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University of Alabama System Announces Statewide Reading Initiative “Reading Allies”

The University of Alabama System is launching a statewide reading initiative designed to help K-3 elementary school students read on grade level by the end of third grade. The program was announced today at the annual meeting of the Board of Trustees of the University of Alabama System.

Envisioned by Dr. Robert Witt as a way to transform reading proficiency across the state and co-chaired with UA System Chancellor Fess St. John, **Reading Allies** will involve working partnerships among UA System campuses, higher ed and K-12 partners, civic groups and Alabama business leaders who share a commitment to transforming reading proficiency across the state.

Reading Allies aligns with the goals of the recently passed Alabama Literacy Act, which requires all students to read at grade level by the conclusion of their third grade year.

“Our System is committed to six core principles that guide our decisions and priorities,” UA System Chancellor St. John said today in announcing **Reading Allies**. “Leading a unified approach to improving education at every level is one of those six principles that will shape the future of Alabama. We are pleased to introduce this

collaborative, results-driven program that will impact children in every corner of our state.

“I am deeply grateful to Dr. Witt for his vision and his work to address the issue of reading proficiency,” Chancellor St. John said. “It is an honor to join with him to achieve these goals that will have lasting results for generations to come.”

Chancellor St. John and Chancellor emeritus Witt outlined key goals of the program, which include developing a network of 25 universities and two-year colleges with 1,500 trained student reading tutors in school districts statewide. The **Reading Allies** team will recruit 100+ participating businesses and 1,000 trained volunteer employees to serve as tutors in designated K-5 schools.

Based on a proposal submitted by Dr. Witt and his colleagues Dr. Elizabeth Wilson and Vicki Holt, **Reading Allies** has been selected as the 2019 recipient of the McMahon-Pleiad Prize. The prize was established by the family of emeritus Trustee John McMahon, Jr. to advance collaboration and contribute to Alabama’s success.

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