacher, Shelby County Schools
- Jennifer Box, Assistant Principal, Tuscaloosa City Schools
- Cynthia C. Brown, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, State Department of Education
- Laura Casey, Board Member, Albertville City Schools
- Don Cox, Alabama High School Athletic Association
- Carol Crawford, Education Administrator, State Department of Education
- Tyna Davis, Manager, Education Policy and Professional Practice, Alabama Education Association
- Mark Dixon, Policy Analyst to Governor Bob Riley
- Joe Evans, Alabama High School Athletic Association
- Pam Fossett, Director, Education Policy and Professional Practice, Alabama Education Association
- Jeff Goodwin, Superintendent, Oxford City Schools
- John Henry Heard, III, Superintendent, Perry County Schools
- Pam T. Henson, Instructional Support Director, Baldwin County Schools
- Lynn Hollis, Distance Education Teacher, Trussville City Schools
- Sally Howell, Executive Director, Alabama Association of School Boards
- Linda B. Ingram, Superintendent, Coffee County Schools
- Donna P. Jacobs, Dean of Education, University of North Alabama
- Gloria Linton, Guidance Counselor, Crenshaw County Schools
- Cathy McNeal, Research and Development Director, Huntsville City Schools
- Martin Nalls, Principal, Hoover Freshman Center, Hoover City Schools
- Caroline Novak, President, A+ Education Foundation
- Jennifer Parsons, Board Member, Jefferson County Schools
- Dorinda Phillips, Career Technical Director, Mobile County Schools
- Mark Raines, Career and Technical Education Teacher, Tuscaloosa City Schools
- Danny Stallings, Principal, Meek High School, Winston County Schools
- Kandis Steele, Director of Academic Affairs, Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education
- Carolyn Lee Taylor, Assistant Superintendent Curriculum and Instruction, Mobile County Schools
- Cindy Wade, Mathematics Teacher, Scottsboro City Schools

Middle School Initiative Committee Members

- Stephanie W. Bell, Member, Alabama State Board of Education
- Ardrene Bishop, Director of Federal Programs, Fairfield City Schools
- Cynthia C. Brown, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, State Department of Education
- Mary Jane Caylor, Member, Alabama State Board of Education
- Dennis Coe, Superintendent, Henry County Schools
- Tyna Davis, Manager, Education Policy and Professional Practice, Alabama Education Association
- Mark Dixon, Policy Analyst to Governor Bob Riley
- Dorothy Dolasky, Education Specialist, Curriculum and Instruction, State Department of Education
- Peggy Duck, Science Supervisor, Baldwin County Schools
- Cathy Gassenheimer, Managing Director, A+ Education Foundation
- James C. Gill, Jr., Principal, Peter F. Alba Middle School, Mobile County Schools
- Janet Harris, Superintendent, Cullman City Schools
- Larry P. Haynes, Principal, Oak Mountain Middle School, Shelby County Schools
- C'Kiimba Hobbs, Principal, Hillcrest Middle School, Tuscaloosa County Schools
- Ray Landers, Principal, Boaz Middle School, Boaz City Schools
- Fannie L. Major-McKenzie, Superintendent, Dallas County Schools
- Jean Heath, Math Teacher, Opelika City Schools
- Margaret O'Neal, Director of Instruction, Tuscaloosa City Schools
- Sandra Ray, Member, Alabama State Board of Education
- Cindy Reed, Professor, Auburn University
- Tim Solley, Director of Middle School Education, Madison County Schools
- Jeanie Solomon, Resource Specialist, Dothan City Schools
- Joyce Woodburn, Special Services Supervisor, Baldwin County Schools
- Camille Wright, Middle School/Secondary Curriculum and Instruction, Madison City Schools

Alabama High School Graduation Requirements

Beginning with the ninth grade class of the 2009-2010 school year, ALL students will have as their default diploma option the **Advanced Academic Endorsement** to the Alabama High School Diploma. The course requirements for all endorsements to the Alabama High School Diploma are presented in Attachment A.

Should a student and his/her parent or guardian determine that the Advanced Academic Endorsement is not appropriate for the student's educational needs, the parent or guardian may remove the student from the Advanced Academic Endorsement by meeting with the student's counselor and completing the Endorsement Change Request Form (Attachment B). This change in endorsement may occur prior to the student entering high school or at logical points throughout the student's high school experience.

Following the spring administration of the *Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE)*, twelfth grade students who have not passed all sections of the AHSGE may choose the **Credit-Based Endorsement** of the Alabama High School Diploma if approved as an endorsement by the LEA and if the student has met the following criteria:

1. Successfully met the academic course requirements as established by the local school system.
2. Successfully met the course requirements for one career and technical education course.
3. Passed the reading, mathematics, and one other subtest of the AHSGE.

Once a student chooses the Credit-Based Endorsement, it will serve as the final endorsement to the Alabama High School Diploma. A Credit-Based Endorsement Request form must be completed and signed by the graduating senior and his/her parent or guardian and submitted to the high school counselor in order to receive the Credit-Based Endorsement (Attachment C).

Included in the newly adopted requirements of the Advanced Academic Endorsement to the Alabama High School Diploma is the requirement that all students will have an **Online Experience**. An online experience for this purpose is defined as a structured learning environment that utilizes technology—consistently and regularly—with Intranet/Internet-based tools and resources as the delivery method for instruction, research, assessment, and communication.

The online experience may be delivered through a **Teacher-Led** online learning experience much like the traditional classroom but led/managed through a virtual environment or through **Blended Instruction** to include a balanced mix of traditional face-to-face instruction activities along with appropriately designed online experiences. This blended format can provide opportunities for students to work outside the classroom in virtual teams with students from other schools or classrooms to learn writing, research, teamwork, and technology skills.

A student may obtain his/her **Online Credit** through one or more of the following options:

1. Take an online course
2. Participate in an online experience
3. Participate in online experiences incorporated into required courses for the Alabama High School Diploma.

For the online experience to be successful and to meet the **Credit Requirements**, it must meet the following standards:

1. Be relevant and address many learning styles appropriate to the task.
2. Include asynchronous and/or synchronous interaction between teacher and student as well as student and student.
3. Incorporate resources outside of the classroom.
4. Meet the *Alabama Course of Study: Technology* standards for Grades 9-12.
5. Incorporate the following:
 - a. **Use** of technology tools for managing and communicating personal information.
 - b. **Apply** advanced software features such as built-in thesaurus, templates, and styles to improve the appearance of word processing documents, spreadsheets, and presentations.
 - c. **Identify** and **describe** various telecommunications or online technologies such as desktop conferencing, listservs, blogs, and virtual reality.
 - d. **Incorporate** a variety of media and formats to **design, develop, publish, and present** products.
 - e. **Collaborate** in content-related projects that integrate a variety of media.
 - f. **Demonstrate proficiency** in the use of emerging technology resources such as podcasting, Webcasting, compressed video delivery, online file sharing, graphing calculators, and global positioning software.

Credit Recovery

School systems may choose to offer students who have been unsuccessful in mastering content or skills required to receive course credit or earn promotion the opportunity to apply for **Credit Recovery**. Credit Recovery study is based on deficiencies rather than a repeat of the entire course. Students who have not achieved a baseline average of 40 or above (on a 100-point scale) or its equivalent on a locally adopted grading scale must repeat the entire course.

LEAs offering Credit Recovery shall develop program rules, regulations, and processes and shall provide them in writing to students, parents, guardians, and the State Department of Education. At a minimum, they must address the following guidelines for admission and removal, instruction, content and curriculum, grades, and credits:

1. Admission and Removal

LEA rules and regulations, or procedures for admission to and removal from Credit Recovery programs, may include but not be limited to attendance, discipline, availability of coursework, availability of space, appropriate progress, and grades. At a minimum, they should:

- a. Require students to complete an application process (Attachment D).
- b. Require parent/guardian consent.
- c. Require students to have earned a baseline average of 40–59 on a 100-point scale or the equivalent on a locally adopted grading scale.

2. Instruction

- a. Teachers of teacher-based programs shall be certified and highly qualified in core academic areas.
- b. Facilitators of computer-based programs:
 - i. Shall be certified teachers.
 - ii. Shall receive training pertaining to course organization, online/computer-based instruction management, and related technology.
- c. Facilitators of online courses provided by the SDE and which have certified, highly qualified teachers shall:
 - i. Be adults approved by the local school board.
 - ii. Receive professional development in online methodology and technical aspects of Web-based instruction.
- d. Content standards and concepts to be addressed in Credit Recovery courses should be determined by measures such as:
 - i. The teacher who assigned the failing grade to the student describing the course of study content standards that were not met by the student.
 - ii. A course and skill-specific diagnostic tool provided by the vendor of the software being used for instruction.
 - iii. A comprehensive school or school system test such as a semester exam, a final exam, or a test designed specifically for the Credit Recovery program to identify unmet standards in a course.

3. Content and Curriculum

- a. Credit Recovery content may be delivered by a highly qualified teacher.
- b. Credit Recovery may be delivered through instructional technology.
- c. Credit Recovery curriculum shall be aligned with the Alabama academic content standards approved by the Alabama State Board of Education.

4. Grades

- a. LEAs are responsible for establishing specific uniform procedures for evaluation of student progress and awarding of final grades in Credit Recovery programs not to exceed a final score of 70 on a 100-point scale.
- b. Options available for Credit Recovery programs include the following:
 - i. LEAs shall establish a grading formula that may or may not include the original failing grade in the calculation of the final credit recovery grade.
 - ii. LEAs may choose the option of grade forgiveness in which an original grade of F may be replaced with a grade of D or C dependent upon the student's performance in Credit Recovery.
 - iii. The Credit Recovery grade will be included in computing the student's overall Grade Point Average.

A sample Credit Recovery Plan, with all required forms and components, is available for use by LEAs in development of their individual school Credit Recovery Plan. This sample plan can be found on the State Department Web site under the Curriculum and Instruction Section.

Credit Advancement

School systems may choose to offer students who exhibit proficiency beyond the level required for all students for an individual course the opportunity to pursue **Credit Advancement** as an alternative to the traditional Carnegie Unit approach to course completion if offered by the local school system. For a student to be eligible for Credit Advancement he/she must:

1. Be recommended by a current or former teacher of the subject/course being considered for Credit Advancement.
2. Have criterion-referenced or norm-referenced test scores that support an above grade-level proficiency of content in the subject/course being considered for Credit Advancement.
3. Complete a Request for Credit Advancement form, signed by the parent or guardian, the high school counselor, and high school principal (Attachment E).

Credit Advancement may occur in the following two ways:

1. The student may request to take an **End-of-Course Assessment** covering all of the standards of the course. A mastery score of 80 or above must be obtained to receive credit for the course through Credit Advancement, and this score will be included in the student's overall Grade Point Average.
2. The student may show **Proficiency** during a course and request permission to work ahead through independent and teacher-supported assignments or through online opportunities. At a point jointly agreed upon by the student and teacher of record, the student will be administered the end-of-course assessment, and if he/she obtains a proficiency score of 80 or above, the student may move forward into the next course in the sequence of that content area. This situation would offer an opportunity for the student to pursue online options or other LEA-developed options for individualized independent study.

During the 2009-2010 school year volunteering school systems will pilot Credit Advancement to determine final guidelines for future implementation across the state.

During this same time end-of-course assessments will be developed for all core academic courses, World Languages, and selected career and technical courses.

Alabama Middle School Initiative

In order to support the increased academic requirements at the high school level, the **Alabama Middle School Initiative** will be expanded simultaneously for the purpose of developing, implementing, evaluating, and refining a comprehensive, whole-school improvement effort that will assist all middle grade students to receive a high-quality, challenging, and appropriate education that prepares them for success in college and career-level courses in high school.

The Alabama Middle School Initiative will use as its base the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) **Making Middle Grades Work** framework.

This comprehensive framework sets forth the following overarching goals:

1. To increase the percentage of eighth-graders who perform at the proficient level in academic subjects.
2. To provide educational experiences that will close the gaps and increase students' knowledge and skills in reading, mathematics, language arts, science, and social studies.
3. To provide students with opportunities to apply their skills in the fine arts and to explore careers and new technology.

More specifically, the academic expectations for all middle schools will be as follows:

Mathematics: By the end of Grade 8, all students will pass a pre-algebra proficiency test and be able to use algebra skills to solve problems or they will complete Algebra I satisfactorily.

Science: All students will use the scientific process, mathematical analysis, and engineering design to pose questions, seek answers, and develop solutions in physical, life, and earth/space science courses. These classes will incorporate laboratory and technology experiences. Students will design, conduct, analyze, and give oral and written descriptions of scientific investigations.

Reading: All students will demonstrate an overall understanding of eighth-grade material. They will read a minimum of 25 to 30 books or the equivalent across the curriculum each year and will apply various strategies while reading independently to learn in all content areas. They will be able to synthesize, analyze, and formulate crucial opinions from the text.

Language Arts: By the end of Grade 8, students will be able to find, organize, and report information using correct, effective language skills as they communicate in various formats for different audiences and purposes. Students will complete short writing assignments weekly and major reports once a semester and will write research papers to standards that indicate readiness for college-preparatory English in high school.

Social Studies: By the end of Grade 8, students will be able to describe their heritage, their government, the world in which they live, and key economic principles by studying issues of the past, present, and future. They will be able to assess geography's influence on economic, social, and political development.

In addition, the following components will be implemented in all of Alabama's middle schools:

1. An **Advisement Program** through which **ALL** students will have an adult mentor/advisor. A framework for the advisement program will be developed by a representative stakeholder group for implementation beginning with the 2009-2010 school year.
2. A prescriptive reading program for middle grade students reading below grade level. This effort will be provided through the expansion of the **ARI-Adolescent Literacy Program** over the next three years.

It is the goal of the Alabama Middle School Initiative that all middle schools will have had the opportunity to participate in the Making Middle Grades Work initial assessment by the end of the 2012 school year.

ALABAMA HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

The Alabama High School Diploma

The Alabama High School Diploma requires the passing of 24 credits of coursework—Mathematics (4), Science (4), Social Studies (4), English (4), Computer Applications (0.5), Physical Education (1), Health Education (0.5), Arts Education (0.5), and Electives (5.5). It also requires the passing of 5/5 sections of the AHSGE. An Alabama High School Diploma may have no endorsement or any one of the four endorsements listed below:

ENDORSEMENT	REQUIREMENTS
Advanced Academic Endorsement	Requires passing all standard coursework including Algebra II with Trig., two foreign languages, and an online experience and passing 5/5 sections of the AHSGE.
Advanced Career and Technical Endorsement	Requires passing the same coursework as the Advanced Academic Endorsement with the exception of foreign language and passing three career and technical courses (or two career and technical courses and another course related to the student's career choice). In addition, 5/5 sections of the AHSGE also must be passed.
Career and Technical Endorsement	Requires passing all standard coursework, passing three career and technical courses, and passing 5/5 sections of the AHSGE.
Credit-Based Endorsement	Requires passing all standard coursework and passing 3/5 sections of the AHSGE, including Reading, Mathematics, and one other section.

A diploma with or without an endorsement signifies completion of high school and all requirements associated with the awarding of the diploma by the Alabama State Board of Education.

The Alabama Occupational Diploma

The Alabama Occupational Diploma (AOD) is achieved through the standard curriculum or an alternative that is aligned with the Alabama courses of study. The recipients of this diploma are students with some form of learning disability. Those who receive the AOD must take the AHSGE but are not required to pass in order to receive the Alabama Occupational Diploma.

