

CHARTER CONNECT

MAGAZINE
APRIL 2021

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ABDULLAH

**States Target
Learning Loss**

Parents want
option to hold kids
back



NEW SCHOOLS
FOR ALABAMA

**2021
Legislative
Session
Update**

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APRIL 2021

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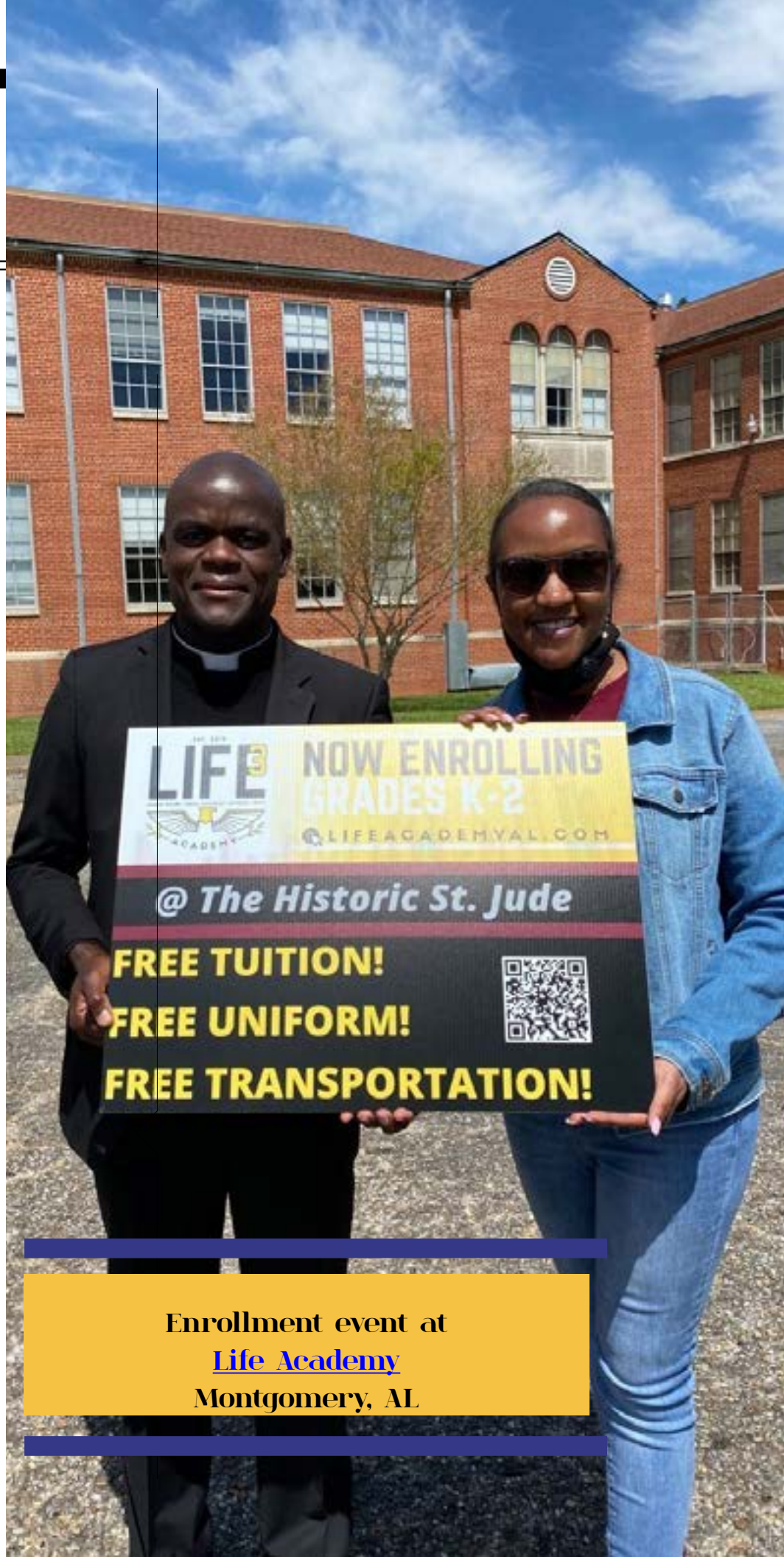
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Enrollment event at
[Life Academy](https://www.lifeacademyal.com)
Montgomery, AL



Legacy Prep

About Legacy Prep:

Our mission is to educate and empower our scholars to embrace their identity, lead lives of choice and opportunity, and impact their communities as the next generation of socially-conscious leaders.

About our Founder:

Jonta is a leader with an unwavering commitment to equity and justice. As Legacy Prep's Founder and CEO, she is passionate about creating lives of choice and opportunity for Legacy Prep's children and families; empowering them to redefine what is possible in their lives, community, and world.

It is her firm belief that a school should always be the heartbeat of a community, and that it is the job of educators to pour into the lives of students in a way that prepares them to step into and lead in the purpose assigned for their lives. Jonta has been a leader in education reform for the past decade. Prior to her current role, Jonta served as both an Assistant Principal and Principal Resident at a priority turnaround school within Denver Public Schools. Prior to joining DPS, she served as both the founding reading teacher and was asked to be the founding assistant principal at KIPP Montbello College Prep in Denver, Colorado. Jonta also spent time as a Kindergarten teacher at KIPP Academy Elementary in Bronx, New York. As a 2008 Teach For America Corps Member, Jonta taught first grade within Atlanta Public Schools. In the summers of 2009 and 2010, she was able to engage her love for building a strong adult and student culture and effective instruction as a Teach For America Atlanta Institute staff member.

Jonta holds a Master of Education in Administration and Supervision from National Louis University. In addition, she also holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communication from the University of Missouri-Columbia, where she graduated with highest honors.



**Jonta Morris,
Founder and CEO**

Charter
Spotlight



Mr. Dunn's second graders enjoying recess at [i3Academy](#), Birmingham, Alabama

Khadijah Abdullah



Khadijah Abdullah is the Vice President of Economic Development and Social Impact at Shipt. In her role, she leads Shipt's national and local strategy and champions Shipt's mission to "spark the connections to show why every person counts." Her team works to ensure Shipt is a strong corporate citizen via philanthropy, employee engagement, volunteerism and most importantly, creating and/or leveraging catalytic initiatives with a focus on food insecurity, families in crisis, and increasing economic prosperity for marginalized and oft disenfranchised communities.

Abdullah is a "reformed attorney" and brings over ten years of experience and expertise in rural and urban non-profit leadership, fund development, diversity, equity and inclusiveness, and community building. Previously, she was the executive director for both Teach For America Alabama and Metro Atlanta where she scaled and stabilized both organizations in order to equip high need communities with educators and leaders in order to increase student achievement and access. She is most proud of her time as a public high school teacher in Louisiana where she taught biology, chemistry and physics and was named Teacher of the Year.

Abdullah is a committed and passionate advocate for educational equity and increasing economic access and opportunity across the communities she is privileged to lead alongside. She is a member of Leadership Birmingham Class 2015, Leadership Huntsville Class 28 and the Alabama Leadership Initiative.

She was named Birmingham Business Journal's 2015 Woman to Watch, and was recently named Top 40 under 40 for the decade in Birmingham. She serves on a number of boards, including New Schools for Alabama, Atlanta Partners for Education, and The Penny Foundation.

**HIGH-QUALITY CHARTER SCHOOLS CREATE
FREE PUBLIC SCHOOL OPTIONS FOR FAMILIES...**

Candie: Tell me a little about yourself, your work (job), your passion?

Khadijah: I'm Aisha and Kareem's daughter. This is important because my parents were children of the civil rights movement and this has influenced my commitment to equity across my community. I am the 5th of 9 children and I grew up in the Birmingham City Schools System. I've lived many lives and I am grateful for the numerous opportunities I've been fortunate to experience, and I'm just getting started!

I am the VP, Economic Development and Social Impact at Shipt.

I am passionate about creating real solutions to systems of inequity that impact communities of color.

Candie: What brings you to the work of educational equity?

Khadijah: I became a high school teacher in 2006. I taught high school science in South Louisiana the year immediately following Hurricane Katrina. As many can likely imagine, similar to the ways that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequities, Katrina further highlighted educational inequities across our communities in Louisiana.

My students were brilliant and talented and wanted to grow up to live lives filled with possibility, and due to poverty, and systemic racism, often found themselves at the intersection of multiple systems of inequity which worked to limit their access to resources, and opportunities that their counterparts on the Northside of town were afforded. Given my own identity as a student in west Birmingham and working as a classroom teacher, it gave me a first-hand understanding of the impact of chipping away at systems through creating educational opportunities.

Candie: Why did you want to be on the board of New Schools for Alabama?

Khadijah: My parents raised 9 children across Birmingham and the metro Birmingham school systems. They stressed the importance of education as a gateway to living the lives we aspired as adults. I joined the New Schools for Alabama board because I believe in the power of education to transform the lives of

students.

Candie: What do you think New Schools, as an organization, adds to the education space in Alabama?

Khadijah: In my work across communities, I've witnessed that families who have options are empowered to make decisions for what is best for their families. These options sometimes include food, shopping, medical facilities, and school options. As it relates to educational options, some families, who can afford it, elect to send their children to private schools, other families may choose to live in certain communities to benefit from the school system in their neighborhoods. These options are usually reserved for families who have financial access, which means that for families who may not have access to these resources, their choices are non-existent, and at best, limited. I believe that New Schools provides the opportunity for families to have additional free, public school options as they determine what works best for their families.

Candie: What is your response to the perception that charter schools take away from public schools?

Khadijah: In the state of Alabama, state funds are currently allocated per child, and thus, when a family elects to send their child to another school, those funds follow that child. In the case of charter schools, these are public schools and when a child attends a public charter school, those funds follow that child and their family to support their parent's choice in their child being educated at this public school.

As I mentioned before, families with financial means, have been voting with their feet for years, and communities that do not have the same wealth capacity, acutely feel these transitions in our student population. One opportunity for our state is to have a broader discussion around a school funding equity model to ensure that schools receive more funding based on the actual needs of the community, versus the existing per-pupil spending allocation. This shift would enable schools and communities to receive school funds where they are needed.

Candie: Do you think high-quality

charter schools are an asset to the educational landscape of Alabama? Why and how?

Khadijah: Yes. Each child deserves to receive the best possible education to unleash their imaginations so they can live the lives they aspire. Families deserve to have options to determine what is best for their families. High-quality charter schools create free public school options for families to have this choice.

Candie: What is the best advice you've ever been given?

Khadijah: There are two pieces of advice that I carry with me daily:

"You have two ears and one mouth, use them in proportion." This advice pushes me to make sure I'm listening to the needs of my community. This keeps me honest and grounded and allows me to leverage my voice for advocating for needs that have been communicated to me.

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, it is that we are powerful, beyond measure..." This is less a piece of advice, but instead a quote from Marianne Williamson's poem, which pushes me to not dim my light, but instead to find solace in the freedom of being liberated from my fears so that others are also able to do the same.

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

Khadijah: Relax. Stay focused. Keep practicing your violin. Speak out more, because there is power in your voice.

Candie: What imprint would you like to leave on this earth?

Khadijah: Leave it better than I found it. Create positive disruption that leads to improved life outcomes for black and brown children.

THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT



What Will The American Rescue Plan Act Mean For Your School?

BY KIM MCCABE

The American Rescue Plan Act provides nearly \$122 billion in COVID-19 relief funding for K-12 education. That's a lot of money considering that the FY2021 regular appropriation for K-12 programs is \$42.6 billion.

Here's what that means for charter schools:

How are American Rescue Plan funds being allocated to states for schools?

100% of the funds are allocated to states based on Title I shares. That means they use a mathematical formula to determine how much each state gets based on the number of children eligible for Title I support and the state per-pupil cost of education.

How are states using American Rescue Plan funds on education?

States can reserve up to 10% of American Rescue Plan funds to spend on:

- Activities to address learning loss
- Summer enrichment programs

After school programs
Administrative costs

That means states must allocate at least 90% to local educational agencies (LEAs)—including charter school LEAs—based on Title I shares. Of that, 20% must be used for activities to address learning loss.

All of these expenditures must also address students' social-emotional needs and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on subgroups of students. The activities also must be evidence-based.



What can schools spend these funds on?

Schools can use the proposed funds to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19. The America Rescue Plan funds are extremely flexible, but here are a few examples:

- Technology
 - Sanitation and cleaning supplies
 - Mental health services and supports
 - Facility repairs and improvements, like HVAC upgrades or adding modular classrooms to abide by social distancing guidelines
 - COVID-19 tests
 - Addressing learning loss
 - Instructional materials, curriculum, or professional development
 - Additional transportation costs
 - Additional pay for employees to address COVID-related challenges
- Note: Capital expenses and transportation purchases must receive prior written approval from your state educational agency and the U.S. Department of Education.

If you work at a charter school, we recommend watching our webinar [What Will the American Rescue Plan Act Mean for Your School?](#) below to help you plan, avoid potential pitfalls, and learn more about what's next in relief funding.



*This 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 March 22, 2021. Kim McCabe is the senior director of communications at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.*



States Target Learning Loss with Summer School and Extended Days, but Some Parents Want Option to Hold Kids Back

This article first appeared on [the74million.org](https://www.the74million.org) on March 22, 2021. Used with permission.

BY LINDA JACOBSON

Even before President Joe Biden signed the latest federal relief bill — which requires a portion of funds to be spent on learning loss — state lawmakers were already moving on their own proposals to help students make up for missed instruction due to school closures.

Legislatures are weighing proposals to establish summer learning initiatives, expand afterschool programs and extend the school year. But for those who need more to get back on track, some states are

examining a more controversial option: holding students back.

New Mexico [legislation](#) would allow elementary schools to add an hour to the school day — an idea viewed as more palatable to teachers unions than requiring summer school. Connecticut lawmakers have introduced [a bill](#) that would award grants to districts, cities and nonprofits to provide educational and enrichment programs that promote literacy. And an [Indiana bill](#) would spend \$150 million on grants to districts that submit “a student learning acceleration plan.”

As states await new federal relief funds, experts urge leaders to take a long-range view of the challenges ahead and to make the most of tools they’ve already developed to get through this crisis.

“If during this time you have created the infrastructure where every kid can be on zoom at home, you’ve just created infrastructure that is very valuable for tutoring long term,” said Michael Magee, CEO of Chiefs for Change, who urged districts to think of this as “a multi-year learning acceleration challenge.”

[Preliminary data](#) shows that students,

particularly English learners and students of color, are especially off track in math compared to their peers in a typical year. Further data from curriculum provider Amplify shows that young students learning to read didn't make the progress they normally would between fall and winter.

Uneven effects

How states respond to that data largely depends on their fiscal outlook. Some are not experiencing the sharp declines in tax revenue they were expecting this year and have already dedicated funding toward extra academic support for students. But others are contemplating budget cuts.

"What's really striking in this recession is how unevenly states are feeling the effects," said Barbara Rosewicz, a state fiscal policy expert at the Pew Charitable Trusts. Some states, like Idaho, have continued to see revenues grow, even if increases are less than expected, she said. Other states, such as Oregon, are depending on federal relief to fill budget gaps.

California, where [revenues](#) are higher

than expected, is among the states on their way to economic recovery. In early March, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed [a bill](#) that includes \$2 billion in incentives for districts to reopen schools by April 1 for the early grades and students most impacted by school closures — including those with disabilities, English learners and homeless students. An additional \$4.6 billion in funding will be available to help students catch up.

Some teachers unions still aren't sold. United Teachers Los Angeles said the legislation will create further inequities. "If you condition funding on the reopening of schools, that money will only go to white and wealthier and healthier school communities that do not have the transmission rates that low-income Black and brown communities do," Cecily Myart-Cruz, the union's president, said in a statement.

Additional days, or hours?

Other states, including North Carolina and [Connecticut](#), are already crafting summer learning initiatives to help students catch up.

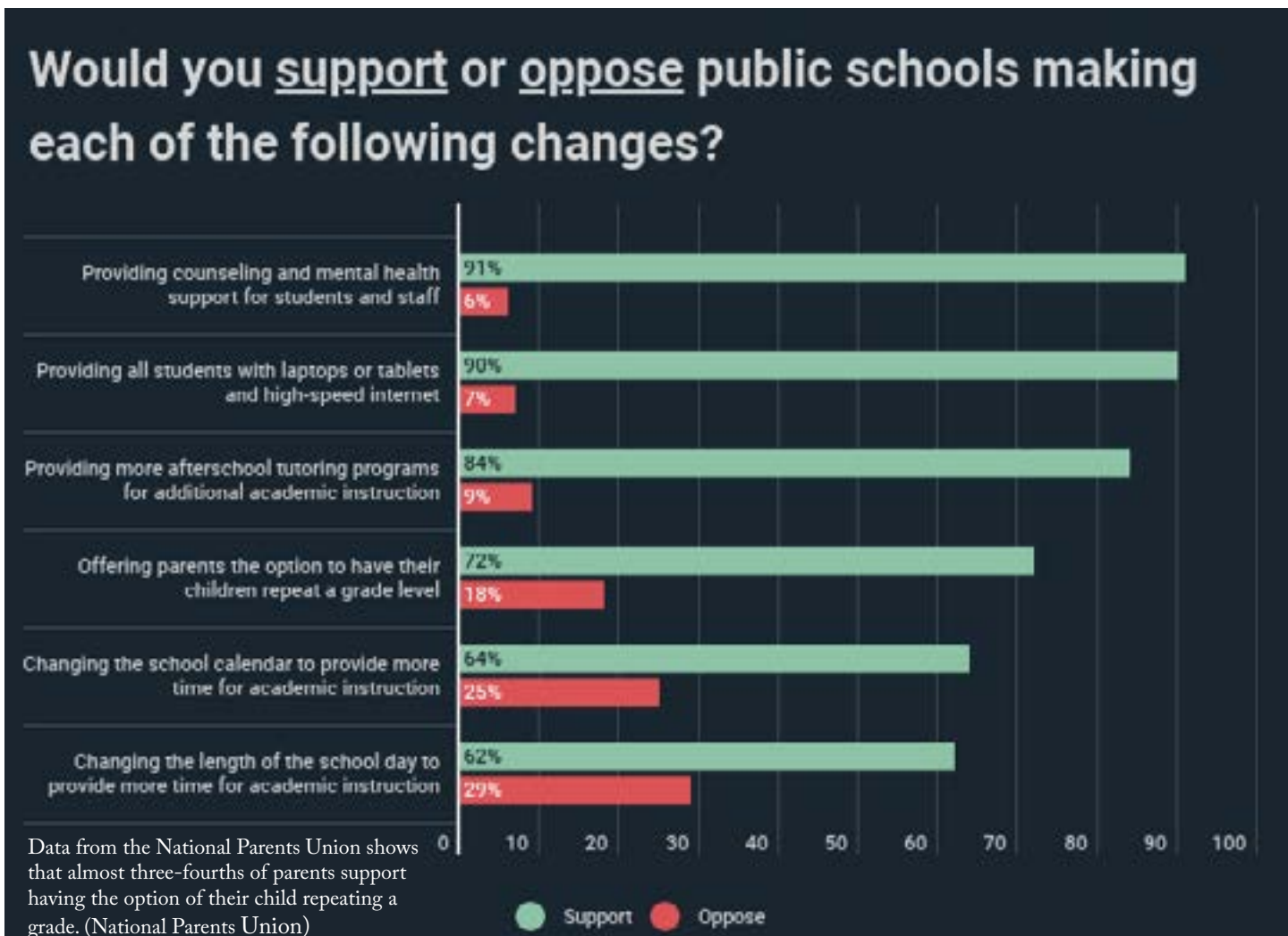
In North Carolina, [a bill](#) passed Feb. 24 in the House mandating that districts offer students at least 150 hours of summer instruction, as well as sports and enrichment activities. Students would not be required to attend, but districts are expected to target programs toward students most at risk.

The bill includes funding for transportation and lunch to make it easier for families to participate. But Javaid Siddiqi, president and CEO of the Hunt Institute, a nonprofit focusing on education in the state, said building the programs and convincing families to enroll their children will be challenging.

"Over the last year, we have seen districts be incredibly innovative in providing academic content to students, but we can't underestimate the strain this has placed on teachers, leaders, and district staff," he said.

The Connecticut plan would involve community-based nonprofit groups in addressing learning loss, giving teachers some time to recoup.

"Many teachers have been working



harder than ever this year and will need the summer to recharge,” said Michelle Cunningham, executive director of the Connecticut After School Network.

In Connecticut, getting teachers to work over the summer might have involved negotiations with the teachers unions. But Tennessee doesn’t have a collective bargaining law. Lawmakers there jumped on the issue of learning loss in January when they passed a \$160 million legislative package.

“One of the biggest concerns we heard from districts was, ‘We might build it, but are [teachers] going to come?’” said state education Commissioner Penny Schwinn. “I think we are seeing teachers step up.”

The state’s plan includes a strong push to build the early reading skills students might have missed during remote learning as well as recruiting thousands of tutors.

In New Mexico, districts will have the option of extending the school day instead of pushing the school year into the summer months. Union leaders support the approach.

“I love HB 184,” Ellen Bernstein, president of the Albuquerque Teachers Federation, said about the bill. She noted that while some districts prefer adding days to the school year, others want flexibility to expand the day.

“Too heavy of a hammer?”

But as in North Carolina, districts will also need to get families on board to take advantage of the additional academic support. In Tennessee, Schwinn said, that [support](#) will include free books and text messages to parents with early literacy tips.

“There is a lot to get done in a short time,” said David Mansouri, president and CEO of the State Collaborative on Reforming Education. “We certainly feel urgency to get implementation right for students.”

Even with the additional learning time, there are concerns that some students might need an additional year to get back on grade level. Tennessee’s plan includes a new third grade retention law that would go into effect in the 2022-23 school year — affecting this year’s first graders.

Third graders in 2022-23 will need to score “on track” in English language arts on the state test in order to progress to the fourth grade. If they are in the “approaching” or “below” categories, they would have to participate in summer school and tutoring programs to be promoted.

Gini Pupo-Walker, state director of The Education Trust-Tennessee, an advocacy organization, said she hopes the extra instruction for struggling readers will be sufficient, but worries what will happen if thousands of students are held back.

“Is it too heavy of a hammer?” she asked. “The first cohort we would potentially retain would have spent first grade and part of kindergarten in a pandemic.”

Retention is expensive, because it adds to the number of years a student is in school. And [research](#) shows that repeating a grade may have initial positive effects on academic performance, but contributes to students dropping out in the long run.

In other states, lawmakers are considering the retention issue from the perspective of parents. In Florida, a [Senate](#)

[bill](#) would allow parents of students in K-8 to request that their children repeat the grade they’re in this year. Lawmakers in California are considering a [similar bill](#).

Polling data from the National Parents Union shows that almost three-fourths of parents support having the option of their child repeating a grade, but less than 20 percent identified retention as a decision that would most help their child at this time.

“It’s a tough call,” said Keri Rodrigues, the organization’s president. She said despite research showing negative effects from retention, it’s clear many students are struggling. “I think parents and families should make the ultimate choice as to whether or not this option is right for their child. And a lot of that is going to come down to how much faith parents have in the plans being established by educators and schools to adequately support their children.”

Linda Jacobson is a senior writer at The 74.

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Senator Rodger Smitherman

Sen. Rodger Smitherman introduced **SB387**, which ensures that students attending public charter schools get access to a more equitable share of local and county tax revenue to support their needs.

Currently, students at public charter schools receive up to 30% less funding than those at their local district schools. **SB387** provides equitable per student funding for any student who resides within the district boundaries in which the charter school is located. For those attending a public charter school from outside the district boundaries, none of their local revenue would follow them to their public charter school. However, **SB387** also provides that public charter schools would receive an equitable per student share of any countywide revenue for students who are residents of the county in which the public charter is located.

For more details about Bill **SB387**, [click here](#).

To contact your legislator to support equitable funding for Alabama public charters, [click here](#).

CHARTER HEROES

Celebrating Alabama Charter School Champions



[BREAKTHROUGH CHARTER SCHOOL, PERRY COUNTY, AL](#)

Get to know Breakthrough Charter School's board member, Kalen Early. He is proudly from Uniontown in Perry County, AL!

Q: What's your education philosophy?

A: Albert Einstein once said, "I have no special talents. I'm just passionately curious!" My ardor and willingness to learn comes from my endless curiosity. I am always interested in learning more about anything that I find to be intriguing and intellectually-stimulating. At Breakthrough, we plan to learn each student's mental processes and see what they are most "curious" about. With exposure, a student's curiosity becomes more and more expanded, creating passion and excellence at school and within their community.

Q: What led you to your passion for charter schools?

A: Ironically, I staunchly opposed the charter school model before jumping on board! After months of contemplating, I decided to serve as a board member because I believe that the quality of a child's education should not be determined by the zip code in which they reside in. I also believe that Mr. Ramalho and his leadership team will put the students first.

Q: What opportunities do you see for Breakthrough for the community?

A: Community is one of our core values for a reason! Ever since the beginning, we have been meeting with countless community stakeholders and leaders to engage them on our intentional efforts here at Breakthrough Charter School. We also understand the plight of Perry County; therefore, we plan to use our school not only as place of learning but also as a community hub! This will allow community members to be exposed to opportunities that could potentially elevate themselves from the protracted realities of poverty. We plan to host professional development workshops like job fairs on campus. Community members will also have unfettered access to our community room and food pantry to search for educational and employment opportunities.

Q: What are some major issues that you believe our state education is currently facing? How do you think Breakthrough is conquering those issues?

A: Currently, Alabama is ranked 47th out of 50 states when it comes down to educating our students. I think one of the reasons for this is how the state currently funds its public schools. The funding inequities that are present in Alabama's educational finance system have been known to disproportionately affect our rural students, especially our students of color! I also believe that the state fails to provide a "common sense" curriculum to their students. At Breakthrough, not only we plan to provide the necessary resources for student success, we also plan to provide a culturally-relevant and responsive curriculum so that our students can be fully prepared to tackle our nation's most challenging issues!

Charter

HAPPENINGS



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Go to alaahs.org for more information.



New Schools for Alabama is a 501(c)3 nonprofit, public charity organization created to serve kids in Alabama. The organization supports the growth of excellent public charter schools in Alabama to ensure that every child has access to a quality public education. For more information go to www.newschoolsforalabama.org

**Absolutely For
Our Kids!**

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