



UNITE FOR GOOD

## KeyWay Weekly Newsletter

### **This Week's Program:**

*Dr. Bryan Johnson, Superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools*



Our featured speaker is Dr. Bryan Johnson who is the Superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools, bringing executive-level corporate experience and transformational K-12 leadership to the role. With nearly two decades in education, he has led at the highest levels across both public and private sectors.

Previously, Dr. Johnson served as Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Strategy Officer at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC), where he steered both the completion of the university's strategic plan and the launch of its 2025–2030 vision. In the private sector, he was Chief Transformation Officer at U.S. Xpress Enterprises. From 2017–2021, he led Hamilton County Schools in Tennessee, transforming it into the state's fastest-improving district.

Nationally recognized for innovation, Dr. Johnson launched Future Ready Institutes and bridged the digital divide during the pandemic by securing high-speed internet for economically disadvantaged students. His accolades include 2021 Tennessee Superintendent of the Year and finalist for National Superintendent of the Year. He holds honors from EdWeek, the National School Public Relations Association, and Austin Peay State University.

Dr. Johnson is a proud husband and father, with a school-aged child enrolled in Atlanta Public Schools.

#### **JOIN ONLINE**

Zoom Link - [Click here](#)  
Meeting ID: 874 0116 4307  
Passcode: Service

#### **Dial In**

1-646-558-8656  
Meeting ID: 874 0116 4307  
Passcode: 846122

***September's Theme is Basic Education and Literacy:  
Fridays: 5, 12, 19, 26***



**KeyWay Report on Our Speaker**  
**Aretta Baldon, Atlanta Board of Education**  
**September 5, 2025 | AWER Weekly Meeting**

**President Victoria Seals** introduced Ms. **Aretta Baldon**, of the Atlanta Board of Education elected in 2019 to represent District 2 on the Atlanta Board of Education and an honorary AWER member since January 2024. A Spelman graduate and Washington Park resident for more than 20 years, Aretta has long been a leader in education and community service. She is the founder of Atlanta Thrive, a parent-led movement to empower families to influence educational outcomes, and she continues to operate a monthly food pantry in partnership with the Atlanta Community Food Bank. Beyond her board service, she is active with Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and Providence Missionary Baptist Church, bringing her commitment to service into every sphere of her life.

Aretta opened her remarks by describing APS's current "math problem": a system with 70,000 seats but only 50,000 students enrolled. This imbalance not only stretches resources but also affects funding, since the state withholds full funding from schools under 450 students. APS has been covering deficits from reserves, but this is unsustainable. NO decisions have been made by the board on school closures; however, closing some schools is a near certainty.

Consolidation scenarios are now being considered, which could include repurposing **M. Agnes Jones Elementary**, a long time AWER partner school. It is under consider for closure, as are elementary schools in each of the APS's nine clusters. Each APS cluster has a high school, middle school(s), and several elementary schools.

M. Agnes Jones elementary is a community or STEM-focused facility. If closure occurred, its students would be disbursed to other schools in the cluster. The Washington Cluster is anchored by **Booker T. Washington High School**. Aretta assured members that Washington High School - despite serious under-enrollment - will not be considered for closure. In fact, APS has invested in facility upgrades (including a new field, field houses, bleachers, and theater lighting) and continues to expand early college programs, which already serve 25 percent of Washington's students.

Aretta stressed, however, that no final school closing decisions have been made, and that APS is committed to robust community engagement before moving forward.

The conversation also explored APS's relationship with charter schools, which enroll about 10 percent of students in the district. While outcomes are similar to traditional schools, charters have been more effective at marketing to gain student enrollment. To compete, APS is enhancing its offerings with new career and technical pathways, including programs in renewable energy, sustainability, and the film industry, along with expanded arts opportunities.

Aretta announced that she will not seek reelection at the end of her term. Three candidates — **Stephen Owens, Tony Mitchell, and Melissa Crawford** — have already qualified for the District 2 seat. Reflecting back on her tenure, she underscored that the most important factor in student success remains parental involvement, noting that “children learn what they live.” Schools can provide structure and resources, but parents and caregivers instill the values and priorities that shape educational outcomes.

— Neil Shorthouse, *Keyway Speaker Reporter*

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## **September is Basic Education and Literacy Month**

### *Building Community Through Learning*

September is Rotary International’s official focus month for Basic Education and Literacy, one of Rotary’s seven core areas of focus and a cornerstone of its efforts to foster individual growth and sustainable community development

Let’s celebrate Basic Education and Literacy Month by lifting up local learning. Whether through material support, personal mentorship, or simply spreading awareness. Our combined actions make a difference. Let’s show how AWER builds brighter futures, one lesson learned at a time.

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## **New Member!**

### *Bridgette “Bee” Long*

President Victoria Seals introduced Bee Long, who was formally inducted into membership. Bee has attended multiple meetings, actively engaged with the club on social media, and demonstrated a genuine commitment to AWER. Members warmly welcomed Bee as an energetic new addition to the club.



She is affiliated professionally with Destiny Wealth Solutions, LLC, and works as an Insurance Broker. Bridgette is a community advocate focused on education, affordable housing, healthcare equity, and health and wellness. She actively promotes wellness through farmers markets and health education events. Though not previously a Rotarian, she brings a strong background in grassroots community engagement and aligns well with Rotary’s values of service and leadership.

### **MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

- 9/14: Streets Alive! *Peachtree St.*
- 9/19: Shelly Goodrum, Washington Cluster Superintendent
- 9/26: Club Assembly
- 9/27: WEND Candlelight Concert
- 10/3: District Governor Steve Ivory
- 10/25: ATL Tech. College 5K
- 10/26: Streets Alive! *West End*

***Sign up to be a program chair [here](#) today!***

### **CELEBRATIONS**

#### **Birthdays**

Uku Urb: September 3

#### **Service Anniversaries**

Don Schewe: 44 years September 1

Elma McCutchen: 2 years September 15

Uku Urb: 2 years September 16

Debra Stokes: 3 years September 23

### **Meeting Agenda**

1. Call to Order
2. Invocation & Pledge
3. Introduction of Guests
4. Tasse Trivia
5. DEI Moment
6. Announcements
7. Program/Speaker
8. The Four-Way Test
9. Adjournment

### **RY2025–2026 Board of Directors**

**President:** *Dr. Victoria Seals*

**Co-Presidents-Elect:** *Debra Stokes & Chris Hempfling*

**Immediate Past President:** *Jared Evans*

**Secretary:** *Neil Shorthouse*

**Treasurer:** *Rose Caplan*

**Club Administration:** *Chris Hempfling*

**Membership Chair:** *Sonia Hantman*

**Public Image Chair:** *Jared Evans*

**Service Projects Chair:** *Carolina Ramos*

**The Rotary Foundation Chair:** *Debra Stokes*

**DEI Chair:** *Marilyn Jackson*

### **THE FOUR-WAY TEST of the things we think, say or do**



- first* **Is it the TRUTH?**
- second* **Is it FAIR to all concerned?**
- third* **Will it build GOOD WILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS?**
- fourth* **Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?**

**Stay Connected with AWER:**

**Email:** [inforotaryawe@gmail.com](mailto:inforotaryawe@gmail.com)

**Website:** [atlantawestendrotary.org](http://atlantawestendrotary.org)

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/RotaryAWE](https://facebook.com/RotaryAWE)

**Instagram:** [@rotaryatlantawestend](https://www.instagram.com/rotaryatlantawestend)

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