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Alabama Governor Bob Riley Expands ACCESS Program to 100 Additional Schools

By Nihit Aurora

The Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators, and Students Statewide (ACCESS) Program is a distance-learning initiative that connects more than 20,000 students across the state of Alabama. Recently, Governor Bob Riley announced the expansion of the ACCESS Program to 100 additional schools. The program is now accessible to more than 20,000 students. Using integrated technology, the ACCESS Program makes advanced-level courses and electives available that otherwise would not have been available to schools.

According to its website, the ACCESS Program links students to quality coursework and classroom instruction online in order to help them complete their educations successfully. It provides a comprehensive technological infrastructure that combines web bases and interactive video conferencing (IVC) techniques. This enables the delivery of suitable coursework developed in accordance with advanced educational models. The ACCESS Program has also facilitated the expansion of the Alabama Research and Education Network (AREN), which works to ensure that all high schools in Alabama acquire broadband capabilities to connect with other public institutions, such as colleges, universities, and libraries.

The ACCESS Program has also introduced the concept of e-teachers working alongside state-certified teachers. Among a broad set of objectives, the ACCESS Program makes available advanced diploma courses, additional programs, dual-enrollment courses, remedial and supplemental resources, improvised current resources, distance-education programs, and various multimedia and technology tools.

Governor Riley first announced the launch of the ACCESS Program in 2005. Pilot classes commenced in 2006. ACCESS Program funding for the 2008 fiscal year is \$20.3 million, and 100 new sites will be eligible for \$8.5 million in funding. Governor Riley plans to expand the ACCESS Program statewide by 2010 and increase its capability, allowing it to serve 45,000 students. The program will also be especially advantageous to rural school systems.