Meet Wyatt Jinright. Wyatt is a student at Auburn Junior High School. He will begin the 9th grade this fall. Wyatt said that he is excited to start 9th grade because he enjoys attending school and learning new things; his favorite subject is math. He also enjoys getting to see his friends at school. Wyatt participates in extra-curricular activities such as dancing, basketball, computer games, working on his iPad, listening to music, and hanging out with his friends. Wyatt says he enjoys each of these activities, many of them at school. He appreciates the opportunity to meet new people and says it is important to be nice to others and make new friends. When asked what advice he would give to an upcoming middle school student, Wyatt said “they need to be prepared to work really hard.” After the completion of Junior High School and High School, Wyatt reports he would enjoy working in the field of criminology and that he hopes to one day be able to serve and protect Auburn’s citizens.

This summer Wyatt attended Auburn City’s Therapeutic Summer Camp which seems to be one of his favorite events. He has participated in camp for the past two years and states he enjoys that camp offers engaging activities and a fun-filled summer. Wyatt reported his favorite part of camp was going bowling on Tuesdays and having an opportunity to meet new people and friends. He describes bowling as a place for him to have fun, dance, and sing, while hanging out with his camp friends.

Aside from taking part in Auburn’s Therapeutic Summer Camp, Wyatt is also an avid participant in the Special Olympics Program. He is a competitor in several swimming events in the Special Olympic Games. He states his favorite event is the backstroke competition; he also races in the freestyle and relay events. Additionally, Wyatt participates in the annual bowling tournament and track and field events. When asked what his best quality is Wyatt replied, “Being honest and doing what is right.” Great job Wyatt, keep up the hard work!

*My advice to upcoming middle school students, “be prepared to work really hard.”*
TEAMWORK – 2013 TRANSITION LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

By Sadi Fox

On June 5th–7th the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute (ATLI) in collaboration with the Alabama Department of Education hosted the 2013 Transition Leadership Academy. This Academy was geared toward assisting various teams from multiple districts in Alabama in writing local transition plans for their districts to be implemented during the upcoming school year. The specific goals written in the plans were based on data from district Post-school Outcomes and Alabama Parent Survey Reports, as well as Special Education Performance Profiles. This data was used in order to help the Academy participants set measurable, data-based objectives.

The Academy included twenty-five individuals who made up nine teams from Anniston, Birmingham, Calhoun, Monroe, Auburn, Bullock, Clarke, Opelika, and Trussville. Transition roles represented at the Academy included special education teachers, job coaches, program specialists, resource teachers, transition coordinators, and inclusion teachers.

The Academy’s keynote speaker, Dr. Ryan Kellems, from the University of Oregon and the National Post-school Outcomes Center, inspired attendants to use data-based decision making when setting measurable goals for their local transition plans. This presentation motivated participants as they created goals based on their data from Post-school Outcomes responses.

Following the keynote, the participants engaged in a nominal group activity. This activity provided a means for the attendees to brainstorm their ideas in order to develop goals that are measurable and achievable. Moreover, the participants benefitted from collaborating with other professionals in terms of being introduced to new ideas and in receiving feedback on their own ideas as well. The subsequent concurrent roundabouts at the Academy included six consultants rotating for 15 to 30 minutes to individual team’s tables, answering participants’ questions and providing feedback about the team’s goals and concerns.

The twenty-three consultants and the facilitators were also integral to the success of this year’s Academy as they shared their knowledge and answered the teams’ questions. Many of the consultants serve on Alabama’s State Interagency Transition Team and helped provide valuable information to the participants. Consultants for the Academy encompassed representatives from Alabama’s Departments of Education, Mental Health, Rehabilitation Services, Youth Services, Alabama Parent Education Center, the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute, Madison City Schools, and the University of Oregon, National Post-school Outcomes Center.

The teams then met to develop their transition plans and prioritize goals. The team members worked diligently while the facilitators, the consultants, and other ATLI staff were available to answer questions and make suggestions to the teams. The team meetings were essential to the process at the Academy. In fact, many individuals commented that they greatly enjoyed working in the team environment and that many collaborative ideas were created through this process as well. The majority of the participants commented that they “could not wait” until next year’s Transition Leadership Academy.

“The mix between presentations, teamwork, and concurrent roundabout all enhanced my understanding of the bigger picture in special education. Data helped drive our team goals. This team experience has been great for collaboration.”

“Overwhelming amount of knowledge in the room. Great Transition Leadership Academy!”

— 2013 Academy Participants
Curtis Gage currently works at the Alabama Department of Education, Office of Learning Support, Special Education Services as an Education Specialist. He is involved in various capacities for the department, including: State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG), collaborative teaching consultant and data entry for Subject Personnel Codes, and Goal 3 of the Closing the Gap Project that offers professional development and support services for educators, families, and stakeholders involved in transition-related issues.

Mr. Gage, a graduate of Alabama State University, started his career while studying elementary education. He took a course on “Exceptional Children” and this inspired him to pursue a master’s degree in special education. During his program, Mr. Gage worked as a paraprofessional in self-contained classrooms and after graduation began working as a special education teacher. He started teaching at a Title 1 elementary school in Montgomery and then moved to a junior high school, first as a collaborative teacher and then as a special education facilitator. As a facilitator, Mr. Gage collaborated with professionals, parents, and agencies to develop inclusive transition-related Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Mr. Gage emphasizes the powerful impact of starting the transition process at an early stage. He states that successful transition planning can start as early as elementary school—where students can explore their interests for middle school, with increased planning and preparation as the student progresses through high school and beyond. Mr. Gage states that transition planning and individualized education and transition plans are the “unifying framework” in supporting and defining students’ postsecondary needs and goals. Parental and teacher support and training are also said to be a crucial part of the transition process. He seems passionate about family participation where parents “play an active role” in transition planning. Mr. Gage embraces the unique challenges faced by students with disabilities in response to constant changes in the learning environment, and works every day to provide valuable transition education and assessment.

Specifically highlighting several of Auburn Transition Leadership Institute’s (ATLI) many programs and trainings, Mr. Gage indicates these have made a positive contribution to the field of transition. He says he learned a lot from other professionals about the Collaborative Approach to Training Transition Specialists (CATTTS) program, which he says gives scholars the opportunity to collaborate with transition professionals and stakeholders, as well as promoting teacher assistance with post-school needs.

He shares that he believes the annual Transition Conference and the Community Transition Expo give transition stakeholders the opportunity to connect and gain awareness, knowledge, and skills related to all areas of transition. Additionally, Mr. Gage states that the online Training in Transition modules are an additional opportunity for professionals and stakeholders to increase transition-related opportunity, further reinforcing conference and expo transition education.

The Transition Leadership Academy, during which Mr. Gage participated as a consultant, gave Local Transition Teams the opportunity to develop transition goals and improve student outcomes. He reports he also supports ATLI’s ongoing transition data collection, assessment, and analysis as this helps identify transition needs throughout the state and provides a “direction into our future as a state” for improved transition education. Mr. Gage envisions the projects and activities as a way to “connect the transition dots” throughout the state of Alabama and states, “Alabama has greatly benefited from ATLI’s continued transition work.”

---

**Transition-related Work and Contributions**

Alabama State Interagency Transition Team Member

Alabama State Personnel Development Grant Co-Project Coordinator

2013 Transition Leadership Academy Facilitator

---

**Recognizing hard work and dedication!**
THE WHO, WHAT, AND WHEN CAN I GET INVOLVED WITH BEST BUDDIES

by Betty Schiffer

WHAT? The International Organization of Best Buddies is active at Auburn University and its mission is to create friendships between college students and young adults with disabilities in the community. Best Buddies also strives to promote equal opportunities in the local community for adolescents with disabilities. Lauren Swindle, current president, and Dr. Caroline Dunn, faculty advisor, were interviewed to share important information about Best Buddies and let people know how college students can get involved!

WHO? Anyone who is an undergraduate student may participate. Best Buddies welcomes students from multidisciplinary majors, and in fact encourages persons other than education majors to get involved.

WHEN? There is a one-year commitment (fall/spring semesters) for those who wish to be involved. At the beginning of the fall semester each year, Best Buddies sets up a table at O-Day on the Haley Concourse. This is where people can go and find out how to apply to become a buddy. An application must be completed, followed by an interview. If selected to be a buddy, you will not be disappointed. Once buddies are matched, the fun can begin. Each year the first “get together” is the Match Party in September. College students and their buddies will meet once a month for exciting events. Events include: bowling night, movie night, Halloween party, Thanksgiving party, Christmas party, large group activities, and an end of the year banquet. College students and their buddies pay a small fee to join which includes activities for the year and a t-shirt. The majority of the funds for the events come from community sponsors and fundraisers by Auburn’s chapter.

Best Buddies of Auburn has also been awarded the Most Outstanding Chapter Award for 2012-2013! To be recognized out of 425 chapters speaks wonders for the members of Best Buddies and what this organization represents. To learn more, please contact Matthew Moore at mdm0022@auburn.edu or Dr. Caroline Dunn at dunca1@auburn.edu.

~Building Brighter Futures~

UPCOMING EVENTS & DATES TO REMEMBER

2014 ALABAMA TRANSITION CONFERENCE
March 3-4, 2014 | Updates, visit auburn.edu/atli

SEPTEMBER
16 — AL Transition Conference Concurrent Proposals Due

OCTOBER
17 — EAAECPD Awards Luncheon
25 — AU CATTs Community Transition Expo

NOVEMBER
4 — State Interagency Transition Team Meeting
7 - 8 — AL Rehabilitation Association Training Conference
14 - 16 — DCDT Conference

HAPPY THANKSGIVING FROM ATLI

NEWSLETTER NOTES
Do you have an interesting personal story to share about the transition process? Our newsletter staff would like to hear from you! Call 334-844-5927.

Archived issues of ATLI Directions are saved at auburn.edu/atli (click on “Publications”).

Guest Editor: Betty Schiffer, ATLI Graduate Assistant