Brittney Fisher is a recent 2014 high school graduate from the Alabama School for the Deaf (ASD), where she represented her class as the salutatorian and senior class president. Brittney had a successful high school experience, with various accomplishments. One was becoming the recipient of the Dean Prestige and William Biggs scholarships, totaling $29,000. Brittney’s second biggest accomplishment was being able to navigate both the hearing and deaf worlds. Brittney’s mother gave birth to her and her twin sister prematurely at seven months and became aware that both were deaf when they were one-year old. Brittney learned to speak, despite being deaf, before she learned sign language. Prior to entering the ASD, Brittney remembers attending a public school and struggling with being bullied because of her deafness. She entered ASD in second grade and continued through her high school completion. While attending ASD, Brittney began to flourish and became actively involved in several clubs and sports including; the Junior National Association of the Deaf, Beta Club, Future Business Leaders of America, Big Brother and Big Sister Program, ASD Ambassadors, basketball, volleyball, and track. She expressed that ASD was like her second home.

Brittney is a leader amongst her peers and is also known for being a positive young lady. She described how, “ASD gave me so many opportunities that nobody else would experience as a deaf person. I was able to attend the 2013 National Black Deaf Advocacy Conference, the 2014 Alabama Transition Conference where I sang the National Anthem, and I was also the 2nd runner up in the Miss ASD Pageant.” While Brittney has had many successes being deaf, she states that she still has had challenges. She expressed that it was not easy being a deaf girl and that her biggest challenge is communicating with people who are not deaf. Brittney is a prime example of how self-determination, family involvement, motivation, and interagency collaboration can work together for positive post-school outcomes. Brittney stated that career and technical education teacher at ASD, Mrs. Robbie Stewart, along with her vocational rehabilitation counselors, Mr. Melvin Walker and Ms. Melissa Norred, helped her successfully transition out of high school. Brittney shared that Mrs. Stewart and her principal, Mr. Paul Millard made the biggest impacts on her transition to college.

Brittany’s success is sure to follow her as she attends college at Gallaudet University in Washington D.C., where she plans to major in social work. She dreams of auditioning for her favorite television show, American Idol, because she loves to sing and has thought about bringing awareness to people that being deaf does not mean that dreams have to be limited. Brittney wants people to know that they can do anything they want to achieve.

“Being deaf doesn’t limit your dreams, you can do anything you want and achieve your dreams.”
HIGHLIGHTING TRANSITION IN ALABAMA DURING 2014
by Joshua Turchan & Courtney Dotson

Alabama Transition Conference Fashion Show. During the 24th annual Alabama Transition Conference, five young ladies (Angel Brewer, Duygu Kucuktas, Auburn; Toniquia Chapman, Grove Hill; Nakia Davis, Shakera Waugh, Selma) and three young men (Drew Burque, Brady Ramsey, Auburn; Joshua Edwards, Talladega) from Alabama high schools participated in a fashion show featuring Designs by Ashley. Ashley DeRamus was named one of the Top 6 Entrepreneurs in the World with Down syndrome. Her clothing line, Designs by Ashley, was developed for young women with Down syndrome. Each of the students are a member of their high school’s Youth and Young Adults in Transition “YAiT” group. The fashion show featured the young ladies modeling the clothing line to the beat of Alicia Keys’ hit “This Girl is on Fire” and the young men as the escorts.

Governor’s Proclamation Signing Event. Governor Robert Bentley proclaims “March is Transition Awareness Month in Alabama”. Alabama youth and young adults with disabilities and their parents along with state leaders in transition from the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, Mental Health, and Auburn University attended the event. Each young adult met Governor Bentley and witnessed as he signed the proclamation (see below).

Youth and Young Adults in Transition attend Mini Youth Conference. A collaborative effort between the Alabama State Department of Education and the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute afforded 31 students and 23 parents, advocates, or YAiT facilitators with the opportunity to attend the 24th annual Alabama Transition Conference. This opportunity was granted through fee waivers on a first come, first serve basis. These attendees had the option of attending the general conference and/or the mini youth conference (hosted by Auburn University’s Collaborative Approach to Training Transition Specialist Scholars), as well as compete during the poster session competition and showcase a transition-related topic during the Share Fair event. This year Severe Threats, a student from Central High School of Clay County showcased multiple pieces of his personal artwork during the Share Fair event. Brittney Fisher from Alabama’s School for the Deaf and Ali Britt from Auburn High School both displayed their leadership abilities by introducing conference featured speakers to over 700 attendees.

Student-driven Poster Session Competition and Share Fair Event. Each year the Alabama Transition Conference features events that entertain, educate, and inform its attendants. For two years the conference has invited students from the high school, undergraduate, and graduate level to compete in a poster competition highlighting a topic related to transition. This year’s poster competition was excellent and there were many qualified posters. The winners of this year’s high school division were the Shelby County, Class of 2014 Interns, “Project SEARCH of Shelby County”; the undergraduate division winner was Keara McKenzie, Auburn University, “The Importance of Social Interactions for Teens with Disabilities.” The award for best graduate division poster was awarded to Mary “Reenie” Laginess, Auburn University, “An Unconventional Collaboration: Bridging the Gap Between Special Education, Industrial Design, and Assistive Technology.”

ATLI congratulates all winners and their recognition continues to be acknowledged on a plaque which will be on display during future Alabama Transition Conferences, and at the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute at Auburn University.
Ms. Robbie Stewart entered the field of transition in 2002 when she served as a Career and Technical Business Education Teacher in Talladega County Schools for nine years. Following this experience, Ms. Stewart became the Career and Technical Education Director for the Alabama School for the Deaf (ASD). During our interview, Ms. Stewart explained how transition has been an integral part of both of her career and technical education positions and how her interest in transition has continued to motivate her work. Ms. Stewart also described how she is constantly inspired by her son’s experiences at ASD; Ms. Stewart’s pride was easily detectible as she spoke about her son’s graduation from ASD in 2009. Helping students plan for the future and giving them the tools necessary to advocate for themselves were other motivators that she identified as encouraging.

Ms. Stewart explained that the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute (ATLI) has supported her projects related to transition. The Training iN Transition modules, her involvement in the State Interagency Transition Team (SITT), and her participation at the 2014 Alabama Transition Conference were ATLI resources she named to be helpful.

Ms. Stewart’s involvement in SITT was encouraged by another member, Bedarius Bell, who approached her at a conference and sparked her interest. She explained how beneficial her participation in SITT has been due to the opportunity to collaborate with other agencies in order to provide the best services to students who often have multiple disabilities.

Ms. Stewart and the students from ASD recently attended the 2014 Alabama Transition Conference that was hosted by the ATLI in March. The students attended the Youth and Young Adult in Transition (YAiT) sessions offered at the conference and provided feedback that they enjoyed connecting with the other students with disabilities. They also told Ms. Stewart that they appreciated the bullying workshops and the mock interviews most.

YAiT is a group of students with disabilities who encourage self-determination and leadership skills in other youth and young adults. This program is just getting started at ASD and inspiration for its start was influenced by their conference experiences and Ms. Stewart’s involvement in SITT. The group is planning to meet two times per month and will be led by sophomore and junior students who are interested in self-advocacy and leadership.

**Ms. Stewart’s hard work and dedication to her students is appreciated and does not go unnoticed.**
TRANSITION SPECIALIST GRADUATE CERTIFICATE

by Betty Schiffer

Are you enrolled in graduate school at Auburn University or would you like to be? Are you interested in transition? If so, you may be interested in collaborating with professionals and transition stakeholders by earning a graduate certificate as a transition specialist. While the target audience for this certificate is those pursuing masters in special education, there are several other majors that are appropriate for this certificate program. According to the federal definition of transition, to include “coordinated services,” and the standards set forth in professional organizations, those completing the transition specialist graduate certificate will gain an emphasis in transition and collaboration, while integrating up-to-date research on effective practice.

The certificate requires that individuals either be enrolled in graduate school or enrolled as a non-degree seeking student and to complete 16 credit hours in the area of transition. Seven hours are required course while the remaining nine are electives that can be chosen from a list of 21 approved hours. For more information on the transition specialist graduate certificate, please visit http://www.education.auburn.edu/programs/certs_minors/trans.html. You may also contact the program directors for more information, see right.

~Building Brighter Futures~

UPCOMING EVENTS & DATES TO REMEMBER

2015 ALABAMA TRANSITION CONFERENCE
March 2-4 | Updates, visit auburn.edu/atli

JUNE
8 - 10 – 2014 Transition Leadership Academy

JULY
28 – State Interagency Transition Team Meeting

AUGUST
13 – Registration Close: TNT Webinar VI
25 – State Interagency Transition Team Meeting
27 – TNT Webinar VI, 2014 Alabama Transition Updates

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”).

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JAMES, BROOKE, SARAH, TEANNA, MARY “REENIE”
(left to right)