

LEADERSHIP PROFILE

President

A+ Education Partnership

Montgomery and Birmingham, AL

***“Driving improvements in public education
for every Alabama student.”***

--from the A+EP Annual Report, August 2018¹

THE OPPORTUNITY

A+ Education Partnership is Alabama’s only statewide nonprofit dedicated to improving the performance and prospects for Alabama’s students. Founded in 1991, A+ has become the most respected and influential driver of public education transformation across the state, known for its evidence-based advocacy and commitment to professional development.

Earlier this year, President & co-founder Caroline Novak informed the board of A+ Education Partnership of her intention to retire at the end of 2018, following some 27 years as a ubiquitous force in Alabama education.

BoardWalk Consulting has been retained to assist in the search for a successor who can build on the organization’s considerable successes, making its vision a working reality:



***“That every child in Alabama has the opportunity and support
to succeed in education, the workforce and civic life.”***

¹ Except where noted, all quotations in this Leadership Profile are from documents or webpages published by A+ Education Partnership.

THE ORGANIZATION

A+'s approach to improving Alabama schools is straightforward: Pair the best policies with the best practices. In practice, A+ combines forward-thinking research-based information with the practical tools and training educators and policymakers use to improve educational opportunities for all Alabama students.

Over the past quarter-century, A+ has developed an enviable reputation as a trusted nonpartisan advocate for advancements in public education statewide, sometimes as partner, sometimes as critical friend, but always as an advocate for better outcomes. Programmatically, A+ is a highly respected source of innovative research and practical tools for both educators and policymakers.

Three major themes inform A+'s work, "*Equip, Empower and Expect More*":

- **Equip:** Through its extensive policy work, A+ partners with elected and appointed officials, educators and [partners](#)² to help shape policies and promote investments in best practices. *Representative impact:* In 2017, the state increased funding for Alabama's "First Class" Pre-K program by \$18.5 million, resulting in 142 more Pre-K classrooms statewide
- **Empower:** Through the [Alabama Best Practices Center](#), A+ provides teachers, principals and educational leaders across the state with professional development opportunities available nowhere else. *Representative impact:* A+ facilitated research-based professional learning sessions for 58 districts and 135 schools, and teachers and leaders from 122 schools convened four times last year in one of A+'s five Powerful Conversations Networks.
- **Expect More:** [A+ College Ready](#) partners with teachers and leaders in the state's middle schools and high schools to foster a culture of high(er) expectations. A+CR supports development of a diverse pipeline of students for demanding high school coursework by broadening readiness for and access to Advanced Placement exams. *Representative impact:* In 2017, 28,000 Alabama



² <https://aplusala.org/partners/>

students sat for AP exams, *four times* the number in 2008. Of note, these students came from 161 high schools in 76 districts.³

The staff of A+ Education Partnership is split about evenly between offices in Montgomery, where the CEO has been based, and Birmingham. The organization is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors comprising leaders from a variety of business, civic, educational and nonprofit contexts across the state. Its budget of nearly \$9 million is derived from grants, contracts, program fees and donor contributions. More information on A+, its people, its programs and its impact can be found [here](#).⁴

“Although it rarely takes credit, A+’s fingerprints have been on every major education advancement in Alabama.”
--Long-time observer of education in Alabama

THE PRESIDENT

A+ is seeking a dynamic President to provide leadership, management and energy as the organization begins the next chapter in its impressive story. Ideally, the President would combine a blend of business and education experience with deep-seated passion for education attainment and student achievement statewide.

As the foremost change agent in K-12 education in Alabama, the head of A+ must be nimble enough to balance the roles of visionary, strategist, advocate, thought-leader, fundraiser, partner and manager. It’s a very tall order in a very complex operating environment, and thus contenders with experience encompassing more than one sector would be a plus.

THE MANDATE

The next President of A+ Education Partnership will inherit a smooth-running organization that enjoys enormous respect from multiple quarters, including elected and appointed officials, the State Department of Education, public school leaders at the district and school levels, individual teachers and a variety of program partners, supporters and funders. While progress on key metrics has been very real, so are the continuing challenges for an organization committed to leveraging best policies with best practices in a system as complex as public education.

³ Alabama has 67 county school systems and 70 city systems. A+ has provided professional development in over 90% of the state’s districts.

⁴ <https://aplusala.org/>

Accordingly, the next President can be expected to receive several mandates from the board of directors, among them

- **Strategy development.** The President will be expected to develop and implement a forward-looking strategy that builds on the success of A+ while reflecting the changing opportunities for the students of Alabama. *Focus* will be a key consideration, as the organization assesses the best way to leverage its influence and experience in support of measurable, sustainable progress in education in Alabama while remaining opportunistic as political and societal environments shift.
- **Partnership and policy development.** The President will take up the mantle as thought-leader and advocate for the advancement of education in the state. He or she must deploy, personally and collectively, the expertise, informed perspective, and political savvy to be a credible champion and effective advocate at the state, local and school district levels. The role requires a sophisticated blend of moxie and humility to maintain and deepen broad-based support for ambitious goals.
- **Team development.** The President will inherit an organization and team proud of its commitment to educational excellence and comfortable with a hands-off management style. A+ has known only one President, and a number of the more senior members of the team have worked together for years. A change in leaders is inherently disruptive, but it also provides an opportunity to revisit organizational dynamics, develop new opportunities for teaming, and be intentional about succession planning in a maturing nonprofit—all within the context of an inspirational mission.
- **Diversification of funding.** As A+ enters a new phase, the President will work with the board and staff to grow the base of ongoing support through a sophisticated fundraising strategy targeting an expanded and diversified set of supporters. A couple of A+'s programs have earned a line item in the state's education budget, but such funding is never to be taken for granted, and an effective strategy for growing and maintaining a diverse funding base is essential.
- **Operational management.** A+'s multifaceted mission makes for some complex dynamics, and a strategy geared towards highest impact for all the state's public students implies a commitment to continuous improvement in



the organization’s own operations. The staff has excelled under the light hand of the founder, but A+’s continued growth, impact and visibility will require significant attention to the management of the enterprise itself, reinforcing, for example, the synergies between program areas and ensuring attractive career paths for A+’s younger professionals.

THE KEY RELATIONSHIPS

<i>The President reports to</i>	Board of Directors
<i>And manages a team of ~35 employees and consultants through six direct reports</i>	VP, Operations & Policy VP, Strategic Communications & Development VP, Academic Affairs, A+ College Ready VP, Operations, A+ College Ready EVP, Alabama Best Practices Center Chief Financial Officer
<i>While fostering other key relationships, such as</i>	Superintendent, Alabama State Board of Education Alabama State Board of Education State and local officials, elected and appointed Community, civic, philanthropic, corporate, nonprofit & academic leaders Professional organizations Current and prospective donors and partners Peers in other advocacy organizations ⁵

THE LOCATION

Since inception, A+ Education Partnership has been headquartered in Montgomery, Alabama’s capital city and therefore home as well to the Alabama state legislature and the state’s Department of Education. Long known for a culture shaped by politics and human rights, Montgomery has been recognized nationally for its downtown revitalization and new urbanism projects.

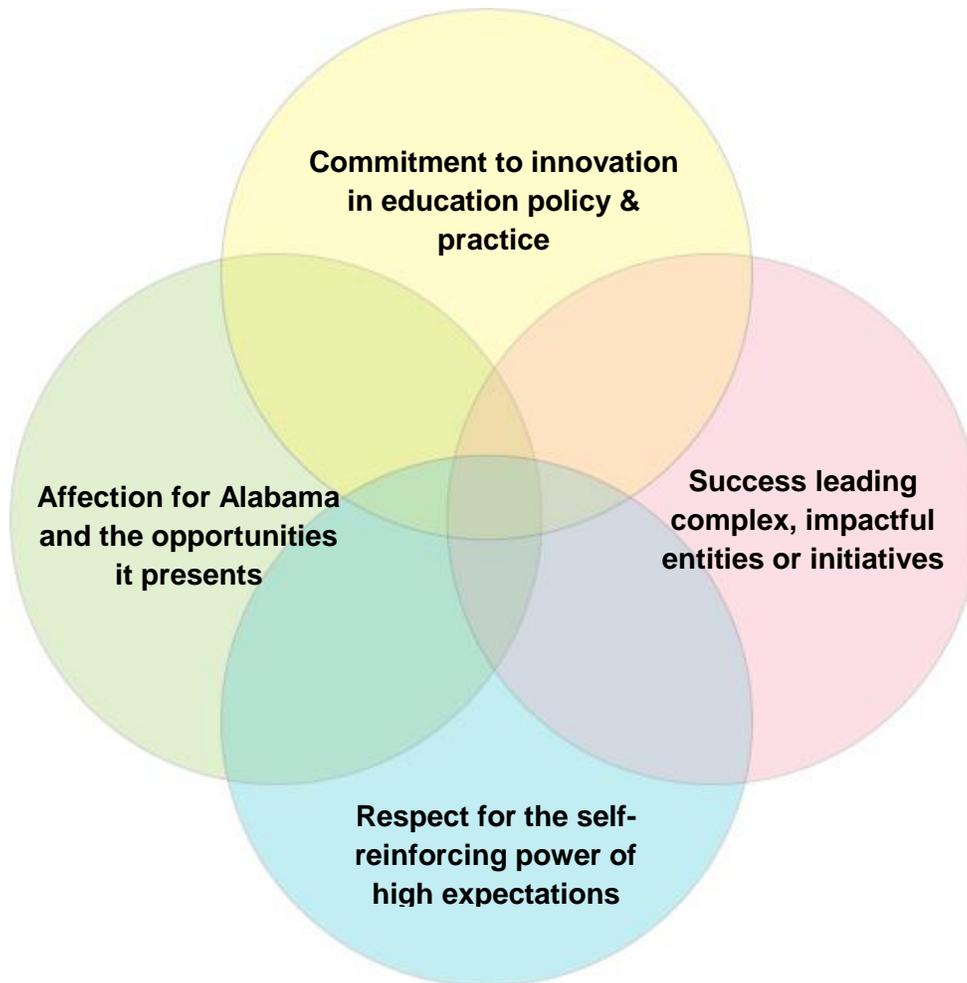
About a third of A+’s employees are based 90 miles north in Birmingham, and a number of its consultants and several of its staff work remotely from other

⁵ E.g., The Columbia Group, of which A+ is a founding member. Other members include Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence (Kentucky), Education’s Next Horizon (Louisiana), Mississippi First, Public School Forum (North Carolina) and SCORE (Tennessee)

locations across the state. Regardless of where the next President resides, the President's regular presence in Montgomery will be essential to continued impact.

THE CANDIDATE

The ideal candidate for President of A+ Educational Partnership will be a progressive, energizing leader who demonstrates a nuanced combination of



Among the assets of special interest to the search committee:

- Passion for A+ Education Partnership's mission and the power of innovation
- Genuine respect for the role of equity in public education
- A collaborative and inspirational leadership style, internally and externally, that backs strategic vision with appropriate structure and discipline

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- The proven ability to attract support from a diverse set of stakeholders and funders; a relationship-builder
 - Significant experience working with policymakers, educational partners and community leaders on consequential issues
 - The communication skills to engage a variety of audiences through various means and media
 - An empowering leader adept at leveraging the synergy from A+'s joint emphasis on policy *and* practice
 - Affection for Alabama and the incredible opportunities it presents
 - A deft leader with the nurturing demeanor and management disciplines this growing organization deserves
 - Respect for the power of data and the students—and student futures—the data represents
 - An appreciation for the asset inherent in an engaged board of a diverse set of leaders with a shared commitment to A+ and its continued impact on behalf of Alabama's future.

A+ Education Partnership respects the power of adaptive expertise, and thus the search committee is receptive to an array of career experiences any individual prospect may offer. In fact, leadership successes in more than one environment—nonprofit, educational, civic, corporate, public service—would be additive.

For consideration or to suggest a prospect, please email
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or call Sam Pettway or Laura Lovelace at
404-BoardWalk (404-262-7392).
