FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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THREE SCHOOLS, ONE UNIVERSITY HONORED AS 2015 ALABAMA GREEN RIBBON SCHOOLS

Montgomery, Ala. - The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) is pleased to announce the 2015 Green Ribbon Schools (GRS). The schools are honored for their approach to create "green" environments through reducing environmental impact, promoting health, and ensuring a high-quality environmental and outdoor education.

The winning schools and university are:
- Lincoln Elementary School, Talladega County Schools
- Lincoln High School, Talladega County Schools
- Bluff Park Elementary School, Hoover City Schools
- Auburn University, Auburn, AL

“We are excited to see more schools and, for the first time, a university become Green Ribbon Schools,” said Dr. Tommy Bice, State Superintendent of Education. “Environmental education is an important part of our overall instructional program. We are proud to honor schools who are creating and innovating new ways to teach and learn about conservation efforts.”

All nominated and winning K-12 schools will receive State Board of Education recognition at the May 13th meeting. The Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE) worked in collaboration with ALSDE to nominate Auburn University and will be honoring the university. All schools will be celebrated with a picnic lunch at Eat South Farm in downtown Montgomery provided by the Environmental Education Association of Alabama (EEAA). Green Ribbon Flags, sponsored by Legacy, Partners in Environmental Education, will be presented to each of the schools.

The U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools Program (GRS) is a federal recognition program that began in 2011. Honored schools exercise a comprehensive approach to creating "green" environments through reducing environmental impact, promoting health, and ensuring a high-quality environmental and outdoor education to prepare students with the 21st century skills and sustainability concepts needed in the growing global economy.

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The USDE Green Ribbon School Program recognizes schools that save energy, reduce costs, feature environmentally sustainable learning spaces, protect health, foster wellness, and offer environmental education to boost academic achievement and community engagement. On Earth Day, April 22nd, the USDE will announce the national winners.

Alabama’s previous GRS state nominees include:

- 2014: Brock’s Gap Intermediate School, Hoover City Schools; F. E. Burleson Elementary School, Hartselle City Schools; Homewood Middle School, Homewood City Schools.
- 2013: Munford Middle and High Schools, Talladega County Schools; Fayetteville High School, Talladega County Schools; Gwin Elementary School, Hoover City Schools; Talladega School District winner
- 2012: Munford Elementary School, Talladega County Schools; Winterboro High School, Talladega County Schools; Mill Creek Elementary School, Madison City Schools.

School Information:

**Lincoln Elementary School in Talladega County** is a rural school in the northeast corner of Talladega County. The school is rapidly growing school, serving 843 students in kindergarten through fifth grades. The school is a Title One school with 65% of students receiving free or reduced lunches. Lincoln Elementary is a student centered school that serves as a model for any school with goals of developing potential leadership and actively engaging all students.

Built in 1999, the school received Energy Star Certification in 2009 and continues to be recognized as an Energy Star Certified School. Since that time, the school has maintained an Energy Star Score of 95. The new Media Center, constructed in 2012, is equipped with lighting and HVAC occupancy sensors for security and long term energy savings. Also, the school system received a $15,000.00 grant to equip all of Lincoln Elementary and other schools in the system with occupancy sensored thermostats that will help to continue the decrease in energy consumption.

Lincoln Elementary School is fortunate to have Honda Manufacturing of Alabama as a partner. Fifth grade students tour the Honda Plant in Lincoln annually to learn not only about assembly line production of automobiles, but about the environmental stewardship which is a part of the Honda belief. Honda builds more than 340,000 vehicles annually and has a zero environmental impact. Nothing from the Honda plant is ever sent to landfills.

In 2013, LES earned the Gold Award of Distinction in the U.S. Healthy Schools Challenge. Staff and students made vast efforts to promote proper nutrition and physical activity. LES partnered with Samford University and the University of Alabama-Birmingham to implement the Healthy Eating and Active Lifestyle Program (HEAL) to promote health and fitness at the school. Health and wellness for LES students is also emphasized outside the school day. For the past four years, more than 100 students from first through fifth grades stay after school on Wednesday afternoons to be a part of the LES Running Club. The goal for students is to log 25 miles during running club and then to participate in the Kids Run at the Mercedes Marathon in Birmingham.

Last year, the dream of having an outdoor classroom came to fruition as beautiful and functional gardens became reality. Children travel stone pathways to work in raised beds where they grow vegetables, fruits and flowers in themed beds such as the Sensory Garden, the George Washington
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Carver Garden and the Butterfly Garden. The outdoor classroom facilitates acquisition of science knowledge, horticulture, and ecology while also promoting learning experiences in reading, writing, data collection, health, and history.

Lincoln High School in Talladega County has had two key factors in the last two years that have drastically and positively impacted the pursuit of enhancing a vibrant environmental education program and becoming a leading school community in sustainable green practices. One factor is the robust renewal of an environmentally focused agri-science program and curriculum. A barren ground surrounding the school now has thriving natural landscapes that are being further developed and expanded through classroom projects and studies in not only the agri-science classes but all science classes. The second key factor is the awareness that Honda Manufacturing of Alabama, a large area industry demands a highly environmental friendly workplace that practices 100% recycle in manufacturing. However, recycling is not available for small businesses, the schools or the residents. Therefore, Lincoln High School has taken ownership of this identified need, and has fully integrated recycling and other environmental measures into student organizations, daily habits, and additional facets of the curriculum.

Being an Energy Star School is now meaningful to the students and faculty. Being associated with the Healthier Choice school initiatives has created new physical fitness approaches. The agri-science and science curricula leaders have acquired grants to expand the outdoor classrooms and environmental study areas and student and community interest is exceptional.

There are now numerous environmental study areas evident for everyone to see on the campus that was truly barren just two years ago. Once inside the building, the environmental components are still highly evident with recycling and energy conservation being the norm. Most importantly, environmental efforts are a supported, healthy learning daily practice, not an occasional project.

Bluff Park Elementary School in Hoover City Schools is the original Hoover school. This year the school celebrates 90 years of excellence as staff, students, and families move as one to provide innovative and useful holistic methods designed to nurture students to become “confident and competent learners.” Teachers at Bluff Park are always refining best practices to meet the needs of a new generation of learners. Knowing that students learn more effectively using hands on methods, Bluff Park transformed a weedy lot into the beginnings of an Outdoor Classroom in 2009. The entire Bluff Park staff completed Project Wild and Flying Wild standards with April Waltz in order to gain Outdoor Classroom certification that would help integrate environmental studies effectively.

Being globally minded and locally active are traits of “Bluff Parkers”. This was the mind set of Nancy McGowan’s grade four enrichment class in 2012. Team Green was established due to the intense interest of this unique group whose motto became: “All Hands on Earth”. The class worked in coordination with Alabama Power and Hoover HVAC specialists to follow up on questions students posed after completing a Cool Schools informal energy audit. Students from all grade levels met to disseminate information about the energy audit and plan conservation efforts. Students also worked in coordination with the school PTO to launch the first Outdoor Social family night. Students served as tour guides to educate families and community partners about environmental education in the Outdoor Classroom. Team Green led the entire school to meet EcoSchool criteria in energy, healthy living, school grounds, and habitat diversity to earn Bluff Park the NWF Green Flag May 2014.

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The tenets of environmental education, healthy living, and the school’s impact on the environment are ever present in the K-5 curriculum. Students can begin their day at 7:15 a.m. with Coach Uhlman and Coach Selemian’s “Run Club,” followed by a great breakfast in the lunchroom served by cafeteria staff who set the mark for Alabama schools by becoming the first to achieve the Gold Award of Distinction. When leaving the lunchroom, students recycle plastic milk bottle tops and empty plastic salad containers. Weather permitting, students will be in the Outdoor Classroom studying bugs and micro worlds, releasing butterflies, collecting rock samples, identifying trees and plants, or planting in the raised bed gardens. Language arts classes can be found in the grassy courtyard or by the gazebo writing poetry. A newly refurbished playground allows students daily outdoor time in addition to daily scheduled physical education classes.

Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama, demonstrates its commitment to its role in helping to create a sustainable world through the pursuit of strategies that improve environmental conditions, enhance individual wellbeing, and develop well-educated, thoughtful, and engaged graduates. Efforts to achieve a more sustainable university can be found in the university’s instruction, research, operations and outreach activities, and are being championed by students, faculty, and staff at all levels within the university.

While a great deal of this activity comes from the ground up, the administration has established policies, plans, and administrative units to support this transition toward sustainability. Adopted in 2011, the Sustainability Policy affirms the university’s commitment to sustainability as a core value and guiding principle for operations, instruction, research and outreach. It outlines key sustainability goals, and commits to measuring progress towards these ends. The Sustainability Policy comes to life through the integration of its principles in the university’s many plans, including the Strategic Plan, the Campus Master Plan, the Landscape Management Plan, the Stormwater Management Plan, the Climate Action Plan and the Parkerson Mill Creek Watershed Management Plan. In addition to these policies and plans, the university has also established an Office of Sustainability, housed in the President’s Office, and the Academic Sustainability Programs, which operate from the Provost’s Office. Together these two units help encourage, support and advance sustainability through all functional areas of the university.

Recognizing the rapid progress within the field of sustainability, Auburn also engages with the larger movement beyond campus. As a member of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), Auburn seeks to connect with other universities to both share successes and learn from colleagues. In addition, the university maintains membership in the United States Green Building Council, and is a licensed affiliate of the AtKisson Group sustainability firm, which has been at the forefront of the movement since 1992. Furthermore, the university has joined with other colleges and universities in dedicating themselves to be part of the solution to global climate change by becoming a signatory to the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment. Most recently, the university has partnered with the City of Auburn to participate in the Urban Sustainability Accelerator program offered by Portland State University to identify ways to improve the infrastructure of downtown Auburn in ways that demonstrate and promote sustainable development.

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The university’s successes in sustainability have resulted in a Silver rating in AASHE’s Sustainability, Tracking, Assessment and Rating System, and annual recognition in the Princeton Review’s Guide to Green Colleges every year since 2010. Auburn will not, however, rest on its laurels, but rather continues to accelerate its commitment to sustainability via practice with an eye toward creating the natural, economic, social and individual wellbeing conditions that will lead to a flourishing future for all.

About the EEAA: The Environmental Education Association of Alabama (EEAA) is a non-profit group comprised of educators and professionals involved in teaching about the environment. EEAA is an affiliate of the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE). Throughout the year, EEAA conducts workshops, hosts an annual conference, and offers Members' trips to various natural sites. EEAA also sponsors an annual awards program, maintains free teaching trunks and offers financial grants to its membership.

About Legacy: Legacy is an organization making a difference in Alabama's environment. This is evidenced by the more than $2.5 million in grants and scholarships Legacy has offered Alabamians for environmental-related projects and education. Legacy has trained more than 3,000 of Alabama's teachers about our environment in a fun and exciting way. In turn, those teachers pass the knowledge along to their students. Legacy is educating Alabama's future generations about the importance of protecting our environment for future generations. The “Protect Our Environment” car tag provides money to support their projects.

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