



Will Alabama’s “School of Choice” Look Like Florida?

BY DAVID G. BRONNER

Florida recently expanded its school voucher program to remove income caps and to pay expenses beyond school tuition and fees. The media has reported that these taxpayer dollars will be paid by all taxpayers and not just parents with school-aged children. Parents of that \$8,000 award have used it for Disney World passes, big-screen TVs, and PlayStation 5s.

The *Tampa Bay Times* states:

The items appear in a list of authorized expenses in a 13-page purchasing guide published this summer... The list quickly raised eyebrows as it circulated. ‘If we saw school districts spending money like that, we would

be outraged,’ said Damaris Allen, executive director of Families for Strong Public Schools, who recently started speaking out publicly on the issue. ‘We want to be conservative with our tax dollars. We want to be sure it is being used for worthwhile things.’ By comparison, Allen and others noted, teachers who want some of the same items for their classrooms would have to pay out-of-pocket or turn to other fundraising sources such as GoFundMe because schools won’t pay for them.

Conversations among parents in online discussion groups have sparked added concern. Participants inquired

about the possibility of vouchers paying for tickets for fan fests and conventions. They discussed whether they could get a television and a projector, or just one of those. They shared sample wording to submit for requests to get theme park passes paid for with public education funds, something that was prohibited a year ago.

Do Alabama taxpayers want their valuable taxes to be spent this way? Removal of income caps for voucher programs and allowing parents to directly spend taxpayer monies is a recipe for abuse. **Will a parent with a drug, alcohol, or gambling problem really worry about their kids’ education?** ●

The 10 Best and Worst States to Have a Baby

BY MARIE HOLMES, HUFFPOST

WalletHub has just published its 2023 list of the ‘Best and Worst States to Have a Baby.’ States were ranked ... **W** in each of the following categories: cost, including the costs of both childbirth and early child care; healthcare, including rates of infant and child mortality, postpartum depression and the numbers of OB-GYNs, midwives, and fertility clinics per capita; baby-friendliness, including parental leave policies and share of nationally accredited child care centers; and family-friendliness, with scores from this year’s WalletHub list of the ‘Best and Worst States to Raise a Family.’

The top 10 states overall have a few things in common, such as most being in the country’s northern half and having adopted Medicaid expansion, which has been linked to a decrease in maternal and infant mortality rates. These states are, in order: 1. Massachusetts, 2. Minnesota, 3. Vermont,

4. Rhode Island, 5. North Dakota, 6. New Hampshire, 7. Iowa, 8. Utah, 9. Connecticut, 10. Washington.

...“Massachusetts scores the highest for family leave policies and has one of the best healthcare systems in America, but medical costs are sky high,” WalletHub analyst Jill Gonzalez told *HuffPost*.

“It is among the most expensive states in which to have a baby, with an average cost of \$19,631 for a cesarean delivery.”

...**The bottom-ranking states overall** were almost entirely in the South. Five are among the minority of states that have not adopted Medicaid expansion. They are: 42. Florida, 43. Nevada, 44. Oklahoma, 45. Arkansas (approved Medicaid expansion in 2023), 46. Georgia, 47. West Virginia, 48. Louisiana, 49. South Carolina, **50. Alabama**, 51. Mississippi... ●

Magnolia Grove on The Trail Gets Transformation

BY MARK FAGAN

Magnolia Grove opened in 1993 as the second site on the RSA's Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail. It is a 54-hole golf complex on 650 acres, part of the 1,500-acre Miller Park in Northwest Mobile. This site is unusually hilly for South Alabama. It is heavily forested with creeks, lakes, undisturbed wetlands, soft rolling sand hills, short slash pine trees, and magnolia trees.

There are two regulation 18-hole courses (Crossings and Falls) and one 18-hole par-3 course. The Crossings Course has scenic hills and wetlands and is where the Ladies Professional Golf Association tournaments have been played. The Falls Course plays out to a lake and small waterfall and back to the clubhouse. The par-3 course plays over many bulk-headed marshes. The practice range includes the University of South Alabama's golf building and practice area. There is a 36,700-sf clubhouse with a pro shop, grill, and meeting rooms.

Over the last 30 years, large trees along the fairways grew longer limbs that encroached on the fairways, blocking sunlight from reaching turf on fairway

edges. This reduced the turf quality in some of the "rough" areas on fairways and near cart paths. Improvements were recently made to rectify this situation and enhance these courses' beauty and playability. Trees with large limbs were trimmed, and 12,000 smaller trees were removed. Bushes and undergrowth in many areas between fairways were cleared away. There were 20 acres of closely maintained turf added around tees, fairways, cart paths, and greens. Some 60 acres of native grass were planted in the areas between holes.

These cleared areas allow more shots without penalty strokes. The new turf adds to the overall appeal of these world-class courses. Fewer trees and more open areas now provide long views across the courses not seen before. These course enhancements at Magnolia Grove and a stay at one of the RSA's two award-winning AAA Four Diamond hotels in Mobile (The Battle House Renaissance Mobile Hotel & Spa and the Renaissance Mobile Riverview Plaza Hotel) combine for a great golf outing. ●



Free Smoke Alarms

BY JONATHAN LEDBETTER, GET ALARMED ALABAMA SMOKE ALARM PROGRAM MANAGER

Attention all Alabama teachers, employees, judicial officials, and their families residing in Alabama! We are pleased to inform you that you are entitled to free smoke alarms. The state of Alabama has prioritized ensuring its citizens are safe and protected from fire hazards. As such, the Alabama Fire College's Get Alarmed Alabama offers free smoke alarms to RSA members and their families living in Alabama.

Smoke alarms are essential in any home or workplace, as they can alert individuals to the presence of smoke and fire, giving them time to evacuate and seek safety. To take advantage



of this offer, contact the **Alabama Fire College Office at 800.241.2467** or fill out the form at <https://www.cognitofirms.com/AlabamaFireCollege1/requestasmokealarm>. We will, in turn, contact your local fire department to install free smoke alarms for you at no charge.

We encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity and ensure your homes and workplaces have the necessary safety measures. Remember, smoke alarms save lives, and we want to ensure that everyone in Alabama is protected from fire hazards.

Thank you for your attention, and stay safe! ●

Alabama Success Stories

Alabama Transfers Saving Students Time, Credits, and Money

BY STEPHEN KATSINAS, DIRECTOR, AND NATHANIEL BRAY, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
EDUCATION POLICY CENTER, THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA

Since its creation by legislation authored by Senator Jimmy Holley in 1994, the Articulation and General Studies Committee (AGSC) has fought to save students time, credits, and money by avoiding duplication of courses and effort. At the time, many universities would only accept certain courses, thus forcing transfer students to retake similar courses after transfer. This created confusion, misunderstanding, and mistrust between students, parents, and representatives at the transfer institutions.

Funding for AGSC was low for twenty years, but this did not stop progress. The Alabama Community College System (ACCS) under Chancellor Jimmy Baker and former Vice Chancellor Vicky Ohlson, the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE) under Robin McGill helped create the Transfer Data Matrix to map 230 transferable courses to universities.

In October 2022, the AGSC replaced the old Statewide Transfer and Articulation Reporting System (STARS) with unanimously adopted new branding – Alabama Transfers (AT) powered by AGSC. Its new website, for which seed money was provided by The University of Alabama under former Provost Kevin Whitaker and current Provost Jim Dalton, and spurred by efforts from Program Coordinator Brandi Stacey and Program Manager Mike Malley, was launched on November 17, 2022 (<https://alabamatransfers.com>).

The new totally online AT system lets students preview how their credits will transfer within their target major and university. By submitting an official “transfer guide” online, they hold a legally binding agreement with the university to accept transfer credits on their mobile phones.

The Alabama Transfers website streamlines students’ transfer experience by helping them:

- Think about fields of study broadly, not specific degree requirements
- “Shop around” for best-fit programs, universities, and fields of study
- Develop a vision for career opportunities

- Immediately connect with universities and take the next step

As a result of AT, when Alabama students transfer from a community college to a public four-year university, they can rest assured their coursework will accompany them. At the community college level, the ACCS maintains its common course numbering system, while AGSC maintains and audits course curricula to ensure each course carries the same weight, no matter where a student takes it. The ACCS provides information about transfers through its website (<https://www.accs.edu/academics/2-to-4-transfer/>).

Alabama Transfers, led by Executive Director Keith Sessions reprising his role from STARS, offers resources for counselors and school administrators interested in dual enrollment to help integrate transfer guides into their regular workflows. Whether you are a community college student, a guidance counselor, or a school administrator, you

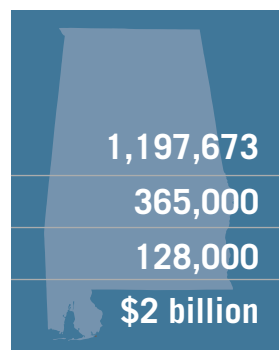
can visit the website to learn more and discover what Alabama Transfers can do for you.

Shortly after his retirement, Senator Richard Shelby said, “Education is the key for Alabama’s future.” Senator Holley called AGSC the most successful education reform in his three decades of service. Alabama Transfers positions Alabama to be in the forefront again—increasing transfers statewide helps Gov. Kay Ivey and state leaders meet the goal of 500,000 more Alabamians with high-quality degrees and certificates by 2025. The faster, more cohesive advising process that resulted means greater workforce diversity for Alabama businesses because ACCS’ student enrollment mirrors the 27% statewide minority population. Saving students and parents time, credits, and money is good for Alabama businesses and taxpayers.

This is a series of articles about Alabama Success Stories. Please let us know if you have a similar success story you would like to share with the RSA membership. You may contact us at communication.correspondences@rsa-al.gov. ●



Senator Shelby meeting with Alabama educators



Alabama Has Among the Nation’s Strictest Eligibility Rules for Medicaid

Alabama **Has NOT ACCEPTED** Federal Medicaid Expansion

1,197,673

Number of Alabamians covered by Medicaid/CHIP as of February 2023

365,000

Number of additional Alabama residents who would be covered if the state accepted expansion

128,000

Number of people who have NO realistic access to health insurance without Medicaid expansion

\$2 billion

Federal money Alabama left on the table in 2023 by not expanding Medicaid

Source: healthinsurance.org

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Discounts Webpage

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ENJOY YOUR FALL/WINTER A Special Deal FOR RSA MEMBERS

**The Battle House,
A Renaissance Hotel \$129**
• October 1-3, 8-9, 21-24, 29-31
• November 1-2, 5-9, 12-16, 19-28
• December 2-6, 9-11, 23-26, 27-30

The Battle House RSA Spa Package \$244
• October 2-3, 9, 23-24, 30-31
• November 1, 6-8, 13-15, 20-22, 27-28
• December 4-6, 11, 27

Riverview Plaza \$119
• October 1-4, 8-11, 21-25, 29-31
• November 1-2, 5-9, 11-14, 22-28
• December 10-13, 14-18, 23-30

Grand Hotel (plus a 15% resort fee) \$137
• October 1-2, 4-5, 29-31
• November 3-5, 8-9, 12-13, 20-21, 26-30
• December 3-5, 10-14, 17-20

Grand Hotel RSA Golf Package (plus a 15% resort fee) \$209
• October 1-2, 4-5, 19, 29-31
• November 3-5, 8-9, 12-13, 20-21, 26-30
• December 3-5, 10-14, 17-20

**Grand Hotel RSA Spa Package \$285
(plus a 15% resort fee)**
• October 1-2, 4-5, 19, 29-31
• November 3-5, 8-9, 12-13, 20-21, 26-30
• December 3-5, 10-14, 17-20

Marriott Shoals \$119
• October 1-3, 11-12, 25-26 • November 19-23, 26-27
• December 17-18, 24-29

Marriott Shoals RSA Spa Package \$229
• October 1-3, 11-12, 15, 25-26
• November 12, 19-23, 26-27
• December 17-18, 24-29

Renaissance Ross Bridge \$129
• October 1-5, 8-9, 29-30 • November 19-23, 26-30
• December 10-21, 24-28

Renaissance Ross Bridge RSA Spa Package \$260
• October 8, 23-24 • November 5, 12, 19-21, 26-29
• December 3, 10-13, 17-20

**Auburn/Opelika Marriott Resort \$119
(plus a 10% resort fee) Web reservation will show \$144, including \$25 resort fee. Guest will only be charged RSA rate at checkout.**
• October 4-5, 15-18
• November 5-8, 12-14, 19-22, 27-30
• December 11-14, 17-30

Auburn/Opelika Marriott Resort RSA Spa Package \$234 (plus a 10% resort fee)
• October 4-5, 15-16, 18 • November 5-6, 8, 27, 29-30
• December 11, 13-14, 17-18, 19-21

Prattville Marriott \$99
• October 1-2, 28-31 • November 5-6, 19-20, 26-27
• December 3-4, 17-20, 24-27

Renaissance Montgomery \$129
• October 7-8, 15-16, 21-22
• November 5-6, 19-21, 25-27
• December 17-18, 25-28

Renaissance Montgomery RSA Spa Package \$244
• October 7, 21-22 • November 21, 25, 27
• December 17-18, 25

Specific room requests may require additional charge.
Rates available the 1st of the month and are not applicable to groups.

Corporate/Promotional Code: R2A
on www.rsa-al.gov
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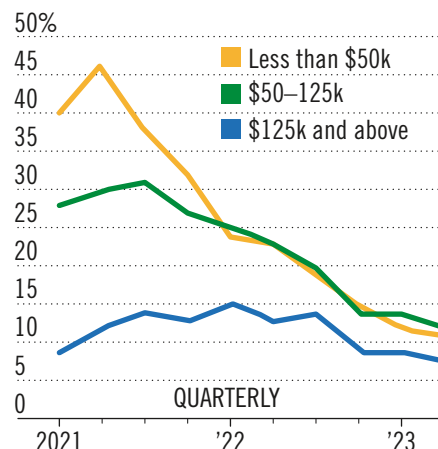
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TRS Board Member Sworn in at September Meeting

TRS Board of Control Vice Chair Ricky Whaley administers the Oath of Office to Chair Luke Hallmark.



U.S. Spending on Luxury Fashion by Income Level, Change from 2019



Source: Bank of America



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