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LOCAL COALITION SEEKING LESSONS FROM ALABAMA SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

A diverse group of Columbia educators, elected officials, neighborhood and business leaders will head to Alabama this week to find out how their counterparts in Mobile worked together to generate greater community support for their schools and increase student achievement.

The fact-finding trip is one of the next steps being taken by the *Columbia and Richland One: Together We Can Build A Better Community* coalition that was announced in August. Partners include the City of Columbia, Richland One, Richland County, Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce and the Partners In Education Foundation.

“The school district in Mobile has earned impressive gains in closing the achievement gap among some of its lowest-performing schools with the assistance of community stakeholders,” said Wendy Brawley, Richland One school board chairwoman. “We’d like to learn more about what they did by meeting and hearing from those involved.”

Roughly 80 people, including Brawley, Richland One Superintendent Allen Coles, Mayor Bob Coble, City Councilman E.W. Cromartie II and representatives from local colleges and universities, will board two chartered buses and depart for Mobile on Tuesday morning and return to Columbia Thursday night.

Coble said city leaders have a vested interest in working to improve the quality of education in the local public schools because “the economic success of the City of Columbia is linked to the success of Richland School District One.”

While in Mobile, the group will meet with staff from the Mobile County Public Schools and the Mobile Area Education Foundation, which assembled a countywide partnership of citizens, businesses and agencies, and has led nationally-acclaimed initiatives to support and transform struggling schools in the district. School visits are also on the itinerary.

The *Together We Can* contingent traveling to Mobile also will include staff members from the five Richland One schools that are under state review for not making expected student achievement gains over a three-year period as measured by state testing. Richland One is providing extensive resources and assistance to turn around student achievement in these schools, which are referred to as its “A+ Schools.”

“Many of the challenges confronting Richland One will require more than the resources of the district to adequately address,” Coles said. “What is needed is an organization, like the Mobile Area Education Foundation, to give life to the *Together We Can* coalition to assist the district in meeting our challenges.”

The *Together We Can* group hopes to return from Mobile with a wealth of information and ideas that can be used to help develop its action plans to bring about similar successes here. Cromartie said in the end the entire community will benefit from what will happen as a result of the coalition’s efforts.

“The citizens of our city achieve success when the community, businesses, governmental officials and the school system work together,” he said.

For more information about the Mobile County Public School System, visit the district’s Web site at www.mcpss.com or the Mobile Area Education Foundation Web site at www.maef.net.

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‘Together We Can’

Columbia Mayor Bob Coble and other city, school district, business and community leaders held a joint news conference on August 13, 2007, to announce the formation of an historic coalition to support Richland One schools.