



EDUCATION
PARTNERSHIP



2024 A+ Legislative Playbook

Creating Great Schools for Every Child

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...

Every child has the resources they need to be successful.



- Modernize Alabama's school funding policy.
- Expand access to high-quality summer and after-school programs.

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 through Quality Stars expansion and tax credits.

Every child can read on grade level.



- Invest in the Alabama Literacy Act through the Education Trust Fund.
- Remove three-cueing from literacy instruction and educator preparation, an outdated strategy not based on the science of reading.

Every child can do math on grade level.



- Increase investment in the Alabama Numeracy Act through the Education Trust Fund.

Every school has a high-impact principal and effective teachers.



- Increase investment in the Alabama Principal Leadership and Mentoring Act.
- Implement a Teacher Pathways, Support and Advancement Pilot program to retain and reward our most effective educators.

Every child has access to high-quality, transformative schools.



- Ensure that Alabama's public charter schools receive state funding to make up for the significant gap in local funding.

Every graduate is college and career-ready and has access to pathways to economic mobility.



- Continue to expand Advanced Placement through the Education Trust Fund.
- Continue to fund Computer Science Education through the Education Trust Fund.
- Invest in the successful implementation of the Alabama Works Act to build and expand access to high-quality career pathways for students.

A+ Education Partnership works to create a legislative agenda that is student-centered and backed by evidence and research.



Legislative Action

- Modernize Alabama's school funding policy.
- Remove three-cueing from literacy instruction and educator preparation, an outdated strategy not based on the science of reading.
- Implement a Teacher Pathways, Support, and Advancement Pilot program to retain and reward our most effective educators.
- Expand access to high-quality childcare for children from birth through age 3 through tax credits.



Education Trust Fund

- Ensure that Alabama's public charter schools receive state funding to make up for the significant gap in local funding.
- Increase investment in the Alabama Literacy Act through the Education Trust Fund.
- Increase investment in the Alabama Numeracy Act through the Education Trust Fund.
- Increase investment in the Alabama Principal Leadership and Mentoring Act.
- Increase investment in the Alabama Works Act to build and expand access to high-quality career pathways for students.
- Continue to expand Advanced Placement through the Education Trust Fund.
- Continue to fund Computer Science Education through the Education Trust Fund.
- Continue to expand access to Alabama's First Class Pre-K and invest in the Quality Stars Program.
- Expand access to high-quality summer and after-school programs.



Modernize Alabama's School Funding Policy

It's time to modernize Alabama's education funding formula to ensure no more students are overlooked and every child gets a quality education. Alabama is one of six states that still uses a resource-based funding formula, which is outdated and doesn't provide resources to students who need them the most. We need to join the 41 states around the country that use a student-weighted formula, which would provide greater opportunities for every Alabama child to lead a successful life. Every student deserves to have a high-quality teacher, healthy meals, and a safe building and supportive environment to learn in.

How will this impact students?



Many public schools in Alabama are not equipping kids for opportunity-filled lives. Even though Alabama has made progress on the 2022 NAEP results, less than 50% of kids can read on grade level, and only 29% can do math on grade level. In an effort to change this, Alabama has made record investments and reforms over the past few years. However, instead of only addressing the symptoms, it's time to address the root cause. The Foundation Program, the resource-based funding formula that Alabama has used to fund schools for the past thirty years, is not providing the funding students need to reach their full potential. Every child is different, and some children need more help to be successful. If we want every child to reach their full potential, we need to fund schools based on their unique needs. When we give our public schools the resources they need, it strengthens communities, making them better places to live, raise a family, and even start a business.

Remove three-cueing from literacy instruction and educator preparation, an outdated strategy not based on the science of reading

Students deserve teachers who are trained in the science of reading, which has a strong foundation in phonics, instead of balanced literacy teaching strategies like three-cueing, a strategy akin to guessing (instead of sounding out the word) that cognitive researchers have confirmed doesn't work. The Balanced Literacy/three-cueing approach has not worked and is the reason that reading scores have declined nationally. It's time to ensure every child is receiving evidence-based literacy instruction and that every educator is receiving preparation and training aligned with the science of reading.



How will this impact students?

Cognitive scientists found in the 1990s that over 60% of all students need to be taught using the science of reading in order to learn how to read. The science of reading is structured, explicit reading instruction on sounds and letter combinations that make up the English language. It includes a focus on phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. It is the most effective way to teach children how to read.



Implement a Teacher Pathways, Support, and Advancement Pilot program to retain and reward our most effective educators

We need to improve educator retention by implementing the pilot program recommended by the Alabama Teacher Quantity & Quality Roundtable, which includes providing comprehensive early career supports for new teachers and career advancement opportunities to keep our most effective teachers in the classroom. In 2020, convened by Dr. Mackey and supported by SREB, the TQ2 Roundtable evaluated the state's teacher shortage, previous efforts to reverse this shortage, current state policies, and research and best practices from around the nation with the goal of recruiting and retaining great teachers. The [full report](#) recommends a Teacher Pathways, Support and Advancement Pilot program to develop the following in a diverse set of school districts around the state: new pathways into teaching, better early career supports, and advanced teacher roles.

How will this impact students?



For many years, researchers have found that effective teachers are one of the most critical and foundational levers for improving student outcomes. If we want to improve student outcomes in Alabama, it is critical that we find ways to improve the effectiveness of our teachers. Currently, there are very few early career supports for new teachers and 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.

Expand access to high-quality childcare for children from birth through age 3 through tax credits

Expanding access to high-quality childcare will help set our children up for success and provide opportunities for their families to fully engage in Alabama's workforce. Given Alabama's workforce needs and our historically low labor participation rate, this will help bring Alabama's workforce off the sidelines.



How will this impact students?

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.



Increase investment in the Alabama Literacy Act

In 2019, the Legislature passed the Alabama Literacy Act. Sponsored by Rep. Terri Collins, the goal of this legislation is to ensure that every child can read on grade level by the end of third grade. Continued investment will support expanded training in the science of reading, high-quality instructional materials and interventions based on the science of reading for struggling students, more reading coaches, and summer programs.



How will this impact students?

Being able to read is a fundamental skill necessary for life. Currently, less than half of Alabama students can read on grade level, including only 35% of students in poverty and 32% of Black students. 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.

Increase investment in the Alabama Numeracy Act

In 2022, the Legislature passed the Alabama Numeracy Act, a comprehensive plan to build a strong foundation for students in grades K-5. Sponsored by Senator Arthur Orr and Rep. Alan Baker, 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, interventions for struggling students, and intensive support and accountability for low-performing schools.



How will this impact students?

We continue to face a math crisis in Alabama, with only 30% of Alabama students proficient, including only 17% of low-income students and 13% of Black students. In 2023, there were 19 Alabama Schools with 0% of their students proficient in math. Additionally, there were 52 schools with 0% of Black students proficient. Continued investment in the Alabama Numeracy Act will support student achievement and growth in our lowest-performing schools, allowing them to implement high-quality instructional materials, hire effective math coaches to build the capacity of their teachers, and leverage auxiliary teachers in every classroom to facilitate interventions.



Increasing investment in the Alabama Principal Leadership and Mentoring Act

Passed in 2023, this new law establishes the foundation for a strong principal pipeline in our state. By successfully participating in the Alabama Principal Leadership Development System, principals can receive a stipend of \$10,000 (\$15,000 for hard-to-staff schools), and assistant principals can receive \$5,000 (\$7,500 for hard-to-staff) per year. This participation includes creating a professional learning plan every year, completing five additional days of high-quality professional learning, and eventually working with a principal mentor for two years (beginning in 2024-2025), participating in the new evaluation system (beginning 2027-2028), and completing a new year-long leadership academy by 2029-2030. Until last year, Alabama has not addressed principal leadership through policy since 2005.



How will this impact students?

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. Through the Alabama Principal Leadership and Mentoring Act, our state will begin to develop a strong principal pipeline so that every child has a well-prepared and effective principal.

Create a new line item to ensure that Alabama's public charter schools receive state funding to make up for the significant gap in local funding

Since the charter school law passed in 2015, Alabama has seen 14 public charter schools open – 11 start-up charter schools and 3 conversion charter schools. These schools receive all state and federal funding associated with the students they serve, but they do not receive any local funding. This results in as much as a \$4,000 per student gap between what charter and district schools receive to serve their students. Alabama's public charter schools need access to equitable funding to continue improving and providing students with the high-quality academic opportunities they need.



How will this impact students?

Researchers have found that high-performing charter schools can significantly increase academic achievement and attainment for students, particularly students of color and those from low-income backgrounds. Additionally, 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 school models.



Invest in the successful implementation of the Alabama Works Act to build and expand access to high-quality career pathways for students

Sponsored by Rep. Terri Collins, the Alabama Works Act will help close the gap between Alabama's graduation rate and college and career readiness rate by requiring that each graduate earns a college and career readiness indicator starting with the class of 2026. Additionally, it creates a credential registry to ensure programs are preparing students for in-demand jobs, institutes a credential review process to ensure quality and alignment with industry demand, and codifies ATLAS, our state's data system, which will help to identify state investments that effectively improve student outcomes.

How will this impact students?



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 through college or entering the workforce. Our state's future depends on it.

Continue to expand to expand Advanced Placement courses

In order to prepare students for life after high school, whether they go on to college or begin their careers, they must have access to a rigorous curriculum in the classroom that prepares them for the real world. One important pathway to reach this goal is access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

How will this impact students?



Research shows that taking just one AP course in high school can increase college success for students because of exposure to a college-level curriculum. Access to these courses that hold students to high standards and increase rigor in the classroom must be available to all students in Alabama who wish to take them. Since 2008, Alabama has increased the number of qualifying scores on AP exams from 7,260 to 22,231 per year, which is the highest number of qualifying scores ever in the history of the state of Alabama. The number of AP tests taken by students of color and students in poverty has increased by 135% and 340%, respectively. The number of students of color earning qualifying scores was also the highest in Alabama's history. Continued funding for Advanced Placement through the A+ College Ready program will help Alabama achieve its ambitious goal of all graduates earning a college & career readiness indicator by 2026 and will prepare more Alabama students for college, career, and life.



Continue to fund Computer Science

With the passage of the 2019 Computer Science Bill, Alabama became a national leader in expanding computer science education. Alabama is one of only three states, with over 90% of high schools offering computer science to students. Continued funding is needed to train Alabama teachers to teach this important subject matter and meet the goals of this legislation.

How will this impact students?



Computer science courses have become a necessary part of K-12 education to prepare students for the workforce. The number of computer science jobs is increasing alongside the number of students interested in learning computer science. 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.

Continue to expand access to Alabama's First Class Pre-K

Children need access to high-quality early childhood experiences to build a strong foundation for lifelong learning and achievement. We should continue to expand Alabama's First Class Pre-K program which has been recognized as one of the highest quality pre-k programs in the nation.

How will this impact students?



Children who attend Alabama's First Class Pre-K are more likely to be proficient in reading and math long-term. Continued expansion would ensure more 4-year-olds have access to this nationally-recognized program.



Expand access to high-quality summer and after-school programs

Alabama needs to 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.

How will this impact students?



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 and improving students' performance in reading and math.



**Building an
Alabama where
EVERY CHILD
receives a
world-class
education,
regardless of
circumstance**

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