

# CHARTER CONNECT

SEPTEMBER 2020

MAGAZINE

## 2 NEW CHARTER Schools Approved for Alabama

**Meet  
Alabama's  
1st Charter  
School Leader  
Dr. Jeremiah  
Newell**

New Members  
Appointed to  
Alabama Public  
Charter School  
Commission

NEW SCHOOLS FOR  
ALABAMA



# CHARTER CONTENT

SEPTEMBER 2020

MAGAZINE

## BOARD MEMBERS

**Khadijah Abdullah**

Teach for America

**Dave Borden**

Aldridge, Borden & Company

**Carol Butler**

The Mike & Gillian Goodrich  
Foundation

**Nick Gaede**

Bainbridge, Mims, Rogers &  
Smith, LLP

**Maria Kennedy**

The Daniel Foundation

**Miho Kubagawa**

New Schools Venture Fund

**Dr. Jan Miller**

University of West Alabama

**Richard Perry**

(retired) DuPont

**Emily Schultz**

National Alliance for Public  
Charter Schools

**Tyler Barnett**, Executive Director

[tyler@newschoolsforalabama.org](mailto:tyler@newschoolsforalabama.org)

**Candie A. Price**, Communications &  
Operations Manager

[candie@newschoolsforalabama.org](mailto:candie@newschoolsforalabama.org)

**Chris Reynolds**, Sr. Advisor

[chris@newschoolsforalabama.org](mailto:chris@newschoolsforalabama.org)

**Nivory Gordon**, Policy Fellow

[nivory@newschoolsforalabama.org](mailto:nivory@newschoolsforalabama.org)

**New Schools for Alabama**

Two 20th St N, Suite 1315,

Birmingham, AL 35203

[www.newschoolsforalabama.org](http://www.newschoolsforalabama.org)



September 2020 Issue #3

# Inside

## Charter School Spotlight

LEAD Academy -Montgomery, AL

04

## Feature Story: Dr. Jeremiah Newell

Meet Alabama's FIRST Charter  
School Leader

05

## Alabama Public Charter School Commission

New Members are appointed to the  
Board

08

## 2 New Alabama Charters Approved

Meet Alabama's FIRST Charter  
School Leader , Dr. Jeremiah  
Newell

09

## Bite Size Scoop

10



Legacy Prep's Founder, Jonta Morris  
and sons, Hamilton and Pierson,  
ready for school!



# charter



**LEAD ACADEMY -  
MONTGOMERY, AL**  
[www.leadacademyal.org](http://www.leadacademyal.org)

We extend a warm welcome to Adam Hopper, LEAD Academy's new principal and Erik Estill, its first executive director. Read more about the appointments of these two LEADers [here](#).



# spotlight

# Meet Dr. Jeremiah Newell

Founder of Alabama's **FIRST** Charter School

*“ We aren't designing schools around what we are passionate about teaching, but we're designing schools around what students have a passion to learn and then we give them the foundational skills to be able to mature that passion. ”*

---



**D**r. Jeremiah Newell is the founder and Head of School of Accel Day and Evening Academy in Mobile, the first charter school in the State of Alabama, and he is on a mission to incite change in public education, specifically for at-risk students in Mobile, Alabama.

Newell, a proud native Mobilian and product of public schools, saw a stark contrast in educational differences as a middle schooler, and that awareness would soon put him on a trajectory of advocacy and educational reform that would bring Alabama its very FIRST charter school. “I have been working at improving the quality of our public schools since I was in high school, and the fire in my belly around that really comes from experiences I had in middle school. I would go with my mom to clean up an affluent private school here in the city, and I was lucky in that I kind of won the lottery, so to speak, because I was able to get into a magnet program in elementary school. It was a great school and really pushed me to learn at high levels, but I could see the difference in opportunities, facilities, exposure, and experiences for kids who went to that private school where my mom would clean. That really stuck with me over the years. and in high school, I became really passionate about issues of inequity across the various high schools in Mobile.”

Thankfully, his passion didn't end in high school. For nearly 20 years, Newell has devoted his career to creating learning environments for kids and meeting their needs. He has served on two state Governor's Commissions for Education Reform, led turnaround of low performing schools, and designed and led innovative models within public school systems in Alabama. He sees charter schools as an important part of the innovation. “For me, charter schools are



just another tool in the toolbox to meet the needs of students. I didn't enter this work as a charter person. I entered this work as an educator and am using this tool to create learning environments for some of the most vulnerable and disconnected youth in our community," said Newell.

### The Journey

Newell worked for the Mobile Area Education Foundation (MAEF) on a part-time basis during his first year of undergrad as a chemical engineering student. "I got a chance to work closely with the superintendent here in Mobile and be mentored by him at that time and be exposed to national best practices. I realized that the work is about teaching and learning, but how you get to that really can change based upon the learning environments that you create. So, I changed my major to education to become an English teacher. Working at MAEF while I was in college allowed me to see that there is a lot of engineering systems thinking that totally applies to education and when I got exposed to that, it really helped me to see a path forward that wasn't kind of the traditional path," Newell recalled. Upon finishing undergrad, he designed a night school program for disconnected youth based upon best practices he had been exposed to in other cities. "The state superintendent allowed me to direct and lead the program and that was my first school model straight out of college. We saw a lot of success with approximately 700-800 kids graduating through that process. I then led turnaround efforts in the lowest performing high school and middle school in Mobile as a part of a Department of Education grant within the school district,

and saw that high school go from the one of the lowest high school graduation rates to one of the highest."

After five years, Newell left to complete his doctorate at Harvard University and get experience at the state level, authorizing and closing charters, as well as school turnaround efforts at the state level. Once Newell finished his doctorate, he decided that the place he wanted to land and continue the work he began was in his hometown of Mobile. He became the Chief Operating Officer of MAEF and started developing the plans for the charter school he now leads, ACCEL Day and Evening Academy, as a strategy of the Foundation to improve the quality of public education in his community.

### About ACCEL

Rightfully so, Newell is proud of ACCEL which he says is, "designed for young people who are Ferris Bueller's Day Off bored in traditional settings, and just not feeling it, and for kids who might have fallen behind because of various needs or whom might have dropped out altogether." ACCEL is a 9-12 high school that Newell describes as warm and supportive and a place where every child is known by name. Newell and staff make it a point to know what the students' goals and plans are from the beginning so that the instructional design is hands-on and student-driven.

"We're competency-based, so when students demonstrate mastery in areas, they can move onto the next area; they don't have to just do grade after grade after grade just to get a numeric average. We're focused on our kids mastering their skills. We also offer intensive support and counseling to help students find out who they're going to be, but also address

challenges that they might have in their lives."

ACCEL doesn't follow a traditional guidance counseling approach with students, but rather have implemented an advocate counseling model so that counselors have a small case load in order to give personalized attention, including home visits, in order to help students be successful. On the post-secondary side students have opportunities to receive paid internships so that they can learn about the things they're really interested in. ACCEL has partnerships for academic and technical dual enrollment so that the kids can start taking the courses on their pathways to the next level. AP courses are offered as well, but instead of doing them every semester, they are offered year-round so that kids have more time and support to be successful. "So, our model is flexible in academics and competency-based, with lots of supports that are driven around positive youth development, and then post-secondary opportunities to get kids connected as soon as possible to the real world and what they're interested in," Newell stated. "We believe that in order to help students be successful, it is our job to ignite their passion and then use those passions to help them build skill and confidence. We aren't designing schools around what we are passionate about teaching, but we're designing schools around what students have a passion to learn and then we give them the foundational skills to be able to mature that passion."

### Alabama's FIRST Charter School

Newell is proud that the first charter school in the state is a school that supports disconnected young people and thinks this says a lot for the sector in Alabama. Building charters in Alabama is not just about doing traditional work better but taking on some of the hardest work. For the class of 2020, despite 75% of students starting behind when they joined ACCEL, 73 percent of ACCEL students actually graduated on-time with their peers. This performance is 30 percentage points above the national average for schools serving similar populations of students. As a result of the opportunities ACCEL students have, 89% of them are accepted into two or four-year colleges. Additionally, ACCEL has been approved to grow down to support young people in middle grades

“ Charter schools are designed to create opportunities where there were not opportunities, and our model and mission are all about serving underserved young people and doing the really hard work in different ways to try to get different results. ”



with similar profiles. NewSchools Venture Fund has seen the model and innovation at ACCEL and has supported the school with grant funds to grow the school. ACCEL was also one of four charters that recently received a \$1,500,000 three-year grant from New Schools for Alabama for its middle school initiative.

### Charter Misconceptions

When asked what he thought were the top misconceptions about charter schools, Newell replied, “the most common one is that we are private schools taking public dollars. We are public schools that are required to meet the same requirements of other public schools, and our kids graduate with the same state high school diploma as anyone else. All Charter means is that we have the opportunity to design a school that’s different, but we’re held accountable to showing results or we can be closed.” Newell went on to say, “An additional misconception that I hear fairly often is this notion that charter schools take away funding from traditional public schools. Charter schools are designed to create opportunities where there were not opportunities, and our model and mission are all about serving underserved young

people and doing the really hard work in different ways to try to get different results. That’s what I think charters should do, and the leaders in our state have stepped forward to say we’re going to do things differently, and I think that’s powerful.”

### Moving Forward

Hopefully, you now see the commitment to bridging the educational gap for disconnected students is not just a passion, but the driving force behind Newell’s career in education. He is excited about the expansion to a 6-12 school in Mobile, and nearly tripling enrollment over the next four years to meet the needs of his community. Newell is dedicated to codifying ACCEL’s instructional model and sharing that practice with others who are interested in opening schools in other locations in Alabama where there is a need.

When Newell isn’t pushing the needle for education for kids in Mobile, he is spending time with family and friends (preferably in the great outdoors in beautiful Alabama), and exercising his faith through ministry.

Dr. Jeremiah Newell. Remember his

name; not just because he is actually the first black man to start and lead a charter school in Alabama, but because he will go down in history as an innovator, revolutionary and reformer who saw marginalized and underserved kids falling by the wayside, and he decided to get involved. We’re so glad that he did.

# AL public charter school COMMISSION

## APPOINTS NEW MEMBERS

This month the Alabama Public Charter School Commission has appointed Steve Siple, Dr. Becky Lee, and Dick Brewbaker to its board.



**STEVE SIPLE**

**STEVE SIPLE** brings a wealth of experience concerning charter schools to the Alabama Public Charter School Commission, having previously served as an advisor to charter schools and as a charter school board member. He is currently a Senior Vice President at Regions Bank in Birmingham and a Principal at Mission 1st Advisors. Steve has spent nearly 30 years serving government and nonprofit clients for a handful of major U.S. banks. For over half of this time he has also served as a Member, Treasurer, Board Chair, and in some cases Founding Chair, for several highly successful organizations. He has served on several Boards including – most recently – the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, where he is Immediate Past Chair and has founded 2 of its Chapters, and Legacy Prep Charter School where he served as the Founding Chair of its Board of Directors.



**DR. BECKY LEE**

**DR. BECKY LEE** is a retired lifelong educator with abundant experience as a principal and district administrator, having served as Deputy Superintendent for School and Community Support in Jefferson County Schools and as Chief of Staff in Birmingham City Schools. Prior to those roles she served as Superintendent for two different Alabama school systems in Russell County Schools and Lanett City Schools, and she has served at the Alabama State Department of Education. She was also formerly CFO for Kansas City Schools in Missouri and Deputy Chancellor for Fiscal Affairs and Operations with the Education Achievement Authority of Michigan.

Dr. Lee holds a PhD from the University of Missouri, and Ed.D from the University of Alabama, and an M.Ed. from Georgia State University.



**DICK BREWBAKER**

**DICK BREWBAKER** attended the Montgomery Academy. He graduated from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. He then taught in a number of schools, including the Montgomery Academy. He worked as the state director of SCORE 100, an education reform initiative. He was appointed by Governor Fob James as an education liaison to the Alabama House of Representatives and to the Alabama State Board of Education.

From 2003 to 2007, he was a member of the Alabama House of Representatives for the 75th district. He then served in the Alabama Senate. He is also the President and CEO of Brewbaker Motors, a family business started by his grandfather in 1947.

# Welcome



2

## new charters approved for Alabama

The Alabama Public Charter School Commission has approved Breakthrough Charter School and Ivy Classical Academy to open for the 2021-2022 school year.

# Breakthrough

Breakthrough Charter School is a recipient of New School for Alabama's Charter School Program Grant and its founder, Darren Ramalko, is a School Founders Program Fellow. The mission of Breakthrough Charter School is to prepare students in Perry County for success as citizens and leaders by providing a rigorous service-oriented, , and project-based public school that supports the social-emotional development of each individual child.



[www.breakthroughcharterschool.org/](http://www.breakthroughcharterschool.org/)

# IvyClassical



Ivy Classical Academy is a tuition-free, public charter school with open enrollment located in Prattville, serving Autauga County. The mission of Ivy Classical Academy is to train student's minds and hearts through a classical, content-rich curriculum that puts an emphasis on virtuous living, traditional learning, and civic responsibility.

[www.ivyclassical.com/](http://www.ivyclassical.com/)

*Congratulations*

## Charter School Board Training

New Schools for Alabama partnered with Ed Board Partners to offer best-in-class training at a reduced cost for every charter school in the state. The training package includes the following 3 components:

1. **Full-day Statewide Training** for every charter school board member in Alabama on charter school board governance 101 (broken up over 2 half-day sessions)
2. **One-on-One Coaching** of up to 5 hours, giving each of you individualized, private trainings around specific needs for your board
3. **Role-specific Training** for groups of board members from around the state who have similar roles on their boards (i.e., a cohort for board chairs, a cohort for board treasurers, etc.).

Training began on September 17th with nearly every charter in the state in attendance. The final session will be held on September 24th.

## New Schools CSP Feature

The National Alliance for Public Charters Schools featured New Schools for Alabama in their CSP Grant Profile. The CSP Grant helps us support high-quality charters and continue growing the charter sector in AL. Download and read the feature [here](#).

## Bellwether Education Partners

Bellwether Education Partners released a comprehensive report on the CSP and two accompanying policy briefs, which you can find [here](#).

“It is not who you attend school with, but who controls the school you attend.”

—Nikki Giovanni

bite size  
**SCOOP**

