



**ATLANTA  
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INDUSTRY FOCUS  
MAY 18-24, 2018 • SECTION B

# EDUCATION WHO'S WHO

**A GUIDE TO THE TOP 100 LEADERS EDUCATING THE FUTURE OF METRO ATLANTA**



## EDUCATION: WHO'S WHO

# List highlights leaders in metro Atlanta education

Welcome to Atlanta Business Chronicle's Who's Who in Education 2018 list of the top 100 leaders in metro Atlanta's K-12 and postsecondary education. This section, compiled by our research director Patsy Conn, includes biographical information on leaders from our Book of Lists research: metro Atlanta's largest colleges and universities; its top 20 independent schools and largest metro area business and engineering schools; along with public school district superintendents from metro Atlanta counties and state board of education members who represent metro Atlanta districts. We are also including data in the section Education by the Numbers on page 14B, as well as, on page 12B, a Q&A with a young man who may find himself on this list in the future.

– Melanie Lasoff Levs, Associate Editor

### MARYAM ALAVI

Georgia Tech, Scheller College of Business  
Dean and Stephen P. Zelnak Jr. Chair

**Education:** Bachelor's degree, State University of New York at Buffalo; master's degree and Ph.D., The Ohio State University

**Career highlights:** Alavi serves as a professor and dean of the Georgia Tech Scheller College of Business. She has authored numerous papers and has served on the editorial boards of several academic journals. A frequent speaker at national and international conferences, Alavi also has received numerous awards.  
[scheller.gatech.edu](http://scheller.gatech.edu)



### IVAN ALLEN

Central Georgia Technical College  
President

**Education:** Bachelor's degree, Morehouse College; master's degree, Georgia College & State University; doctorate, Nova Southeastern University

**Career highlights:** Allen serves as president of Central Georgia Technical College (CGTC), serving more than 33,000 individuals annually. Under his leadership, CGTC has grown enrollment and expanded both credit education and economic development services across the globe through its Global Initiatives program.  
[www.centralgatech.edu](http://www.centralgatech.edu)



### MATT ARTHUR

Technical College System of Georgia  
Commissioner

**Education:** Bachelor's degree, University of Georgia

**Career highlights:** Gov. Nathan Deal appointed Matt Arthur commissioner of the Technical College System of Georgia effective Jan. 1. Arthur previously served as the deputy commissioner of TCSG. He also served as the director of education reform for the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget. Arthur has worked as a teacher, coach, assistant principal and secondary principal. He served as superintendent of the Rabun County School District for 13 years, and is on numerous nonprofit boards.  
[www.tcsge.edu](http://www.tcsge.edu)



### FRED ASSAF

Pace Academy  
Head of school

**Education:** Bachelor's degree, Johns Hopkins; master's degree, University of Virginia

**Career highlights:** Each day I'm inspired by our faculty – from the inspirational, fun-loving work of teaching children in our Lower School to the incredible energy and enthusiasm of our Middle School programs to the thoughtful and dedicated work of our Upper School faculty. But mostly, each day I'm overwhelmed by the intellectual spark of our students – they are creative, thoughtful and empathetic. I believe I have the best job in America!  
[www.paceacademy.org](http://www.paceacademy.org)



### BENJAMIN C. AYERS

Terry College of Business,  
The University of Georgia  
Dean and Earl Davis  
Chair in Taxation

**Education:** Bachelor's and master's degrees, University of Alabama; Ph.D., University of Texas at Austin

**Career highlights:** Ayers is dean of the University of Georgia Terry College of Business and holds the Earl Davis Chair in Taxation. He came to UGA in 1996 and served as director of the Tull School of Accounting for nine years prior to becoming dean. Ayers was elected president of the American Taxation Association in 2017 and serves on the board of directors of Athens First Bank and Trust, a division of Synovus Bank.  
[www.terry.uga.edu](http://www.terry.uga.edu)



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## EDUCATION: WHO'S WHO

### WILLIAM D. UNDERWOOD

Mercer University  
President

**Education:** Bachelor's degree, Oklahoma Baptist University; law degree, University of Illinois

**Career highlights:**

Underwood has served as Mercer University's 18th president since July 2006. Mercer's enrollment has grown to more than 8,600 students, the number of Ph.D. students has increased to more than 200, and the amount of externally funded research expenditures has grown to more than \$35 million a year. In 2016, Mercer was reclassified by the Carnegie Foundation as a doctoral research university.  
[www.mercer.edu](http://www.mercer.edu)



### PAULA S. WALLACE

Savannah College  
of Art and Design,  
Atlanta (SCAD)  
President and Founder

**Education:** Bachelor's degree, Furman University; master's and Ed.S., Georgia State University

**Career highlights:** Wallace is the president and founder of SCAD, a private, nonprofit, accredited university with 50,000 students and alumni, 100-plus academic degree programs and locations in Atlanta, Hong Kong, Lacoste, Savannah and online. Under Wallace's leadership, SCAD has been honored internationally, and she herself has received many honors and awards.  
[www.scad.edu](http://www.scad.edu)



### DAVID WELDEN

Acting President; Vice  
President of Economic  
Development  
Gwinnett Technical  
College

**Education:** Bachelor's degree and MBA, Georgia State University

**Career highlights:** Welden oversees continuing education and the Launch Pointe Center Career Experience. A senior administrator at the college since 2005, Welden served as interim president from May through August of 2014. He joined in 2000 as a faculty member. He was a certified public accountant for 14 years.  
[www.gwinnettech.edu](http://www.gwinnettech.edu)



### BELLE S. WHEELAN

Southern Association of  
Colleges and Schools  
Commission on Colleges  
President

**Education:** Bachelor's degree, Trinity University (Texas); master's degree, Louisiana State University; doctorate, University of Texas at Austin

**Career highlights:** Wheelan's career spans over 40 years in roles including faculty member, campus provost and college president. Wheelan has received numerous awards and recognition including four honorary degrees. Wheelan has memberships in numerous local, state and national organizations.  
[www.sacsoc.org](http://www.sacsoc.org)



### J. ALVIN WILBANKS

Gwinnett County  
Public Schools  
CEO/Superintendent

**Education:** Bachelor's and master's degrees, The University of Georgia; Ed.S., Georgia State University

**Career highlights:** Wilbanks has been superintendent since March 1996. He has served on a number of state and national education committees, and the district has received honors and awards including 2016 National Advanced Placement District of the Year and was a 2017 National Council on Teacher Quality Outstanding Great District for Great Teachers honoree.  
[www.gwinnett.k12.ga.us](http://www.gwinnett.k12.ga.us)



### JEREMY WILLIAMS

Gainesville City Schools  
Superintendent

**Education:** Bachelor's degree, University of North Georgia; master's and doctorate degrees, Piedmont College

**Career highlights:** Williams became Gainesville City Schools superintendent in May 2017. He previously served as assistant superintendent and associate superintendent of Union County Schools for four years. He has five years of administrative experience at Pioneer Regional Education Service Agency, and has 12 years of teaching and coaching.  
[www.gcscsk12.net](http://www.gcscsk12.net)



### RICHARD WOODS

Georgia Department  
of Education  
State School  
Superintendent

**Education:** Bachelor's degree, Kennesaw State University; master's degree, Valdosta State University

**Career highlights:** Woods has more than 22 years of experience in public education. He was a high school teacher for 14 years, serving as department chair. For eight years, Woods served in various administrative roles such as assistant principal, principal, curriculum director, testing coordinator, pre-k director and alternative school director.  
[www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org)



### STEVE WRIGLEY JR.

University System  
of Georgia  
Chancellor

**Education:** Bachelor's degree, Georgia State University; doctorate, Northwestern University

**Career highlights:** Wrigley became 13th chancellor of the University System of Georgia in 2017. He oversees 26 public colleges and universities with a \$8.8 billion annual budget, 47,000 faculty/staff, and more than 325,000 students. Prior to becoming chancellor, Wrigley was executive vice chancellor of administration. He also was chief of staff to Gov. Zell Miller.  
[www.usg.edu](http://www.usg.edu)



# Debate program training minority students to raise their voices

BY MELANIE LASOFF LEVS  
[mlevs@bizjournals.com](mailto:mlevs@bizjournals.com)

After a troubled childhood and an injury that shattered his college-basketball-playing plans, **Brandon Fleming** was lost. "I hated school. I hated the teachers," he said. "I had no motivation to be [at college] other than athletics, so I dropped out."

The workers on the factory assembly line he landed on encouraged him to go back. "They said, 'Do you know what we would've done for the opportunity to go to college and you threw it away?'" he said. "That really opened my eyes."

Fleming went back to **Liberty University** two years later. He quickly realized he was behind, because, he said, teachers had ignored his learning difficulties and passed him every year so he could play basketball. "I couldn't keep up," he said. "I wanted to give up again."

His break came in the form of two books recommended by a professor, who had taken notice of Fleming's drive along with his struggles: "The Autobiography of Malcolm X" and "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass."

"I was inspired by these two black men who were self-taught," Fleming said. "I was determined to become a self-made scholar."

During what he called his "educational metamorphosis," Fleming visited his university's debate center. "I started to find



SPECIAL/CHRIS HOUSE

Brandon Fleming, far right in red bow tie, with advisory board members and students from the Harvard Debate Council Diversity Project, which he founded.

myself because I started to find my voice."

Today, Fleming, 27, a former teacher at Atlanta's **Ron Clark Academy** middle school, is providing opportunities for dozens of students of color to find their voices. Last year, Fleming founded the **Harvard Debate Council Diversity Project**, housed in donated space at **The Art Institute of Atlanta**. HDCDP's first class of 25 students, from high schools across

the metro area, have spent the last six months of Saturdays training in oratory, research and debate skills with Fleming. In July, they will participate in the two-week-long Harvard Debate Council program on the Cambridge, Mass., campus along with other high-achieving students from around the country.

Fleming, who is based in Atlanta and commutes to Harvard about once

a month, spoke with Atlanta Business Chronicle about HDCDP. The conversation has been edited for space.

**What led you to start this program?**

[At The Ron Clark Academy], I started a speech and debate team. To challenge the students, I entered them in a high school tournament. We went undefeated at that tournament. A former Harvard instructor was there scouting and saw what my team accomplished, and suggested I go to Harvard to be a summer instructor at the Harvard Debate Council. So two years ago, I went to Cambridge and taught, and they offered me a permanent position as an assistant coach. While there during the summer institute, I was heavily grieved that there was such a lack of African American representation. I had a conversation with my supervisors about that, and designed and proposed to them a diversity pipeline program that would recruit, train and feed students into that level. They approved it and gave me a seed grant. We spread the word around metro Atlanta and received more than 150 applications. We nailed it down to 25 [students] and have hit the ground running training for the last six months. We've raised nearly

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15B

\$100,000 [from corporate and private donors] to send them all to Harvard, travel, room and board included.

**Why debate?** Debate is the most fundamental skill of leadership. It's impossible to lead without the ability to persuade. It's impossible to persuade without the ability to reason. And it's impossible to reason without the ability to debate. Regardless of what profession they choose, we want our kids to be social advocates. We want them to be social entrepreneurs, and to be civically engaged. For the rest of our lives, we are going to have to come up with ideas and sell them. Debate teaches students how to think creatively, how to examine and look at any given issue from multiple perspectives, how to question, how to analyze. It teaches them how to present, and how to persuade and convince others to believe in their ideas.

**What criteria did you use to choose the 25 students?** They had to submit an online application and answer essay questions. They also had to submit a video of them giving a presentation on why they would be a good fit for the program. They also had to submit a transcript and a recommendation letter from a teacher, administrator or professional counselor.

Leadership was one of things we looked for. We didn't look for students with debate experience but for those who want to be world-changers. We are equipping them with the skills they need. I say it is equipping the future to lead now. We wanted to identify young people who had a passion for engaging other young people, because we want them to be cultural ambassadors. We were disheartened when we had to turn away so many, and our students felt that same burden. They said, "What if we take what you're teaching us and teach it to other young people?" They started having free workshops across metro Atlanta where students can come and receive free training in public speaking and civic engagement. We put the word out and the response was unbelievable. Now other young people are looking at our kids and they're creating social norms within African American culture. Our kids are making scholarship appealing to other young people, who are looking at our kids and saying, "I want to be that powerful and that brilliant."

**How do you see the HDCDP evolving?** We have a phenomenal advisory board and are getting ready to scale the program in other cities. Eventually we will be sending students of color throughout the country to Harvard. That public speaking workshop that we're doing, we are getting ready to do that in other cities. We will test interest in other cities, see how many people come out and start building a team. We are looking at Washington, D.C., and Houston right now. I'm humbled that I've been able to journey from being an at-risk youth to a college dropout to an award-winning educator. [But] I've got a lot more work to do.

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

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