

So, Why Do We Support Taking \$80 Million Out of the ETF?

When the Alabama Legislature put forth a General Fund budget for Gov. Bentley to sign at the end of the Second Special Session, it was not without debate and compromise. Pressured by the looming threat of a state government shut-down, lawmakers put forth a budget that, although inadequate in many ways, kept the state running. Unfortunately, many state agencies took a financial hit in the process – not the least of which was public education.

Make no mistake about it, public education in Alabama is and has been woefully underfunded for years. Any suggestion otherwise is inaccurate. Still, we recognized the state’s financial crisis required extreme measures – and sacrifices – to stay operational, and the education community came to the table willing to help find a solution.

Ultimately, the Legislature transferred \$80 million of Use Tax proceeds (*sales tax on goods purchased outside Alabama, but used within the state*), which are dedicated to the Education Trust Fund (ETF) to support the General Fund, and changed the percentage split going forward for the ETF (47%) and the GF (53%). Prior to



THIS WAS NOT A PERFECT FIX. EDUCATION HAS CLEARLY GONE ABOVE AND BEYOND WHAT SHOULD BE EXPECTED FOR THE GREATER GOOD OF THE STATE.



the change, the ETF garnered 75% of Use Tax and the GF 25%.

Taking money from the ETF to prop up the General Fund, in any capacity, is a temporary solution to a much more perpetual problem. If education must shoulder the burden to keep the state functioning, it had to be done in a way that paid back any money taken from the ETF, now and in the future.

No one wanted to transfer \$80 million out of the ETF, but the compromise made sense for the following reasons:

1. Initial proposals would have removed upwards of \$225 million from the ETF. That would have had an even greater impact and it offered no established method to repay the ETF.
2. Allowing modifications to the Rolling Reserve Act and amending Use Tax distributions will allow for funds to flow back into the ETF. Additionally, some back-fill measures dedicating monies to the ETF adopted in the First Special Session will also help long after the initial \$80 million is repaid.
3. Most importantly, education gets to maintain its autonomy, as opposed to combining budgets.

Here’s how it works. The Rolling Reserve Act requires the state to allocate education money based on a 15-year average of actual revenues. Any money above that cap goes into a special savings account (Budget

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4 Questions For Alabama's Teacher of the Year

Jennifer Brown

Vestavia Hills High School
Vestavia Hills City Schools
District III

1. What can be done to increase the amount of curiosity for science?

I think students are naturally curious. They need opportunities to engage, explore, and experience science concepts as active participants in a student-centered learning environment. The new Science Course of Study allows students these opportunities.

(2) College programs must provide a variety of teaching, planning, and managing experiences in all education classes. Teachers need to plan and carry out real lessons for real students as often as possible before becoming a real teacher.

(3) All first-year teachers should be provided a mentor who provides routine support. Second- and third-year teachers should be mentored in a cohort-type setting, with less frequent meetings. We need to look at schools with strong mentoring programs and use them as models for other schools.

(4) Once third-year teachers acquire tenure, school systems must empower them to become leaders in their schools.

One specific way I would like to support teacher retention efforts is by learning more about a new program at the University of Alabama in Birmingham called UABTeach. This program, modeled on the successful UTeach program at the University of Texas, is an outstanding example of a program that can help with teacher retention. When students complete the UABTeach curriculum, they earn a bachelor's degree in a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) field and certification as a high school teacher.

That means students can go directly into a STEM profession, teaching, or graduate school. Even with all of these options available, 80% of graduates of UTeach programs across the nation are still teaching after five years. This could potentially be a model for other colleges and universities in Alabama.

4. As Teacher of the Year you are not only a role model for students but also an exemplary model for educators. How will you use your role to reinvigorate and engage educators in the work they do for students?

I would like to use my role as Alabama's Teacher of the Year to encourage teachers to open the closed doors of their classrooms to observe, share, collaborate, and reflect with colleagues to create a culture of leading and learning that extends beyond their four walls. Not only are teachers charged with the responsibility of inspiring, empowering, and growing students, but others in the profession as well. I think getting out of the classroom and sharing with colleagues increases engagement and generates excitement among teachers. In fact, I've been fortunate enough to experience this firsthand through our school's teacher-led instructional rounds.

2. What can schools that do not have the financial resources do to offer opportunities similar to schools that do have financial resources (in science)?

The Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI) and Alabama Science in Motion (ASIM) program are great resources for teachers who lack finances to purchase science equipment. Another option might be to collaborate with other teachers in the department in an effort to acquire common supplies that could be shared among a large number of students.

Teachers could also use technology as a resource. For example, a science class might partner with another school via Skype or Google Hangout during a science lab. There are websites like PhET, which provide free interactive simulations in biology, physics, chemistry, and environmental science. Teachers may have to be creative, but hopefully a lack of equipment wouldn't keep students from "experiencing" science!

3. In your role as Teacher of the Year how do you plan on supporting teacher retention efforts?

There is no easy solution to the problem, but here are a few suggestions:

(1) Don't overload first-year teachers with too many extracurricular activities/coaching duties.

Thomasville's WBL is a “win-win” for the Community

Carolyn Drinkard · Public Relations/Marketing · Thomasville City Schools

When the economy took a downturn in 2008, most Alabama schools had difficulties finding jobs for students in their Work-Based Learning (WBL) Programs. This was not the case, however, in Thomasville, a community of less than 5,000 people. Even through the uncertainties of the recession, businesses in this community stepped forth to offer jobs to students. In fact, Thomasville High School has seen demand for the popular program grow each year, and in 2015 placements are at an all-time high.

Local employers have learned that WBL students are good investments. These students not only have the skills employers are seeking, but also they possess the soft skills that make a good employee. In turn, students in work-based learning contribute to Thomasville's economy, pumping over a quarter of a million dollars into the local economy last year. After working and developing relationships with the WBL students, employers and community members have also developed a greater trust and confidence in Thomasville's schools.

"The Work-Based Learning Program is an example of what makes Thomasville great," said Chuck Alford, principal at THS.

"The cooperative effort between school and community affords our students work experiences and training that will benefit them long after their high school days."

Gina Wilson, Director of Thomasville's Public Library, agrees. Three of her recent workers have found college jobs at major university libraries. These students have told Wilson that their work experiences in Thomasville's Library prepared them for working in a college environment.

"We have loved each student who has worked here," said Wilson. "They brought a fresh perspective to our staff. Also, our customers

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— CHUCK ALFORD, PRINCIPAL

”

enjoyed seeing those THS shirts here in the library. I would encourage any employer to use WBL students."

Ernest Curry of Walgreens said that his participation in the program had been a positive experience. "This program has been a God-send for our business. The quality of students that we get is very high. Our customers know these kids, and they have relationships with them and support them. I feel like we're working with the community

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Katie Parrish, a senior at THS, tags jeans that have just come in to the clothing store. Parrish works at Lee's Kloset, a business in Thomasville that supports WBL students.



Haley Amos, a senior at THS who hopes to work in the medical field, works in the dental office of Dr. Randy Walters.



Hayden Megginson interns at Thomasville Elementary School in the Physical Education Department. Principal Dawn Gillis says that the student interns are a blessing for the teachers and students.



Five Alabama Schools Honored as National Blue Ribbon Schools

The **Alabama State Department of Education** is proud to announce the 2015 Alabama Blue Ribbon School winners. The [National Blue Ribbon Schools Program](#) recognizes public and private elementary, middle, and high schools based on their overall academic excellence or their progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups.

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ALABAMA HONOREES:

BEAR EXPLORATION CENTER
MONTGOMERY COUNTY SCHOOLS

CRESTLINE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
MOUNTAIN BROOK CITY SCHOOLS

CLARK-SHAW MAGNET SCHOOL
MOBILE COUNTY SCHOOLS

OLD SHELL ROAD SCHOOL OF PERFORMING ARTS
MOBILE COUNTY SCHOOLS

SHADES CAHABA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
HOMEWOOD CITY SCHOOLS

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Every year the U. S. Department of Education seeks out and celebrates great American schools, schools demonstrating that all students can achieve to high

levels. “This honor recognizes your students’ accomplishments and the hard work and dedication that went into their success,” U. S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said in a [video message](#) to the awardees.

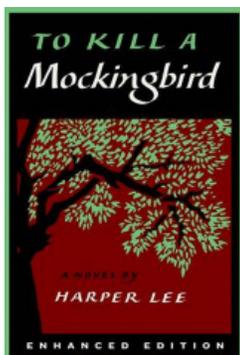
“Blue Ribbon Schools demonstrate how to turn innovation and perseverance into success. We are very proud of these schools and all of our schools that have been named as Blue Ribbon Schools in past years,” said Dr. Tommy Bice, State Superintendent of Education.

The National Blue Ribbon School award affirms the hard work of students, educators, families and communities in creating safe and welcoming schools where students master challenging content. The award flag gracing a school’s building is a widely recognized symbol of exemplary teaching and learning.

The Department will honor 285 public and 50 private schools at a recognition ceremony on Nov. 9-10 in Washington, D.C. In its 33-year history, the [National Blue Ribbon Schools Program](#) has bestowed this coveted award on more than 8,000 of America’s schools.

To view previous award winners, visit the [ALSDE webpage for Alabama winners](#) (since 2012) and the [USDE webpage](#) for all winners.

To Kill a Mockingbird Essay Contest



The **University of Alabama’s** College of Communication & Information Sciences is accepting entries for the 13th annual To Kill a Mockingbird Essay Contest. The contest, open to Alabama students in grades 9-12, was inaugurated on the occasion of author Harper Lee’s 2001 induction into the Alabama Academy of Honor.

The statewide student winner as judged by the College of Communication & Information Sciences will receive \$500 and \$500 will also go to that student’s school. The deadline for submissions is 5 p.m. Tuesday, December 15, 2015. The winner will be announced at an awards luncheon for all participating contestants on February 5, 2016.

For more information or an entry form, visit mockingbird.ua.edu or contact Litsa Rivers at the College of Communication & Information Sciences at lerivers@ua.edu.

\$80 Million Out of the ETF

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Stabilization Fund) for public education that can be tapped if the Governor declares proration.

Under the old law, ALL funds above the cap had to be moved into the Budget Stabilization Fund until the balance of that account reached 20% of the previous year's ETF appropriations. Under the new law, only a percentage of money above the cap will be moved into the savings account. For the first year (beginning FY '16), 2% will be deposited into the Budget Stabilization Fund, and then beginning FY '17 and thereafter, 1% will be deposited until the balance reaches 7.5% of the previous year's ETF appropriations. The tweak to the Rolling Reserve also allows for the lowest year of earnings to be dropped so that if we experience a severe economic slump it can be excluded when factoring the amount in which to calculate the prior year's budget.

In short, the new law adjusts the Rolling Reserve Formula so that going forward the percentage of money going into education's savings account will be lower, yet still adequate enough to allow for more dollars to flow directly into the ETF to be used to meet the needs of our students, teachers, and school personnel. The adjusted formula benefits education funding in future years – assuming no proration occurs. Even then, the adjustment to the percentage being set aside would still allow for funds to be available should proration be declared.

This was not a perfect fix. Education has clearly gone above and beyond what should be expected for the greater good of the state. But as is usually the case, when called upon to do more with less, to make something where there is nothing, the education community stands steadfast with a primary objective that supersedes our financial limitations, and that objective being to make sure Alabama students get the best education possible, thereby preparing them for college, the workforce, or whatever endeavor they embark upon after high school.

ALSDE Receives Principals Path to Leadership Grant

The Alabama State Department of Education

(ALSDE) is one of five recipients of the Principals Path to Leadership grant, a giving program created by American Express and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) to expand effective principal preparation programs and share their best practices broadly to impact education reform.



The ALSDE will receive \$750,000 over a three year period to support the

statewide implementation of the **Alabama Strong: Principals as Catalysts for School Improvement program**. The program will be piloted in the Birmingham City, Bullock County, Escambia County, Lawrence County, Perry County and Selma City School Systems.

"As part of the ALSDE's commitment to an integrated learning supports framework state rollout, 50 districts and approximately 300 principals are currently involved in the initiative," said Dr. Linda Felton-Smith, director of the Office of Learning Supports. The ALSDE's Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports addresses risk-producing conditions that can be barriers to student learning and achievement.

The Principals Path to Leadership grant program launches at a time of heightened awareness of the principal's crucial role in school improvement. More than a decade of research from the Wallace Foundation identifies quality principal leadership as second only to the quality of instruction in school-based factors that affect student achievement.

The five programs—selected from among a targeted pool of more than 70 applicants—will receive a total of nearly \$2.5 million to increase their capacity and impact over the next three years with an eye toward long-term sustainability.



NASSP and American Express will work with the grantees to collect and disseminate effective practices and other informative data in the hopes of reaching more leaders and having a broader impact.

For more information about the grant program and the winners, [click](#).



2015-2016 State Superintendent Student Advisory Council Members Announced

The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) is pleased to announce the students who will be this year's State Superintendent Student Advisory Council Members. The State Superintendent Student Advisory Council is a group of 16 secondary school students who currently participate in their local Student Government Association (SGA). These students will provide student voice to the decisions made directly affecting them in the state of Alabama.

"I am excited to meet with these ambitious and thoughtful students about what they feel is important in their districts and schools. Student voice is invaluable to educators and administrators as we make decisions that affect students' lives and futures," said Dr. Tommy Bice.

Students were selected based on their leadership in schools and letters of recommendation. Over 80 applications were submitted. Judges of the student applications included representatives from the ALSDE, CLAS, AASB, A+ Education Partnership and the 2015-16 Alabama Teacher of the Year.

Council members will meet two times throughout the school year with State Superintendent Dr. Tommy Bice. Members are advisors that act as liaisons between the State Department of Education and the students of Alabama.

Members will gather input from their district on students' needs or opinions on state level policies or directives and discuss at the meetings. Dr. Bice will bring approved recommendations to the State Board of Education at a late Spring meeting. Topics discussed by the Student Advisory Council could include: the school dropout rate, student leadership, communication/messaging, graduation requirements, testing, school climate, and career and technical education.

The 2015-2016 selected council members:

- District 1** { William Tyler Lott – Mobile County, Alma Bryant High School
Morgan Manning – Brewton City, T.R. Miller High School
- District 2** { Jessie Warren – Geneva County, Samson High School
Madeline Armstrong – Henry County, Headland High School
- District 3** { Casey Brumbeloe – Elmore County, Stanhope Elmore High School
Jadaria Thomas – Talladega County, Childersburg High School
- District 4** { Taelor Allen – Birmingham City, Huffman High School
Addie Melchior- Tuscaloosa County, Hillcrest High School
- District 5** – Rebecca Kravec – Montgomery County, BTW High School
- District 6** { Grace Mitchell – Oxford City, Oxford High School
Anna Clay Adams – Albertville City, Albertville High School
Trey Cheatham – Decatur City, Decatur High School
- District 7** { Jacob Burchfield – Jefferson County, Oak Grove High School
Sami Warren, Haleyville City, Haleyville High School
- District 8** { Garrett Little – Jackson County, Stevenson Middle School
Stephen Phraner – Athens City, Athens High School



U. S. Department of Education Approves Alabama's Plan to Provide Equal Access to Excellent Educators

As part of its Excellent Educators for All initiative — designed to ensure that all students have equal access to a high-quality education — the U. S. Department of Education (USDE) has approved [Alabama's plan](#) to ensure equitable access to excellent educators.

Alabama is among several states receiving approval for plans that will aid in eliminating the gaps some students face in access to excellent educators by implementing strategies and innovative solutions to challenging problems that meet local needs. State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tommy Bice said Alabama is committed to improving student outcomes for all students, noting the purpose of the state's plan is to improve access to excellent educators who are highly qualified for Alabama's most disadvantaged youth without decreasing the focus on the need for high-quality educators for all districts, schools, and classrooms.



It is our aim to narrow and ultimately eliminate the gap between the number and percentage of highly qualified teachers in the state's high-poverty and low-poverty schools. Our comprehensive approach will strengthen and maintain teacher and principal effectiveness across the state with an emphasis on our schools and classrooms with the greatest need. – State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tommy Bice



Some of the highlights of [Alabama's plan](#) include:

- Working to pilot "Professional Pathways for Alabama Teachers" — a tiered certification system to provide career development pathways for educators in the state designed to help attract and support new teachers and retain and recognize effective ones.
- Taking steps to increase data-driven decision-making to help ensure that schools and districts have access to accurate, timely information necessary to make knowledgeable decisions.
- Making a commitment to be publicly accountable for meaningful progress in eliminating identified equity gaps by publicly reporting their progress. This public reporting will help ensure that students, schools, communities, and stakeholders continue to have information about the state's progress in this critical work.

In July 2014, the U. S. Department of Education announced a comprehensive Excellent Educators for All Initiative. As part of this initiative, states were asked to create new, comprehensive plans that put in place locally developed solutions to ensure every student has equal access to effective educators. These plans are required by Title I of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*.

All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have submitted their plans for review by the USDE. The USDE is currently reviewing the remaining state plans to determine whether they meet all of the requirements set in ESEA and will make determinations regarding the plans on a rolling basis. The determinations and the plans in their entirety can be found [here](#).

New Security Procedures in Effect

Visitors to the Alabama State Department of Education offices:

On Tuesday, December 1, 2015, the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) began implementation of the Secure Access For Education (SAFE) program, which will add significant security measures for gaining access into Education-related offices within the Gordon Persons Building.

All guests will be required to visit the newly established ALSDE Visitor's Management Desk on the 5th Floor Rotunda for a Visitor's Pass and to be escorted in by ALSDE personnel.



Thomasville's WBL is a “win-win”

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to mold the future of these youngsters, and this is what our country needs to do!”

Mayor Sheldon Day sees the program as a model for a community working together. "Employers realized our schools 'wanted' their input on how to better prepare our children for the workplace and their future careers. Thomasville's WBL program is a wonderful example of cooperation and collaboration to develop a 'win-win' for our students and our local businesses."

The success of the program continues to attract even more businesses. Recently, representatives from the Golden Dragon Copper plant approached Thomasville City Schools about starting a student intern program at GD Copper.

"There are so many great employers in Thomasville that, along with our hard working students, have made this program a success," explained Kay Larrimore who coordinates the program. "The students do what they are supposed to and they work very hard. I have to say that the businesses in our community and our students are the keys to the success of Thomasville High School's Work-Based Learning Program."

The Work-Based Learning Program offers mutual benefits for everyone involved. "We are so excited to give these students the opportunity to participate in this career tech program," added principal, Chuck Alford. "Our community works with us to make sure all of our students graduate and are prepared for life."

For more information about this program, call Kay Larrimore at 334-636-4451.



Recently, representatives from Golden Dragon Copper met with Thomasville City Schools officials to set the foundation for a WBL internship with it's company. (L to R) Randall Fullington, Career Tech Director; Chuck Alford, THS principal; Kay Larrimore, WBL Coordinator; Sheldon Day, Mayor of Thomasville; K.C. Pang, Director of HR & Corporate Affairs at Golden Dragon; Latoya Dixon, Employee Relations/Benefits Coordinator at Golden Dragon; and Dr. Vic Adkison, Superintendent, Thomasville City Schools.

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