

charterconnect

MAGAZINE

AUGUST, 2026

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STILL TEACH

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FOR TENS OF
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Charter School Leaders Share
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FOR ALABAMA

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**NEW SCHOOLS
FOR ALABAMA**

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Keep in **touch.**



from the editor.

A Strong Start Begins With Purpose

There is something special about the beginning of a new school year.

Classrooms come alive again. Teachers prepare lessons and learn new names. School leaders welcome returning families and introduce new programs. Parents adjust routines, ask questions, and help their children prepare for everything the year may bring.

This issue of Charter Connect celebrates the people, partnerships, and possibilities that make those new beginnings meaningful.

We begin by recognizing Alabama's charter school teachers. In "Why Alabama Charter School Teachers Still Teach," David T. Marshall and Tim Pressley remind us that, even amid growing demands, teachers continue showing up because they believe knowledge matters, children matter, and communities matter. Their commitment is not simply to a profession. It is to the students whose futures are being shaped in their classrooms every day.



That same sense of purpose can be seen in the goals shared by charter school leaders across Alabama. They are preparing for growth, strengthening academic programs, creating new family engagement opportunities, and building school cultures where students feel known, challenged, and supported. While their plans may look different, each leader is focused on helping students grow academically, personally, and socially.

This issue also highlights what is possible when schools make learning both rigorous and engaging. Through

Summer Boost, students at Legacy Prep strengthened their math and reading skills while exploring drama, music, dance, and content creation. The results are encouraging, but the story behind the numbers is even more powerful. Students wanted to attend. They developed greater confidence. They returned to school better prepared to learn.

Families also play an essential role in creating a successful school year. In "The First Month of School Matters," I share four questions parents can ask early to better understand how their children are adjusting, what skills need reinforcement, what success should look like, and how they can support the classroom. Strong family engagement does not always require a formal meeting. Sometimes it begins with one thoughtful question.

You will also meet Christy Mead, whose 28 years of experience in school finance demonstrate how integrity, accountability, and wise stewardship help schools serve students well. We recognize Representative Terri Collins as the newly elected Chair of the Alabama Public Charter School Commission, welcome Dr. Yolanda Page to the NSFA Board, and provide updates on policies, funding, assessments, and other decisions affecting public education across Alabama.

As you read this issue, I hope you see more than programs, policies, and plans. I hope you see people who believe deeply in Alabama's students.

Here's to a strong beginning, meaningful partnerships, and a school year filled with growth.

Warm regards,

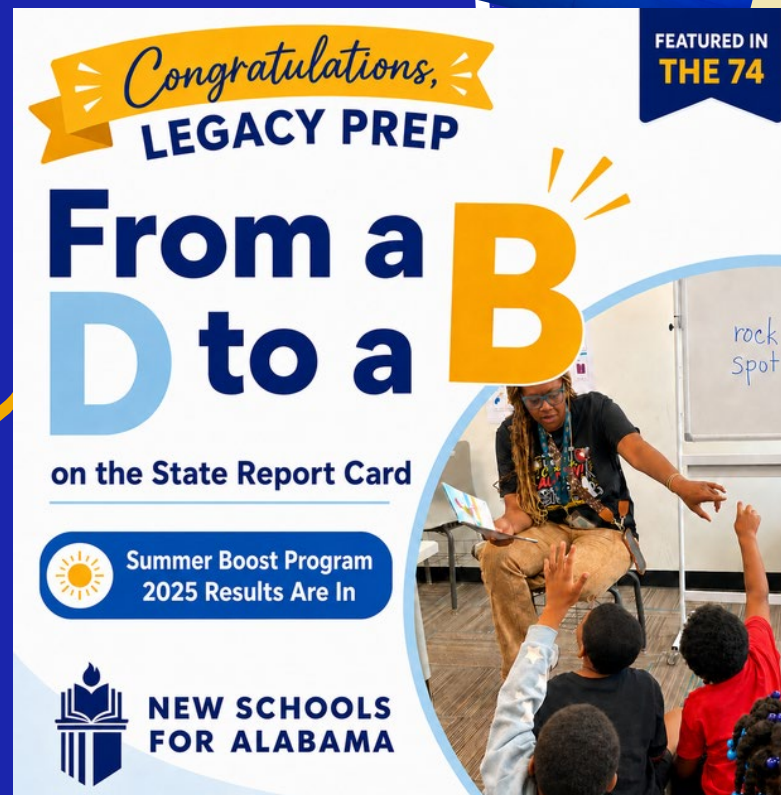
Candie Mitchell-Price
MACE . MPR

Candie A. Mitchell-Price, MACE, MPR, Editor

CHARTER SPOTLIGHT

LEGACY PREP

BIRMINGHAM, AL



The 2025 Summer Boost evaluation is officially out, and our own Legacy Prep was featured in The 74's national coverage of the results. Under Dr. Reneta Johnson, Legacy Prep built a summer their kids actually wanted to show up for, a "Lights, Camera, Action" program that wrapped real math and reading practice inside drama, music, and dance. Three years in, Legacy Prep's elementary school moved from a D to a B on the state report card. CONGRATULATIONS!!!!

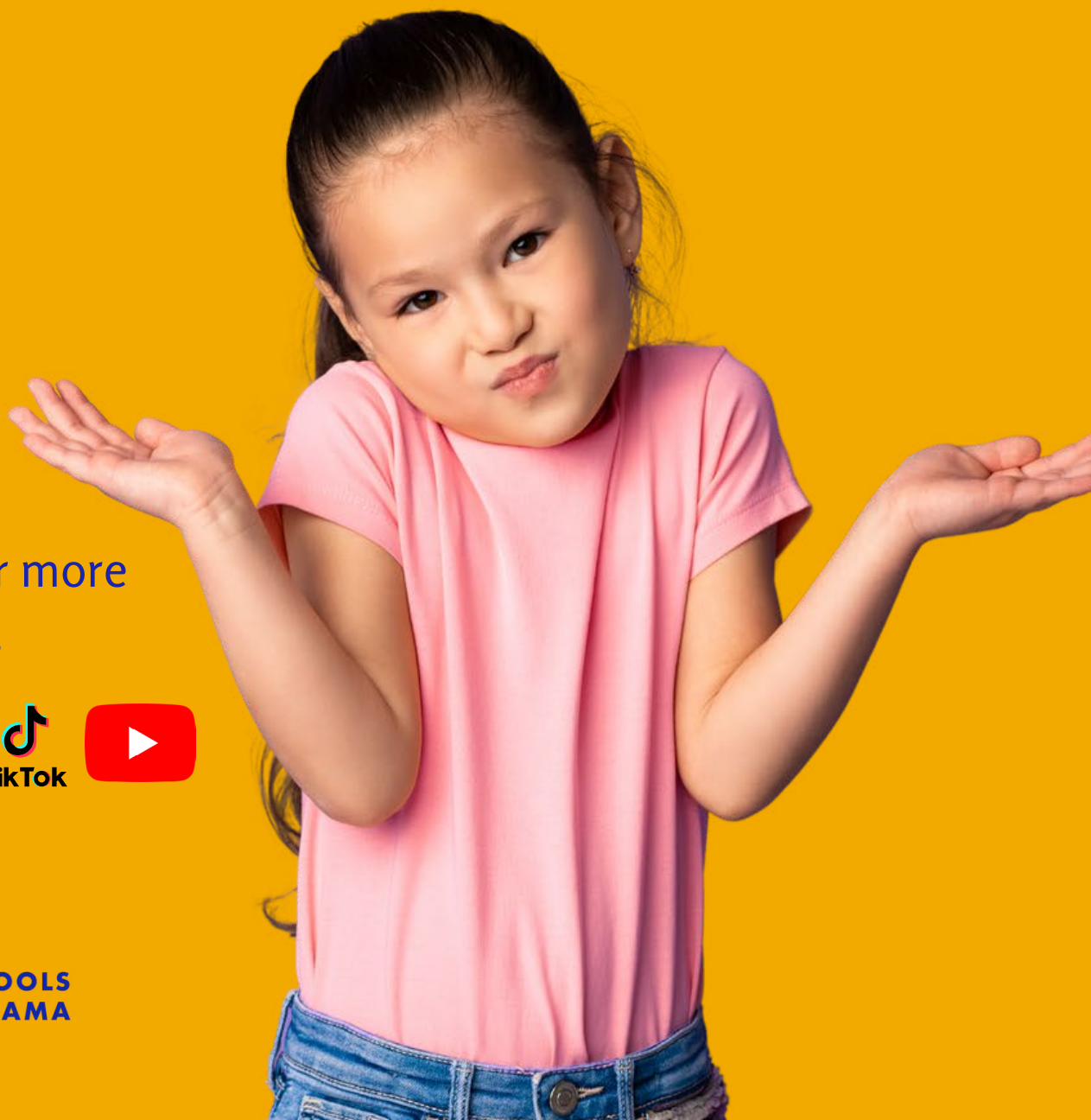
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NEW SCHOOLS
FOR ALABAMA



WHY ALABAMA CHARTER SCHOOL TEACHERS STILL TEACH

BY DAVID MARSHALL AND TIM PRESSLEY

This month, classrooms across Alabama will come back to life. Teachers will arrange desks, decorate bulletin boards, learn dozens, if not hundreds, of new names, and prepare lessons they hope will spark curiosity. It marks the beginning of another year devoted to helping young people learn, grow, and succeed.

We recently surveyed nearly 600 teachers from across the United States and asked them a simple question: Why do you teach? Their responses were remarkably consistent. Despite the headlines about burnout, bureaucracy, and teacher shortages, most teachers did not describe why they entered the profession in terms of salaries, schedules,

or benefits. Instead, they described purpose.

Some teach because they genuinely love their subject. Whether it is mathematics, history, science, music, or literature, these educators want students to experience the same excitement they felt when they first discovered their discipline. One teacher explained simply, “I love math and want students to see it in the same way.” For these educators, teaching is an opportunity to share something that has enriched their own lives.

Others teach because they love working with children. Again and again, teachers described the relationships they build with students as the best part of the job. They spoke about encouraging reluctant learners, celebrating small victories, and watching students develop confidence over time. For many, those

daily interactions make the challenges worthwhile.

A third group viewed teaching through the lens of impact. These educators recognize that schools shape far more than academic achievement. They help prepare future citizens, workers, parents, and community leaders. One teacher summarized that motivation in just four words: “Influence the next generation.” That sentiment appeared repeatedly throughout our survey.

Finally, many teachers described their work as a way of serving their communities. Some returned to teach in the same schools they once attended. They viewed education not simply as a career, but as an opportunity to invest in the communities they call home.

The challenges teachers face, however, are real. The same teachers also told us



Behind every classroom is a teacher who chose this profession because they believe knowledge matters, children matter, and communities matter.

about increasing workloads, student behavior, paperwork, and the growing complexity of meeting students' academic and social needs. They were candid about the obstacles they face every day. Yet what stood out most was not frustration. It was commitment.

That commitment is especially meaningful here in Alabama, where charter schools continue to expand educational opportunities for families across the state. Charter school teachers have chosen to be part of something that is still growing and evolving, but undoubtedly changing life trajectories for young Alabamians.

One of us serves on the board of Breakthrough Charter School, located in Perry County, which graduated its first senior class this past May. One senior shared that he had always expected to drive a truck for a living. After graduating from Breakthrough and enrolling at Florida

A&M University, he now plans to study supply chain management—an opportunity he had not previously known was possible. This is one of many examples that exist across the Yellowhammer State. Whether one teaches in Birmingham, Mobile, Montgomery, Prattville, or elsewhere, they are helping shape not only the lives of their students but also the future of Alabama's charter school community.

As another school year begins, conversations about education will inevitably focus on test scores, accountability, funding, technology, and policy. Those discussions matter. But before we debate any of those issues, it is worth remembering the people who greet students every morning.

Behind every classroom is a teacher who chose this profession because they believe knowledge matters, children

matter, and communities matter. To Alabama's charter school teachers – and to teachers everywhere – thank you for choosing to do this work. We are grateful for your commitment, and we wish you a successful, rewarding school year ahead.

David T. Marshall is a professor of educational research at Auburn University. He served two terms as chair of the Alabama Public Charter School Commission and currently serves as chair of Breakthrough Charter School's Board of Directors. Tim Pressley is an associate professor of psychology at Christopher Newport University in Newport News, Virginia. Both are former teachers.

The Making of NSFA

With 28 years of experience in school finance, Christy Mead, Senior Accountant at New Schools for Alabama, brings integrity, humor, and heart to helping schools serve students well.



With 28 years of experience in school finance, Christy Mead, Senior Accountant at New Schools for Alabama, has seen it all, but her motivation has stayed the same: helping schools serve students well. “If I am honest, I never thought I would be in the school finance scenery until my aunt helped me get a summer job in a central office while I was in college,” she recalls. “That is where I fell in love with it. I am passionate about making sure funds are used for what they are intended, the kids.”

As a former Chief School Financial Officer for 18 years, Christy’s leadership philosophy is simple but powerful. “Stay true to yourself,” she says. “There are things that will test you, whether it is

landscape, Christy sees both challenges and opportunities. “In my opinion, the biggest challenge with charter schools in Alabama is the public’s lack of knowledge and experience with charter schools,” she explains. “However, I believe this is an easy fix. We are our best advocates, and we collectively need to market the organization’s capability to give back to Alabama.”

Her attention to detail and humor shine through when she shares her best “finance secret.” She jokes, “Simple, poor reporting and inaccurate information can lead to jail. I do not want to end up incarcerated.” She adds, “Setting goals, deadlines, and responding in a timely manner keeps you from getting behind and keeps the team moving toward a common goal.”

Life Beyond the Ledger

Outside of spreadsheets and audits, Christy’s world revolves around family. “My husband and I have two great kids, Alec and Ericka. Since we are empty nesters, we enjoy the company of a spoiled Cocker Spaniel named Cowboy,” she says. “Yes, my husband is a Dallas Cowboys fan.” Christy loves traveling and creating memories with her husband, mother, and stepfather, and she is preparing for a new hobby. “I have been told that I will start to love playing golf this spring after my husband forces golf lessons on me.”

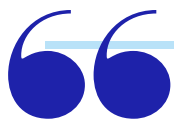
Her ability to balance work and life comes down to focus and boundaries. “I work hard when I work and I am disciplined about staying on task. As soon as I move on to family or personal interests, I focus on that activity. I do not think about work on my personal time, but I will respond to time sensitive questions or requirements if needed.”

If she had not pursued accounting, Christy says she would have become a large animal veterinarian. “I love animals and grew up on a farm,” she says. When it is time to unwind, she follows the weather’s lead. “On a sunny day, I love working outside and getting some

vitamin D in the yard or on the farm. On a cold or rainy day, I am snuggled up on the chair with my dog, watching movies with a good pot of soup in the crock pot.”

As for her life’s theme song, Christy admits she needed help deciding. “I had to phone a friend on this one,” she laughs. “My husband says it would be ‘Here Comes the Boom’ because, throughout my career, if my interaction with an employee was out of character, the result or topic usually did not yield a positive outcome.”

Whether she is tightening budgets, mentoring others, or making memories with her family, Christy brings integrity, humor, and heart to everything she does. She is a true reflection of NSFA’s mission to make every dollar and every day count for Alabama’s students.



*Stay true to yourself.
Do not get wrapped up
in drama and change
who you are.”*

gossip or politics. Do not get wrapped up in drama and change who you are. In the wise words of one of my lifetime heroes, Queen Elizabeth II, never complain never explain.”

When Christy joined NSFA, it felt like a natural next step after retirement. “My passion is giving students the resources to succeed. NSFA underscores my core values, so I was blessed to join an organization that allows me to continue doing what I love and make a difference,” she says. In her role, Christy helps schools properly report and organize their financial books and she participates in state monitoring and audits.

Advocating for Alabama Charters
Looking at Alabama’s education



*With a steady hand and a
servant’s heart, Christy
helps schools stay focused,
organized, and equipped
to support student
success. Her work reflects
the spirit of NSFA:
using resources wisely so
Alabama’s students can
thrive every day.*

AL Public Charter School Commission News

New Schools for Alabama Congratulates Representative Terri Collins on Her Election as Chair of the Alabama Public Charter School Commission

"Few people have done more than Representative Terri Collins to make high-quality public charter schools a reality in Alabama."
- Tyler Barnett, CEO, NSFA

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New Schools for Alabama congratulates Representative Terri Collins on her election as Chair of the Alabama Public Charter School Commission. We are excited to see one of Alabama's most influential education leaders—whose work has fundamentally shaped the state's charter school movement and expanded educational opportunities for families across Alabama—assume this important leadership role at a pivotal time for public charter schools.

Representative Collins has been one of the foremost catalysts of Alabama's charter school movement for more than a decade. As one of the original sponsors of the Alabama School Choice and Student Opportunity Act, she led the effort to establish Alabama's public charter school law and create the framework that has allowed charter



schools to serve thousands of students and families across the state. She has continued to champion innovative education policy through her leadership on the CHOOSE Act and House Bill 363 (2023), which strengthened Alabama's charter school framework and reinforced the state's commitment to expanding high-quality educational opportunities.

"Few people have done more than Representative Terri Collins to make high-quality public charter schools a reality in Alabama," said Tyler Barnett, Chief Executive Officer of New Schools for Alabama. "Her leadership, thoughtful approach to education policy, and unwavering commitment to Alabama's students have transformed educational opportunities for thousands of families. As Chair of the Alabama Public Charter School Commission, she will continue to provide the principled, student-centered leadership that has defined her public service. We congratulate Chair Collins on this well-deserved honor and look forward

to working alongside her to strengthen Alabama's public charter schools and expand educational opportunities for students and families across our state."

About Representative Terri Collins

Representative Terri Collins has served in the Alabama House of Representatives since 2010 and has chaired the House Education Policy Committee since 2015. Widely recognized as the architect of Alabama's public charter school law, she led the passage of the Alabama School Choice and Student Opportunity Act, creating the framework that established public charter schools in Alabama. She has continued to champion transformative education policies, including playing a leading role in the passage of the CHOOSE Act, Alabama's landmark education savings account program, and sponsoring House Bill 363 (2023), which strengthened and expanded the state's public charter school law.

In recognition of her extraordinary leadership and enduring commitment to educational opportunity, Representative Collins received the Charter School Champion Award at the 2023 Alabama Charter School Conference, earning her induction into the Alabama Charter School Hall of Fame. Her election as Chair of the Alabama Public Charter School Commission reflects more than a decade of visionary leadership, thoughtful policymaking, and an unwavering commitment to ensuring every Alabama student has access to a high-quality public education.



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Top 5 Takeaways

— from the —

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING



All board members were present. Kelly Mooney was elected Vice President of the SBOE, and Dr. Long was elected President Pro Tem for the 2026-2027 term.

Here are our key takeaways from the July 14th State Board of Education board meeting and work session. All board members were present. Click [here](#) to see the agenda for the full meeting and work session.

"While Alabama students made gains in many areas, there is still significant growth needed, especially in math and English."

1.

Alabama's Federal Waiver Submitted to the U.S. Department of Education

During the work session, Dr. Mackey stated that Alabama's Ed-Flex waiver was submitted to the U.S. Department of Education at the end of June. Dr. Mackey has not received a response from the USED at this time. This waiver had two public comment periods between September and April 2026, and he did not share whether the draft had been edited before submission.

Alabama's waiver request, according to the most recent

published draft, seeks approval from the federal Department of Education to change several education policies. Many of the changes could provide helpful funding flexibility, however the waiver would also incorporate the WorkKeys Assessment into Alabama's state report card. If approved by the federal Department of Education, the request would allow Alabama to merge students' ACT scores with their WorkKeys scores, and base school and district accountability on the combined scores. Unfortunately, [WorkKeys](#)

is far less rigorous than the ACT. For example, the math skills that WorkKeys assesses are directly aligned with Alabama's elementary and middle school standards.

While A+ Education Partnership supports the seven sections of the waiver that request funding flexibility, we oppose including WorkKeys in the state's proposed measurement of achievement because it would lower the bar significantly for students. For more information, check out [our overview](#) of the ALSDE's request.

2.

Apportionment of RAISE Act funds and the Foundation Program

During the meeting, the board unanimously voted to announce their intent to adopt the rules for the education budget. This process now includes both the Foundation Program (rule 290-2-1-.01) and the RAISE Act funds (rule 290-2-1-.06) that are distributed to districts.

The RAISE Act funding for FY27 will support student needs for the 2026-2027 school year. This year, \$191 million will flow

to districts to support students in poverty, special education students, English learners, gifted students, and charter school students. Districts can move up to 10% of RAISE funds between student groups, and apply for permission from Dr. Mackey for additional flexibility. During the meeting, Dr. Mackey shared his gratitude for the legislature for passing the RAISE Act, and sending hundreds of millions of dollars to school districts.

For more information on the

RAISE Act, check out our recent [webinar series](#). Funding levels for each district for the 2026-2027 school year can be found [here](#).

3.

Annual Student ACAP Testing Data Released

During the work session, the board shared the new ACAP data from the 2025-2026 school year. This year, Alabama saw gains in many grade's assessments scores across multiple subjects. Dr. Mackey shared that he is happy with the increases, and attributed them to the Alabama Reading Initiative, the Alabama Literacy Act, the Alabama Numeracy Act, and the RAISE Act. Dr. Mackey said that "we saw this growth in level four, the only real difference that I can attribute that to is the beginning of the investment of those RAISE Act funds."

Each year, students in grades 2-8 take the ACAP summative assessment to measure their progress and inform the state

report card. Dr. Mackey and Mrs. Maggie Hicks, student assessment coordinator, shared the preliminary state-level ACAP scores and their comparisons to last year.

Students made large gains in science in particular. This year was the first year that the new Science Course of Study was fully implemented and assessed. Last year this exam was optional, while this year it was mandatory, and had a new cut score. Alabama students showed large gains in science scores, and Dr. Mackey shared that he was positively surprised by these results.

English Learners are assessed by the ACCESS exam rather than the ACAP while they receive ELL services. While Alabama's ELL population is increasing, the number of students succeeding on

the ACCESS exam and exiting EL services has also increased. In 2026, 6.45% of the 49,680 students identified as EL from across the state tested out, and will take the ACAP next year. This is an increase from 4.6% in 2024 and 5.29% in 2025.

While there are gains in many areas, there is still significant growth needed for Alabama students. 50-75% of students are still below proficient in math, and 30-45% are still below proficient in English. District level data will be available soon, and those scores will be included in the annual state report card.

4.

Annual State ACT with Writing and WorkKeys Data

During the work session, the board received the preliminary data for ACT and Workkeys data for 2026. All 11th grade students are required to take the ACT with Writing in school as a part of our state's accountability system. District level data will be available

in the fall, and these scores will be included in the state report card.

This year, Alabama's state composite ACT score was 17.63. This is an increase from the composite score of 17.31 in 2025. There were gains in ACT proficiency scores across subjects:

The WorkKeys is a separate test that students can use to fulfill

their college and career readiness indicator requirement. This year, 47.5% of Alabama test takers received a passing score of silver, gold, or platinum.

5.

Educator Prep Programs Approved

During the meeting, the board voted unanimously to approve seven educator prep programs from across the state. Universities must receive authorization from

the board to begin their programs with students that lead to teacher certifications.

The colleges and universities approved included Athens State University, the University of Mobile, the University of

Montevallo, Troy University, Tuskegee University, the University of Alabama, Auburn University at Montgomery, and Faulkner University.

The next Board meeting will be on Thursday, August 13, 2026, at 10 am at the Alabama School of Cyber Technology and Engineering in Huntsville, Alabama. The work session will be held at the same location at 11 a.m. or immediately following the State Board Meeting.

The August Board Retreat will be on Friday August 14, 2026, beginning at 9am at the Alabama School of Cyber Technology and Engineering in Huntsville, Alabama.

The Alabama State Board of Education usually meets on the second Thursday of each month, with the exception of the July meeting, to discuss important policies, procedures, and changes for Alabama's K-12 public schools. The Board takes official action during their monthly meeting and then follows up with a Work Session to get updates and discuss future action that will be voted on at the next board meeting. You can watch them live and see old meetings [here](#).

Used with permission by A+ Education Partnership. Also check out the A+ Education policy portal, a one-stop-shop for accessible information about evidence-based, student-centered education policy. <https://policy.aplusala.org/>.



ALABAMA'S 2025-2026 ASSESSMENT SNAPSHOT



WORKKEYS ASSESSMENT

State Level WorkKeys Assessment Comparing 2025 & 2026

	Bronze	Silver	Gold	Platinum	Total Test Takers
2024	11,742	11,237	5,231	2,901	36,649
2025	11,358	10,466	4,697	2,592	34,932
2026	10,196	8,447	3,548	1,559	28,517



47.5%

of WorkKeys
test takers earned
a passing score of
silver, gold,
or platinum.



ACT WITH WRITING

State Level ACT with Writing Comparing 2025 & 2026
Proficiency Rate (Levels 3 & 4)

Subject	2025	2026
ELA	30.28%	33.84%
Math	23.93%	27.51%
Science	31.92%	35.95%



ACT Composite
Score Increased

17.63

in 2026

up from 17.31 in 2025



ACAP ASSESSMENT

State Level ACAP Assessment Comparing 2025 & 2026

Grade	English Proficiency		Math Proficiency		Science Proficiency	
	2025	2026	2025	2026	2025	2026
2	60.04%	63.58%	46.10	49.21	–	–
3	65.85%	65.55%	45.97	45.40	–	–
4	61.47%	60.36%	42.13	42.55	42.51%	50.51%
5	68.07%	70.32%	39.64	39.36	–	–
6	57.31%	57.45%	34.29	35.46	34.63%	41.00%
7	56.82%	55.68%	24.28	24.60	–	–
8	54.86%	59.07%	24.79	26.55	41.43%	54.28%

Welcome to

THE NSFA BOARD



DR. YOLANDA PAGE
President, Stillman College



**NEW SCHOOLS
FOR ALABAMA**

Summer Program Boosts Learning for Tens of Thousands of Charter Kids

From Birmingham to Baltimore, Summer Boost is helping charter school students build academic confidence, gain extra weeks of learning, and return to school better prepared.

BY LINDA JACOBSON

When Reneta Johnson, head of a small charter network here, asked students how they wanted to spend this summer, they said they like to make TikTok videos.

That gave her an idea.

The staff at Legacy Prep built a three-week summer schedule around the theme of “Lights, Camera, Action,” blending drama, music and dance, culminating in a final performance. But between learning choreography and exploring careers related to content creation, students this month are spending three hours a day polishing the math and reading skills they’ll need for next school year.

After three years of the program, Johnson sees more confidence in kids when they come back in the fall and considers it one of the reasons why Legacy Prep’s elementary school went from a D to a B last year on the state report card.

“Our test scores were in the tank,” she said. During summer school, “our kids have more time to talk to the teacher. They know what they need to focus on.”

It’s a model that prevents what’s known as the summer slide, not just at Legacy Prep, but at nearly 460 charter schools in seven cities. Standardized assessments show that over 39,000 students in Summer Boost gained, on average, nearly a month more learning in math and two and a half extra weeks in English language arts, according to a new study. While the growth is significant, the fact that the study found improvement across so many sites makes the findings stand out even more, said Geoffrey Borman, a researcher at Arizona State University who led the study.

“A key thing to keep in mind is the scale at which these impacts are being made,” he said. “We’re talking, in this case, about tens of thousands of students per year.”

In education research, he added, there are examples of small, “one-off efforts” that produced “groundbreaking impacts.”



These kids are going back to school better prepared to engage in instruction and benefit from it.”

– GEOFFREY BORMAN

But those effects often fade when a program — high-dosage tutoring, for example — expands to more students and locations.

Bloomberg Philanthropies, founded by former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, spent \$50 million to launch Summer Boost in 2022 to help students recover from academic decline during the pandemic. The program served over 16,000 students that year in New York City and has since spread to six more cities, including Baltimore, Nashville and San Antonio.

Students retained the skills and material they learned into the next school year, even though they often didn’t take follow-up tests, either i-Ready or NWEA’s MAP tests, until months after the summer program ended.

“These kids are going back to school better prepared to engage in instruction and benefit from it,” Borman said.

The study design didn’t include a comparison group, but the researchers looked at whether scores were higher than what they would have predicted if students hadn’t attended the program.

The positive effects in math are similar to what the Rand Corp. found when it studied summer learning programs in five urban districts, several years before the pandemic. The Rand sample, however, was much smaller, about 5,000 kids, and the researchers found no improvement

AT A GLANCE



7

cities



Nearly 460

charter schools



39,000+

students served



Launched in
2022



\$50 million
from Bloomberg
Philanthropies

in reading, attendance or social-emotional skills.

In another study, after the COVID-era school closures, a team from Harvard, NWEA and the Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research examined the use of federal relief funds for [summer learning](#) in 10 districts, serving nearly 450,000 students. Students gained two to three weeks of learning in math on MAP tests, but as with the Rand study, the researchers saw no impact on students' reading skills.

In the Arizona State study, Borman noted that because students often lose more math than reading skills when they're out of school, a summer program can have a bigger impact in math.

The expectation that sites prioritize phonics-based instruction, a shift that has picked up momentum since the pandemic, may help explain why students in Summer Boost made gains in reading when the earlier studies didn't find impacts on literacy, said Harvard University researcher Thomas Kane, who served as an adviser on the Summer Boost study.

Small classes also contributed to the reading gains, Borman wrote. The results were weaker when class sizes exceeded 21 students.

Consistent student attendance, a rate of at least 70%, matters as well. It's a principle Summer Boost reinforces by holding back 30% of the funding to sites until the program is over. Students exceeded the target with a 75% rate last year.

"The more kids attend, clearly, the better they perform," Borman said. "This is something that has been a problem with a lot of summer school programming in the past."

'The big question'
The findings clarify what it takes to run an effective summer learning program. But districts no longer

WHERE SUMMER BOOST WORKS

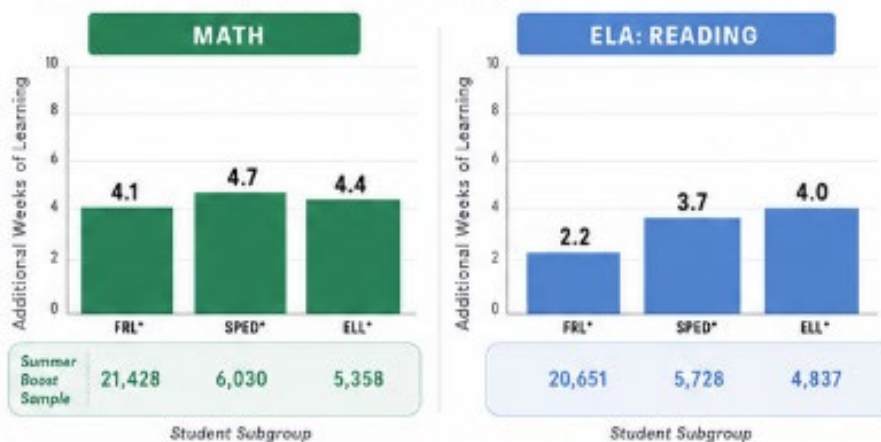


7 CITIES

- Baltimore
- Birmingham
- Memphis
- Nashville
- New York City
- San Antonio
- Washington, D.C.

LEARNING GAINS THAT LAST

Additional weeks of learning compared to non-Summer Boost peers



*FRL = Free or Reduced-Price Lunch | SPED = Students with Disabilities | ELL = English Language Learners

Source: ASU Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation

have federal COVID funds to spend on summer school. Foundation funds, like those for Summer Boost, are limited.

"The big question is how to sustain summer learning programs now that the federal [relief] funding has lapsed," Kane said.

One source will likely be the new federal education tax credit, he said. Advocacy organizations like the Afterschool Alliance are [encouraging](#)

[nonprofits](#) to form scholarship-granting organizations that focus on public school students.

Linda Jacobson is a California-based senior writer for [The 74](#), covering Congress, policy, courts, early education and more. Prior to [The 74](#), Linda spent three years at Education Dive, writing and editing a blend of news and features with a special focus on school and district leadership.

This [story](#) was produced by [The 74](#), a non-profit, independent news organization focused on education in America.

The BIG Picture

Summer learning programs help charter school students stay on track academically, build confidence, and return in the fall ready to learn. High-quality instruction, smaller class sizes, and steady attendance add up to meaningful gains - especially for students who need it most.

BACK-TO-SCHOOL
2026-2027

AL CHARTER LEADERS SHARE GOALS FOR NEW SCHOOL YEAR



HERE'S WHAT THEY TOLD US ABOUT
THEIR HOPES & PARENT ENGAGEMENT
PLANS FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR

EMPOWER COMMUNITY SCHOOLS OF ALABAMA

Dr. Meredith Davis, Executive Director/Superintendent

EXCITED ABOUT

The 2026–2027 school year represents more than a new beginning, it marks a defining moment for Empower Schools of Alabama.

The most exciting part of this school year isn't just a new program, new classrooms, or record enrollment. It is that Empower continues to grow stronger in every aspect of serving children. By bringing transportation and child nutrition in-house, investing in exceptional instruction, strengthening our House System, and building systems that support long-term success, we are creating a school system that our scholars, families, staff, and community can be proud of.

The future of Empower has never been brighter—and together, we are building it.

STUDENT GOAL

At Empower Schools of Alabama, we believe success is measured by growth. Every scholar should leave this school year knowing more, reading stronger, thinking deeper, leading with confidence, and believing in their ability to achieve more than they thought possible. Because at Empower, success isn't about being better than someone else. It is about becoming better than you were yesterday.



FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

This year, Empower is strengthening family partnerships by making communication and engagement easier and more accessible. Families will benefit from a redesigned website, a new mobile app, expanded social media updates, and timely communication through ParentSquare, phone, email, and text.

We will also build relationships through orientations, academic nights, House events, workshops, volunteer opportunities, and school celebrations. By communicating openly, listening to families, and providing practical ways to support attendance, reading, behavior, and academic growth, we can help every scholar succeed together.

IVY CLASSICAL ACADEMY

Dr. David Withun, Head of School

EXCITED ABOUT

Everyone at Ivy is excited about our expansion in the coming school year. We are adding 7th grade and growing our middle school by more than 100 students. We have also added more than 20 new members to our faculty and staff, including adding Elementary and Middle School Principals to our School Leadership Team. We are all very excited for the rapid growth of our thriving school community.

STUDENT GOAL

At Ivy, our mission is to "train the minds and improve the hearts of young people"—that is, to help students develop in both intellect and character. Both of these goals require perseverance and hard work. Our school's theme this year is "We can do hard things." Our goal is to teach our students that every challenge is an opportunity and that they are capable of doing difficult things.



FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

At Ivy Classical Academy, parents are viewed as the first and primary educators of their children and the school partners with parents to assist them in the formation of their children. We foster that relationship through open channels of communication, building community through events, assemblies, and meaningful volunteer opportunities, sharing resources to help parents understand classical education and our school's curriculum and culture, and a commitment to collaboration in every important decision affecting our school community. Ultimately, we partner with families through a shared mission to help children grow in knowledge and virtue.

LEGACY PREP

LaBrenica Harris, Principal

EXCITED ABOUT

The opportunity to serve as school leader at a school who truly embarks the core values of excellence, boldness, and perseverance.

STUDENT GOAL

To ensure full implementation of the VentureLab entrepreneurship program/curriculum.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

The upcoming school calendar has several family friendly events to ensure parent voice and partnership. Examples include, Meet the Teacher, Fall/Spring Book Fair, Guardian Appreciation Day celebrations, Special Day Pic. and JoyFest to name a few.

I DREAM BIG ACADEMY

Dr. Angela L. Lang, Founder/Executive

EXCITED ABOUT

We are most excited about Welcoming a New Cohort of 6th Grade students and staff into the I Dream Big Family. We had a strong Year 1 launch and are very excited to take the Year 1 Glows, Grows and Reflections into Year 2.

STUDENT GOAL

We have two primary goals for our students. The first is for every child to feel connected to an adult and a positive peer; the second is for every student to meet or exceed their academic growth target.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

Our Parents are great; from supporting us during summer athletic camps, summer institute, student recruitment and preparing for Summer Orientation, they are a constant presence in all we do. Our partnership is extensive; as Partners in this Education Journey, we value and solicit their feedback, advice and support on every aspect of our operations.

UNIVERSITY CHARTER SCHOOL

Dr. JJ Wedgworth, Superintendent

EXCITED ABOUT

This year, we are taking a renewed approach to our pursuit of excellence. We are increasing accountability for all stakeholders (students, staff, and parents) and we are setting very specific and strategic goals aligning with five priority areas to help ensure that accountability is maintained and excellence achieved. The five priority areas include Student Success, Character & Culture, Community & Partnerships, Innovation & Place-Based Learning, and Sustainability & Impact.

STUDENT GOAL

For student success specifically, our goal across all grade levels is to increase the percentage of students meeting or exceeding grade-level expectations in reading and mathematics through high-quality core instruction, targeted intervention, and consistent progress monitoring. We expect more students will demonstrate grade-level readiness in foundational academic skills, and fewer students will perform significantly below expected grade-level targets.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

We are looking forward to strengthening parent and family engagement by increasing participation in school events, improving communication about student learning, and clarifying parent responsibilities as members of a school-of-choice community.

WHAT LEADERS
ARE PRIORITIZING



ACADEMIC
GROWTH



STRONGER
WRITING



ENTREPRENEURSHIP
& INNOVATION



FAMILY VOICE
& PARTNERSHIP



SCHOOL EXPANSION
& EXCELLENCE

INDEPENDENCE PREPARATORY ACADEMY

Dr. Calandra Sales. Founder/Executive Director

EXCITED ABOUT

I am incredibly excited to continue building something that will have a lasting impact on our community. This year represents another important step in bringing our vision to life as we welcome new scholars, strengthen our academic program, and continue creating a school where every child is known, challenged, and empowered to choose their destiny.



STUDENT GOAL

My goal is that every scholar experiences meaningful academic growth while developing the strength of character to persevere through challenges and lead with purpose. I want every child who walks through our doors to leave each day believing they are capable of achieving more than they ever imagined.



FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

At iPrep, we believe educating children is a true partnership with families. We are committed to maintaining open, consistent communication, creating meaningful opportunities for family engagement, and ensuring parents feel valued, informed, and empowered as essential members of our school community.



E. D. NIXON ELEMENTARY

Tyler Merriweather, Principal

EXCITED ABOUT

I am most excited about building a schoolwide culture where every scholar sees themselves as a confident reader, writer, and thinker. This year, we are placing a strong emphasis on improving writing across all grade levels and creating meaningful opportunities for students to express their thinking through speaking, writing, and collaborative learning.

STUDENT GOAL

Our goal is for every scholar to grow as a writer and become more confident in articulating their thinking. We want students to communicate their ideas clearly, support their thinking with evidence, and develop the critical thinking skills that will prepare them for success both inside and outside the classroom.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

We believe strong family partnerships are essential to student success. This year, we are expanding our family engagement efforts through events like our August 4 Back-to-School Kickback, interactive family learning experiences throughout the year, and our new Parent Resource Space, where families can access tools, strategies, and activities to support learning at home. Our goal is to equip parents with practical resources that empower them to be active partners in their child's academic journey.



PROPOSED SCHOOL: REIMAGINE EDUCATION ACADEMY

Jhory T. Buskey, Founder/NSFA School Founders Fellow

EXCITED ABOUT

I am most excited about creating learning experiences that help students see themselves as thinkers, leaders, creators, and advocates. I look forward to bringing STREAM+H learning to life in ways that connect classroom learning to the real world, while building a school culture where every student feels seen, challenged, and supported. Most importantly, I am excited about deepening our partnership with the community and demonstrating what is possible when schools are designed with families rather than for families..

STUDENT GOAL

My goal is for every student to leave the school year more confident in their ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and solve problems independently. Academic growth is essential, but I also want students to develop the courage to use their voices, ask meaningful questions, and advocate for themselves and their communities.



FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

We partner with families by treating them as true educational partners. This includes maintaining consistent two-way communication, creating opportunities for family input and leadership, hosting workshops and community events, and ensuring families have meaningful opportunities to shape school decisions. We believe student success is strongest when schools and families work together toward a shared vision for every child's future.

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The First Month of SCHOOL *Matters:* Questions Every Family Should Ask

BY CANDIE A. MITCHELL-PRICE

The first month of school sets the tone for everything that follows. Your child is learning new routines, meeting new expectations, and figuring out where they fit in a new classroom community, and all of that is happening whether we're paying close attention or not. As families, we don't have to wait until report cards or parent-teacher conferences to understand how things are going. The best information often comes from simple, honest conversations, ones we start early and keep going all year long.

Here are four questions worth asking in these first few weeks, and why each one matters.

1. "How is my child adjusting?"
This question opens the door to more than academics. Teachers see your child in ways you don't get to see at home, how they handle transitions, how they interact with peers, whether they raise their hand or hang back, and that view is worth asking for directly. Give the teacher room to answer honestly, even if the honest answer is "still finding their footing." That's not a red flag. That's useful information you can act on together.

2. "What skills should we focus on at home?"
Every child walks into a new grade with a different mix of strengths and growth areas, and rather than guessing what to reinforce at home, ask the teacher to point you toward the one or two things that would make the biggest difference. This keeps home practice focused instead of scattered, and it shows your child that school and home are working from the same playbook.

3. "What does success look like this semester?"
Success can mean different things depending on the subject, the grade level, and the child. Maybe it's mastering multiplication facts. Maybe it's building the confidence to speak up in class discussions. Getting clear on what success actually looks like, in the teacher's own words, gives you a real benchmark to check progress against instead of relying on guesswork or comparison to other kids.

4. "How can I support the classroom?"
Options exist for every kind of family schedule and skill set. Some parents can volunteer during the day. Others can send in supplies, help from home, or simply reinforce classroom expectations at the dinner table. Asking this question tells the teacher you're a partner, not just a spectator, and it often opens up ways to help that you wouldn't have thought of on your own.

Why These Conversations Matter

Charter schools thrive on strong relationships between families and educators, and those relationships are built in small, consistent moments, not just big events. A five-minute conversation at pickup or a short email in September can shape how the rest of the year unfolds for your child.

You don't need a formal meeting to ask these questions. A quick note, a hallway conversation, or a message through the school's communication app all work. What matters most is that you ask, and that you keep asking throughout the year. Your engagement, paired with your child's teacher's insight, is one of the strongest predictors of a successful school year. Here's to a strong start and an even stronger finish.

You don't need a formal meeting to ask these questions. A quick note, a hallway conversation, or a message through the school's communication app all work. What matters most is that you ask, and that you keep asking throughout the year.

Your engagement, paired with your child's teacher's insight, is one of the strongest predictors of a successful school year.



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