

June 10, 2009

To: All Superintendents of Alabama Public School Districts

Re: The Transparency Project – A Review of Alabama’s Public School Districts’ Web Sites

The Alabama School Community Information Network (ASCIN) conducted a review of all available web sites for Alabama’s school districts that were online in March and early April of 2009. The purpose of the review was to look for [34 specific pieces of information](#) (Click the link to view the information for which we were looking).

The “Final Report” is available at [this link](#). The complete review, with all supporting data and worksheets, is available at [this link](#).

It is our hope that you will share this review with your public information officers and whomever is charged with the duty of maintaining your web site. The [“Final Report”](#) gives the details of the study and the reasons it is important to share information through your web site with your school community. We fully recognize that the position of webmaster is often not one that is clearly defined within Alabama’s school districts, and that the current economic situation clearly does not necessarily allow for the luxury of having an employee charged with the sole responsibility of keeping your web site up-to-date. The ASCIN believes that as much of our money as possible should stay within Alabama’s classrooms and not necessarily spent on functions such as webmaster.

However, even with the current economic climate and constraints on Alabama’s school systems, we believe there is a cost-effective way to keep your district web site maintained while offering pertinent and useful information to your school community. We have a number of volunteers with the ASCIN who are willing to offer their services, free of charge, to any school district wishing to create a better workflow or streamline current processes to maintain meaningful web sites. Please contact [ASCIN@ASCIN.org](mailto:ASCIN@ASCIN.org) for more information. We are available by telephone, e-mail, or possibly could visit your school district to help with this process.

Regarding the review itself, it is important to remember that the purpose of the review was to determine what information could be found online by the researchers, without having to make any additional phone calls or utilize other methods of communication other than search engines and links within your district web sites.

Please do not be discouraged if your school district’s web site did not score a high number of “points”. The purpose of the review was not to penalize those districts that did not post all 34 pieces of information, but rather to quantify the types of information available and to determine which districts are posting what types of information. The media is often interested in “points” and “rankings”, but that was not the purpose of quantifying the results.

I have been contacted by two districts wishing to point out that additional information was, in fact, on the site and was missed by our reviewers. We acknowledge that if the information was not “easy” to find, it may have been missed in the initial review. We also acknowledge the possibility of human error, which is possible in any study. We recognize that part of the difficulty in finding the specific information for which we were looking is that there is no standard for Alabama’s school district web sites. We hope that this review will bring attention to this deficiency and that a standard will be developed to allow for easier navigation from one district web site to the next. We encourage each of you to review the results to determine why our researchers may have missed the information, if indeed we did.

The ASCIN will conduct a re-review in September of this year to determine if more information is available online than was found in the March/April review. We acknowledge that district web sites are “works-in-progress” and that additional information may have been added between the time the review was conducted and when the review was published. It is for that reason that we are committed to the re-review in September. Some web sites have been completely re-vamped since the review was conducted. Such is the nature of web sites, and we applaud those districts who are continually seeking to improve their online communications.

Overall, we were pleased with the amount of information available to our online community. We recognize that many districts do not have the resources to employ webmasters, but hope that by offering our services free of charge that we can help to get more information to our school communities to allow them to better engage in their children’s education and become full partners in their children’s school district operations. The ASCIN believes it is these relationships that build strong public support for Alabama’s schools and can best further the education of Alabama’s schoolchildren.

The ASCIN strives to support Alabama’s public schools by providing facts about our public schools and educating our Alabama school community about the qualities and attributes of a strong public school system. We believe that the best practice to build public support for our public schools is to provide convenient public access to as many details as possible about the functioning and the performance of those schools. Posting information online is only one way to reach a community, and admittedly one to which not all community members may have access, but it is an important and convenient source of information for many.

Please let us know if you have any questions about this review. We look forward to conducting the re-review in September and hope to publish the results in mid-October. We will forward those results to you when they are complete.

Thank you for your service and commitment to Alabama’s schoolchildren.

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