

**Envision 2020 Update July 2004**  
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Autauga County is paving the way for our rural counties to have PIE! In summer of 2003 Bob Lee, Prattville volunteer; Leigh Gray, Autauga County Public Schools and Marla Akridge, Prattville Chamber of Commerce met with Envision representatives and Hannah Williams, Executive Director of Partners In Education (PIE) in Montgomery County to learn how to deliver PIE to the River Region. With over 600 partnerships in Montgomery County created over the last 20 years, it is the ideal model to assist rural counties in central Alabama. Hannah Williams enthusiastically took on the task of working with business and education leaders in the River Region to share her knowledge and help guide the PIE process for each county.

Prattville has moved ahead quickly to lead the initiative in Autauga County and on June 30, 2004 held a kickoff lunch. Several hundred were in attendance to celebrate this important milestone. There will be 4 schools (of the 12 in the county) in this first round of partnerships: Prattville Kindergarten School, Daniel Pratt Elementary, Prattville Intermediate School and Marbury High School.

Using Montgomery PIE's bylaws as a model to develop the local non-profit, Autauga County PIE is taking responsibility for the future by promoting education as an important economic investment. Partnerships with businesses, churches, clubs and individuals will offer support services from tutoring and specialized teaching to special events and internships. Other plans include focusing on reading in kindergarten and having trained volunteers in the Spellbinders Program. The Autauga County Co-chairs, Pam Goodwin (365-1007) and Deborah Boutelier (361-7273), should be contacted for additional information

	% of K-3 Students Reading at Grade Level		<b>Gain</b>
	<b>Fall, 2003</b>	<b>Spring, 2004</b>	
Montgomery	37	68	31
Macon	25	46	22
Autauga	62	78	17
Lowndes	42	59	17
Elmore	56	71	15
Tallassee City	62	72	10

For everyone interested in the economic future of the River Region, there is heartening news. The recent Shareholder's Report in the *Montgomery Advertiser* gave the best possible news about the future of economic development in central Alabama: Envision 2020's number one goal has begun to be realized. That goal is creation and maintenance of excellent K-12 public education systems.

The Envision plan, developed in 15 public meetings in Autauga, Elmore, Lowndes, Macon and Montgomery counties, calls for “emphasis to be placed on the importance of quality education, programs and opportunities for students of all ages and abilities, setting the highest curriculum standards and hiring teachers and administrators who are trained, motivated and qualified in their subject”. Further, the people in the region envisioned schools that “have earned the trust and support of the community” and where “teachers’ and students’ performance achievement is celebrated”. Strike up the band and wave the banners! Alabama’s River Region has begun the parade!

There has been great rejoicing in the release of record-breaking reading achievement scores, particularly in Montgomery County’s public elementary schools. Indeed, national recognition is being realized with elementary schools soaring from a kindergarten reading achievement level of 42% to 88%, from a first grade level of 32% to 65%, a second grade level of 38% to 63% and from a third grade level of 33% to 57%. And there is more good news in the River Region: Autauga, Elmore, Lowndes, Macon and Tallasee school systems all showed improvement in reading in kindergarten through third grade.

According to Dr. Joe Morton, Superintendent of Schools for Alabama, "The DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Learning) data are of utmost importance because they point to what matters most for teaching students to read and because they predict performance on the high-stakes Stanford 10 test. In other words, teachers, principals, and superintendents can know by mid-year of kindergarten which students are on track (i.e., at benchmark) to score well on the Stanford 10."

In just ten months five of the six regional systems have moved to having more than half of their students reading at grade level. Expert reading coaches further strengthen teachers and work with students who need extra help. Schools are strategically using funds to increase the knowledge and skills of teachers who now have the tools needed to diagnose, at biweekly intervals, problems students are experiencing and they have the skills to help students overcome those problems.

The momentous DIBELS scores say it all: concentrating energy and resources in public schools works! Poverty, single-parent homes and the other reasons we give for children failing in school are finally disproved.

Have all the education goals for Envision been met? Of course not, but we are seeing progress. This sort of public school success must be increased and maintained in every county in order to compete in the world marketplace for jobs. Achievement at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile is not good enough. Across Alabama’s River Region we are seeing phenomenal growth. Hyundai’s assembly plant and suppliers’ factories are leaping out of the ground, and downtowns and riverfronts in every county are coming back to life. But the best investment we can make is that of building productive human beings. Schools play a leading role in that game and making excellent public schools a first priority will insure we all win! We should think of it as an investment in our future. Having educated, productive workers is the centerpiece of keeping and expanding current businesses, both large and small, as well as attracting new businesses

**In Other Action:****Tourist Map Project**

The regional tourism map, designed by LWT as part of last fall's Create-A-Thon and released by Envision in March, has been well received by locals and visitors alike. In a recent meeting of key tourism contacts across the River Region, it was stated that it is a good companion piece for Montgomery's current materials, and Elmore County has the maps available at the welcome center/rest area and is using them for special events.

There is discussion about forming a River Region Tourism Council that would use the map as a starting point for regional tourism promotion and cooperation. It is available through each county seat's chamber of commerce and the Sheriff's Department in Lowndes County.

**How to get involved**

1. Call 269-0224 to sign up for a task force or arrange for a speaker.
2. Use the Envision Plan to guide activities and planning in all organizations.
3. Pick up a copy of the Envision 2020 Regional Tourism map and become a home-state tourist. It will be fun and educational!