

charter**connect** magazine

NOVEMBER 2021

MEET

**Natalie
Tucker**

New Schools
for Alabama

**Parent
Voice**

Pg. 10

+

2nd Annual New Schools
for **Alabama**

Charter Conference



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OUR TEAM



Tyler Barnett, Executive Director
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Tyler began his career in the classroom, teaching high school English with Teach For America. Before returning to Alabama with his wife and two daughters, he worked in multiple nonprofits and for two state departments of education.



**Candie A. Price, Director,
Community Engagement/Editor**
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In addition to founding a nationally-distributed magazine, Candie has led communications and PR strategy for numerous organizations. She is also a Teach For America alum, having taught middle and high school English in Birmingham City Schools.



Chris Reynolds, Senior Advisor
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Chris is a CPA with an extensive background in charter school leadership, nonprofit management, and philanthropy. He has founded multiple high-performing charter school networks and supported the development of a national facilities funding strategy.



Dr. Mike Brown, Senior Advisor
mike@newschoolsforalabama.org

Mike is a school leader at heart, having been a school leader with KIPP, a principal at the Tennessee Achievement School District, and Chief Schools Officer with Freedom Preparatory Academy in Memphis. He also served as Executive Director of the Freedom Fellows Institute.



**Natalie Tucker, Director,
Organizational Strategy**
natalie@newschoolsforalabama.org

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.

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➔ **Parent** Voice

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➔ **AAAHs.**

Local faith leaders tour i3 Academy.

➔ **#nsfacharterconference2021.**

Photo highlights from New Schools for Alabama's 2nd Annual Charter Conference held October 21-22, 2021 at City Club Birmingham in downtown Birmingham.



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New Schools for Alabama

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3605 Rosa Parks Ave,
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About [PLA Davis Elementary School](#)

At PLA Davis Elementary School, we believe that every student is a scholar. With the right education, scholars can fulfill their tremendous innate potential and become leaders in their communities and the world.

In 2021, with the support of the Montgomery Education Foundation (MEF) and Phalen Leadership Academies (PLA), Davis became a premier charter school in Montgomery, Alabama. We work together with parents and the community to improve the educational outcomes of our scholars and neighborhood families. Davis exists to serve the local community and create a safe and thriving space for scholars to feel loved, empowered, and encouraged through quality education.

CREATING A COMMUNITY OF VIBRANT LEARNERS & LEADERS

Phalen Leadership Academies is excited to serve the students and families at Davis Elementary School as well as the Montgomery community. Our goal is to support our scholars at Davis in outperforming their peers and making Davis one of the strongest charters in the state.

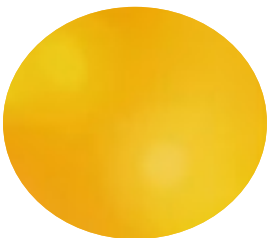
The PLA educational model utilizes best practices in data-driven instruction and differentiated learning to deliver instruction in core subjects, creating a uniquely rigorous and personalized learning experience for every child. Children who are behind academically receive the daily, personalized attention that they need to accelerate their progress towards proficiency. A wide range of learning opportunities help scholars explore their interests, reinforce core subject skills in hands-on projects, increase awareness of possible career paths, and see the relevance of their learning to their lives.

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Spotlight





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Meet NATALIE TUCKER



“...every child has a fundamental right to attend a quality school offering safe, supportive, and academically challenging environment.”

NATALIE TUCKER

DIRECTOR, ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY
NEW SCHOOLS FOR ALABAMA

Candie: First of all, welcome to the NSFA Team! Tell everyone a little about yourself?

Natalie: Thanks! I'm so happy to be here. I was born and raised in Alabama with a mother who is a teacher and a grandmother who was a teacher. A love for education is in my DNA. I taught for 6 years and then was part of a school start-up team in various roles for 6 years. I have also worked in leadership training, professional learning design and facilitation, and strategizing for various organizations.

Candie: What do you do at NSFA?

Natalie: I am the Director of Organizational Strategy. Among other things, I navigate the growth of NSFA and scale change as we advocate for the growth of excellent public charter schools in Alabama.

Candie: What are you most excited about in your new position?

Natalie: It's no secret that Alabama ranks nearly last in the nation in education rankings. I believe that humans as a whole are worthy of more than what education is currently offering to them—but especially in Alabama. I love this state that I call home, but I would be remiss if I didn't say we have a lot of work to do. I'm excited to be a part of NSFA because we believe every child has a fundamental right to attend a quality school offering a safe, supportive, and academically-challenging environment. Cheers to the education revolution and the humans who are worthy of more!

Candie: What brings you to the work of educational equity? Why did you want to work at NSFA?

Natalie: I believe that every person, any age, deserves to belong and be known. I believe even more strongly that schools are one of the most important places to belong and be known. Too much of our state's history is haunting—a history of social inequity and racism. We have the opportunity to directly confront the pieces of Alabama history that must be confronted, in order for us to move forward and heal as a people. I wanted to work for NSFA because NSFA is doing the work to directly address the barriers and social inequities that persist as determining factors of success.

Candie: What, if anything, do you feel will be the most challenging part of your job?

Natalie: I think the most challenging part of my job will be scaling the vast and quick change that is to come for public charter schools in Alabama and NSFA. While I consider this the most challenging, I also consider this the most exciting part of my job! Let's go!

Candie: What do you feel will be NSFA's greatest contribution to the educational landscape in Alabama?

Natalie: I believe one of our greatest contributions will be our belief that every child has a fundamental right to attend a quality school. This is necessary and possible.

Candie: Now for some fun questions: What is the best advice you've ever been given?

Natalie: Go slow to go fast.

Candie: If you could go back to speak with your teenage self, what would you say?

Natalie: I would say, your voice will not always be the loudest (literally and figuratively, ha!)...but is the point to be the loudest to the ear? You'll find your loud.

Candie: What hobbies do you enjoy when you're not working?

Natalie: Reading. I'm currently reading "The First 90 Days" by Michael Watkins. I'm nearly 90 days into this new job and it has been the perfect "read".

Candie: What is one little-known fact about you?

Natalie: Y'all. This is almost embarrassing to admit but I have a real obsession with the royal family. You want me on your trivia team.

Candie: Okay, here's a petty question: Who's the most fun to work with at NSFA? Lmbo

Natalie: I'm unable to answer this question at this time. Also LMBO.

Faith Leaders visit i3 Academy

Pastor Arthur Price, Jr., 16th Street Baptist Church, Dr. Pervis L. Mann, First Baptist Church of Mason City, and Pastor Lawrence Jackson, Greater Grace Baptist Church receive a tour of i3 Academy by Dr. Martin Nalls and hear first-hand experiences from parents.



For visits to Alabama charters, email Candie A. Price at candie@newschoolsforalabama.org



NEW SCHOOLS
FOR ALABAMA

Leadership Matters

SCHOOL FOUNDERS PROGRAM

The School Founders fellowship is NSFA's premier principal program and is a full-time, full stipend fellowship for selected leaders positioned to submit a quality charter application in year 1. Participants receive 160 hours of school-based in-person professional development tailored to strengthening the adaptive and technical competencies needed for a successful launch and long-term school sustainability.

ASPIRING FOUNDERS PROGRAM

As a new addition to NSFA's leadership development offerings, the Aspiring Founders Program is a part-time, stipend fellowship which identifies up-and-coming educational leaders who, with an additional year of training, will be prepared to launch a high-quality school in the state within 2 years. Aspiring Founders convene for 8 development opportunities over the course of a year focusing on academic model, diverse learners, and school design.

OUR COMMITMENT

Academic research provides evidence that leadership is a critical factor in explaining variation in student outcomes and experience between schools (Day and Sammons, 2016). With nearly 37,000 students across our state enrolled in underperforming schools, NSFA understands effective leadership to be a key remedy. We seek to drastically improve the quality of education in local communities through an intense focus on effective leadership development of high-impact principals and school founders.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Under NSFA's New School Development priority, the School Founders Program seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- *Cultivate strong, sustaining leadership in Alabama schools by recruiting high-quality charter school operators and developing homegrown leaders to build great schools throughout the state.

- *Integrate academic leadership and virtue-based decision making as dual approach to leader development for Alabama charter school principals.

- *Establish a meaningful and thriving "community of care" for school principals during their most critical years of leadership.

Parent Voice!

Parents of Alabama public charter schools share their experiences.

On the weekends they beg to go to school and for once they have real friends.



Name: Kathryn Kelley

Child(ren): Wilhelm Kelley

School: [Magic City Acceptance Academy](#)



1. How would you describe your and your child's experience at the school so far? It's the best experience of their life. They've never had somewhere where they could be their own and they have that now. They have room to grow and learn and be a good human being.

2. How would you describe the school culture? The culture is amazing. It is accepting of everyone and does not judge on color of skin or beliefs.

3. How has your child adjusted to being at a brand new school? I was worried because they are on the spectrum and don't do well with change. They've adjusted amazingly with very few hiccups.

4. Have you seen any significant improvements in your child, either academically, socially, etc. since being at your school? I'm seeing a positive dramatic change and improvement. My child was depressed and begged not to go to school every day and now on the weekends they can't wait to get back to school and wants to tell me all about their day instead of crying and begging not to go back like we used to deal with everyday. On the weekends they beg to go to school and for once they have real friends.

5. What would you say to other parents who are thinking about enrolling their children at your school? Come check it out. All it took for me was when we walked through the first time, we were sold. The academics are amazing, the staff truly care and there are a good group of students as well.

6. Please leave any information you'd like about your school, school leader, favorite teachers, or experience. The counselors at the school have been amazing. Wilhelm has also bonded with his homeroom teacher and really trust her. The principal answers emails and concerns quickly and fairly.



Name: Mitchell Whaley

Child(ren): Anna Holt, 6th grade

School: Magic City Acceptance Academy

1. How would you describe your and your child's experience at the school so far? It's been fantastic! There have been some minor hiccups along the way, which are to be expected and completely normal for any new school or organization opening its doors for the first time. But those are minor inconveniences here and there. Overall, our experience has been wonderful.

As for my daughter, who's a 6th grader, she has loved the school. After almost a year and a half of virtual school coupled with the transition to middle school, we expected some growing pains for her. Thus far, it has been a smooth process for her.

2. How would you describe the school culture? If you're looking for a single word, I'd have to say, "Amazing." But for a more thorough description, I'll give you two things I personally witness almost daily at the carpool pick-up. First, the staff are almost like cast members at Disneyworld. There is almost always a genuine smile on their faces and waves to the parents. Second, the vast majority of the kids I see exiting the school are literally bounding. There's a spring to their step that, to me, indicates happiness and contentment from their day at school. I believe they genuinely feel the love and support MCAA is giving them.

3. How has your child adjusted to being at a brand new school? She's done well.

4. Have you seen any significant improvements in your child, either academically, socially, etc. since being at your school?

I don't have a good gauge on this at the moment. After doing virtual school for 1.5 years and almost no group interactions with kids her age (we have been diligent with social distancing during the pandemic), some academic and social stagnation was expected. But Anna Holt seems to have jumped right back in to the swing of things both academically and socially.

5. What would you say to other parents who are thinking about enrolling their children at your school? I would highly recommend it.

6. Please leave any information you'd like about your school, school leader, favorite teachers, or experience. Theatre class is Anna Holt's favorite. She takes dancing, musical theatre, and voice lessons as her extra curriculars, so naturally theatre



class would be her favorite. But she has also been fond of social studies, which was always a personal favorite of mine. And while math has traditionally been her weakest subject, she feels comfortable enough to ask her teacher for help understanding it.

This school could very well be the linchpin we've needed for a better community.



Name: Heather Thurber

Child(ren): Hunter Thurber, 3rd grade

School: [Breakthrough Charter School](#)

1. How would you describe your and your child's experience at the school so far? In one appropriate and all descriptive word – Fantastic! Fantastic defined means “extraordinarily good or attractive.” Both Paul and I believe that BCS was exactly what we needed for Hunter and has proven to be just that and more.

2. How would you describe the school culture? We believe the culture evolving in and around BCS is contagious and new to this community. It demonstrates both diversity and inclusion while being exemplified by the teacher's and staff's professionalism, high expectations of learning, and involvement from parents. This school could very well be the linchpin we've needed for a better community.

3. How has your child adjusted to being at a brand-new school? Hunter never meets a stranger and makes friends quite easily; however, we've been impressed and slightly entertained by his love for the staff, his teachers, and his classmates. In fact, Hunter wants to have school 7 days a week and wants to increase the hours in attendance. Just yesterday he told us he now wants to be a principal, teacher, and bus driver! That reinforces/reiterates our belief that he is in the right place.

4. Have you seen any significant improvements in your child, academically, socially, etc. since being at your school? The love he receives at school has helped his desire to learn and he seems to take on more responsibility in returning notes to his teacher and preparing his backpack and snacks for school. He thrives on having so many friends in his class. He loves learning more now than before and I believe that's the highest compliment.

5. What would you say to other parents who are thinking about enrolling their children at your school? I'd tell them to visit and talk with a few of the students in the class as well as the principal and teacher. Just one visit to BCS will demonstrate the excitement surrounding the educational process. Of course, Paul and I would be willing to serve as ad hoc references should the need ever arise.

6. Please leave any information you'd like about your school, school leader, favorite teachers, or experience. Everyone is very approachable and so extremely easy to work with. Our son's teacher is very professional and informative as to his performance and her expectations in the classroom. The principal and vice-principal have a huge heart for the betterment of each child, demonstrated in their love and actions toward the children. We're very thankful for BCS and for the previously stated (positive) impacts it's having on our children, families, and community.



BCS has a very diverse culture. Students attend from all over Perry County, AL and this gives my children access to an open-minded learning experience...



Name: Towanda Hinton
Child(ren): Bryant, 5th grade, and Aunola, 1st grade
School: [Breakthrough Charter School](#)



1. How would you describe your and your child's experience at the school so far?

My children experience so far from attending Breakthrough Charter School has been so rewarding. They have been exposed to so many learning opportunities though social-emotional active learning from amongst their peers, teachers, and individuals in our community.

2. How would you describe the school culture? Breakthrough Charter School has a very diverse culture. Students attend from all over Perry County, AL and this gives my children access to an open-minded learning experience which aides in their academic success.

3. How has your child adjusted to being at a brand-new school? I can honestly say my children have adjusted quite well to their brand-new school. I gave them the option to attend Breakthrough knowing they would excel academically and socially.

4. Have you seen any significant improvements in your child, either academically, socially, etc. since being at your school? I have seen significant reading improvements with my first grader. She has never been interested in reading. Since attending Breakthrough Charter School when she comes home from school, she offers to read to me to gain prizes out of our family surprise box. I was shocked to see her read over 20 words without any help. I asked her where she learned how to read like that? She stated she has a friend at school who helps her sound out her words correctly during reading time. I also appreciate her teacher Ms. Turner for motivating her to participate in classroom activities which

she has struggled with in the past. My fifth grader has also shown significant improvement with math. Math is a subject that has always challenged my fifth grader but he understands it better since attending Breakthrough Charter School. Both of my children have learned how to communicate effectively and socially amongst their peers academically.

5. What would you say to other parents who are thinking about enrolling their children at your school? Breakthrough Charter School is a free public school with a diverse student body which enables students to learn academically with students of different cultures. Breakthrough Charter School also challenges students to learn actively in their community which sets education to higher standard because students are going out into the community learning the basics of social life while also learning academically. As a parent of two bright children that attend Breakthrough Charter School, I would say give your children the option to learn at Breakthrough Charter School because you will see a significant increase in your child/children learning experience socially and academically.

6. Please leave any information you'd like about your school, school leader, favorite teachers, or experience.

I love the fact that Breakthrough Charter School has small classroom settings which I believe enables teachers to pay closer attention to students who may be struggling with learning. I also appreciate the professionalism of the teachers and Breakthrough Charter School entire staff. Breakthrough Charter School has become a second home for my children and I am so happy that they are enjoying school, making new friends, and excelling exceptionally well.



2ND ANNUAL NSFA CHARTER CONFERENCE 2021

Photo highlights from the conference held October 21-22, 2021
at [City Club Birmingham](#), downtown Birmingham.

[Photos by J&M Photography & Design](#)







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Charter School Commission Welcomes Newest Commissioner

Lakeshia **Wheeler**

Lakeshia Wheeler is a freelance graphic designer and owner of Keekee360 Design, a brand and marketing design firm located in Huntsville, AL that serves clients all over the world. Keekee helps entrepreneurs bring their dreams to reality. Keekee is a twenty year veteran of using print and web technologies to build relationships for business, organizations and individuals. She speaks, blogs, writes and creates.





l-r Dr. David Marshall, APCSC, Nathaniel Dunn, III, Dr. Martin Nalls, i3 Academy

Nathaniel Dunn, III, receives the Henry Nelson Teacher of Excellence Award by the Alabama Public Charter School Commission at the NSFA Charter Conference 2021

Mr. Nathaniel Dunn III, of i3 Academy, is the winner of the 2021 Henry Nelson Teacher of Excellence Award. He received a check for \$2,500 as part of his award.

A graduate of Woodlawn high school, Mr. Dunn's return to this community through his role at i3 Academy brings his teaching experience full circle. He said, "I've always wanted to become the teacher that I wanted when I was in school. Being fun, empathetic and consistent brings the best qualities out of my students."

Upon his acceptance of this award, Mr. Dunn stated, "I am deeply honored and grateful to accept this award. I'd like to share this achievement with all of the amazing teachers and staff at i3 Academy. Their dedication makes our school special. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to do what I love."

As a Southside baseball coach and mentor through the years, his role as teacher is one way he impacts the lives of the children in his community. Mr. Dunn has taught kindergarten, second grade, and currently teaches third grade at i3 Academy. He holds a bachelor's degree in business management from Miles College and a master's degree in elementary education from Liberty University. Outside of his regular school day, he is an EdFarm Teacher Fellow. This program enhances the learning experience of teachers and equips them to be designers and facilitators of future-focused learning.

"Mr. Dunn is an outstanding example of the collection of teaching talent at i3 Academy. Although he is a gifted educator and able to authentically connect with his students, he continues to seek opportunities to grow professionally. Mr. Dunn's character, commitment and dedication uniquely qualify him for this honor," said Dr. Martin Nalls, head of school for i3 Academy.

CHARTER HAPPENINGS



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