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ALABAMA MAKES HISTORY WITH BACK-TO-BACK NATIONAL SCHOOL NUTRITION ASSOCIATION PRESIDENTS

MONTGOMERY, Ala. – The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) Child Nutrition Program is celebrating the outstanding leadership of two Alabama school nutrition professionals who have achieved a remarkable milestone on the national stage.

During the recent School Nutrition Association's (SNA) *Annual National Conference* (ANC), held last month, in Charlotte, North Carolina, our state's school nutrition leaders made history.



Stephanie Dillard, Child Nutrition Program Director for Enterprise City Schools, officially passed SNA's presidential baton to *Dr. Ashley Powell*, Child Nutrition Program Director for Auburn City Schools.

With USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins joining them on stage, the leadership transition marked a historic milestone for Alabama as the first state in the School Nutrition Association's 80-year history to have two consecutive national presidents lead the organization.

**Pictured l-to-r Brooke Rollins, Stephanie Dillard, and Ashley Powell*

The School Nutrition Association is a national nonprofit professional organization representing more than 50,000 school nutrition professionals, who are dedicated to providing healthy school meals and nutrition education to students.

Founded in 1946, SNA advocates for policies and programs, which ensure access to healthy and nutritious meals for children in schools nationwide.

"Alabama is proud to have these exceptional leaders representing our state and serving students every day," said ALSDE School Nutrition Program administrator, Julie Autrey. "Their dedication as child nutrition professionals reflects a devoted commitment to ensuring students receive healthy, nutritious meals that support learning and achievement."

Stephanie Dillard has served as the Child Nutrition Program Director for the Enterprise City School System for the past six years. Previously, she served 18 years as the nutrition director for the Andalusia City School System, and also five years with the Geneva City School System.

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Throughout her career, Dillard has championed the mission of ensuring that every child is fed and ready to learn. During her tenure as SNA President, she participated in congressional briefings in Washington, D.C., advocating for policies that strengthen school meal programs and improve student access to healthy meals nationwide.

At the state and local levels, Dillard has also promoted initiatives that provide breakfast at no cost to students. Enterprise City Schools received funds through Alabama's School Breakfast funding for 2025 and 2026 to help expand breakfast access and offset district expenses.

"It's been an honor and privilege to serve as SNA President to not only represent the state of Alabama but our School Nutrition Association members and our nation," said Dillard.

Dr. Ashley Powell began her career in school nutrition in Clarke County Schools, Georgia, before becoming Child Nutrition Program Director for Auburn City Schools in 2008.

As leader of one of Alabama's fastest-growing school districts, Powell has played a key role in designing cafeteria spaces in new school facilities to meet the evolving needs of Auburn City School's students. Her efforts have emphasized fresh, locally sourced foods, including Alabama-grown produce and Alabama beef. She has also introduced innovative menu offerings, such as açai bowls lightly sweetened with Alabama honey.

Through Alabama's FY 2025 School Breakfast Grant, Dr. Powell has implemented Universal Breakfast, providing breakfast at no cost to all Auburn City School's students for the 2026–2027 school year. Powell stated, "It is an honor to represent child nutrition professionals in our great state of Alabama as well as across the nation. SNA is at the forefront of working to meet the challenges associated with providing the best possible programs to nourish our students, impacting their academic success in the classroom."

Placing a Priority on Alabama Agriculture

School districts regularly incorporate Alabama-grown foods into student meals, supporting local farmers while providing fresh, wholesome options for students.

Beth Spratt, Interim Director, for the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries AG Promotions and Farm to School, said, "Both Enterprise City and Auburn City have always been supporters of Farm to School. Since our incentive program began in SY2020-2021 both school systems received over \$71,000 for \$.20 per meal component and they could have been paid an additional \$43,000 if we had not run out of funds."

The Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries continues to support local food procurement in schools through its Farm-to-School Incentive Program, which provides funding to school districts each time Alabama-grown products are served to their students. During the 2025–2026 school year, Alabama schools received \$600,000 through the program for incorporating locally grown foods into school meals.

An additional \$600,000 has been allocated for the 2026–2027 school year, further expanding opportunities for schools to purchase fresh, Alabama-grown products.

Since the program's launch in 2020, more than \$2.195 million has been distributed to Alabama schools that serve locally grown agricultural products on student trays, strengthening connections between schools and local farmers while supporting student access to fresh, nutritious foods.

Angelice Lowe, State Director of the Alabama State Department of Education's Child Nutrition Programs, praised the accomplishments of both leaders and Alabama's continued impact on school nutrition nationwide.

"Alabama continues to set the standard for excellence in school nutrition through innovation, advocacy, and commitment to student success," said Lowe. "The leadership of Stephanie Dillard and Ashley Powell reflects the very best of our profession. Their dedication to expanding access to healthy meals, supporting Alabama agriculture, and advocating for children has strengthened school nutrition programs not only across our state, but throughout the nation. We are incredibly proud of their accomplishments and the example they set for future leaders."

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