



ALABAMA EDUCATION NEWS

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

Dr. Tommy Bice leaves office, but not his passion for children



After more than 39 years of service to public education, State Superintendent of Education, Dr. Tommy Bice, has announced plans to retire from his post as Alabama’s educational leader.

In his more than four years as State Superintendent of Education, Bice has charted a course to improve public education that includes improving graduation rates, increasing students’ college- and career-readiness, establishing rigorous academic standards and meaningful assessments and accountability systems, supporting teachers and leaders to create innovative learning opportunities for students, and advocating for adequate funding for schools and school systems.

Dr. Bice leaves a legacy of his vision to accomplish these things and much more through PLAN 2020, the state’s strategic plan for education reform. Through changes in leadership and election cycles, PLAN 2020 continues as intended, focused on creating a student-centered culture for innovation and creativity while meeting each student’s

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Alabama Second in Nation with Strong Background Checks and Processes

An examination by USA Today of states’ efforts to utilize background check for teachers and other school employees found Alabama has one of the most comprehensive systems in the country. Over the course of a year, *USA Today* gathered the databases of certified teachers and disciplined teachers using the open records laws and asked each state department to answer a series of questions concerning their systems.



Alabama received the second-highest score overall and one of just seven A grades.

“It is a tall order to have such a comprehensive system, but we make it a priority at the

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STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

from front ... individual needs and passions.

"While I may be retiring from formal public education, my work on behalf of students is far from over," Dr. Bice said. "I will return to where my greatest passion lies – working with inner city students, their teachers and leaders to transform not only the educational opportunities for students, but the communities in which they live."

After a period of renewal and reflection, Dr. Bice will join the Mike and Gillian Goodrich Foundation as its Education Director later this spring.

Dr. Bice said the trajectory of public education in Alabama is moving in the right direction and he is certain teachers and administrators will continue to do what they have always done, aggressively pursue



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quality education for the state’s greatest commodity – students.

"I retire knowing that public education in our state is moving forward at an accelerated pace due to the dedicated teachers and leaders who have embraced the policy environment created by our State Board of Education," Dr. Bice said.

"An environment where innovation and creativity are not only encouraged, but expected and supported. At the end of every school visit I take, I leave knowing that a great work is underway at the local level. I see faculties, parents, community organizations and students creating learning opportunities that are engaging and relevant to today’s student."

As he leaves the formal setting of public education, Dr. Bice’s parting message for those in roles that impact public education policy and practice is to truly understand that the measure of success for Alabama’s students and schools cannot be defined by a single test, on a single day, but rather multiple indicators of student learning that embrace the individual strengths and challenges of each student that are often observable only to those who know the student best — their parents and their teacher.

Dr. Bice’s retirement is effective March 31, 2016. [aen](#)

Alabama Leads the Nation with Strong Background Checks and Processes

from front ... State Department of Education," said Corey Martin, the assistant coordinator for background review at Alabama State Department of Education. "Student safety is obviously a top priority – we want our children to feel safe whenever they enter a classroom. Fortunately, the department has been able to devote the resources necessary to make sure that’s the case." [aen](#)

Sources: [Alabama earns high marks on teacher background check system](#); [Broken discipline tracking systems let teacher flee troubled pasts](#)

“To be so highly noted in this report is a testament to the hard work that ALSDE staff employ daily – work performed in order to protect the students that are in every Alabama school. We will continue to monitor every employee of our schools with utmost scrutiny.”

– State Superintendent Dr. Tommy Bice



The Surprise of a Lifetime!

Mobile County Schools Educator Receives Milken Educator Award and \$25,000

The Milken Family Foundation (MFF) and the [Alabama State Department of Education](#) (ALSDE) are pleased to honor Dr. Melody Tucker as the 2015-16 Alabama Milken Educator! Dr. Tucker is an educator at [Citronelle High School](#) in [Mobile County Public Schools](#). She teaches science in Grades 9-12 with high enthusiasm and creative instruction. Dr. Melody Tucker is indispensable to Citronelle High School, teaching everything from regular, Honors, and AP Biology, to Honors Anatomy and Physiology to her eager classes.

[The prestigious honor](#), which was launched by the Milken Family Foundation in 1987, has been described as "the Oscars of teaching" by *Teacher* magazine. Since 1987, the Milken Family Foundation has awarded over \$66 million in individual awards to more than [2,600 recipients](#). Alabama has seen 33 Milken Educator Award winners since 1998.

"Melody Tucker is a STEM leader who instills in her students an appreciation for the sciences and inspires them to excel long after they have left her



class," said Dr. Jane Foley, senior vice president of the Milken Educator Awards. "Colleagues from the school, district and beyond have also drawn on her expertise, broadening Melody's impact.

We are pleased to honor her work with a Milken Educator Award and look forward to following her contributions to education for years to come."

Creating a college atmosphere in the classroom, Tucker uses innovative, project-based instructional techniques to engage her students. One of her memorable tasks involved asking them to create a 3-D replica of a cell, which they presented to their peers, and were then made to defend. Another of her assignments that thrilled them was a full immersion of an interactive biology notebook that she had created.

Dr. Tommy Bice, State Superintendent of Education, said, "This tremendous honor is greatly deserved by Dr. Tucker. Her devotion to students matched with her innovative teaching methods creates a great combination ensuring success from her students. We are grateful to have her as an Alabama educator."

Tucker's use of real-world examples, technology, and labs has led her students to maintain a 93% passing rate at this high-poverty school. Tucker's classroom presence is commanding, and she paces herself to work with all, including honors, regular, and special needs students. To complement her classroom practices, she works with online programs such as Moodle, GradPoint, and ACCESS to help students stay on track with assignments.

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Tucker received her Bachelor of Science in biology with a teaching certification and minor in music from the University of Mobile in 2005. She performed her graduate work in instructional design at the University of South Alabama, where she earned a Master of Education in 2008 and a Doctor of Philosophy in 2013.

"It is exciting to have the work of an outstanding science teacher recognized," said Mobile County Public Schools Superintendent Martha Peek. "Dr. Melody Tucker

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INNOVATION CELEBRATION!

Robotics, 3-D printing, and fun in math class bring learning to life in Hoover City and Jefferson County Schools

The Innovation Celebration visits took an exciting stop in Hoover City Schools and Jefferson County Schools in January, and the Alabama State Department of Education staff members and other invited guests were thrilled to see all the creative ways students are learning!

The day began with a trip to Trace Crossings Elementary School to see the "MakerSpaces Studio." Children were actively learning, building 3-D mini toys while learning coding simultaneously, and traversing designed 'roads' on the classroom carpet with robotic cars. Innovation and surprising ways of learning were everywhere! Dr. Kathy Murphy, Superintendent of Hoover City Schools, then took staff and guests on a tour of the multi-sensory literacy strategy classroom of our 2015-16 Elementary Teacher of the year Minette Wiggins, where students were reading in every corner of the room, even in a redesigned bathtub! Working on sounds, writing skills, 'reading thinking,' and listening to others read are all a part of the work that Wiggins teaches in this innovative classroom.

The next stop was R. F. Bumpus Middle School where a classroom for coding and computer science was designed as a quiet, dimly lit, comfortable space where students could work in groups while creating scripting language known as Python. The students are learning to program figures in Minecraft, a platform used to build foundational computational thinking. The figures move, mine, and build the world the students design. A math intervention class for the middle grades was the next stop for students who need remediation in foundation skills for algebra readiness. Helping all levels of student need is a priority for R. F. Bumpus!

Jefferson County Schools was the second and final system to see in the Innovation Celebration tour, and the visit began with a detailed presentation by the local staff on their programs: Accelerate JefCoEd, the Maker Spaces classroom, and the cooperative Community Connections partnerships, which offer students a world of knowledge found outside of the school.

The next stop was Irondale Community School where, once a month, over 25 clubs are offered to students to try out during the school day. Community partners are an essential part to this project, offering



their time and expertise to club time such as the Home Depot Club where students work with tools and build small projects, which also embodies teaching construction, math, and teamwork. Other clubs include Lego Club, Computer/Robotics Club, Good Character Club, and Art Club hosted by the Birmingham Museum of Art. [aen](#)

New Performance Assessment Gets Positive Reviews in the Beginning Stages of Implementation

The *edTPA*, the first nationally available performance-based test and support system for teacher licensure, complements the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) Plan 2020 goal of ensuring that every child is taught by a well-prepared, resourced, supported, and effective teacher. *edTPA*, developed by Stanford University with the necessary technical infrastructure provided by Evaluation Systems of Pearson, has been field-tested across the nation with over 12,000 teacher candidates and deemed to be both vigorous and reliable.

On September 10, 2014, members of the Alabama State Board of Education adopted a resolution to endorse the concepts reflected in the report of the Alabama Commission on Educator Preparation, Licensure, and Entry into the Profession (ACEPLEP). One recommendation was to implement a performance assessment for prospective teachers. As a result, *edTPA* was selected. Twenty-one of the 27 Alabama educator preparation institutions were represented at an August 2015 meeting hosted by Auburn University during which staff members from the Georgia Professional Standards Commission and representatives of three Georgia institutions shared information about implementation of *edTPA* in Georgia.

On November 12, 2015, Alabama State Board of Education

We appreciate the universities and colleges for their enthusiasm to utilize edTPA in their work. – State Superintendent Dr. Tommy Bice

members adopted a resolution to adopt preliminary *edTPA* performance assessment scores in lieu of one component of the ALSDE's current pedagogical assessment, the *Praxis Principles of Learning and Teaching*, as a precondition for initial certification. The statewide performance assessment will be implemented as a criterion for earning an initial Professional Educator Certificate by the fall semester of the 2018-2019 school year. All individuals completing Class B or Alternative Class A internships during fall semester 2018-2019 and thereafter will be required to document having earned an acceptable score on the *edTPA* performance assessment.

edTPA is now being piloted in Alabama to replace a written test, the *Praxis Principles of Learning and Teaching* (PLT): Grades K-6 or 7-12, as a precondition for initial certification in the teaching fields. Small grants from the ALSDE were awarded

to universities and colleges and can be used for activities such as working with local education agency partners, providing consultants for faculty study groups, helping students to videotape their teaching, and helping to defray the assessment costs. During the pilot phase, a passing score on *edTPA* will allow the candidate to be exempt from *Praxis Principles of Learning and Teaching: Grades K-6 or 7-12*. The pilot has seen successful results in its initial rollout.

The benefits of *edTPA* are seen across the spectrum. Universities and colleges participating have expressed positive sentiments on the use of *edTPA* in their evaluation and program reviews. "We appreciate the universities and colleges for their enthusiasm to utilize *edTPA* in their work," said Dr. Tommy Bice, State Superintendent of Education.

"*edTPA* is one tool teacher educators can use to shape and validate the preparation of future teachers. *edTPA*, along with other measures, has the potential for our faculty to ensure candidates are ready on day one of the job to have a positive impact on P-12 student learning," said Dr. Katie Kinney, Director of Assessment and *edTPA* Coordinator at the University of North Alabama.

With *edTPA*, students must demonstrate they can teach in a classroom – not just know content. *edTPA* allows students to demonstrate more than the theory of teaching; it showcases their ability to teach. The *edTPA* has the same format as the test for National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certification, helping teachers to prepare for success when they decide to begin

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Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards Annual Review **Now Open**

In our constant effort to continually improve outcomes for students in Grades K-12, the Alabama State Department of Education is asking for public feedback specifically related to the current Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards for English/language arts and mathematics. This annual review offers an opportunity for those who are genuinely interested in improving education to offer feedback related to each standard for English/language arts and mathematics by grade.

We hope you participate in the review process of the Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards for English/language arts and mathematics. Your input is highly regarded and invaluable as we seek to maintain the highest level of rigor and challenge for all students in Alabama's public schools.

The public review begins January 11, 2016, and will conclude on March 14, 2016. [Click](#) to begin the review.

At the conclusion of the public review, the feedback generated will go to the state English/Language Arts and Mathematics Course of Study (COS) teams.

The comments that will be considered for action by the teams are those of academic substance that are tied specifically to a standard. The COS teams may then provide recommendations to the Alabama State Board of Education. [aen](#)



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Florence City Arts Instructor Wins Grammy Award



The Steeldrivers, with Gary Nichols at the far left!

Congratulations to Florence Academy of Fine Arts Instructor Gary Nichols of the Steeldrivers. The Steeldrivers won the Grammy for Best Bluegrass Album of the Year.

On Sunday, February 15, 2016, the day of the Grammy Awards telecast, Dr. Janet S. Womack, Superintendent of the Florence City School System, sent an e-mail message to Dr. Tommy Bice and Mr. Jeff Newman, Vice President of the Alabama State Board of Education, and stated the following:

Leaders:

Florence High School--Florence Academy of Fine Arts Instructor, Gary Nichols, from the Steeldrivers, just won a Grammy! Gary teaches at the school on Monday and Tuesday of every week and has for the past three years, impacting the future of Florence's children. This is possible because of the bold move the SDE and State Board made five years ago in allowing districts to apply for an IS2 waiver – waiving the rules to take students to a higher level. We waived teacher certification in the arts as a part of our waiver.

At that time we formed the Florence Academy of Fine Arts and have grown the academy from offering 30 courses in the arts to 116 courses this year. Gary began teaching in the academy in an old classroom with whatever equipment we could piece together. Today, he is teaching in our state-of-the-art recording studio made possible by a community member who caught the vision and a host of music industry folks that Gary knows far and wide.

I wanted you to see the fruits of your labor. You were bold and stepped out to allow us to do things differently, and today our district is making dreams come true for students with a Grammy award-winning instructor! You can't get much better than that!

Please keep believing in us and helping us push the limits into uncharted territory. When you let us out of the box, we achieve beyond what anyone could imagine.

Alabama Students Support of Digital Learning Day



Students and teachers from the Tallassee, Macon, Pike Road, Baldwin, and Huntsville school systems visited the Statehouse recently as part of Digital Learning Day. The groups spoke with members of the Alabama Digital Learning Commission and lawmakers about how technology is enhancing instruction and helping prepare students for college and 21st century careers.

The Alabama State Department of Education, in partnership with the Alliance for Excellent Education, participated in the [Digital Learning Day](#) campaign on February 17. This national campaign is designed to celebrate innovative teaching and highlight practices that make learning more personalized and engaging for students and to explore how digital learning can provide all students with the opportunities they deserve — to build the skills needed to succeed in college, a career, and life.

Through this work and by hosting Digital Learning Week from February 15-19, 2016, Alabama strives to build momentum for a wave of innovation that changes policies, shifts attitudes, and supports wide-scale adoption of these promising instructional practices. [aen](#)



edTPA Implementation

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the process to earn NBPTS certification.

Allyn Lee, elementary education student, University of Alabama at Birmingham, offered the following insight: "My experience with *edTPA* was very valuable throughout my student teaching internship. *edTPA* is composed of four tasks that are centered upon literacy and math. Each task required extensive planning, explanation, analysis, and justification. I strongly believe that all four tasks helped me grow tremendously as an educator. As a member of the pilot group at UAB, I truly think *edTPA* was beneficial in preparing each of us for our own classroom. I found myself constantly having to reflect upon my teaching and explain why I chose specific instructional strategies."

Feedback from the *edTPA*, completed during internships, helps prospective teachers to look at their performance and abilities. Prospective teachers have the opportunity to demonstrate how well prepared they are as evidenced with the preliminary scores. At the time of employment, a standardized statewide assessment helps administrators in the hiring of prospective teachers.

The Alabama State Board of Education is committed to implementing the same assessment requirements regardless of whether a candidate completes a traditional or alternative approach to certification.

Information about *edTPA* is accessible from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (www.AACTE.org). For more information, please contact the ALSDE Office of Teaching and Leading at 334-242-9560. 

The Surprise of a Lifetime

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is a leading teacher who inspires and motivates students to be engaged learners in the classes she teaches. She is most deserving of this national award."

New recipients are invited to join the Milken Educator Network, a group of distinguished educators coast to coast whose expertise serves as a valuable resource to fellow educators, legislators, school boards, and others shaping the future of education.

Recipients are selected in early to mid-career for what they have achieved and for the promise of what they will accomplish. Alternating yearly between elementary and secondary educators, the Milken Awards are sourced through each participating State Department of Education, which appoints an independent blue ribbon committee to confidentially review candidates for recommendation to MFF.

Tucker is Mobile County Public Schools' sixth teacher to be named a Milken Educator. The others are: Jennifer Olewnik of Grand Bay Middle (2013); Stephanie LeGrone, the district's science supervisor who was formerly a teacher at Mary G. Montgomery (2009); Lynn McCain, formerly of J.E. Turner Elementary and Semmes Middle (2006); Mike Fletcher of Davidson High (2003); and Scott Nelson of Baker High (1998).

For more information about the Milken Educator Awards, visit www.MilkenEducatorAwards.org or call MFF at (310) 570-4772. 

Get the ALSDE app!



Alabama State Department Announces **New App!**

A new app will help users to navigate the Alabama State Department of Education website faster and with more ease. Obtaining directions, contact information, and calendar dates can all be found on the app. Quick access to the Education Directory, *Alabama Education News* magazine, press releases, links to social media, and more, are right at your fingertips!

Lee County and St. Clair County School Systems Make Gaston Caperton Honor Roll

The Lee County and St. Clair County School Systems were the only K-12 public school districts in Alabama to make the 2015 Gaston Caperton Honor Roll, the College Board announced recently.

The two districts are among 130 school systems across the U.S. that are being recognized for creating opportunities for traditionally underrepresented students. The districts



featured on the honor roll have expanded access to higher education by providing students with

rigorous academic offerings and innovative college-preparation programs. Districts on the honor roll demonstrate significant and consistent growth in the number of underrepresented and low-income students taking college-level courses and applying to four or more colleges.

There is no application to be on the Honor Roll; instead the College Board looks across multiple data sets to identify recipients.

To be included in the Honor Roll, school systems must have:

- Increased the number of underrepresented students who took the SAT.
- Increased the number of underrepresented students who took an AP course and exam.
- Increased the number of underrepresented students who were on track for college, as demonstrated by scoring 1550+ on the SAT.
- Increased the number of underrepresented students who scored a 3+ on an AP Exam.
- Increased the number of underrepresented students who sent their SAT scores to at least four colleges.



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