

From an article in the GadsdenTimes by Lisa Rogers (August 2, 2013)

Etowah County Schools picked for learning support system

The Etowah County school system is one of 10 in the state chosen to participate in a learning support system. ...

The [State Dept. of Education's] Comprehensive System of Learning Supports design document and district roll-out plan were presented at a news conference in Montgomery.

Alan Cosby, superintendent of Etowah County Schools, said the pilot program will help the system deal with issues that affect students' academics.

"We talk about academics, but this program is about all the other things that surround academics and affect academics," Cosby said. "Whether it's health, socioeconomics or the home life, a lot of kids are from different backgrounds, and those backgrounds, positively and negatively, affect academics."

He said the program will help school officials deal with outside influences

"Whether it's through a breakfast program or whatever, it will be part of a unified state plan to improve factors that have an impact on academics," Cosby said.

He said the program has been successfully used in Gainesville, Ga., and it's based on a study at UCLA. ... the program will help maximize all the resources that already are implemented in many of the schools.

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The new direction will help advance Alabama's PLAN 2020, which outlines four priorities, including the learners, the support systems, the school systems and the professionals, according to Tommy Bice, state superintendent of education.

"Each of these four components of the plan has to function together like an 'ecosystem' so that we can meet our objectives of improving student growth and achievement, closing the achievement gap, increasing the graduation rate, and increasing the number of students that are college- and career-ready," Bice said. Student support is a vital part of that total system."

The intent is to fully integrate the learning support system as a primary component of the school improvement policy and practice and focus on:

- Reframing current student/learning supports programs.
- Re-deploying resources.
- Developing in-classroom and schoolwide approaches, including learning supports found effective in the state's high-poverty/high-achieving schools.
- Developing the capacity to implement learning supports through leadership training.
- Revamping infrastructures at the school, district and state levels.
- Developing and implementing accountability indicators directly related to the learning support system, and fully integrating them into school improvement accountability