

A+ Education Partnership is a statewide advocate that works to drive improvement in public education in Alabama. Driven by our relentless belief in every child, we partner with educators, communities, and policymakers to expand access to a high-quality education so that every student can thrive.



## ***We are working to build an Alabama where...***

- 1** **Every child has a strong start.**
  - Continue to expand access to Alabama's First Class Pre-K.
  - Expand access to high-quality childcare for children from birth through age 3.
- 2** **Every child can read.**
  - Continue to invest in the Alabama Literacy Act through the Education Trust Fund.
  - Remove three-cueing in literacy instruction, an harmful strategy not based on the science of reading.
- 3** **Every child can do math on grade level.**
  - Continue to invest in the Alabama Numeracy Act through the Education Trust Fund.
- 4** **Every school has a high-impact principal and effective teachers.**
  - Support legislation to recruit, develop, and support highly-effective principals.
  - Build pathways for educators to access advanced teacher roles to retain and reward our most effective teachers.
- 5** **Every student has access to high-quality, transformative schools.**
  - Make common sense changes to the charter law to support the development and operations of high-quality charter schools.
- 6** **Every child has the resources they need to be successful.**
  - Modernize Alabama's school funding policy.
  - Expand access to high-quality summer and afterschool programs.
- 7** **Every student is college and career-ready and has access to pathways to economic mobility.**
  - Pass HB 109, the Alabama Workforce bill, to build high-quality career pathways for students.
  - Continue to expand Advanced Placement through the Education Trust Fund.
  - Continue to expand Computer Science through the Education Trust Fund.

A+ Education Partnership works to create a legislative agenda that is student-centered and backed by data. This document dives deeper into our legislative playbook, providing important context and data. Each category is color-coded to align with the items listed on the preceding agenda.


### Strong Start: Birth to Five

The opportunity gap begins before students even get to kindergarten. Ninety percent of a child's brain is grown between birth and the age of 5. Children need access to high-quality early childhood experiences during this critical period to build a strong foundation for lifelong learning and achievement.

-  Children who attend Alabama's First Class Pre-K are more likely to be proficient in reading and math long-term. The continued expansion would ensure more 4-year-olds have access to this nationally-recognized program.
-  Expanding access to high-quality childcare will help set our children up for success, especially those from low-income families, and will provide opportunities for their families to fully engage in Alabama's workforce.

### Math: The Alabama Numeracy Act

Math in Alabama continues to face a crisis, with only 28% of Alabama students showing proficiency (on grade level) on the 2022 ACAP results, including only 16% of low-income students and 11% of Black students. Last year, the legislature passed the Alabama Numeracy Act, a comprehensive plan to build a strong foundation for students in grades K-5. This first-in-the-nation legislation includes math coaches in every elementary school, beginning with our highest-need schools, training for teachers and principals, high-quality instructional materials and curriculum-based professional learning, intensive support for low-performing schools, interventions for struggling students, and accountability to get it done.

-  Continued investment in the Alabama Numeracy Act will support growth in our lowest-performing schools, so they can purchase high-quality instructional materials and hire math coaches and auxiliary teachers for every classroom to facilitate interventions.

### Reading: The Alabama Literacy Act

Being able to read is a fundamental skill necessary for life. Currently, only half of Alabama students can read on grade level. According to the American Education Research Association, a student who can't read on grade level by third grade is 4x less likely to graduate high school. Add poverty to the mix, and a student is 13x less likely to graduate than their wealthier peers. By contrast, 96% of 3rd graders reading on grade level will graduate from high school.



Continued investment in the Alabama Literacy Act will support expanded training in the science of reading, interventions for struggling students, more reading coaches, and summer programs.

### Reading: Remove Three-Cueing

Over 60% of all students need explicit literacy instruction to learn how to read. Students deserve teachers who are trained in the science of reading instead of teaching strategies like three-cueing, a strategy akin to guessing (instead of sounding out the word) that cognitive researchers have confirmed doesn't work and can be harmful to students.



We must remove three-cueing in literacy instruction, a harmful strategy not based on the science of reading.

### Transformative Schools: High-Quality Charter Schools

High-quality public charter schools offer an opportunity to reimagine public education. Eight years after passing a charter law, Alabama has seen some innovative charter schools that meet the diverse needs of students and challenge traditional models. There are some common sense updates needed to simplify the commission appointment process, increase commission expertise, and provide clarity on funding to support the development and operations of high-quality charter schools.



Alabama should continue expanding its high-quality charter school sector through both start-up and conversion models. Alabama's charter schools need access to equitable funding to continue improving and providing students with the high-quality academic opportunities they need.

### Teachers & Leaders: Effective Principals

Principals significantly impact the success of students and teachers in their schools. Like effective teachers, highly effective principals can add up to 3 months of learning in math and reading for all students in a school. Alabama needs to develop a strong principal pipeline so that every school has a well-prepared and effective principal.



This should include the creation of a statewide leadership development program that will:

- replace standards with an updated framework of evidence-based competencies,
- provide high-quality professional development and support for principals at every stage of their careers,
- reform principal pay to incentivize excellence and growth, and
- create a stronger evaluation system to ensure principals grow and improve at every turn.



In addition, we must modernize our Principal Prep programs (PPP) to ensure Alabama principals are ready to be effective on day 1.

### Teachers & Leaders: Advanced Teachers Roles

Currently, there are very few avenues for Alabama teachers to advance in their career (and salary) beyond those that remove them from the classroom, like becoming a principal or an instructional coach. To increase student achievement and growth, Alabama must retain the best and most effective educators in our classrooms and modernize outdated school organization models.



We need to build pathways for educators to access advanced teacher roles so that our most effective educators can grow their leadership and salaries while remaining in the classroom.



We also need to provide incentives for our most effective teachers to work in schools that need them the most.

### Resources: School Funding Reform

Alabama uses the Foundation Program, an outdated, 30-year-old funding model that does not account for differences in students' needs, like students living in poverty, students with special needs, and students who speak English as a second language. Our schools, especially those serving our most marginalized students in rural and urban high-poverty districts, are not adequately or equitably funded and cannot fully provide the support their students need to succeed. However, more money alone won't raise student achievement. We need new systems for accountability & transparency that provide visibility into how and why districts are budgeting, as well as new methods for budgeting to ensure that we are spending taxpayer dollars wisely on practices & programs that move the needle for student achievement.



The time has come to modernize Alabama's school funding policy and move to a student-weighted formula, as well as more accountability and transparency, so that all students have the resources they need to succeed in the classroom.

### Resources: Summer and Afterschool Programs

Even before COVID, Alabama has faced long-standing academic challenges that disproportionately affect students from our most marginalized communities. Closing these achievement gaps will require more than just the regular school day. Students attending summer programs for 20+ days saw significantly better outcomes in math and reading. In addition, students who attended for two summers outperformed those who did not by up to a 20% difference in reading and math. More time in afterschool programs narrowed the math achievement gap by grade 5. Research shows that every \$1 invested in afterschool programs saves at least \$3 by increasing students' earning potential, improving students' performance in reading and math, and reducing crime and juvenile delinquency.



We should expand the Summer & After-School Grant Program, a pilot to increase access to high-quality, community-based summer and afterschool programs in reading and STEM.

## College and Career Readiness

While 91% of students graduated from high school in 2022, only 76% were considered college & career ready, including only 71% of Hispanic students, 68% of low-income students, and 63% of Black students. Even for those who may have earned a credential, a recent Burning Glass analysis reported that only 18% of those earned by K-12 students across 30 states, including Alabama, are actually demanded by U.S. employers. Our students deserve to be prepared for life after high school, and they should have access to pathways to economic mobility, whether it is a four-year postsecondary degree or the workforce. Our state's future depends on it.



HB 109 - Alabama Workforce Bill: Through the Alabama Workforce bill, we must create a credential registry to ensure programs are preparing students for in-demand jobs, institute a credential review process to ensure quality and alignment with industry demand, and require students to earn one or more college and career readiness indicators before graduation.



Advanced Placement Courses: Students who take an Advanced Placement course and exam are more likely to graduate from college. Since 2008, Alabama has increased the number of qualifying scores on AP exams from 7,260 to 18,430 per year. The number of AP tests taken by students of color and students in poverty has increased by 135% and 340%, respectively. Continued funding for Advanced Placement will prepare more Alabama students for college, career, and life.



Computer Science Education: In a changing workforce with new technologies, Alabama must continue to ensure students have increased access to high-quality computer science courses, both for our children and our economy. With the passage of the 2019 Computer Science Bill, Alabama became a national leader in expanding computer science education. Increased funding is needed to expand training for Alabama teachers to teach this important subject matter and meet the goals of this legislation.