

Renee Moore

UAB Grand Challenge

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My proposal is to change the way that the state of Alabama is viewed by the nation as well as the rest of the world. According to data collected by CNBC in 2017 Alabama ranked #1 on a list of the 10 Worst States to Live In. But that was just one of many polls that ranks Alabama poorly. Alabama is rated amongst the nation's worst in teen pregnancy, childhood poverty, adult obesity, childhood smoking, drunk driving accidents, unemployment, incarceration rates, education, and racism. Many factors play a role in Alabama's situation, but none more so than the education of its citizens.

A good education is the foundation to change in Alabama. Academic achievement is an important factor in the life one leads in a society. High school dropouts are more likely to become teen parents, abuse drugs and alcohol, live beneath the poverty line, and commit crimes. Over 80% of the incarcerated population in the United States are high school dropouts according to a 2014 Huffington Post article. High school dropouts on average earn \$10,000 a year less than someone with a diploma. A difference that could mean a shift between living above or below the poverty line.

Although Alabama's graduation rates have now increased to 89%, interim state superintendent Dr. Ed Richardson states that over 150 schools are failing to prepare Alabama graduates for either college or the workforce. In April 2018 Education Week wrote that Alabama's K-12th achievement index, last updated in 2016, finished with a D average in 45th

place amongst 50 states and the District of Columbia. The Literacy Council of Alabama provides statistics that show 16% of adults in Alabama are functionally illiterate and can not read well enough to pass the GED or fill out a job application.

Increasing the graduation rate should have the potential to increase annual incomes for all students over the course of their lives. Unfortunately the standards of our education system are being held too low and leaving students unprepared.

bridging of the financial and educational gap will help to provide a pathway out of poverty. The overall effect will be a brighter future for all of Alabama through an improved socioeconomic status.