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UAB SCHOOL OF EDUCATION



## CREATING A NEW KIND OF MATH TEACHER

### *The Greater Birmingham Math Partnership*

John C. Mayer, Ph.D., has noticed something interesting at parties: When people find out he is a math professor, they tell him that math was their worst subject in high school. No one ever complains about their other classes.

“There should be a wider variety of responses,” Mayer says.

He has also noticed something else: Most children don't dislike math when they're in elementary school. The problem seems to develop sometime during middle school, when more sophisticated concepts are introduced.

To back up his anecdotal data, Mayer cites the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) report, which was released in 2000. TIMSS researchers found that fourth-grade children in the United States were world leaders in mathematics, but by 12th grade they were almost last in this crucial subject.

#### PARTNERS IN PROGRESS

So what's wrong with the way math is taught in America's middle schools—and how can the problem be solved?

Those questions are at the heart of a five-year, \$10-million study being conducted by the Greater Birmingham Mathematics Partnership (GBMP)—a joint effort of UAB, Birmingham-Southern College, nine Birmingham-area school systems, and the Mathematics Education Collaborative (MEC). The

study is supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF), which has certified the pro-

the partnership. The GBMP is addressing that need in two ways: First, it is conducting a series of summer



*Tommy Smith encourages an open-ended approach to teaching math.*

gram as a Targeted Mathematics and Science Partnership.

“We recognize that there is a need for more specialized training for people who teach math at the middle-school level,” says Mayer, who serves as UAB team leader for

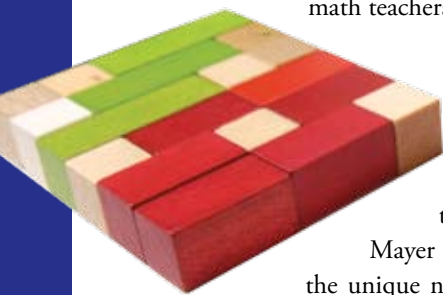
workshops for math teachers in the participating middle schools. At the same time, the group is working to develop a new middle-school mathematics track within the math major at the UAB School of Education.

The educational philosophy

behind both of these teacher-training efforts is built on helping teachers construct practical exercises that will allow their students to discover basic math concepts instead of just being told about them. The idea is to show students how to use math as a tool for solving real-world problems, which in turn should spark their curiosity and make them want to learn more.

The workshops for current middle-school math teachers started two summers ago, and the goal is for every teacher in the nine school systems to take at least two of the seven available summer courses during the five-year study. The partnership also hopes to make these workshops permanent.

As for the new middle-school mathematics track at UAB, it is being designed to change the way future teachers approach the subject—and reverse the decline in students' math abilities. The track could serve as a model for other schools of education in the state, helping them modify their training for future middle-school math teachers.



### AN OPEN-ENDED APPROACH

Alabama currently offers only two levels of certification for math teachers: elementary and secondary.

Mayer says neither of these tracks addresses the unique needs of middle-school students—the very students who seem to be having the hardest time with the subject.

The middle-school math track at UAB will combine traditional mathematics subject matter with deeper courses in mathematics instruction. The School of Education is proposing to the Alabama State Department of Education a certification program for middle-school mathematics teachers, aligned with the track in the mathematics major. If approved, it will be the first such certification program in the state.

The MEC, based in Ferndale, Washington, has been working with the GBMP to develop exercises that help middle-school students discover fundamental principles of math. Material from the MEC is the basis for summer workshops as well as some of the new and modified math courses being designed by UAB. The School of Engineering and School of Medicine at UAB are helping develop material for the new middle-school math classes at the university.

Tommy Smith, Ed.D., an associate professor in the UAB School of Education, taught the first of the new classes. Smith says devising the course re-

quired him to rethink his teaching methods. “We go much greater in depth on fewer topics. The level of understanding on the part of the students seems to be better,” Smith says. “The style of teaching is more open-ended. We pose the problems and let the students figure things out for themselves. This style of learning involves more than just teaching them to mimic what somebody else has done.”

### PRACTICAL MAGIC

Smith says students in his first class responded well to the new emphasis on teaching children how to use math skills as tools to solve practical problems. “The preliminary feedback from the students has been very good,” Smith says. “Several of them said this is the first time they have really understood the subject. It’s an opportunity for them to see math in a different way.”

The future teachers who took the class with Smith are still months or years from entering their own classrooms, but he says the techniques they have learned should work well with students in the targeted grades. “Middle-school kids are different, and how you approach them has to be different,” Smith says.

The new classes are being designed to give future teachers a deeper understanding of the material they will be teaching in middle school. That way, they will be able to explain their reasoning algebraically and geometrically.

According to Mayer and other members of the partnership, the addition of a middle-school track in the mathematics program at UAB is an acknowledgement of the inadequate numbers of qualified math teachers in grades 4–8 across Alabama. He cites the recent case of a Jefferson County school that was unable to get a math teacher in a middle-school position for a teacher on leave.

The principal had to employ two substitutes with no mathematics background who alternated their days in the classroom. “What parent would want his or her child in a situation like that?” Mayer says.



*John Mayer says struggles with math often begin in middle school.*

### MATH IN THE MIDDLE

The idea for establishing the Greater Birmingham Mathematics Partnership came from the educational community in Birmingham-area schools. GBMP codirectors Ann Dominick and Faye Clark are from the Hoover and Mountain Brook school systems. Other school district partners are Bessemer, Fairfield, Homewood, Vestavia, Jefferson County, Shelby County, and

“We recognize that there is a need for more specialized training for people who teach math at the middle-school level.” —John Mayer



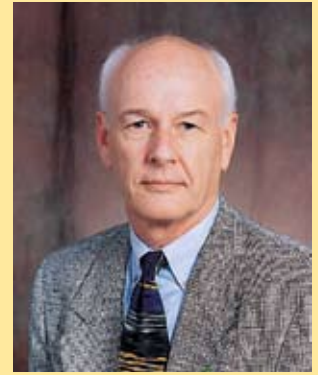
“We pose the problems and let the students figure things out for themselves. This style of learning is more than just teaching them to mimic what somebody else has done.” —Tommy Smith

Trussville. Mayer serves as principal investigator. Co-principal investigators include Dale Feldman, Ph.D., from the UAB School of Engineering; Michael Froning, Ed.D., dean of the UAB School of Education; Dr. Bernadette Mullins, from the mathematics department at Birmingham-Southern College; Dr. Ruth Parker, CEO and founder of MEC; and Scott Snyder, Ph.D., director of the Center for Educational Accountability at UAB. Linda Lucas, Ph.D., dean of the UAB School of Engineering, is another partner in the effort, as are additional faculty members in mathematics, engineering, and education at UAB.

Local funds supported the pilot testing of the partnership, and the five-year NSF funding began in fall 2004. Additional funds are being raised each year locally from school districts, businesses, and foundations to increase the number of teachers in the programs.

The proposed middle-school math track at UAB is expected to receive approval from state officials within the next two years, according to members of the GBMP. Mayer says the real beneficiaries of the new teacher training will be future middle-school students, who may someday look back on their math classes with less disdain than their parents did. “We believe having a teacher who is sufficiently grounded in mathematics, and who can guide students well, will result in improvement of mathematics achievement for middle-school students.”

## Charting a Road Map for the Future



Faculty retreats are nothing new here at the UAB School of Education, but the approach taken for the 2006 retreat definitely was new. And we hope the new approach will clarify the school's goals and help develop strategies for more effectively reaching those goals.

The 2006 retreat was held on May 9-10, just as the academic year was winding down. Past retreats have been held in the summer, just as the academic year was about to begin. We decided to use the retreat to develop goals and then use those goals to develop strategies for the school to implement in the next academic year. It was a matter of taking a different viewpoint, focusing on where we're going rather than where we've been.

The faculty approved five schoolwide goals for the 2006-07 academic year, and each of the school's three departments established goals within that framework. An outcomes assessment model already is in place to determine the school's success at reaching its goals.

It was a fairly unique process. It's hard to get two Ph.D.s to agree on anything, much less 60 of them. But we have a committed group of faculty, and they were very focused on this process. It was impressive to see the positive energy that was put into developing these goals.

The idea for a revamped retreat grew out of the 2006 accreditation process. We passed the accreditation in good shape, but there was a suggestion in the report that our performance criteria were not clear to reviewers.

We felt that was probably a fair criticism. We work with a lot of environments—the university environment, the national scholarly environment, and the local school environment. Those focused local entities need to know exactly what we're doing.

We took that suggestion to heart and decided to change our retreat from a beginning-of-the-year, pep-rally type of approach to an end-of-the-year look at where we've been and where we are going to go. We want to have a real clear idea of what we want to accomplish each year.

For a detailed look at our schoolwide and departmental goals, please turn to page 10.

# {VIEWPOINT}

## *How Valuable is Advanced Placement?*

*When Advanced Placement (AP) was created more than 50 years ago, it was an option for a select group of advanced high-school students who were ready to take on the challenge of college-level courses.*

*While many might still apply that definition, the modern perception of AP is that of a standard all students should aspire to—a perception boosted by government efforts to use AP as a tool in education reform.*

*Over the past decade, participation in AP exams has doubled, reaching 2.1 million exams taken in 2005, and since 2000, percentages of students passing AP courses have increased in every state.*

*As participation has grown, so has debate over the value of AP, especially with regard to the average student. But recent studies have also downplayed AP's impact among its highest achievers, concluding that a score of 5 on the AP exam is no guarantee of an A grade in a corresponding college course. As a result of such studies, many universities no longer accept AP exams as substitutes for freshman-level courses. Despite such challenges to the traditional role of AP, participation continues to grow, with AP exams now covering 35 college-level courses in 20 subject areas, including math, science, English, and social science.*

*UAB alumnus Manson L. Wade, Ph.D., has taught AP physics for more than 10 years at the Russell Mathematics and Science Center at the Alabama School of Fine Arts. During that time, he has experienced the challenge of providing students with the solid background they need while also preparing them for the exam that validates their knowledge in the eyes of admissions officers.*

*To him, the value of AP courses and their respective exams is an issue wrapped in the complexities of learning and evaluation.*



*Manson Wade has mixed feelings about AP exams.*

### **By Manson L. Wade, Ph.D.**

Upon entering this profession about 11 years ago as a high-school teacher, I inherited an AP physics program in its infancy. I was charged with continuing its curriculum development and overseeing its integration into a specialized program.

To say I had limited knowledge of AP—both philosophically and from a content perspective—would be an understatement. In fact, I had never heard of AP because my high-school experience did not include AP classes of any kind. In order to prepare for my new undertaking, I enthusiastically attended an AP institute the summer before my high-school teaching debut. There, I was presented

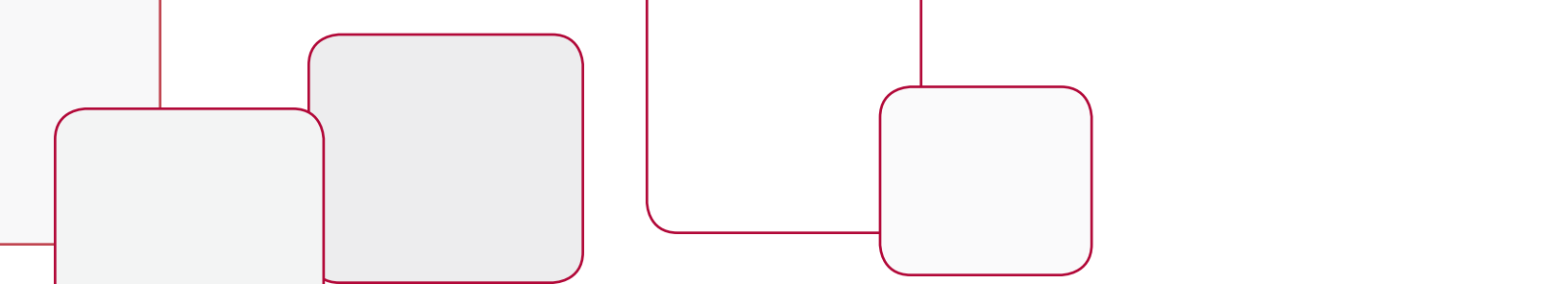
with the “suggested” AP curriculum.

I use the word “suggested” because it was made clear that I was expected to develop a curriculum that would be modified to go beyond what was suggested by the College Board. Still, I was immediately impressed by the depth and breadth of content presented by the curriculum. It reminded me of my first collegiate course in physics. In fact, I would be using the same textbook that I studied as a sophomore physics student.

I began to modify the suggested curriculum, taking the philosophy that my main objective was to prepare my students for collegiate physics courses, with AP exam preparation and development of test-taking skills being important secondary objectives. Having been trained as a scientist and researcher and not as a traditional educator, with my only prior teaching experience coming at the postsecondary level, I was keenly aware of both the expectations and also the

skill sets required of high-school students as they enter college. The “suggested” AP curriculum was more than adequate to prepare students if it was implemented and taught appropriately. It addressed several areas that are key building blocks for further coursework in physics, including appropriate content objectives, laboratory work with a focus on experimental design, and critical thinking infused with application of concept and theory.

In time, I used the AP scores and performance statistics in specific content areas as a means of course assessment and self-evaluation. This allowed me to focus on areas of weakness, to enhance areas of strength, and to continue experimenting, tweaking, and



modifying the curriculum. Simultaneously I began to develop mixed feelings about the AP exam itself, especially in physics, since it was not a true assessment tool in which students could learn and improve. For my students, taking the AP exam represented anything from simply receiving AP credit designation on their transcript (which is impressive for college admissions, regardless of performance) to being exempt from my final exam in their senior year (which, for most, was well worth the preparation time and the \$85 testing fee) to an opportunity for obtaining college credit and not having to take an introductory-level physics course (which is not always the best course of action).

Since the AP physics course is my students' first true exposure to the subject matter, the exam itself presents a real challenge for all of them. The AP exam is comprised of two sections, with the first being in multiple-choice format, focusing on conceptual knowledge and qualitative reasoning. The second section is in a free-response format, focusing on problem-solving skills and procedures, content knowledge, and quantitative analysis.

The free-response section of the exam does an excellent job of evaluating a student's content knowledge and general ability. The problems are comprehensive, and they represent excellent applications of fundamental concepts, with a primary emphasis on process and procedure. These types of problems are consistent with what students will encounter at the collegiate level, and they aid in developing skills that are paramount for students interested in professions involving research, medicine, and engineering.

I have mixed feelings about the multiple-choice section of the exam, especially in regard to its fairness and relevance in evaluating a student's worthiness for collegiate work. Although the merits of any multiple-choice exam can be argued as they relate to critical thinking and qualitative analysis, I also believe that a multiple-choice exam is as much

an exercise in test-taking skills and strategies as it is an assessment of knowledge. I have had students who were brilliant in their understanding of process and procedure, as well as in their ability to interpret, analyze, and solve problems. But if I were to give those students 35 multiple-choice questions and 45 minutes to respond, I would get a wide range of results that would not necessarily provide a true assessment of their skill sets or talents. As a matter of fact, some of my students who have not performed well on the multiple-choice section of the AP exam have performed admirably in college physics courses. Almost without exception, my students perform better on average on the free-response than on the multiple-choice section. Moreover, multiple-choice assessments, especially in physics, are rare occurrences at the collegiate level and are definitely not consistent with what will be expected of students.

As an alternative to the AP multiple-choice format, an essay component in addition to the free response would truly assess a student's conceptual knowledge and aptitude for both qualitative reasoning and critical thought. I understand that multiple-choice assessments are prevalent in the biological sciences, even at the collegiate level. But it seems this is the case because of practical, time-management issues, where assessment of huge numbers of students provides justification for this type of testing. In fact, it seems that the College Board has instituted this type of assessment primarily because of the vast numbers of students taking these AP exams. It seems to be more a matter of convenience than of effective student evaluation.

Ultimately I have had students whose composite AP score really did not reflect their "suitability" or "qualification" for course work at the next level. Almost without fail, and regardless of AP score, approximately 98 percent of my students who have taken a physics course at the college level have made a grade of B or higher, with a very high percentage of those making an A.

This indicates that if a student does not test well, a multiple-choice assessment, in most cases, will not be the most effective way of evaluating content knowledge. But the AP exam in its present format is a reality of the world that I accept, as must my students, and we work together to prepare as best we can.

Although I feel that the AP exam is not the perfect evaluation tool and does not always provide a true assessment of skill sets and qualifications, I am a staunch supporter of the curricula that the College Board has developed and suggests as foundation for AP courses and program development. Over the years, I have adopted and modified this curriculum to suit the needs of my students as they prepare for the next level of education. I was pleased to see that the College Board now will audit AP courses; it has been my contention for years that all AP courses are not created equal.

Any AP program should not only be about exam preparation and test scores; it should also be about the curriculum and the students' needs. For physics I would like to see an emphasis on content objectives and critical thought, coupled with an integration of laboratory experience emphasizing experimental design (which generally is not done well at the college level). I believe this approach would truly train and expose students to skills and processes that will allow them the greatest opportunity for success at the next level.

*Manson L. Wade is instructor of physics and educational consultant at the Russell Mathematics and Science Center, Alabama School of Fine Arts. He received his M.S. degree in physics from UAB in 1991 and his Ph.D. in 1999. He earned his Alabama certification as a physics teacher in the School of Education.*

# INQUIRY: TONDRA LODER, PH.D.

## *Tracking Teachers Across Generations*

Tondra Loder, Ph.D., has found a shortcoming in education research. “There has been very little research that looks at generational differences in education,” Loder says. “We tend to look at one snapshot in time. But we don’t take a broader view of history in order to see how being born into certain time periods can shape the way teachers look at their jobs.”

Loder, an assistant professor in the UAB School of Education, is trying to help fill that research gap. She is studying two groups of African-American educators—those born before the Civil Rights Movement and those born after—and focusing on how they view their roles as teachers. The study, funded by the Spencer Foundation, is titled “Bridging the Tradition of Activism and Professionalism Within the Context of Contemporary Urban Education: Perspectives from Birmingham Educators Born Pre- and Post-Civil Rights Movement.”

“I’m interested in what urban educators see as their key purpose in teaching,” Loder says. “Historically, African-American educators have been viewed as leaders in promoting social change through education. But do African-American educators today still see themselves as leaders in the community? Or do they see their role as a matter of being professionals who are there to do a job from 8:00 a.m. til 3:00 p.m. and then they are gone?”

### THE CASE FOR CONNECTEDNESS

Understanding the past is key to shaping the future of urban education, Loder says. “We need to look at generational differences both between teachers and students and between veteran teachers and new teachers, who might not be too different from the students they are teaching.

“I believe there are tensions today between older teachers and younger people they consider to be part of the hip-hop generation. Older teachers don’t understand these young people, and they often are afraid of them. Some older African-American teachers think some of the young men are angry, unfocused, and wayward, and they don’t know how to reach them. The young people feel they are not understood, and if they feel they are not cared for, they will disengage from school.

“African-American students need close connections to their teachers, and they have had them historically. It’s vitally important that today’s students have those connections.”

Loder’s research already is yielding some important insights. “I’m finding that teachers and administrators who are active in the community are reluctant to identify themselves as activists. They see activists as larger-than-life figures. But the more I talk to them, the more I realize they are activists in their own right.



*Tonya Loder has found a generation gap among urban educators.*

“I’m finding that teachers from the post-Civil Rights generation are grappling with how to reach students who are not too much younger than they are. The teachers might identify with the students on a cultural level, but they still see the students as being very different from themselves. They don’t think today’s students value education the way they did. And they don’t see them as coming from families that are intact, with caring adults who make sure they go to school and do their homework. They are concerned that many students don’t have the support they need.”

### THE POWER OF PARENTS

Parents are at the heart of another research focus for Loder, who is principal investigator for the Communities and Schools Together (CAST) project. An initiative of the Urban Education Project,

“I’m finding that teachers from the post-Civil Rights generation are grappling with how to reach students who are not too much younger than they are.”

—Tonya Loder, Ph.D.

CAST aims to enhance parental involvement and to promote positive home/school relationships in urban communities.

“CAST takes the perspective that parents are an important group, and we need to make sure we bring them on board,” Loder says. “From birth to age 6, they are the first teachers for their children, so it’s important to understand their perspective.

“Parents do care a lot about their children, and they want the best for them. But some feel they are ill equipped to help with homework, and they don’t want to feel stupid in front of their children. Parents often find out too late about how their children are doing. When they are getting report cards, that’s when they are finding out about problems. They would like more frequent communication from teachers.

“We also are finding that some parents don’t feel they are respected by the school staff. They don’t feel welcome, so they aren’t comfort-

able being at the school. We need work hard to break down those kinds of barriers.”

Loder is committed to helping urban educators overcome the challenges they face. “One of our biggest challenges is the negative public image not just of urban schools but of cities in general. People love the city when it comes to taking advantage of the cultural life. But they also see it as a place of difference, where there is crime and poor people.

“Inequities in funding are another big issue. Urban schools with largely African-American and Latino enrollments often don’t get the same kind of resources that schools in middle-class suburban districts get. That should not be happening in 2006.”

## Studying the Connections Between Culture and Kindergarten

Research by a UAB graduate student is shining light on the transition from kindergarten to school in Taiwan.

Ching Lan Yin Kwong, a doctoral student and graduate assistant in the UAB School of Education, is conducting a study titled “Taiwanese Parents’ and Kindergarten Teachers’ Expectations for Children’s School Readiness.”

Kwong interviewed parents and kindergarten teachers in Taiwan, focusing on three primary areas. “One focus was to provide an authentic account based on Taiwanese parents’ and kindergarten teachers’ ways of life,” Kwong says. “Another focus was to understand similarities and differences regarding Taiwanese parents’ and kindergarten teachers’ expectations for children’s

school readiness. The final focus was to explore whether Taiwanese kindergarten teachers’ expectations for children’s school readiness was either widely shared or somehow different, based on different school contexts.”

The study found that parents and teachers in Taiwan share some core beliefs about school readiness. For example, both groups placed emphasis on children’s academics, centered on basic language and mathematics skills. Also, both groups emphasized the need for developing children’s moral sense, such as respecting elders and being polite to others.

Kwong plans to compare her findings with similar research conducted in the United States. A number of U.S. stud-



*Ching Lan Yin Kwong focuses on expectations of parents and teachers.*

ies have shown that parents here tend to emphasize certain knowledge and skills related to school readiness, while teachers focus more on children’s social adjustment and disposition to learn.

# OH, WHAT A FEELING

## *Toyota Funds Family Literacy Project*



*Julia Austin helps make connections with Hispanic families in Shelby County.*

For the growing number of Hispanic and other immigrant parents living in Shelby County, an innovative language program offers a chance to get more involved in their children's educations. A \$600,000 grant from Toyota, combined with the efforts of UAB School of Education faculty, is making the difference.

"The Toyota Family Literacy Program is such an exciting project," says Julia S. Austin, Ph.D., director of educational services in the UAB Graduate School. "It will be a model for the rest of the country."

Bill Tevendale, development officer at the School of Education, identified the grant, and Austin was among those who teamed with him to contact key individuals and supervise the writing of proposals. "Bill and I discussed the possibility of working with Shelby County on a project such as this," Austin says. "The partnership has been a wonderful collaborative effort. I've found Shelby County Schools easy to work with."

### A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE

Toyota has already donated \$350,000 to initiate programs at Valley, Meadow

View, and Creek View elementary schools in Shelby County, which is one of five systems nationwide to receive the funding.

"The parents are thrilled," says Meadow View Elementary adult-education teacher Linda Richardson. "They can better help their children at home because they understand the language. They come here on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, from 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., and go to PACT (Parent and Child Together) time two times a week for 30 minutes.

"They also get 'mini lessons' on what's being learned. For example, if the children are studying the rain forest, I preteach the parents about the rain forest. This really boosts the self-confidence of the parents."

Susan Spezzini, Ph.D., assistant professor for English language learner education at UAB, serves as director of Project EQUAL. Funded by a five-year, \$1.3-million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Project EQUAL is a collaborative project between UAB and Shelby County Schools to provide equal access to education to all students. One of its goals is to prepare 120 teachers in the use of English as a Second Language (ESL).

"Hispanic children in Shelby County are, for the most part, first generation in the U.S.," Spezzini says. "This means that early intervention in literacy will have a great impact on them and their families."

Spezzini, a former Peace Corps volunteer who lived in Paraguay for 26 years, knows what it's like to experience a different culture. "For many English-language learners and their parents, this family literacy program is a life-changing opportunity—one that will open doors and allow them to reach their American dreams."

Austin serves as the principal investigator for Project EQUAL. "UAB's School of Education began offering our first course

to prepare ESL teachers in 1999," she says. "Since that time, we have received several grants that have helped us expand our ESL teacher training. We have worked to help Shelby County Schools effectively meet the needs of their fast-growing immigrant population."

### AN INVESTMENT PAYS OFF

Leah Dobbs-Black, ESL program area specialist for Shelby County Schools, says the program is important to the children and their parents because they are learning simultaneously. "The parents are learning language, content, parenting skills, and instructional strategies that they use to reinforce their children's learning at home," Dobbs-Black says. "Both the child and the parent see the growth in each other."

The English Language and Culture Institute (ELCI) at UAB is working closely with Shelby County Schools to provide professional development and teacher coaching for adult-literacy/ESL teachers. Melissa Hawkins, ELCI program director, plays a key role in planning the training.

"We are participating by assisting with professional-development seminars for the teachers of the parents' ESL courses," Hawkins says. "UAB is having an impact on the quality of the pedagogy in the adult ESL courses, helping to improve curriculum and teaching methodology."

Austin says the Toyota program will have a long-term impact on area families. "Parents are learning English, enhancing their literacy skills, and learning how to interact with U.S. schools. They are also learning how to help their children complete homework, providing educational support and oversight. These children are going to do better in school and develop better literacy skills, which will enhance their entire schooling experience."



### *The Principal Matters*

Living just a few houses from Smith Middle School, Ericka Henderson knows what to expect when she looks out from her front porch.

“Sure enough, I’ll see the principal’s truck sitting in the school parking lot,” Henderson says. “It seems it’s always there, even on weekends. If I glance at his office window, chances are the computer screen is flickering, day or night.”

Henderson’s daughter, Claranita, is a seventh grader at the school. That helps Henderson appreciate Smith Middle School principal Charles Willis Jr. and the extra effort he puts forth. “For my children, Charles Willis has really been like a dad away from home,” Henderson says. “He is a role model who not only listens to and cares about kids, but he also disciplines them when they need it.”

Willis, who was presented with the prestigious Milken Family Foundation National Educator Award last October, says he is simply doing his job. “To get the best from everyone, I try to create an atmosphere where each person feels important,” Willis says. “I believe if people are going to be successful, they have to be valued. My style is very inclusive. I like to get input from parents, students, and leaders in the community. I try to instill in young people how important it is to put their best foot forward. I make a point to demonstrate that in my daily life. It’s not just something I say, but what I actually do.”

#### EXAMINING ROOT CAUSES

Willis, a former physical-education teacher and coach, is an alumnus of the Urban Principal Academy—a program sponsored by the UAB School of Education in the mid-1990s. He finds his current duties both challenging and rewarding.

“It’s easy to give up on a situation, but that’s not me. I totally enjoy being in an urban setting where I can help make a difference. When I came here, the school was suffering and students were underachieving. My administration started analyzing the root causes of the problem. We came up with a comprehensive plan.

“When the teachers really started working together and there were more discussions of how to meet the needs of each individual child, we really got the best out of people.

There wasn’t a feeling that we were facing an insurmountable task. We monitored student progress and found we had been tremendously successful. It was by all means a team effort.”

The Milken Award came as a pleasant surprise, Willis says. “It had been presented to me as a way to recognize my staff for meeting all of the adequate yearly progress goals. I had no idea the outstanding educator they were talking about was me. I kind of dropped when I heard the news. But it gave me a feeling of pride. Being acknowl-

edged for the things we’ve accomplished, and being appreciated and recognized, meant a great deal.”

Willis wasn’t the only one touched by the award. Heather Jackson, guidance counselor at Smith Middle School, remembers the moment they called Willis’s name. “I had tears running down my face,” she says. “I couldn’t think of anyone more deserving of the honor. Mr. Willis can be very firm when he needs to be, but he also has a soft side. He loves children and cares about his employees. He likes his staff to shine and be all we can be. He also has worked extremely hard to help our school turn things around and make all the goals we established.”

The Milken Award, which included a \$25,000 cash prize, also impressed Willis’s youngest fans. “Some of the students thought I had struck it rich and was going to retire,” Willis says with a laugh. “The reaction overall has been wonderful.”

#### FIRM AND FAIR

Willis, a graduate of Ensley High School, the University of West Alabama, and the University of Montevallo, is the first African American to receive the Milken Award, considered a top honor in the field of education. “To be one of only two in the state to receive it, and



*Charles Willis Jr. says it takes a team effort to boost a struggling school.*

among only 100 in the nation, seems pretty unreal,” he says. “It certainly motivates me, but I already believed in what we were doing.”

Smith Middle School, located in the Center Point/Huffman area of Birmingham, has approximately 400 students currently enrolled. Willis enjoys trying to know each one, but he walks a fine line. “They’re aware of the expectations. They know I’m here for them, but they also understand who the authority figure is.”



April 27–29, 2007 Birmingham, Alabama—Sheraton Birmingham Hotel

## {HELLOS & FAREWELLS}

The UAB School of Education faculty, staff, and students warmly welcome new faculty and staff listed below.

### HELLOS

David Schwarzer, Tamilane Blaudeau

### FAREWELLS

Elaine Robinowich, Valerie Jeffcoat, Yvonne Law

## UAB SCHOOL OF EDUCATION *Strategic Goals for 2006-09*

1. Attract and retain high-quality undergraduate and graduate students and, in so doing, increase credit-hour production.
2. Increase preparation of, and support for, faculty and students to better prepare them to teach diverse populations, e.g. special-needs and English-language learners.
3. Increase faculty and student research and scholarship presence, locally and nationally.
4. Strengthen a cohesive organizational culture and intellectual community committed to implementing our mission, values, and vision.
5. Recruit, retain, and support high-quality faculty.

## GOALS FOR DEPARTMENTS IN THE UAB SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

### DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN STUDIES

David Macrina, chair

1. Increase enrollment and credit-hour production by developing program options that would maximize the strengths of department faculty across program areas, including:
  - a. Adventure-based counseling (Counseling, Physical Education, Health Education).
  - b. Human services education program (EPR, Health Education, Counseling).
2. Identify and compete for sources of additional funding for graduate student assistantships and fellowships.
3. Explore potential “certification of training completion” type opportunities to be offered by our program faculty (program evaluation, ropes courses, research methods, etc.) as a means of attracting additional students and revenue.

### DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Charles Calhoun, chair

1. Increase and maintain head count and credit-hour production at the graduate level.
2. Improve the quality of teacher candidates to work with special-needs and ELL students.
3. Improve the integration of internships with internship seminars and the philosophies of the early childhood/elementary and secondary programs.

### DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, SPECIAL EDUCATION, FOUNDATIONS, AND TECHNOLOGY

Boyd Rogan, chair

1. Collaborate on the development of advanced interdisciplinary programs that will serve diverse populations.
2. Develop a more cohesive intellectual community at the departmental level.
3. Explore the development of an interdisciplinary resilience institute.

# A **Tax-Wise** Alternative to Investments with Low Rates of Return

## The School of Education Charitable Gift Annuity Program

Charitable gift annuities enable persons 60 and older to make gifts to the School of Education and receive favorable rates of return on their investments in the school's scholarship, research, and other important programs. Typically funded with cash or appreciated securities, charitable gift annuities also result in significant tax savings.

A 70-year-old donor creating a **\$50,000** gift annuity with cash would receive the following benefits:

Rate of return: **6.5%**

Guaranteed annual income for life: **\$3,250**  
(For the first 16 years, 60% of the income would be tax-free.)

Federal income tax deductions: **\$21,765**

### Sample Rates of Return Single Life

*(Two life gift annuities are available  
at slightly lower rates.)*

Age	Rate:
60	5.7%
65	6.0%
70	6.5%
75	7.1%
80	8.0%
85	9.5%
90	11.3%

### The UAB Torchlighters Society

*Honoring Those Who Have Included UAB in Their Estate Plans*

For additional information, please contact William A. Tevendale, Senior Director of Development,  
School of Education, EB 233, 1530 3rd Ave. S. Birmingham, AL 35294-1250  
205.934.8354 • [tevendal@uab.edu](mailto:tevendal@uab.edu)

*Always consult your tax or legal advisor when considering a planned gift.*

# END NOTES

■ The UAB School of Education will host the National Urban Alliance for Effective Education (NUA) conference, "Teaching for Intelligence: Believe to Achieve," April 27-29, 2007, at the Sheraton Birmingham Hotel and the Birmingham-Jefferson Convention Complex.

Teachers, administrators, school board members, members of college and university education departments, state and federal government education officials, and students preparing to become teachers are invited to attend. Award-winning author and education advocate Jonathan Kozol will be among the presenters. The conference will feature presentations by education researchers and other experts on proven methods for boosting children's intellectual performance, literacy, confidence, and competence. Conference participants also will discuss challenges facing many of today's urban schools, with special emphasis on the connections between culture, language, and cognition.

The conference is presented by NUA, a nonprofit organization that promotes instructional strategies based on the latest research on concept and cognitive development, reasoning, thinking, and comprehension. The NUA consists of a network of education consultants who work with school districts around the nation.

A two-day preconference program for educators will be held at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute on April 25-26. The Teaching for Intelligence conference cosponsors are the UAB School of Education, Birmingham City Schools, the Alabama State Department of Education, and Learning Point Associates.

For more information, conference prices, or registration, please go to [www.believetoachieve.org], call LJF Educational Resources at (847) 397-8527, or send an e-mail to [ljfedresources@aol.com].

■ Lou Anne Worthington, Ph.D., was the School of Education's recipient of the 2006 President's Award for Excellence in Teaching during the UAB Faculty Awards Convocation in May.

Worthington was one of 13 faculty members from across the campus who received the award, which recognizes full-time regular faculty who have demonstrated exceptional accomplishments in teaching. One recipient is chosen from each school and the Joint Health Sciences departments. The prestigious awards include a cash prize and a Steuben crystal apple with engraved base. Students, faculty, and alumni make the nominations.

Worthington, an associate professor in education, excels at preparing future teachers to teach, among other things. She was cited for assuming sole responsibility for the EDU 200: Education as a Profession course, a degree requirement.

■ Maryann Manning, Ed.D., has been elected to the International Reading Association (IRA) board of directors. Manning assumed office at the close of the 51st annual IRA convention last spring in Chicago. She will serve on the nine-member board through the spring of 2009. Manning specializes in reading education and literacy. A member of the UAB faculty since 1972, she teaches in the UAB School of Education's Department of Curriculum and Instruction.

■ Broderick K. McMullin, a 1986 UAB graduate, has been elected vice president of the School of Education Alumni Chapter. He has taught social studies at Parker High School in Birmingham since 1998.

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## SEND US YOUR NEWS

Do you have alumni news for UAB EDUCATION? If so, please contact either of the following with submissions:

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