

Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators, and Students Statewide

ACCESS Distance Learning is an exciting new program which delivers high quality high school courses through technology across the state. ACCESS is Governor Riley's education initiative for the state of Alabama. ACCESS provides opportunities for all high school students to receive a quality education. ACCESS gives students in rural Alabama the opportunity to take Advanced Placement courses, higher mathematics, foreign languages as well as English, art, science, history, and many electives. Governor Riley says in his 2010 plan "One of the initiatives I think holds the most promise for Alabama's underserved students is our ACCESS Distance Learning program."

For many schools it is difficult to hire qualified teachers to teach subjects like calculus or Spanish because the teachers are not even available in many rural areas. Even when teachers are available, it is hard for a school system to justify spending money on a teacher for just a few students. Now if even one student desires to take calculus, it can be offered through ACCESS. A computer lab may have 15 students enrolled in 15 different courses. The school system provides a facilitator who oversees the students and communicates daily with the teachers of the online or IVC courses. In IVC classrooms, teachers see the students on the monitors and interact synchronously.

ACCESS provides high schools across the state to share teachers. All ACCESS teachers hold an Alabama teaching certificate and are highly qualified in their teaching field. Both teachers and facilitators must attend training before courses begin.

Previously only two Southern states offer fewer Advanced Placement classes than the state of Alabama. Nearly one third of Alabama's schools are in impoverished areas and many have limited funding. Advanced Placement courses prepare students for college better than any other high school courses. Advanced Placement courses require students to utilize higher level thinking skills that will be needed in college. Studies show that students who take Advanced Placement courses have a greater chance of graduating from college than those who do not take AP courses. ACCESS provides the opportunity for high school students statewide to take Advanced Placement courses online or through IVC.

Three support centers were chosen in the state. The support centers are responsible for hiring and training the teachers, coordinating schedules and calendars of the various school systems, evaluating the teachers, monitoring the courses and making sure that students receive the best education possible. Troy University Support Center serves the southern third of the state.

The pilot programs for ACCESS were made possible through federal grant and state funding. Expansion sites have also been funded through grants. All Alabama high schools have the option of joining the ACCESS program.

Troy University's success with distance learning has been a model for the initiative. Josh Blades, a spokesperson for Riley's campaign said, "We want to take what Troy's done and extend that to K-12 education." The ACCESS program is based on the

SEAL Network, which was created and operated through Troy University and the AOHS operated from the University of Alabama.

Students and teachers can communicate through special monitors and microphones from school to school across the state. Students in rural areas have the benefit of courses taught by the best teachers in the state for subjects which may not have otherwise been available.