August 10, 2017

**Cause I Ain't Got a Pencil**
by Joshua T. Dickerson

I woke myself up
Because we ain't got an alarm clock
Dug in the dirty clothes basket,
Cause ain't nobody washed my uniform
Brushed my hair and teeth in the dark,
Cause the lights ain't on
Even got my baby sister ready,
Cause my mama wasn't home.
Got us both to school on time,
To eat us a good breakfast.
Then when I got to class the teacher fussed
Cause I ain't got a pencil.

Dear Alabama Educators:

Being a teacher is one of the most challenging and rewarding callings one can answer. I encourage you to remember Dickerson's words throughout the school year, "You can't teach and reach your students if you don't fully understand their lives and backgrounds." As the late educator Rita Pierson would say, "Children don't learn from people they don't like. Children know immediately whether you care about them as an individual."
One of my most powerful years as an educator came in 2000 on teacher inservice day, when my teachers and I took a ride into the community and visited our students prior to the first day of school. We learned that many of our students had no furniture in their homes, some had no lights, and the school supplies we were delivering was the only evidence of learning in many of their homes. Children's faces lit up when they saw their teacher standing outside their home, and they welcomed us in despite meager circumstances. In most cases, the teacher was visiting for the first time with positive news, forecasting a great school year ahead.

That year, instead of teachers driving into the parking lot in the morning and speeding to the interstate afterschool, our staff became purposeful about ensuring that every student in our school succeeded. We didn't accept excuses, as we recognized education was the only option for our children to become thriving adults. We provided pencils and supplies and created opportunities for students to eat dinner and complete homework at school prior to going home to dark houses without adults, furniture, or food. I know all too well the demands placed on us as teachers, but don't let 'Cause I Ain't Got a Pencil' be the situation that determines the kind of year your students will have. We get one year with our students. Let's make it count! Thank you for answering the calling to educate our future. Welcome back to what I believe will be the best school year ever.

Educationally,

[Signature]

Dr. Barbara J. Cooper
Deputy State Superintendent/Chief Academic Officer