

# Alabama Education News

THE ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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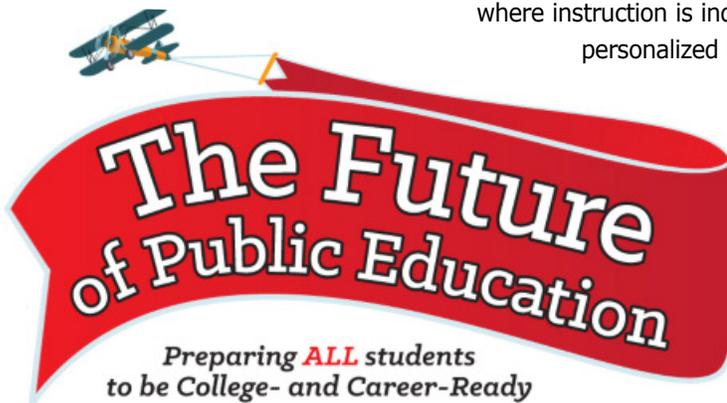
FROM STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION DR. TOMMY BICE

## “The Future of Public Education” Tour Coming to a City Near You!

As we begin the new school year, I want to thank Alabama educators for the work they do each day to prepare our students for the future.

PLAN 2020 is helping to transform our classrooms into learning environments where instruction is individualized and personalized in order to

better prepare our students to be college- or career-ready when they graduate from high school.



We are no longer preparing children to take a test, rather, we are teaching them how to think and solve problems using real-world application. In essence, we are redefining the high school graduate.

**Beginning on Tuesday, August 26, 2014,** I will embark on “The Future of Public Education” tour. In addition to PLAN 2020, the 12-city tour will be a great opportunity for parents, educators, and members of the community to learn more about the Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards, student testing, accountability, and other topics that are reforming education in Alabama.

I will be joined by business and industry partners, representatives from Alabama’s community colleges, and other education stakeholders, as we know how important these connections are to the education system and the local and state economy. Presentations will be made from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m., followed by a question and answer session from 7:00 to 7:30 p.m.

I am looking forward to visiting with members of communities in each of the eight State Board of Education board districts to share first hand the great work educators and students are doing, and discuss the exciting work taking place in the 2014-2015 school year and beyond.

### I hope to see you there!

At right is a list of the tour dates and stops. For addresses, maps of school locations, and other information, [click here](#):

### Tuesday, August 26

Lee High School, Huntsville

### Thursday, August 28

Demopolis High School, Demopolis

### Tuesday, September 2

Opelika Middle School, Opelika

### Thursday, September 4

George Washington Carver High School, Birmingham

### Tuesday, September 9

Carver High School, Montgomery

### Tuesday, September 16

Florence High School, Florence

### Thursday, September 18

Dothan High School, Dothan

### Tuesday, September 23

Tuscaloosa Career & Technology Academy  
Tuscaloosa

### Thursday, September 25

Helena High School, Helena

### Tuesday, September 30

Selma High School, Selma

### Thursday, October 2

Baker High School, Mobile

### Tuesday, October 7

Jacksonville High School, Jacksonville

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## Summer Learning Challenge Wrap-Up

Another summer has ended and full-time, fun learning is about to get started in Alabama's 136 school systems. But the learning did not stop for summer! The Summer Learning Challenge produced some amazing results with thousands of students logging in and learning reading, math, and other subject areas through fun games and tools.



- 517 students pledged to read 3,082 books and 916 students were engaged with weekly math games, both offered by our partner, Lexile, Inc., versus 542 for Summer 2013.
- Over 470,000 questions were answered within the reading and math games provided by Stride Academy. Last year just over 100,000 questions were answered.

For Alabama's students, summer is a time of fun, but those months away from school result in a loss of knowledge and reading ability. The annual Summer Learning Challenge is designed to raise awareness of the summer loss epidemic, share compelling research on the importance of personalized reading activities, and provide access to a variety of free resources to support targeted reading and math summer learning.

Our partner Lexile offered the "[Find a Book Alabama](#)" tool, the Summer Learning Challenge Pledge, and a [FREE email-based math skills program](#) for children who have just completed 2nd through 5th grades.

[Stride Academy](#) offered FREE online math, reading, and science skills video games to all students in the state. [LTS Education Systems](#) offered the Stride Academy game-based learning program, used in many Alabama school districts during and after school hours for fun and personalized learning.

Thanks to our partners! 

## Attendance Awareness Month Encourages Students to be at School Every Day, On Time!

**There's no better time** than the beginning of the school year to encourage students to be in school on time, every day. Last September, there were 604,312 recorded absences in our state. For the entire 2013-14 school year, there were 7,024,152 absences, equal to more than 49 million hours of missed instruction and learning.

[Poor attendance](#) can start as early as kindergarten and continue to affect achievement through high school. Chronic absenteeism is missing 10% (18 to 20 days) or more of school for any reason. Research indicates that attendance is a major indicator for students eventually dropping out of school.

Therefore, September has been proclaimed "**Alabama Attendance Awareness Month**" in support of a national campaign to increase the understanding for educators, parents, students, and community partners of the major impact school attendance has on the success rates, both academically and behaviorally, of our students.

Through "Alabama Attendance Awareness Month" students and parents will become more aware of the crucial need to be at school, on time, every day. The ALSDE will encourage perfect attendance through the use of social media, with information for families. Resources located [HERE](#) offer great materials to help your district. [These free materials](#) can be used in newsletters, websites, social media pages, and other external communications in order to help spread the word and achieve perfect attendance for the month of September and the rest of the year! Posters, videos and other materials are found on the site pages.

Please share ALSDE-related social media posts that you can find on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [Pinterest](#). Also, the [community guidebook](#) with [www.gradnation.org](#) may serve as a springboard for incorporating effective attendance improvement/enhancing activities into your school processes.

Together we can coordinate learning support services and innovative pathways to address attendance as the major indicator enabling poor academic and behavioral success of our students. Let's kick off the first weeks of school with great attendance from all students! 

### ATTENDANCE

in the early grades

Kindergarten and 1st grade classes often have absenteeism rates as high as those in high school. Many of these absences are excused, but they still add up to lost time in the classroom.

1 in 10 kids  
in kindergarten and 1st grade are chronically absent. In some schools, it's as high as 1 in 4.



## ALSDE MEGA CONFERENCE 2014

### Another Successful Event Full of Learning Opportunities for K-12 Professionals

The [MEGA Conference 2014 \(MEGA\)](#) was hosted by the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) recently in Mobile. Over 2400 educators from around the state attended the five-day conference. Hundreds of tweets were posted by educators and ALSDE staff, and they were filled with information and photos showcasing the fun and innovative ideas developed at the conference.

The vision of [PLAN 2020](#) – Every Child a Graduate – Every Graduate Prepared for College/Work/Adulthood in the 21st Century was the theme for the conference. PLAN 2020, the state's strategic plan, was the focus of all MEGA sessions. The sessions were based on the four pillars of the plan: Learners, Support Systems, Education Professionals, and Schools and Systems.



The State Superintendent of Education, Dr. Tommy Bice, and special guest Jaycob Curlee kicked off the conference with a fantastic presentation during the opening General Session. MEGA 2014 offered an array of sessions focused on topics of interest for educators, nurses, parents, and community leaders.

Some favorites of this year's conference were the Behavioral, Legal Aspects and National Board Certification sessions; great presenters; and a helpful focus on students.

#### Comments from the attendees were fantastic!

- ⇒ "I just wanted to tell you how many positive comments I heard from friends who are teachers and administrators about how wonderful MEGA 2014 was. You and your team did an amazing job!"
- ⇒ "First time here. Will be back."
- ⇒ "Wow – what an incredible job in providing such a great learning opportunity for educators across the state. I have followed many comments on Twitter and all were so positive and encouraging. Please convey my thanks to all who contributed their time and efforts to make this a great experience!"
- ⇒ "I have had a great time! Keep doing the same things you are doing."
- ⇒ "The opening performance from the students was such a delight. The performance by Josh was very touching and emotional."
- ⇒ "Great conference! Continue providing family engagement sessions."
- ⇒ "The session on dropout prevention/intervention was extremely beneficial. I am excited about implementing strategies learned during this session."
- ⇒ "MEGA Conference 2014 was a well-organized opportunity to network with others in the state."

**MEGA 2014** provided opportunities for participants to discover innovative and effective instructional strategies, to network with professionals and business representatives, and to refresh and prepare for the 2014-2015 academic year. The ALSDE hopes educators left motivated and with the resolve to make sure that all students graduate college- and career-ready. 





## Alabama Educator Selected for LearnZillion's 2014 Dream Team!

*It's Victoria Whitfield from Autauga County School System!*

Over 4,000 people applied for the 201 spots available on the [2014 Dream Team](#), making it harder to get onto the Dream Team than to get into any Ivy League school. Selected for their content knowledge, grit and humility, these impressive Math and English Language Arts (ELA) teachers represent the best of district, charter, and independent schools in 42 states and four countries (U.S., Singapore, the

Victoria Whitfield with LearnZillion CEO and Co-Founder Eric Westendorf.

UK and Tunisia). Together, the 2014 Dream Team has more than 2,300 years of teaching experience, ranging from 2 to 42 years in the classroom. On June 4-7, the Dream Team convened in New Orleans for **TeachFest**, a unique professional development event where they kicked off a rigorous summer-long collaboration to create high-quality formative assessment tools and resources that will support teachers implementing the Common Core across the United States. Following TeachFest, Dream Team members returned to their respective districts and continued to work in facilitated, online professional learning communities (PLCs). As the 77 returning Dream Team members will attest to, being on the Dream Team is "the best professional development of my career." However, being on the Dream Team is about more than world-class PD and creating great content – it's about being a member of a vibrant and enthusiastic community of educators who are eager to help others and hopeful about the future. 



TeachFest 2014

## Project SEARCH

*Training for Exceptional Students to Prepare for Work and Life*

**Special education students**, when they leave Alabama's schools, often need additional training to prepare for the workplace. Thanks to [Easter Seals of Central Alabama](#) and its program **Project Search Montgomery**, those students are taught important "soft" skills needed for the workplace.

**Project Search Montgomery** is a unique, business-led transition program for students with significant disabilities. It provides high school students with the opportunity to explore careers and develop transferable job skills, while allowing the host placement site,



Baptist Health, a chance to assess or "audition" potential employees at no cost.

On June 23-25, this year's participants participated in a Job Readiness Boot Camp where their functional skills were assessed. Some examples of the fun and intensive training topics were: Attitude, Behavior, Professionalism, Dress/Grooming, Hygiene, Social Behavior/Social Media, Teamwork, Diversity, Counting Money, and Telling Time.

Project Search Montgomery is a collaborative partnership between the Alabama State Department of Education, Easter Seals of Central Alabama, Baptist Health, the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, the Alabama Department of Mental Health, and the Alabama Counsel on Developmental Disabilities.

Project Search Montgomery will be holding an Open House in December and celebrating the graduation of the 11 participants at the end of May 2015. To find out more about how to help a student apply for Project Search, call Melanie Bush at 334-387-3275. 

## Three Schools Honored As 2014 National Green Ribbon Schools

The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) is pleased to announce the state's 2014 Green Ribbon Schools (GRS) have been honored as [National GRS Honorees](#). The schools are honored for their approach to creating "green" environments through reducing environmental impact, promoting health, and ensuring a high-quality environmental and outdoor education.

The selected schools are being honored for their exemplary efforts to reduce environmental impact and utility costs; promote better health; and ensure effective environmental education, including civics and green career pathways.

### The Alabama Green Ribbon Schools:

**F. E. Burleson Elementary School (FEB) in Hartselle City Schools** is one of six schools in the Hartselle City School System. FEB is a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, a 21st Century Community Learning Center, and a Leader In Me school. The faculty and staff at FEB believe the school should not merely focus on test scores, but should provide opportunities for developing the whole child. Learning experiences in sustainability and recycling, paired with an "experiencing nature" approach to learning, not only emphasizes responsibility for our planet and its resources, but also promotes respect for each other while instilling and fostering leadership potential.

**Homewood Middle School (HMS) in Homewood City Schools** is a unique school with a dedicated population of staff, students, and community members that is working to develop a culture of environmental education and green living practices to match the incredible facility. HMS was the only Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) silver-certified middle school in the nation in 2008 and the first LEED-certified building in Alabama. There are a number of programs that have grown and continue to grow in recent years that align with the Green Ribbon Pillars such as the HMS Recycling

Program, community garden, and "The Movement," which promotes healthy lifestyles for employees.

**Brocks Gap Intermediate School in Hoover City Schools** is a new school, but its building is all too familiar to many in the community. In an effort to alleviate overcrowding, the city system implemented a building realignment and "recyclabuilding" plan. At the heart of the plan was a new intermediate school that was recycled from the old R.F. Bumpus Middle School. The three-story building sits on 25 acres in the middle of the Lake Cyrus neighborhood and houses over 800

fifth- and six-grade students. Daylighting is an important component of the school's design. The lunchroom is designed to use natural light to illuminate its space as a way to reduce reliance on electric lighting during daylight hours.

Last year, Alabama had four national winners: Munford Middle School and Munford High School, Talladega County School System; Fayetteville High School, Talladega County School System; Harriet W. Gwin Elementary School, Hoover City School System; and the Talladega County School System. In 2012, Alabama had two national winners: Munford Elementary School and Winterboro High School, both in the Talladega County School System. 



## Ron Clark to Educators: Make a Difference ... Make an Impact

**Thousands of educators from over 12 school systems** serviced by the East Alabama Regional Inservice Center (EARIC) were treated to inspirational messages from two special guests who encouraged them to strive to “do what is right for students” in the coming school year.

**State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tommy Bice** and renowned educator **Ron Clark** spoke to an enthused crowd of nearly 5,000 educators in the Auburn University Arena. The back-to-school event, hosted by EARIC and the university’s College of Education, included teachers and administrators from the Alexander City, Auburn City, Bullock County, Chambers County, Eufaula County, Lanett City, Macon County, Opelika City, Russell County, Tallapoosa County, and Tallasse City school districts.

Prior to Clark taking the stage, Bice told those in attendance that he found it humbling to be in front of the educators who do the work in the state every day. He asked the educators to take selfies to post on social media in an effort to showcase their ability to adapt.

“Thank you for your willingness to be bold. Thank you for your willingness to accept change,” he said, adding that much of the transformative changes happening in classrooms throughout the state is due to the Alabama State Department of Education “turning teachers loose instead of dictating what you need to do.”

“If you have to bend a rule or two to do what’s right for children, we will support you,” he continued. “I believe when we believe in kids and we believe in the people who work with them, great things can happen.”

Bice’s remarks set the tone for Clark’s motivational and often humorous message. Before he began his presentation, he told the group of educators he could “listen to Dr. Bice speak all day” and said “Alabama is lucky to have him.”



The 2000 Disney American Teacher of the Year and two-time New York Times bestselling author kept the crowd clapping and laughing during his nearly two-hour talk, in which he encouraged educators to be passionate about their work.

“I hate that teachers in America want to sit down all day,” said Clark, who directs the Ron

Clark Academy in Atlanta, Georgia. “Why would you want to sit on a stool all day? We set the tone. Whenever you can, you should be up.”

Clark explained that he likens his school to a “Fred Flintstone” bus, and separates the teachers and administrators who keep the bus moving into four categories: runners, joggers, walkers, and riders. “The runners,” he said, “make the largest impact on their schools and students.”

“Why would someone choose to ride or walk when we can run?” he asked. “We only live once. Make a difference! Make an impact!”

He also encouraged the educators to help each other.

“Life is too short not to spend time supporting and

motivating each other,” Clark said.

“Teaching is one of the hardest professions in the world. We are strongest when we are a unit that helps each other and comes together for the good of our students.”

Before departing, Clark challenged

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those in attendance to get creative in their classrooms, and to not be afraid to buck the norm. At The Ron Clark Academy, a giant blue slide connects the first and second floors. He said it serves as a symbol of the school's commitment to innovative, effective teaching. Visitors who go down the slide are dubbed "sliders."

"In life, we often talk about people who are always taking the stairs. I tell my teachers and students that you can't be afraid to slide – to be creative and think outside the box," Clark said. "We are in our prime. We only get one chance to make a difference in

the lives of our kids. I hope you go back to school fired up and that you have a wonderful school year!" **aen**



**Dawson Mack**, Athens Intermediate School, Athens City School System, 2014 "Bring Our Missing Children Home" Poster Contest National Winner!

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