



River Region United Way



## **Rhea Ingram**

*Professor of Marketing, Auburn University at Montgomery  
Chair, River Region United Way Board of Directors*

Rhea Ingram (Ph.D., University of Kentucky) is currently a Professor of Marketing at Auburn University at Montgomery where she also served as Dean of the College of Business for 8 years and the Department Head of Marketing for 3 years.

Rhea enjoys being an active leader in all aspects of her profession. She currently serves as the Chair of the Board for the River Region United Way, along with serving on the boards of the Family Sunshine Center and Alabama Technology Foundation. Professionally she is the Past President of the Society for Marketing Advances and a board member of the Southern Business Dean's Association.

Rhea is an award-winning teacher with interest in Consumer Behavior, Sport & Event Marketing, and Leadership. Her research interests include investigations into ethics and unethical marketing behaviors, motivations in sport and event industry, as well as classroom management issues. Her research has appeared in the Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of Business Research, Innovative Marketing, as well as other journal publications and conference proceedings.



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## **Ron Simmons, IOM**

*President and Chief Executive Officer*

Ron Simmons, IOM, joined River Region United Way as president and chief executive officer in July 2020.

A native of Montgomery, Simmons is a 1983 graduate of Sidney Lanier High School. As a graduate of Auburn University at Montgomery, he received a bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts with an emphasis in Marketing and Military Science. Simmons was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserves from the AUM ROTC program in 1987. He is also a recent graduate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Institute of Organizational Management at the University of Georgia.

Simmons joined River Region United Way after serving 10 years with the Montgomery Area Chamber of Commerce – most recently as the vice president of sales for the Destination Montgomery Convention and Visitor Bureau. Previously, Simmons served as the vice president of business development and sports national sales manager for the chamber and CVB. He believes the experiences and relationships he gained at the chamber have prepared him for his current mission.

Simmons is the founder of D.A.D.S. (Dads And Daughters Saturday), and serves on various boards throughout the community, including the YMCA of Greater Montgomery, East Montgomery YMCA and the Montgomery City-County Public Library. He has also served on the boards of Brantwood Children's Home and Jubilee CityFest. Simmons is a member of the Economic Development Association of Alabama and a Leadership Montgomery graduate, Class XXVIII.

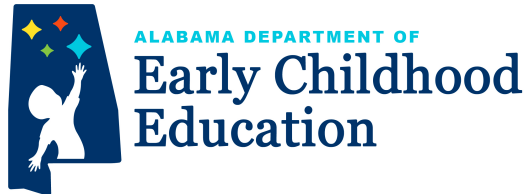
Simmons and his wife, Annette, have been married 30 years. They have two sons and a daughter.



## **Nick Moore**

*Education Policy Advisor & Coordinator Governor's Office of Education & Workforce Transformation*

Nick Moore is a native of Enterprise, Alabama. He served as a Teach for America corps member in Lowndes County, Alabama where he had the privilege of teaching secondary social studies, government, and economics at Central High School. After completing his tenure in Lowndes County, Nick received a Teach for America Capitol Hill Fellowship. During and after his fellowship, he covered education, health care, and workforce development in the Office of Representative Martha Roby (AL-02). Nick later served as Senator Luther Strange's Legislative Assistant for healthcare, education, and labor. He currently serves as the director of Governor Kay Ivey's Office of Education and Workforce Transformation. Nick and his wife, Emily, live in Montgomery, Alabama.



## **Dr. Barbara J. Cooper**

*Secretary*

Dr. Barbara J. Cooper was appointed Secretary of the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education by Governor Kay Ivey on July 1, 2020. She has served the Department of Early Childhood Education since 2018, directing the nationally recognized high-quality Alabama First Class Pre-K program. She previously served as the department's Director of the Office of School Readiness and is the Birth to Grade 12 Advisor for the Alabama Governor's Office of Education and Workforce Transformation.

Dr. Cooper's administrative career is extensive, as she previously served as Deputy State Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer of the Alabama State Department of Education, Chief Administrative Officer for the Montgomery Public Schools Intervention, Deputy Superintendent of Huntsville City Schools, Chief Equity and Engagement Officer of Aurora Public Schools (Colorado) and a Principal with Denver Public Schools. She has teaching experiences ranging from early childhood education through post-secondary.

***"I believe we must start with data-informed, short term goals that facilitate long term priorities. This places us on a trajectory of continuous quality improvement which will result in Alabama's youngest learners receiving an equitable education."***

**- Dr. Barbara J. Cooper**

## Educational Philosophy and Beliefs

My educational philosophy is rooted in the following beliefs which support my work as the agency leader at the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education:

- I believe every Alabama education agency must be led by a courageous, visionary leader capable of bringing people together to collaborate around goals that support us in meeting the needs of every student we impact in our great state.
- I believe in high expectations and standards for all employees, stakeholders, parents, and students.
- I believe we must lead others daily through our actions and by modeling expectations for equity and excellence.
- I believe all children can and will learn, regardless of special needs, when provided opportunities to work with highly qualified, well trained educators. Educators must hold the same high expectations for the students they touch, as they would for their children or relatives.
- I believe a student's educational attainment should not be defined nor predicted by their demography or personal circumstances, and an exemplary, highly trained teacher in every classroom is the number one predictor of student success.
- I believe our parents, community, agency leads, legislators and education leaders are partners in education, and we must work together, while encouraging multiple perspectives in supporting the unique needs of every Alabama county.





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## Dr. Sheila M. Austin

*Dean of Education, Auburn University at Montgomery  
Member, River Region United Way Board of Directors*

Dr. Sheila Austin joined the AUM faculty after 32 years of serving as teacher, director, assistant superintendent, deputy superintendent and chief of staff for the Toledo Public Schools. Her research focus and teaching interest are leadership, parental involvement and issues concerning older persons in education. Her commitment to education is noted by the following awards and recognitions: Golden Pencil Award, Phenomenal Woman Award, University of Toledo Outstanding Minority Alumni Award and recently being included among Who's Who in Black Alabama.

She is currently Senior Dean, Tenured, Full Professor and the highest-ranking African American at Auburn University Montgomery.

Dr. Sheila M. Austin's book, *How to Be a Super Leader: Nuggets of Wisdom That Will Boost Your Confidence and Inspire You on Your Journey to Success*, comes from more than four decades of work and leadership in education and in communities in which she lived.

She has authored/co-authored over 12 Peer Reviewed Publications, and four Peer Reviewed Published Book Chapters.

She traveled to China twice and Africa to establish educational partnerships.

She averages 30 to 40+ Professional Presentations a year.

Entering her 50<sup>th</sup> year as an educator.

At AUM's December 2019 Commencement Dr. Austin, was awarded the ***Rosa Parks Legacy of Courage Award***, by the original artist/commencement speaker Larry D. Thornton.

Appointed by the First African American Mayor Steven Reid to serve on his Education Task Force.

Nominated and selected by LEADERSHIP Montgomery for the June 2020 Alumni Spotlight. From the nominator wrote...

*Sheila Austin should definitely be recognized for her true leadership contributions in this community. In her role as Dean of the School of Education at Auburn University in Montgomery, she leads by example to make sure the students and faculty actively contribute and participate in community causes of their interests. She always says, 'yes' to requests for support from her and AUM. More specifically, she initiates strategies to get the word out to the widest net of people for events of diverse community interest. Montgomery is better because of Sheila Austin!*

2020 Warhawk Spirit Award – Auburn University at Montgomery

2021 Guest Speaks for the Alabama State University “The Marathon Continues: Lighting the path to career success through lecture series.” Wear Your C.R.O.W.N Event

2021 Alabama Education Technology Conference AETC – Keynote Speaker

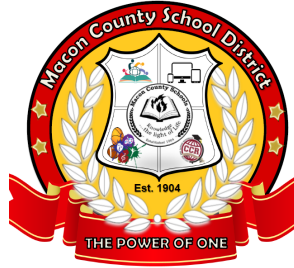
River Region United Way Board Member

Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts Board Member

Montgomery Museum of fine Arts Executive Board Member

Women in Business Task Force – Montgomery Area Chamber of Commerce

Montgomery Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.



## **Dr. Jacqueline A. Brooks**

*Superintendent*

Jacqueline Austin Brooks is the daughter of the late Bernice Austin Alexander and the late Mr. William Bray. We know her as Jackie Austin.

She was raised in the crossroads community by her grandmother the late Mrs. Willi Lee Austin. She received most of her schooling at South Macon High School and graduated as the class valedictorian in 1986. She also served as the 1986 Miss South Macon.

After graduation, she attended Alabama State on a presidential scholarship and began her career as a teacher with Brevard County Schools in Florida in 1990. She was teacher of the year in 1995-96 and was promoted to a school administrator in 1996-97.

Her mom passed in 1997, and she returned home in 1998 to care for her grandmother and baby sister. In 1998, she began working for Chambers County Schools in the Valley and later accepted a principalship at Tuskegee Institute Middle School in Macon County where she has been from July 1998 to present.

She now serves as superintendent and has been superintendent of the year, formerly a board of trustee for Alabama State University, and now a member of the national superintendents' governing board.

She is married to her high school sweetheart, Terry Brooks, and they have two children: Kassidy, 15 and Nixxon, 8.

She attends Sweet Pilgrim Baptist Church. Here motto is Bloom Wherever God Plants You!





## **Richard Dennis**

*Superintendent*

Mr. Richard Dennis began serving as Superintendent of Education for Elmore County in January 2017. He previously served as Principal for 5 years at Prattville High School, Principal for 7 years at Wetumpka High School and before that Principal at Holtville High School for 6 ½ years. He also served as an Assistant Principal at Holtville High School for 2 ½ years and a Teacher at Millbrook Middle School for 6 years, all in Elmore County. Mr. Dennis is a graduate of The University of Alabama where he obtained his Bachelor of Science Degree in Secondary Education, English and History. He achieved his Master of Arts Degree at Troy University Montgomery in English Education. He then obtained his Education Administration Certification in 1994 from Auburn University Montgomery. He has served on many Panels and Advisory Committees in Elmore County. He is a member of The National Association of Secondary Schools Principals, Alabama Education Association, The Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools, Alabama Association of Secondary School Principals, State Superintendents Association, and the Alabama High School Athletic Association Board. Mr. Dennis has experience in AdvancED Engagement Reviews, having participated on school reviews as a teacher and an administrator. Over the last two or three years, Mr. Dennis has traveled to China with College Board's Bridge Builders delegation for a tour of the Chinese education system and to Australia with the LEAP's exchange program with an Australian education director.

Mr. Dennis has been married to Leslie H. Dennis and they have four children, twins, Forrest and Ethan, Jacob, and a daughter, Laura Grace. All four children are currently in college – two at the University of Alabama and two at Troy University.



## **Dr. Chuck Ledbetter**

*Superintendent*

Chuck Ledbetter, superintendent of Pike Road City Schools since June 1, 2017, has been an educator for 32 years. A graduate of Auburn High School, he attended Furman University and played football for the Paladins as a freshman, then graduated from Auburn University with a B.A. in history. Dr. Ledbetter taught high school history and government while also coaching football and basketball. He earned a master of education in history from Auburn-Montgomery and a doctorate of education in educational leadership from Auburn University. He completed the University of Alabama Superintendent Academy and the Texas Superintendent Academy.

As superintendent of Dublin, GA schools for over six years Ledbetter led the school system to great improvement. The system became a charter system and partnered with neighboring systems to create a regional charter career academy. School choice for all students, academically themed elementary schools, International Baccalaureate programs, project-based learning through all grades, and expanded after school and summer programs are some examples of the way students were engaged in rigorous educational opportunities. These changes produced results, despite a high poverty rate among students. Discipline incidences were reduced in elementary schools by 77%. In six years, Dublin High School increased its graduation rate from 59% to 94.1%. Dublin High had the highest graduation rate in the area for 4 consecutive years. Standardized test scores increased in every school, and Dublin High School was recognized by US News and World Report as a Best High Schools Bronze Award winner for 2013 and 2015.

In Dothan, Dr. Ledbetter led a community discussion about how schools can best serve the students and the city. This work led to a plan for Dothan City Schools to provide more challenging learning opportunities for students. Installation of STEM labs in middle schools and extended STEM hands-on learning in all schools were implemented, and the system successfully completed AdvancED accreditation renewal.

Pike Road Schools is the fastest growing school district in Alabama. During Ledbetter's tenure they have achieved AdvancEd accreditation with one of the highest scores in the state, been named an A+ School of Excellence for Advance Placement scores, and grown from one campus to three. In 2020 Pike Road graduated its first senior class with the 4th highest graduation rate in Alabama and a top 20 ACT average score.

Chuck Ledbetter was a history teacher for 11 years, an assistant principal, a middle school principal, a high school principal, assistant superintendent for curriculum and for finance, and superintendent. He serves on the boards of the School Superintendents of Alabama, the Council for Leaders of Alabama Schools, and is the president of the AASA Century Club 100, a group of superintendents made up of two from each state who meet to discuss education issues.



**MONTGOMERY**  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS



## **Dr. Ann Roy Moore**

*Superintendent*

Dr. Ann Roy Moore is a teacher. For more than four decades, Dr. Moore has educated the children of Alabama. From her first post as a pre-school teacher, to her administrative work as a principal, central office curriculum specialist, superintendent, and her mentoring the next generation of teachers as an adjunct professor at colleges and universities, teaching is her passion.

“Even while serving as superintendent for a decade in Huntsville City Schools - I was still a teacher at heart,” said Dr. Moore. “I am always looking for teachable moments to share with administrators and staff. Perhaps more importantly, I am constantly searching for the opportunity to learn and grow myself. Good teachers are also lifelong learners. Ensuring our teachers and administrators have the opportunity to continue to grow and learn while they work to educate our students is critical.”

Before becoming the superintendent for Huntsville City Schools, she served in several roles there including deputy superintendent, elementary education manager, principal, and teacher. Dr. Moore also worked as a teacher, and later an assistant superintendent, for Florence City Schools. Her professorships include work at Alabama A&M University, Athens State College, Shoals Community College, and the University of North Alabama.

“I am so pleased to have been named the Superintendent of Montgomery Public Schools,” said Dr. Moore. “We have many challenges, but there is great potential here. We have a supportive board, caring teachers, strong administrators, and most of all, people with a passion to make our schools the best they can be. We are going to work hard to help our students reach their potential.”

Dr. Moore earned a Bachelor’s Degree in Early Childhood Education from Hampton University, a Master’s Degree in Elementary Education and an Education Specialist Degree from the University of North Alabama. Her Educational Doctorate in Curriculum Leadership Personnel and Early Childhood Education is from the George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University. She also earned A and AA Certification and K-12 Superintendency Certification from Alabama A&M University.

She has earned numerous awards for her work in education and in the community including being named the Alabama Superintendent of the Year in 2008. Dr. Moore is also an accomplished musician – serving as her church’s organist.

Dr. Moore was named Montgomery Public Schools superintendent in May of 2018.

# StriveTogether<sup>®</sup>

Every child. Cradle to career.



## **Monroe Nichols**

*Director of Network Growth*

Monroe Nichols is director of network growth for StriveTogether. In this role, he leads the strategy development for cultivating and supporting communities seeking to join the Cradle to Career Network.

Monroe's work in the Network started in 2014, as a founding staff member at Cradle to Career Network member ImpactTulsa, where he served as chief operating officer. Prior to ImpactTulsa, Monroe served as an aide to Tulsa's mayor, was chief of staff to a university president, managed statewide adult career development programs for the Oklahoma State Department of Career and Technology Education, and directed business expansion programs for the Tulsa Regional Chamber of Commerce. Monroe has held two elected positions, first as a board of education member for Tulsa Technology Center, Oklahoma's largest and oldest postsecondary vocational training institution. He currently serves in the Oklahoma House of Representatives.

Monroe holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Tulsa and a master's degree in public administration from the University of Oklahoma.