




NEW SCHOOLS
FOR ALABAMA

charterconnect

magazine

MARCH, 2023



**Can a charter
school be its
own District?
Maybe...**

Performing Arts
Charter School Approved

Our Board

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**NEW SCHOOLS
FOR ALABAMA**

charterconnect

magazine

Candie A. Mitchell-Price, Editor
candie@newschoolsforalabama.org

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New Schools for Alabama

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Keep in **touch.**





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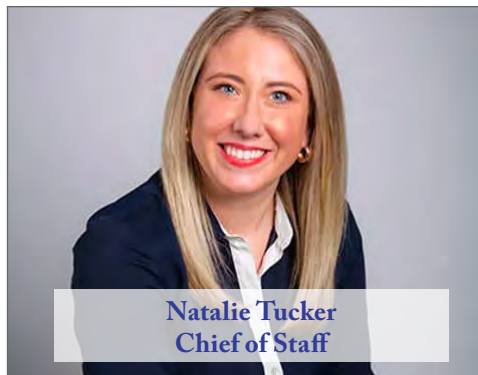
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Alabama Public Charter School Parents: We Need You!

Join Parent Voice, NSFA's Parent Advocacy Group!
Parent Voice is a network for parents and guardians
whose children attend Alabama public charter schools.

Email candie@newschoolsforalabama.org or scan
below to join our Facebook group

Join FB Group!



Why Join?

- *Quarterly Lead & Learn Sessions
- *Parent & Student Resources
- *Advocacy Training
- *Stipend for Parents who join Planning Committee (limit per school) & more!



By working together, members can
help shape the future of their children's
charter schools.

Two Ways to Join



Candie Mitchell-Price



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New Schools for Alabama :
Parent Voice Facebook Group



<https://bit.ly/3JBqW3O>

www.newschoolsforalabama.org/parentvoice

Alabama Aerospace & Aviation High School

I want to thank WBRC FOX6 News and Sarah Verser for stopping by and speaking to our mass media class. Aviation touches some many career fields. Our future drone pilots have a bright future in tv and film! We are now enrolling rising 9th and 10th graders. - Ruben Morris, Founder/CEO

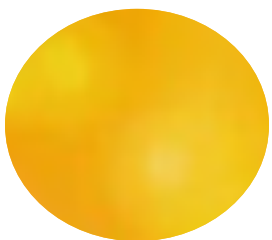


Alabama Aerospace & Aviation High School (AAHS) is a unique public high school located in Bessemer, Alabama that is dedicated to providing students with an education focused on aerospace and aviation.

The school's mission is to prepare students for success in the aerospace industry by providing them with a rigorous academic curriculum and hands-on experiences in aviation and aerospace technology.

To find out more about Alabama charters, [click here](#).

Charter
Spotlight





MARCH MADNESS

**SIGNING DAY
OPEN HOUSE!!!**

MARCH 30TH, 5PM-7PM

- MEET OUR TEAM
- TOUR OUR FACILITY
- ENROLLING GRADES K-6

2080 W. FAIRVIEW AVE.
MONTGOMERY, AL 36108



Welcome!!



...

GAIL SMITHERMAN SENIOR ACCOUNTANT

Gail has over 22 years of finance experience, focusing on local schools, central office, and payroll. She has worked with several different systems and has experience starting new school systems. Gail holds AASBO certificates in local schools as well as payroll. She considers working with school educators an honor.



NEW SCHOOLS FOR ALABAMA



"What I love about Breakthrough is the diversity. I believe that school diversity promotes creativity, creates a positive environment, and allows students to become more accepting of each other's cultural differences."

 **BREAKTHROUGH**
CHARTER SCHOOL

Jaleen Billingsley
PreK-4

Meet Ms. Jaleen Billingsley, one of the incredible PreK-4 teachers at Breakthrough! One thing in her classroom that helps children learn is the "centers." During centers, children learn time management, self-regulation, social skills and explore/develop their own interests.

To learn more about Breakthrough Charter School, Marion, AL, [click here](#).

**Credit
belongs
TO
those
in the
arena...**

BY NATALIE TUCKER

Lest we forget President Theodore Roosevelt's speech called "Citizenship in a Republic" (which later became known as "The Man in the Arena"):

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

It's probably safe to say that if you are reading this, you too feel like you're in the education arena most days. So many of us wake up every day rooting for justice.. I would even go so far as to say, rooting for justice could simply be human nature. But fighting against injustice; that's something else entirely.

It is one thing to say we are rooting for justice. It's another thing to do the work to rectify injustice. Those who are doing the work to rectify injustice are the men in the arena who, in this line of work, are rooting for the stakeholders, families, and children who are also in the arena. They aren't just rooting if they are in the arena. They are the ones fighting injustice, right?

At New Schools for Alabama, we believe every child has the fundamental right to attend a quality school offering a safe, supportive, and academically-challenging environment. Unfortunately, abundant evidence shows that far too many students in Alabama do not have access to such a school, especially students of color and students from low socio-economic communities. The students we are rooting for are often the ones who were born in the arena. The only way to fix the injustices of

those born within the arena is to get in with them and use everything we have to create a better world for them, and that experience must start with a better education.

New Schools for Alabama was established to correct the injustice of a lack of access to quality education for all children in the state of Alabama.. This work is done in an inclusive and collaborative manner through the recruitment and training of high-caliber school leaders. These leaders are committed to starting new schools in underserved communities by fostering a policy environment that supports the growth of excellent charter schools in high-need areas throughout the state.

Chris Reynolds, NSFA Senior Advisor, mentioned in his January article, how hard it is to start and maintain a new learning environment. Since 2018, we have seen the hard work that has been done to create the charter ecosystem in Alabama. The hard work is far from over, even for those schools and leaders in the charter sector who are a few years in.

The people who are doing this work, for this sector and in this state, are the people who are daring greatly. They are the people who aren't afraid to get their hands dirty, who spend sleepless nights researching high quality teaching and learning, they are the ones that believe it is their responsibility to fight the injustices facing our most marginalized youth by taking the leap to design and lead the schools they know all students deserve. To quote Brene' Brown, from her book "Daring Greatly": "In a world where "never enough" dominates and feeling afraid has become second nature, vulnerability is subversive. Uncomfortable. It's even a little dangerous at times. And without question, putting ourselves out there means there's a far greater risk of getting criticized or feeling hurt. But when we step back and examine our lives, we will find that nothing is as uncomfortable, dangerous, or hurtful as standing on the outside looking in and wondering what it would be like if we had the courage to step into the arena. Daring Greatly is a practice and a powerful vision for letting ourselves be seen."

One can only dare greatly with inclusivity, partnership, and

collaboration. This ecosystem will break without partnerships state and nationwide from all sectors.. Our work here is not to be exclusive or one sided. Rather, our work is to step into the hard areas that need a torch bearer and to support those who are in the arena.

Roosevelt made sure to point out: "there is no effort without error and shortcoming". Our charter sector is evidence of this. But stronger evidence suggests that charter stakeholders: "strive to do the deeds; [know] great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spend [themselves/work] in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement.

We will and have had failures. We wouldn't be able to say we are up to much, if we hadn't failed at times. Failures make us rethink, reconsider and find new ways and strategies to achieve our goals. Our successes? They are behind us, with us, and before us. Our failures count, they've made us and will continue to. Our successes count and will continue to.

But the critic?

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better.

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena.

Natalie Tucker is the Chief of Staff for New Schools for Alabama. Natalie's experience as part of a school founder team (as a teacher, school administrator and district administrator) led her to find her niche in organizational strategy and growth. Natalie has worked with both young learners and adult learners throughout her career as a classroom teacher and as a professional learning designer and facilitator.

News

AL Public Charter School Commission

Charter School Commission Approves



The Floretta P.
Carson
Visual and
Performing
Arts Academy,
Mobile, AL

Fall, 2024



Alabama is Set to Gain Its First Performing Arts Charter School: **Lights, Camera, Action!**

BY SHAELLA ASKEW

Mobile will soon have access to an advanced performing arts center in the fall of 2024, serving grades sixth through ninth. The Alabama Public Charter School Commission eagerly and unanimously voted to approve the application for [The Floretta P. Carson Visual and Performing Arts Academy](#).

Charter Commission member LaKeshia Wheeler praised the charter leaders for "improvements on the financial management application." There were prior concerns about the sustainability of the charter school.

According to [AL.com](#), "They have since secured about \$1.5 million in grant funding, and an additional \$45,500 in funding from the county commission. The Mobile Area Education Foundation, which currently supports ACCEL Day and Evening Academy, will also provide a facility, as well as additional accounting and financing support."

[Mike Brown, the Chief Schools Officer for New Schools for Alabama](#), expressed his excitement about the approval. "New Schools For Alabama is excited about the approval of the Floretta P. Carson Visual & Performing Arts Academy serving students in grades 6-12 in Mobile

County. We celebrate with the families of Mobile for this unique educational opportunity for students to experience advanced academic programming and 1st class development in the Visual and Performing Arts."

The Floretta P. Carson Visual & Performing Arts Academy, founded by [Dr. Krista Williams](#), a [2023 Grammy Nominated Music Educator](#), is an ideal arts school that prepares students for college and careers in the arts industry.

ShaElla Askew is the Communications Manager for New Schools for Alabama. ShaElla has extensive experience managing social media platforms for entrepreneurs and organizations. She loves communicating with target audiences and, more specifically, has a passion for social media.





JESSICA LOTZ

This is a time of celebration for us at Parent Voice. We are proud to have almost completed our first year of operation with a fellowship of dedicated parent representatives from our charter schools supported by New Schools for Alabama. We couldn't have done it without the incredible dedication and hard work of our parent leaders, and we want to spotlight one of them today—Jessica Lotz, who represents University Charter School's parent coalition.

Let's learn more about Jessica.

Q: Why did you become a Parent Voice Fellow?

A: I jumped at the chance to become a Parent Voice Fellow to learn how to best advocate for my son and future generations of children. Access to quality primary and secondary education means benefiting from resources and opportunities beyond academics. I wanted to help change the dynamics of higher ed, where students who dream of being the 1st in their families to graduate from college are prepared to succeed. I wanted to show up for my kid, doing more for him than being a PTA Mom.

Q: Why did you choose University Charter School for your child?

A: UCS was the only school choice that made sense to me for my child. Our local county and neighboring county school systems are understaffed and under-resourced; statistics don't lie, and the testimonies of University of West Alabama college freshmen match

the data. I also have the advantage of getting to my son quickly because UCS is conveniently located on the college campus where I work; as a parent, this benefit is priceless. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary learning design implemented at UCS meets the unique needs of children who thrive with a hands-on curriculum. Lastly, I'm impressed by the positive and powerful reputation UCS has maintained; the plethora of news highlights speaks to the GREAT things this school is doing. Go Trailblazers!

Q: Tell us more about you and your family.

A: I'm blessed to be a part of a mixed-racial family, rearing my son to value diversity. My little man is an only child though he wishes and prays for a brother or sister. Thankfully, my husband and I still have each of our moms in the picture, and my kid can't get enough Grandma-time. We don't currently have any pets, but if my child had it his way, our house would be filled with a variety of animals. My husband is a world-class handyman, progressive cattleman, and veteran automotive technician. I'm a proud alumni and employee of the University of West Alabama. I'm an academic counselor for TRIO Student Support Services, where I advise, teach, mentor, and tutor first-gen and low-income college students. I value education at all levels.

Q: What's one thing on your wish list for your child's school?

A: At the top of my wish list for my son's school would be equitable and equal

funding, being granted the same rights as traditional public schools. I'd also like to see UCS receive enough donations to complete the 2nd phase of its new home.

Q: What is the most important thing you have learned being a Parent Voice Fellow?

A: As a Parent Voice Fellow, I've learned the mission, goals, and purpose of NSFA, the politics of the fight for charter schools, and the tools and strategies to affect change at the local, state, and national levels. Parents have a voice that deserves to be heard!

Thank you, Jessica, and to all our charter parents, for trusting us to educate your children. We are here to serve you and make sure that your voices are heard!

Parent Voice is an advocacy group for parents and guardians whose children attend Alabama public charter schools. By working together, PV members can help shape the future of their children's charter schools and that of the Alabama Charter school sector. The Parent Voice Fellowship is a cohort of parents from each charter school selected to participate in meaningful and specialized training and information sessions to help them further advocate for their children. The fellowship runs from September to April of each school year and parents are compensated for their participation. Stay tuned for information on how to apply to Cohort 2 of the Parent Voice Fellowship.



Across the Board February 2023: Key Takeaways from the Alabama Board of Education Meeting

Here are our key takeaways from the February 9th State Board of Education meeting and work session – and what they mean for Alabama’s students.

Top 4 Key Takeaways

1. Discussion with Legislators:

During the Work Session, the Board was joined by the Alabama House of Representatives Majority Leader Scott Stadthagen and Minority Leader Anthony Daniels. This is part of an effort to increase communication between the State Board and the Legislature.

In their remarks, both Leaders put a heavy emphasis on the need for a plan

to help the schools in the state that are struggling the most, including those in rural communities and those with high concentrations of students in poverty. They both also emphasized the need for expanded workforce career pathways for students, including dual enrollment and credentials, where students leave high school ready to work. Leader Daniels specifically mentioned creating pathways for current students into the teaching profession to address the recruitment and retention of teachers. Other priorities included continuing to expand First Class Pre-K and an interest in exploring school funding reform.

During a sometimes tense discussion, Ms. Stephanie Bell, who has been on

the State Board for 28 years, expressed frustration that Legislators do not seek the Board’s input on education legislation they are considering and that some laws they have passed have supplanted the Board’s authority to address issues that might arise with implementation. She said, “What has happened in the last 5-10 years, the Legislature is trying to do our job.” Finishing her comments, Ms. Bell said, “I’m begging you not to take more authority away from the School Board but to give it back.”

Leader Daniels responded that they are “not trying to do your job.” “I’m about outcomes,” he said. “So my district holds me accountable for making certain

we are improving. If we are not moving in those areas and there is no plan...there are schools that were failing ten years ago and they are failing today. There's been no improvement. So I can't sit down as a legislator and allow this to continue unaddressed."

Both the State Board and the Legislators shared broad agreement on the need for a focus on struggling schools and a desire to develop better communication between the State Board and the Legislature.

Ms. Tracie West thanked them for coming and committed to better communication by the SBOE on the ALSDE's strategic plan and their priorities. Dr. Tonya Chestnut agreed and thanked them for their focus on the needs of struggling schools in her district. Dr. Reynolds announced that the Board would be joined by leaders from the Senate at next month's work session.

2. UTeach Update: Dr. Lee Meadows, Executive Director of the Alabama STEM Council, came and spoke with the Board about the UTeach program rollout. UTeach is an initiative to prepare college STEM majors to become teachers. The UTeach program is a partnership between the Alabama Legislature, Alabama Commission on Higher Education, [Alabama STEM Council](#), and UTeach Institute.

UTeach graduates are not traditional education majors; they are STEM majors that add a STEM education minor and a traditional Class B teaching certificate with no time added to their degree. Currently, in Alabama (from the existing UABTeach program), there have been 65 graduates, 58 of who are certified, and 41 who are currently teaching.

The program received \$4.5 million in funding in the [FY2023 ETF](#) budget to expand [UABTeach](#) and start programs at [other universities](#) in the state. Seven universities across the state will be UTeach sites: Alabama A&M, Athens State, Auburn, AUM, South Alabama, West Alabama, and UAB (which already has an active program).

Dr. Meadows announced that the

UTeach program in Alabama will create 250 new STEM teachers every year once fully implemented over the next four years. "We have always had a significant shortage of science teachers and math teachers."

UTeach exists nationally at 56 universities in 23 states. 84% of UTeach graduates enter teaching, and 87% are still teaching 5 years later. 68% of UTeach graduates choose to go to low-income schools. This is one of a number of efforts funded by the Alabama Legislature to address the teacher shortage in the state, especially the shortage of STEM teachers. According to their [fall 2019 report](#), UTeach graduates are proven to stay in the classroom longer and increase their students' learning, even though UTeach costs less than other programs. Investments in proven programs that increase the quality of the teacher pipeline and provide Alabama students with a great STEM education are a great step that colleges and universities can take to better Alabama's current and future workforce.

3. ELA Textbook and Core Reading Program Adoption, K-3: The Board discussed a resolution to [approve the recommendations](#) of the State Textbook Committee for Adoption of Textbooks for English Language Arts, Grades K-3.

The Board received recommendations for textbook adoption for English Language Arts, Grades K-3 from the ELA State Textbook Committee. This includes recommended comprehensive Core Reading Programs that have also been reviewed by the Alabama Literacy Task Force to ensure those programs fully meet the requirements of the Alabama Literacy Act.

The Board had previously received recommendations from the ELA Textbook Committee last year but chose to only approve the recommendations for Grades 4-12 at the time. Due to a technical snafu, the recommendations for Grade K-3 Core Reading Programs only included one option because the second option that had been recommended was too old by law. The Board did not want to have a list with only one

option. So, the Textbook Committee and the Literacy Task Force were asked to undergo a new review process. This new recommendation includes multiple options, according to Dr. Mackey. By law, the names of vendors cannot be released until the Board votes on the recommendation, so the options are not public yet.

Once the list is approved by the Board, the local districts have the authority to pick what is best for them. Dr. Mackey stated that many local superintendents are very anxious to have this list approved so they can make purchases for core reading programs.

The Board plans to vote on the recommendations at their March meeting unless a majority of board members express concern about moving forward.

4. First Grade Readiness and Alternative Teacher Preparation Policy Changes: During the meeting, the Board announced its intent to adopt a change to the administrative code that would align faculty requirements for CAEP-accredited traditional teacher preparation programs with those of alternative teacher preparation organizations.

During the work session, the board discussed next month's vote to permanently adopt new rules on First Grade Readiness and Alternative Teacher Preparation Organizations. The First Grade Readiness rule would require local school boards to create and implement their own policies to ensure that students enrolling in first grade have successfully completed Kindergarten or have the foundational skills to be successful. The vote next month will be on the policy as written [here](#).

The new rule on Alternative Teacher Preparation Organizations is required by law and would allow alternative teacher preparation programs to come to Alabama. The Board did not discuss the measures about these programs.

To see the full February Board Meeting and Work Session agendas, click [here](#).

The Alabama State Board of Education usually meets on the second Thursday of each month 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](#).

Contact Your Board Member:

Have feedback on any of the above items – or anything else? Contact your

state school board member using the resources below:

-To contact your State Board of Education Member, click [here](#).

-To find out which district you live and/or teach in, [click here](#). Scroll down to the bottom of the page and enter your address in the "Polling Place Search" box. Once entered, it will take you to a page that shows your polling place and the districts you live in.

-To view a map of the state school board districts, [click 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/>.



Meet Noah–Legacy Prep has changed his life!
Click picture above to watch Noah's Story. Thanks to Bham Now for covering Noah and [Legacy Prep](#). See full article [here](#)

Out & About

IN THE CHARTER COMMUNITY

[Empower Community School](#), Bessemer, AL, celebrated Women's History Month with the amazing women of their staff!



ELA teacher Mrs. Pickett-Inge reviews grade level data with some of her scholars at [Bellingrath Middle School](#), Montgomery, AL.



Shout out to [Davis Elementary's](#) (Montgomery, AL) Girls Empowerment Group! Kudos to Ms. S. Williams & Ms. Folmer!



can a charter school be its own district? Maybe...

BY KATIE BURKE



Did you know that many, but not all, charter schools are treated as their own school district by their state government? This is very important because it impacts how funding flows to the school and determines factors related to how the school operates day to day.

Each state decides whether a charter school is legally its own district, part of another district, or some combination of the two. The legal designation as a district or part of a district, also referred to as Local Educational Agency (LEA) status, is a big deal.

Why does LEA status matter?

LEAs get federal education funds directly from the State Educational Agency (SEA). That means charter schools designated as their own LEA receive federal funds directly from the state, while charter schools that are part of an LEA receive those funds through their district—and sometimes at the discretion of the district. This arrangement tends to result in a timelier allotment of funds for charter schools that



are their own LEAs. That can have a large impact when operating a school.

For example, in January 2022, the U.S. Department of Education [announced](#) that all \$122 billion of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding had been successfully distributed to SEAs. These funds were intended to help schools mitigate the impact of pandemic-related costs and reopen safely. Given the urgency of school reopening and the many unknown variables impacting schools during the pandemic, receiving the correct amount of funding on time was critical for uninterrupted school operations.

Further, LEA status plays an important role in how charter schools are expected to serve their students with disabilities. Under the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) SEAs are responsible for the implementing legal requirements. SEAs, in most cases, delegate that responsibility to individual LEAs. Therefore, charter schools that are their own LEAs receive IDEA funding directly from the state, have significant flexibility in program operation, and are expected to provide students with disabilities a full continuum of services

within the school. Charter schools that are part of an LEA receive funding through the district and can rely on resources and services from the district but are also afforded less autonomy over their programming. LEA status for purposes of special education is a complex issue, explained in further detail [here](#).

Whether charter schools are designated as their own LEA, part of an LEA, or somewhere in between is important to know. It varies by state and can have a major impact on the charter sector and education ecosystem more broadly.

LEA status of charter schools by state

A charter school is its own LEA:

Arizona, Delaware, District of Columbia, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Utah, Washington, West Virginia

A charter school is part of an LEA:

Alaska, Colorado, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Wyoming

A district-authorized charter school is part of an LEA and a state-authorized charter school is its own LEA: Georgia,

Illinois, Louisiana, New Mexico, Texas

A charter school's LEA status does not align with the above categories:

Alabama, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin

Katie Burke is the senior director of policy at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. His article is reprinted with permission by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, the leading national organization committed to advancing innovative public schools. This article originally appeared on [The Charter Blog](#) on February 7, 2023.

CHARTER HEROES

Celebrating Alabama Charter School Champions

LIFE Academy Charter School SCHOOL COUNSELING REPORT Mrs. Brittany Martin SEMESTER 1, 2022



PROGRAMMING AT A GLANCE:

- **Individual Counseling Needs:** Anxiety, friendship issues, anger, self-regulation, grief and loss
- **Small Groups:** Unlocking the Girl C.O.D.E.
- Red Ribbon Week October 24th – 28th
- Student Government Association & Peer Helpers



MISSION STATEMENT: To maximize the personal/social, and academic potential of all students through the delivery of a comprehensive school counseling program. To equip students with healthy and productive ways to address trauma, engage in healthy conflict, and build confidence.

SUMMARY OF SERVICES: This quarter, we focused on building students' feelings identification and social skills through a series of classroom lessons delivered to all K-5th grade students.

SCHOOL COUNSELING *by the numbers*

11	58	16	62	19	100%
Referrals Received	Individual Sessions Delivered	Small Group Sessions Facilitated	Classroom Lessons Taught	Parent Contacts Made	Percentage of Students Served

**Mrs. Brittany Martin,
LIFE Academy School Counselor**

Thanks for all you do!!!

CHARTER HAPPENINGS



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MARCH 2
PUBLIC LOTTERY FOR OPEN SEATS & LOTTERY

MARCH 3
LOTTERY RESULTS, NOTICE OF ACCEPTANCE, AND WAITLIST LETTERS SENT

MARCH 31
DEADLINE TO ACCEPT ADMISSION

[Empower Community School](#)

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