

SOUTHWEST ALABAMA

3 school systems miss reading goals

By **CONNIE BAGGETT**
Staff Reporter

High school students' reading scores in Clarke, Choctaw and Washington counties fell below state standards, while five other southwest Alabama school systems were in the clear. "We did pretty good," said Clarke County Schools Superintendent Woodie E. Pugh, "but we've got some areas for improvement." Clarke County's testing coordinator, Julia Ann Deas, said there were success stories for the system, citing Jackson Intermediate School and the kindergarten-through-second-grade Joe M. Gillmore Elementary. Both recorded passing grades, making it off the list of schools needing improvement and into the clear. Jackson High School and Clarke County High, however, failed to meet the standards — known as AYP, or Adequate Yearly Progress — in reading.

"We are working on a plan of action for those schools," Deas said, "and we need to find out why the students could pass AYP reading in eighth grade, but are now failing in 11th." Every year, states rate their schools in accordance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act. To meet standards, a certain number of students in each grade must pass standardized reading and mathematics tests, and schools must also meet certain attendance and graduation rates. Students in all demographic groups must meet the standards, or the entire school misses the mark. If enough schools within a system have problems, the entire system can fail. Deas said scores for special education students pose a challenge, with added focus on strategies for those students in development. Some school leaders said the reading component for

11th-grade students, with scores taken from graduation exams, has been difficult to meet. Special education students take the same Alabama High School Graduation Exam as regular students.

Choctaw County Schools had failing scores overall in reading, and Washington County Schools failed to meet AYP because of special education scores at Washington County High.

Bright spots included Brewton and Thomasville city schools, with goals met in all areas. Conecuh County Schools made AYP goals, but had failing scores in reading for students in grades 6 through 8.

Monroe County Schools made overall AYP goals, too, but special education students in grades 3 through 5 failed in reading and math.

Escambia County made overall AYP goals, but high school reading scores and graduation rates marred the report.

"I think we did really well," said Escambia County Superintendent Billy Hines. "We did have problems with graduation rates at W.S. Neal (High School) and Flomaton High."

Hines said elementary schools did well, but graduation rates at the two schools fell a few points shy of the 90 percent goal.

"We are closing in, and hope those rates will climb during the next year," Hines said. He cited the state's move to increase the drop-out age to 17, and toward in-school credit programs as incentives for students to stay in school.

"We have some positive things going on," Hines said. "The system as a whole is in the clear."

Calls to superintendents in Conecuh, Choctaw, Monroe and Washington counties were not returned Monday.

Public school yearly accountability reports

Goals met: Depending on student makeup, a school can have between five and 37 goals. The school must meet each goal to make AYP.

The Alabama Department of Education has posted reports on all of its 1,376 schools. The reports show whether each school met state standards, known as Adequate Yearly Progress. To access a school's report, go to the department's Web site at www.alsde.edu. Click on "Accountability Reporting," then on "Click here to begin Accountability Reporting System." Here's a sample report and how to read it.

Daphne High School

Reading				
Did Not Make AYP	Percent Participation Goal = 95%	Met Participation Goal	Proficiency Index Goal = 0.00	Met Proficiency Goal
Not in School Improvement				
All Students				Yes
Special Education	97	N/A	-37.67	N/A
American Indian / Alaskan Native	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
Asian / Pacific Islander	~	N/A	~	N/A
Black	98	Yes	-11.00	No
Hispanic	~	N/A	~	N/A
White	100	Yes	10.11	Yes
Limited English Proficient	~	N/A	~	N/A
Free / Reduced Meals	100	Yes	-16.43	No

Mathematics				
Made AYP	Percent Participation Goal = 95%	Met Participation Goal	Proficiency Index Goal = 0.00	Met Proficiency Goal
Not in School Improvement				
All Students	99	Yes	16.16	Yes
Special Education	97	N/A	-22.00	N/A
American Indian / Alaskan Native	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
Asian / Pacific Islander	~	N/A	~	N/A
Black	98	Yes	3.17	Yes
Hispanic	~	N/A	~	N/A
White	100	Yes	19.89	Yes
Limited English Proficient	~	N/A	~	N/A
Free / Reduced Meals	100	Yes	-5.43	Yes

Additional Academic Indicator: Graduation Rate		
Made AYP	Graduation Rate Goal = 95%	Met Additional Academic Indicator
Not in School Improvement		
All Students	95%	Yes

Attendance/Graduation: Elementary and middle schools must have an average daily attendance of 95 percent. High schools need a graduation rate of 90 percent or to show improvement from the previous year.

Demographics: Test scores are broken down by race, economic background and other factors to show whether all groups are meeting the goals.

Test participation: Ninety-five percent of the students must take the test.

Test proficiency: Positive numbers indicate students performed well on the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (elementary and middle schools) or the Alabama High School Graduation Exam.

Source: Alabama Dept. of Education
Press-Register graphic

How does the state rate those schools?

By **RENA HAVNER PHILIPS**
Staff Reporter

Here are the answers to some frequently asked questions about Alabama's annual school ratings:

How does Alabama rate its schools? The rating is based on three key criteria: test scores, test participation and either daily attendance or graduation rate. For a school to receive a favorable rating, (1) students must perform well on standardized tests; (2) 95 percent of a school's students must take the test; (3) in elementary and middle schools, at least 95 percent of the students must attend school daily; high schools must have a graduation rate of at least 90 percent (or show improvement).

What tests does the state use? The Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test is given to third-through eighth-graders. Eleventh-grade scores on the math and reading portions of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam are used for high schools. The tests were administered in the spring.

What is Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)? The federal No Child Left Behind Act requires that all students perform at their grade level by 2014. To achieve that, Alabama has established a set of goals for all schools to reach annually, known as AYP. Depending on student demographics, schools are assigned a certain number (between five and 37) of

How many must pass?

For a school to meet state standards, a certain number of students must pass standardized reading and math tests. The numbers increase in specific grades every year until 2014, when 100 percent must pass. Here is a breakdown of the percentages required to pass the tests in 2009 compared with 2008.

Grade	2008	2009
Reading (%)		
Third	77	81
Fourth	77	77
Fifth	77	81
Sixth	81	81
Seventh	68	74
Eighth	59	59
11th	86	86
Math (%)		
Third	68	74
Fourth	72	72
Fifth	65	71
Sixth	56	56
Seventh	49	57
Eighth	55	63
11th	77	77

Source: Alabama Dept. of Education
Press-Register graphic

goals to reach. Schools that are more diverse have more goals. Schools must reach 100 percent of those goals to meet AYP, meaning students of all races and backgrounds have succeeded.

Do the goals change each year? Yes. More students must pass the standardized tests each year, and the number who must pass varies by

grade level. Designed to increase to 100 percent by 2014, the passing requirements are on sliding scales, based on how many students passed in 2001.

When does a school not meet AYP? If students in any demographic group — including groups based on race, economic background, special education status and other factors — score low on the tests or do not have a participation rate of at least 95 percent, then the entire school fails to meet AYP. A school also does not meet AYP if its overall attendance or graduation rate is lower than the state requirement.

What happens when a school fails to meet AYP? Schools that get federal Title I money — available to schools where at least half of students are considered low income — are placed on a state's "needs improvement" list if they do not meet AYP for two years in a row. Students may transfer out of those schools into better-performing schools. Non-Title I schools do not suffer consequences for failing to make AYP.

How does a school get off the "needs improvement" list? By meeting AYP for two years in a row.

Where can I get more information about my child's school? From the school or from the Alabama Department of Education's Web site: www.alsde.edu. Click on "Accountability Reporting."

Charges may fall

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Wettermark emphasized the city's battle with public urination in Bienville Square, which he described as a serious problem. In the context of the ongoing complaints, Wettermark said, "The officer did absolutely what he should have done."

Still, Wettermark said that the city prosecutor's office hadn't yet heard Battle's story firsthand or spoken with her lawyer, who is Jay Casey.

Asked point-blank if the charges might be dropped, Wettermark said: "We'll see."

Battle was arrested after a police cadet saw her run into bushes next to the park's one-room police station and begin to urinate.

Battle has said that she struggles with an incontinence problem.

She said that she felt an emergency coming on while she was in her bank, which is across the street from Bienville Square, but employees told her there was no restroom available to the public.

She was heading for the public restroom on the other side of the park, she said, but couldn't make it, so she tried to hide in the bushes.

She was booked into Mobile County Metro Jail after her arrest, and released on \$500 bail.

Casey said Monday that the city would almost certainly drop the charges rather than take his client, who will turn 82 before her Sept. 15 court date, to court in a highly visible and potentially ugly trial.

"We are not pleading her guilty to anything," Casey said. "There's no question; it's nonnegotiable."

Capital sought

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"People have not panicked, because they know they can get their money out and that their money is insured for up to \$250,000 for individual accounts by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp."

Colonial is the second-largest bank based in the state, with \$26 billion in assets and 4,300 employees at 350 branches in five Southern states. It has been hamstrung by skyrocketing unpaid loans from homebuilders in Florida who ran out of buyers and couldn't repay the money they borrowed.

Even with the losses, Beville said the company has more than enough money to continue operating and is concentrating on finding a merger or acquisition partner, or an investor willing to inject fresh capital.

"That is where our energy is focused," said Beville, who took over last month as chief executive officer for founder and Auburn University trustee Bobby Lowder, who resigned under pressure from regulators after shares lost 92 percent of their value in a 12-month period. "We obviously can't guarantee anything, but we hope and intend to do so by Sept. 30."

Colonial, founded in 1981, said Friday a deal for Florida mortgage broker Taylor Bean & Whitaker and others to invest \$300 million for a 75 percent stake collapsed under the weight of due diligence required by bank regulators. The parties agreed to walk away, and Colonial paid no break-up fee, said Beville, a Colonial director who has taken leave from his Mobile insurance brokerage to serve at the helm.

Beville said a Colonial Bank branch in Orlando received a federal search warrant Monday. He said it relates only to the company's mortgage lending operation, and not the general bank or publicly traded holding company.

Colonial is the largest nationwide lender to brokers who go out and find mortgage customers and then rely on a bank to lend the money, accounting for 20 percent of mortgages nationwide, according to company figures.

No transfers set

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A school must then meet standards two years in a row to halt the transfers.

Statewide, 52 schools must offer transfers this year. That's down from 73 in 2008.

Typically, fewer than 200 Mobile County students took advantage of the transfers. Students who have made such transfers will be allowed to stay at their current school, said system spokeswoman Nancy Pierce, but the school district will no longer pay for the busing.

Joe Toomey, principal of Denton Middle off Azalea Road, said his faculty sought out 90 struggling students to help bring up their test scores, providing reading and math intervention after school and on Saturdays.

"When a kid doesn't know how to punt, you do it until they master it," Toomey said.

He said they also changed the "culture and security of

our building. ... It had not been safe before."

The school dropped from 50 fights a couple of years ago to seven this past year, he said.

Sonya Floyd, principal of Chastang Middle in Trinity Gardens, said her school focused on literacy to get off the list. She said the school provided professional development for teachers and had a full-time literacy coach. Plus, she said, they received a lot of support from the parents.

Merrier Jackson, principal at Mae Eanes Middle in Mayville, said being removed from the transfer list is a big boost for the school and students. "For so long, there was almost an institutionalized mindset," Jackson said. "The students didn't try. They didn't think it would make a difference. But the potential was always there."

(Staff Reporter Renée Busby contributed to this report.)

Most hit standards

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Some question the method that the state uses to calculate the rates, especially as other studies have shown that Mobile County only graduates about 60 percent of its students.

The state measurements also illustrate a debate over how scores of special education students should be treated.

O'Rourke Elementary in west Mobile has had some of the county's highest test scores. But the school did not meet standards this year because of low reading scores by special education students. A school must have at least 40 such students for their scores to count against it. O'Rourke, which has 53 special education students, has a large program that accepts special education students from other school districts.

"Of course you always want to make AYP. You want your community to be proud of what you're doing," said O'Rourke Principal Cheryl

ON THE NET

To see ratings of individual schools, log on to the Alabama Department of Education's Web site at www.alsde.edu. Click on "Accountability Reporting," then on "Click here to begin Accountability Reporting System."

Chapman. "We know our teachers are working very hard in the classroom. Our students are working hard in the classroom, whatever subgroup they're in."

Chapman said that if she were given the choice between keeping the special education students and not meeting standards, or sending them to other schools and meeting standards, she knows what she'd do.

"Nobody's going to take my babies. They're the highlight of my day," Chapman said. "If it means keeping my babies and not meeting AYP, then that's the choice I would make."



MARY HATTLER/Staff Photographer

Jill Johnson, inclusion teacher at Baldwin County High School, jokes around in a classroom. Adequate Yearly Progress results were revealed Monday for schools in Mobile and Baldwin counties. The Bay Minette school fared well this year.