



Let's Celebrate Innovation!

A Message from State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tommy Bice

Just a few days ago, at our Back-to-School general assembly, I spoke to the entire staff about a 4-year-old little boy I met recently named Sam. Sam was practicing writing the letter 'V' on a touch-screen electronic tablet and was more than willing to tell me he "had more letters archived" on his computer. Sam is an impressive little boy, but what made him stand out to me was the realization of what Sam is expecting from education in the world he is inheriting. In pre-school, Sam is already archiving electronic documents into files that he can recall with a keystroke. Sam deserves a different kind of education than was status quo 50 years ago.... 10 years ago. Sam deserves an education that pushes the boundaries of innovation and ingenuity.

Moving into this new school year, I want to recognize now through the end of the year as a time for "Innovation Celebration!" Throughout the rest of 2015, we will showcase and spotlight the schools and school systems that have embraced innovation, and encourage all others to do the same. As we all continue the pursuit of a more meaningful educational experience for our children, so many educators in school systems across the state are thinking outside the box, coming up with new and creative ways to deliver quality education. Many have taken full advantage of the Innovation/Flexibility waivers available as new innovation plans from systems across the state are being received, reviewed, and many already approved. Some have made innovative changes that do not require a waiver.

I've long held to the belief that there is no 'cookie-cutter' fix to education issues. Schools and school systems are as unique and varied as the students who walk their hallways. What might be a perfectly logical and sound solution in School A might not be as effective in



School B. That is where the opportunity to uniquely define specific solutions presents itself. I have full confidence in the dedicated professionals around the state and believe that no one knows a school – or what would work best for that school – like the people who pour themselves into that academic environment every day. During this Innovation Celebration, I challenge school leaders to reexamine your primary challenges; reevaluate the way things are currently done to make sure the processes and policies in place are not just left over relics from a bygone time – but are truly the best, most efficient and productive means of reaching your goals.

Each superintendent in the state has been sent a memorandum from my office asking them to look at the innovative practices within their systems and let us know of any original and imaginative ideas that have helped meet their school's goals and objectives. Whether through the completion of an Innovation/Flexibility waiver or not, the leadership and vision that it takes to be a trailblazer in education should be celebrated. We want to use the time between now and the end of the year to do just that. Learning and innovation are naturally intertwined. Any significant change requires innovation and innovation ultimately leads to progress.

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5 Questions For Alabama's Teacher of the Year

Jennifer Brown

Vestavia Hills High School
Vestavia Hills City Schools
District III

1 **What does it mean to serve as Alabama Teacher of the Year and what impact would you like to make?**

It is an honor and a privilege to serve as Alabama's Teacher of the Year, and I am excited about this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make a difference in our profession! I would like to highlight the amazing work already taking

place in classrooms across Alabama and encourage teachers to share with other teachers.

2 **As a science teacher, how do you feel about the Science Course of Study?**

I like the new Science Course of Study for many reasons. First, the new course of study changes the classroom culture from a teacher-centered environment to a student-centered environment. Students will be asking the questions, defining the problems, planning and carrying out the investigations, constructing the explanations, and communicating the information – not the teachers. This is a significant shift for many teachers because it requires students to be active participants rather than passive listeners. With the new standards, students will be able to experience science and not solely learn about it from a textbook, lecture, or worksheet. For example, a teacher can tell students everything they need to know about gas laws in a class period. However, with the new course of study, students can plan and carry out an investigation with balloons to identify the relationships that exist among the pressure, volume, density, and temperature of a confined gas. The lesson may take longer, but students gain a more thorough understanding of the concept.

3 **What is your favorite area of science to teach and why?**

Hands down, it's the physics component of physical science. I can create real-life, hands-on, and challenging lessons for concepts like speed, acceleration, forces, energy, electricity, sound, and light. It's fun when students realize that physics is everywhere and not just in their textbook!

4 **What was your reason for selecting teaching as a career?**

Truth be told, teaching was not my first choice. I actually wanted to be a nurse like my aunt. While in school at UAB as a pre-nursing major, I was asked to help coach the softball team at my alma mater (Pleasant Grove High School). It took me one practice to realize that I loved teaching the game of softball. At that same time, I was fortunate enough to have been taught science courses by two inspirational professors at UAB—Dr. Volker and Dr. Cusic. I was drawn in by both teachers' contagious enthusiasm for the material and their ability to make it relevant. In classes of what seemed like one hundred students, both of these professors always found a way to engage learners. I changed my major to Secondary Science Education, and it was the best decision I ever made.

5 **What do you feel is needed in order to make sure Alabama's students can compete nationally and globally?**

We must continue to push for high academic standards in Alabama to ensure that all students have a strong foundation for their future. In every classroom, we must teach students to be critical thinkers, problem solvers, collaborators, and digital citizens to help them succeed in the real world. Additionally, I think we should challenge students to be risk-takers and to live on the edge of learning. Many students are scared of challenges because they don't want to disappoint their teachers and parents or receive a bad grade. We need to cultivate schools and classrooms that encourage risk-taking, embrace confusion, promote a productive struggle, and allow time to correct mistakes. Learning should be focused on continuous growth and mastery and not just a test score or a report card grade. All these factors combined should aid Alabama students in competing nationally and globally.

Look for five more questions next month!

Nominations for Green Ribbon Schools

The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) is proud to partner with the U. S. Department of Education to nominate up to three public schools, one private school, one school district, and one college or university for the 2016 Green Ribbon Schools Award. Alabama was honored to have four national winners of the 2015 Green Ribbon Schools Award: Bluff Park Elementary School, Hoover City Schools; Lincoln Elementary School and Lincoln High School, Talladega County Schools; and Auburn University.

This award recognizes a comprehensive approach to greening schools that incorporates environmental learning with improving environmental and health impacts. Becoming a U. S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School is a two-step process. **The first step is to complete and submit the application form to the ALSDE no later than December 22, 2015.** The Alabama Green Ribbon Schools Advisory Committee will review the applications to select up to



three public schools, one private school, one school district, and one college or university with exemplary green school practices. The second step of the process requires the ALSDE to complete nomination packets to add to the applications of the selected schools to be reviewed by the U.S. Department of Education.

Resources and additional applications may be obtained [HERE](#). The ALSDE will host monthly Webinars to assist schools in the completion of the applications. Dates and times of the Webinars can be found on the application cover sheet and the above Web site. If you have any questions regarding the application process or require assistance in completing the application, contact Mrs. Shirley J. Farrell at (334) 242-8317 or sfarrell@alsde.edu, or Mrs. Martha Anne Allison at (334) 353-1258 or mallison@alsde.edu.

Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching Program

Announcing the launch of the 2016-2017 Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching (DA) Program [Online Application](#) for K-12 teachers!

- Are you a U.S.:
- Primary and/or Secondary Classroom Teacher?
 - Guidance Counselor?
 - Curriculum Specialist?
 - Curriculum Head?
 - Talented and Gifted Coordinator?
 - Special Education Coordinator?
 - Media Specialist/Librarian?

You may be eligible to participate in a unique international professional development opportunity for 3-6 months through the Fulbright Program!

By conducting educational research abroad, U.S. teachers gain new skills, learn new instructional methods and assessment methodologies, and share best practices with international colleagues and students. Teachers may travel to: Botswana, Chile, Finland, India, Israel, Mexico, Morocco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Palestinian Territories, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and Vietnam.

**Countries are still pending and may change. Please visit the program [website](#) for updates.*

[CLICK HERE TO START YOUR APPLICATION TODAY!](#) • Application deadline: **November 4, 2015**

[Eligibility Requirements](#). This program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and is administered by the Institute of International Education.



2015 MEGA Conference Achieves Record-Breaking Attendance

More than 3,000 educators from across the state gathered in Mobile

for the 2015 MEGA Conference, making it the highest attended conference in the event's 17-year history!

Hosted by the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE), the weeklong conference brought together local, state, and nationally known speakers from all facets of the education spectrum to provide collaborative learning experiences to support increases in student learning and achievement. Participants discovered innovative and effective instructional strategies and had the opportunity to network with professionals and business representatives who can help accomplish goals.

Among the many highlights of the conference was the opening session, which featured a performance by the Mobile County Schools Show Choir and presentations by renowned educators Stacey Bess and Dr. William R. Daggett.

Bess chronicled her early teaching career into a book, "Nobody Don't Love Nobody." It was later adapted for television as the Hallmark Hall of Fame movie "Beyond the Blackboard." She shared with attendees her experience teaching at "The School With No Name," and encouraged educators to remember why they chose the teaching profession. "You are in the best business in the whole world," Bess said. "You are in the kid business and you are changing lives."

Daggett, Founder and Chairman of The International Center for Leadership in Education, told attendees they must have a growth mindset, noting, "If you don't adopt a culture that supports change, it's going to become the enemy, especially if it disrupts the status quo."

"There are 127 million Americans between the ages of 18-65 who are not employed and we must figure out how to address this," Daggett said. "Our students are not only our responsibility, they are our solution."

MEGA 2015 offered a full array of sessions driven by PLAN 2020: *Every Child a Graduate – Every Graduate Prepared*, the ALSDE's vision for education. The professional development workshops focused on many topical issues that educators and parents are concerned about such as: Assessments, College- and Career-Ready Standards, Data Analysis, Career Readiness Indicators, and Educator Effectiveness, among others.

Many of the sessions filled up quickly, including the ALSDE's Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports, which addresses risk-producing condition that can be barriers to student learning and achievement.



Former University of Alabama Football Quarterback and UA graduate Blake Sims was a special guest at the session, and talked about how the system helped him achieve in high school and beyond.

"Learning supports gave me confidence," Sims said. "It made me wake up happy to go to school and be with my other peers and teachers and take assignments and say, 'I can really do this! Why was I being so down on myself?'"

Sims also moved attendees to tears when he wrapped up his remarks by telling them, "The people I am the closest to are my teachers."

"I know you don't hear this a lot," Sims said. "I just want to take the time out to thank you all for the love you show to your students and encouraging them to succeed in life. Without teachers, the world wouldn't spin the way it does."

Planning is already underway for the 2016 MEGA Conference. To see photos from this year's event, click [here](#).

Brain Forest Program Aims to Reduce Summer Learning Loss for MPS Students

For Alabama's students, summer is a time of fun, but those months away from school can result in a loss of knowledge and reading ability. Without enrichment opportunities during the summer, many students lose some of the learning gains made during the previous year, especially in subject areas such as reading and math.

To help combat summer learning loss, the Montgomery Education Foundation (MEF), in partnership with Montgomery County Public Schools (MPS), developed The Brain Forest Summer Learning Program. The five-week full-day program, which is one of the summer enrichment activities offered through the Montgomery City Youth Initiative, provides rising fourth through sixth grade students mornings of math and reading instruction and afternoons of arts enrichment and physical activity.

City and State leaders, including Montgomery Mayor Todd Strange and State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tommy Bice, recently gathered at Carver High School, which is where the program was housed this summer. They had the opportunity to see some of the instruction taking place and commended the MEF and The Brain Forest Program's partners and sponsors for working to reduce summer learning loss for at-risk students and keeping them on the track for success in the 2015-2016 school year.

"I applaud the partners and sponsors for embracing the research that clearly states that summer learning loss is real," Bice said. "If you really want to make a difference for children who may not have such opportunities during the summer, particularly children from impoverished backgrounds, this is the way to do it."

Bice said he was impressed with what he saw and heard when he visited one of The Brain Forest Program classrooms, recalling an encounter with students who told him they were "collaborating with our peers to co-create interview questions



for characters found in the book *Out of My Mind* (by Sandra Draper).

"That's no learning loss. That's exactly what our whole vision for public education is and that just confirmed it," Bice said.

"We don't want kids that can just take a test and regurgitate an answer. We want kids who can think on their feet and who can collaborate to create solutions to problems. And that is exactly what I witnessed in that classroom."

Classroom instruction for The Brain Forest Program is tailored to improve needed skills, which are built using small- and large-group projects and hands-on learning activities. All instructors are Montgomery Public School teachers, who are

provided additional professional development and support.

The afternoon activities are designed to reinforce and extend the learning that took place earlier in the day. Students took field trips to places such as Old Alabama Town and Maxwell Air History Park and had the opportunity to go bowling, swimming, and horseback riding.

This summer, approximately 204 students participated in The Brain Forest Program. To learn more, visit www.MontgomeryEd.org.



Alabama Chess in Schools Initiative Teaches Educators That Chess is More Than a Game



Several teachers throughout the state are piloting a program this academic year that uses a classic game to help students develop the skills necessary to achieve success as lifelong learners in a global society: Chess.

The Alabama Chess in Schools (ACIS) Initiative is among the nation's first teacher-driven chess in schools programs aligned to the Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards (ACCRS). The mission of ACIS, a partnership between the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) and the Alabama Chess Federation, is to provide resources and opportunities to all students to increase higher-order thinking skills and provide practice with 21st century skills.

Twelve schools – located in the Mobile County, Shelby County and Butler County School Systems – will pilot the program during the 2015-2016 school year. This summer, teachers from those systems participated in four days of professional development designed to familiarize them with the game of chess and how chess can help build skills such as attention to detail, perseverance, resilience, problem solving, and time management.

Members of the Alabama Chess Federation and Jerry Nash, a Chess Education Consultant with Chess2Learn, led one of the sessions hosted by the ALSDE at the Gordon Persons Building in Montgomery. Many of the teachers were not familiar or comfortable

with playing or teaching chess at the start of the session, but by the end of the session, they looked like pros, having played in chess tournaments with colleagues, as well as having taught a chess lesson to others in the class.

Nash said there is much more to the ACIS than “just playing chess. It’s about the skills students are building while doing so.”

“Chess helps students learn skills faster and have longer retention. Chess is a beneficial tool to integrate into the curriculum instead of just relegating it to an afterschool elective,” Nash said, noting chess lesson plans can be tied to math, English and Language Arts, art, technology, and other subject areas.

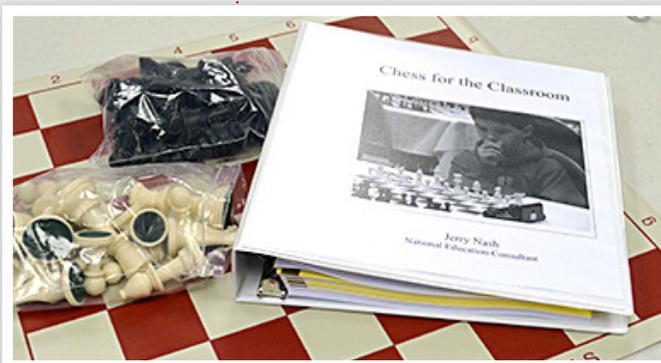
He also explained that 90-95 percent of all scholastic chess programs are “one person away from extinction” because once an educator leaves a school that offers it, there typically is not another teacher at the school who is skilled enough at the game to keep the chess program going.

“That is why this partnership is so historic,” Nash said. “You have multiple teachers from multiple school systems across Alabama who have received training, and others who will be trained during future phases, which builds a network of support. These scholastic chess programs won’t die because you will have many teachers across the state who will be able to lead the programs in their school systems.”

Several of the teachers participating in the ACIS professional development session at the Gordon Persons Building said they

could not wait to integrate chess into the curriculum, using it as an agent that will help their students think critically and take intellectual risks.

“I was really nervous at first because I came in thinking I would not be able to grasp and master the concepts of the game,” said Raquel Stevenson, a



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STI-PD Professional Development Opportunity

Congratulations

on continual increases to our state's graduation rate. Your efforts increased the graduation rate from 72% with the 2011 Cohort, to 75% with the 2012 Cohort, to 80% with the 2013 Cohort, and to 86% with the 2014 Cohort.

Location	Dates
Wallace State Community College 801 Main Street NW Hanceville, AL 35077	August 26, 2015 Registration 9:00-9:15 a.m. Training 9:15-12 noon
Reid State Technical College Library Rom L116 100 Highway 83 Evergreen, AL 36401	September 3, 2015 Registration 9:00-9:15 a.m. Training 9:15-12 noon
Troy City Schools Board Room 500 Elm Street Troy, AL 36081-0529	September 16, 2015 Registration 9:00-9:15 a.m. Training 9:15-12 noon
Montgomery Professional Development Center 515 South Union Street Montgomery, AL 36104	September 18, 2015 Registration 9:00-9:15 a.m. Training 9:15-12 noon

As the 2015 graduation rate procedure begins, we want to ensure continued success in this process. Therefore, the staff in the Prevention and Support Services Section will provide trainings in the following locations for those individuals in your school system responsible for the accurate reporting of the data.

All participants must register in STI-PD for the selected session by the Friday before the scheduled training. The Title PD Number is "**2015GRADRATE**."

After the trainings the Graduation and Dropout Rates Application Portal will open to allow personnel in your system to review the status of students who will affect your graduation and dropout rates for the 2014-2015 school year. Please forward this information to the people you determine will attend this training.

If you have questions about the training, contact your regional graduation rate contact in the Prevention and Support Services Section at 334-242-8165 or contact Dr. Marilyn Lewis or Mr. Tom Mock via e-mail at mlewis@alsde.edu or tmock@alsde.edu.

Coming Schoolfest Attractions: *Driving Miss Daisy* at ASF

Reserve seats for your students today for the Alabama Shakespeare Festival's production of *Driving Miss Daisy*!

Synopsis: When Daisy Werthan causes a car wreck, her son hires hard-working chauffeur Hoke Colburn to look after her. What begins as a hostile clashing of wills between a stubborn

Jewish matriarch and a proud black man evolves into a decades-long friendship as the two navigate Civil Rights-era Atlanta. With humor and heartfelt emotion, Alfred Uhry's Pulitzer Prize-winning play poignantly explores the transformative power of true friendship.

Call or [e-mail](mailto:stan.thomas@asf.net) Stan Thomas at 334-271-5330 with number of seats and desired date. Recommended for Grades 6 through 12. Interested in another title? Visit www.asf.net.



Have You Visited Lately? www.alsde.edu

2015 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. However, 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.



- 1,291 students pledged to read 3,082 books and 1,061 students were engaged with weekly math games, both offered by our partner Lexile, Inc., versus 571 for Summer 2014.
- There was a 13% increase in use of the Quantiles (math) website for our state this summer versus use last summer.
- Over 1.277 million questions were answered within the reading and math games provided by Stride Academy. Last year just over 491,209 questions were answered – a 160% increase!

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 and provide access to a variety of free resources to support targeted reading and math summer learning.

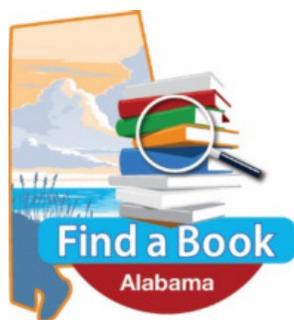
Thanks to our partners!

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 games to all students in the state. The program offered a cool blend

of online math, reading, and science skills practice; spectacular video games; and peer competitions.

[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.



Honoring the 2015 Summer Learning Challenge Readers

The Alabama State Board of Education and the Alabama State Department of Education recognize summer learning is a vital and enriching part of children's education. The annual Summer Learning Challenge raises awareness of the summer learning loss epidemic, shares compelling research on the importance of personalized reading activities, and provides access to a variety of free resources to support targeted reading and math practice.

The Summer Learning Challenge encouraged students to pledge to read five to eight books selected from a personalized reading list, to keep a log of all reading, and to actively engage in math practice every day for a portion of the summer. This year, 16 students are recognized for reading over the summer months, keeping a comprehensive log, and submitting the logs to the Alabama State Department of Education.

The students to be honored are:

- Afrika Rayborn
- Avery Gronowski
- Camaryn Herman
- Gabby Hankins
- Grace Hankins
- Josie Howell
- Wyatt Howell
- John Davis
- Claire Colvin
- Caleb Colvin
- Morgan Bassett
- Elizabeth Davis
- Ian Ross
- Que'mia Lee
- Delonnie Barton
- Kanyjah Bell



New Partnership Helps Parents Become “Learning Heroes” at Home

As families head back to school, a new effort will help parents prepare for the school year with the information and tools they need to become “learning heroes” for their children. “[Be a Learning Hero](#),” a first-of-its-kind national public service partnership built exclusively for parents and guardians, has the support from the nation’s leading parent and education organizations.

Bringing together National PTA, Scholastic, Common Sense Media, GreatSchools and many more trusted parent and education organizations, the **Be a Learning Hero** public service partnership delivers trusted and meaningful information to parents to help them navigate the changes in their child’s classrooms.

The new [BeALearningHero.org](#) website features a search engine where parents can find tools and resources specific to their child’s needs, and also serves as a curated guide for parents of school-aged children to support learning and development—including **THE SUPER 5: The Learning Heroes Back-to-School Toolkit for Parents**, available in both English and Spanish.

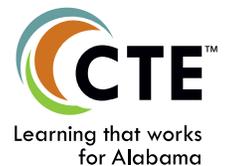
Throughout the school year, [BeALearningHero.org](#) will deliver regularly updated, timely information to help parents feel confident and informed. Parents will find carefully curated, practical, timely and straightforward content from trusted parent and education organizations including videos, tips, guides and fast facts, developed with parents in mind, available in English and Spanish.

Parents can visit [www.bealearninghero.org](#) to learn more and sign up to receive resources.

CTE Educators Attend **Teacher’s Institute** This Summer – Develop New Skills for the Classroom

In July, more than 160 new teachers from across Alabama gathered in Montgomery to participate in the 2015 Alabama New Teacher Institute for Career Technical Education (CTE). For an entire week, these new Alabama teachers took part in rigorous professional development activities. They received best practice-caliber information and examples to use in their classrooms.

Alabama’s 2015 Teacher of the Year, **Jennifer Brown**, led a training session for these educators. Brown discussed methods that educators can use to identify the individual learning styles of students. By participating in this summer program, these new educators earned credit towards professional development requirements.



To learn more about Alabama’s New Teacher Institute, contact Mrs. Niketa Dean at 334-242-9109.

Alabama Music Educators Association Conference

During January 21-23, 2016, the annual in-service conference of the Alabama Music Educators Association (AMEA) will be held at the Renaissance Hotel and Spa at the Convention Center in downtown Montgomery. Workshops, speakers, and training designed specifically for music educators will feature a range of topics such as lesson plans, student assessment, rehearsal techniques, curriculum development, and music technology. In addition, notable composers and authors of music education materials will provide hands-on instruction and insight. Veteran music educators will be available to mentor new and veteran teachers on a variety of teaching techniques. For more information, please visit the AMEA Web site at <http://alabamamea.org/>.

Chess is More Than a Game...

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seventh grade math teacher at Montevallo Middle School. "Not only was I able to get the hang of it pretty quickly, but I also was excited to learn how I can use chess to teach various math lessons and help my students develop important character and life skills."

Stephanie Connor, a fifth grade teacher at Greenville Middle School, echoed those remarks.

"I know my students will be overwhelmed at first, but once they have a better understanding of the game, I know they will be eager to play," Connor said. "They won't realize all the things they are learning while playing chess, and it will be exciting this year for me to see how chess is helping them make academic and social gains."



Let's Celebrate Innovation!

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As we work toward creating a better, more robust and meaningful educational experience for "Sam" and the more than 742,000 public school students across the state, we look forward to hearing about the ways Alabama education leaders are implementing innovative plans. The only limitation to true innovation in school is the will of the leadership to see it through. Let's Celebrate Innovation!

ALABAMA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



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