

# Teachers Matter: Rethinking How Public Education Recruits, Rewards, and Retains Great Educators

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A report prepared for the Business Education Alliance of  
Alabama by the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama

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August 15, 2015



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**Special Acknowledgements**

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A special thanks to our Partners. Without their support this research project would not have been made possible. Each Partners' logo is included in this publication with pride and gratitude.

A special thanks to Caroline Novak, President and Thomas Rains, Policy Director, A+ Education Foundation. Without their interest, support, knowledge and desire, this research project would not have been possible.

**Teachers Matter: Rethinking How Public Education  
Recruits, Rewards, and Retains Great Educators**

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## Executive Summary

The 2014 Business Education Alliance (BEA) report, *Obstacles into Opportunities*, described the potential impact of achieving Alabama's goal of graduating 90 percent of students from high school prepared for college and career. This year's report focuses on the professionals most essential to reaching our goal: teachers.

We've challenged schools to deliver an education that is internationally competitive in its quality and depth. The state has adopted new metrics and new assessments to measure progress toward its ambitious educational goals. We have devised strategies to reach our goals and are making investments to support those strategies. Based on the Obstacles into Opportunities Report, the BEA identified key funding elements critical to success, and the Alabama Legislature funded \$29.2 million in new dollars in the 2016 Education Budget to address those needs.

But the entire endeavor depends on talented teachers. Bright teachers recruited to the profession to address needs in key fields, like math and science, and in hard-to-staff schools. Teachers who are rigorously prepared in college and supported in their transition to the classroom. Veteran teachers challenged to continuously improve their teaching. Teachers given opportunities for professional advancement and tangible rewards.

Research has confirmed over and over that the single most important school-related factor associated with students' success is their teacher's effectiveness. According to research cited in *Endangering Prosperity: A Global View of the American School*<sup>1</sup>:

- Top teachers can produce gains of 1.5 grade levels, while the bottom teachers produce gains of only half a grade level in an academic year.
- Three to five years in a class with a top teacher, rather than an average teacher, is sufficient to erase the average achievement gap between poor and better-off children.

Teacher quality matters. Prior to the Great Recession of recent years, Alabama policy makers had put considerable study and planning into a variety of efforts aimed at improving teacher quality. Some of these initiatives were set aside in light of severely constrained budgets. Others continued in the background and are only now coming to fruition.

As budgets recover, it is time to refocus attention on teacher quality and invest in initiatives that benefit students by improving the instruction they receive. These initiatives can be described in terms of three imperatives:

1. **Recruit and Train:** Alabama should have higher standards for admission to, and a higher bar for graduation from, teacher prep programs. Alabama colleges and universities that train new candidates for the field must develop strong partnerships with local school

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<sup>1</sup> Hanushek, Eric A.; Peterson, Paul E.; Woessmann, Ludger (2013-06-28). *Endangering Prosperity: A Global View of the American School* (Kindle Locations 1208-1216). Brookings Institution Press. Kindle Edition.

systems that benefit both parties. Financial incentives should be put in place for teachers who'll commit to working in hard-to-staff schools or high-need fields.

2. **Review and Support:** By fall 2018, Alabama school systems should have a teacher effectiveness evaluation system in place. For the first time, these evaluations will include student test performance data as a measure. A well-designed evaluation system encourages teacher growth and, ultimately, can inform employment and tenure decisions. Evaluations must be accompanied by support, support for teachers in their entry into the profession and continuing support for teachers who want to improve their effectiveness.
3. **Reward and Challenge:** To encourage a culture of continuous improvement in teaching quality, Alabama should develop pathways for teachers to grow professionally while remaining in teaching roles and create financial incentives for schools that achieve improved or high-level student results.

These imperatives can be implemented with modest investments that will pay great dividends. The programs required have been developed and in some cases already implemented in parts of Alabama, but not yet statewide.

To attract top students and encourage them to teach where they are needed most, the Legislature should consider reviving and revising the Alabama Teacher Recruitment Incentives Program (ATRIP) with a projected investment of \$3 million annually. A pool for scholarships and incentives is vital to addressing teacher shortages, especially considering the essential importance of science, math and technology to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Economy.

To promote the success of new teachers entering the field, the Legislature should renew support for the Alabama Teacher Mentoring Program (ATMP), an estimated \$4 million annual investment. While it operated, ATMP paired carefully selected veteran teachers with beginning teachers, providing a \$1,000 stipend for mentors to support counseling and coaching throughout the school year to new teachers.

To recognize great teachers and magnify their impact, the Legislature should sponsor the development of new teaching roles to allow for career growth within teaching. An appropriation of \$600,000 could sponsor pilot programs to give the best teachers the ability to reach more students and help their fellow teachers improve.

To encourage school faculties to work together toward improving student outcomes, the Legislature should renew its support for financial bonuses to schools that show high levels of improvement or sustained success in student achievement. An appropriation of \$7.5 million would allow for reinstatement of the *Exceeding the Challenge* awards for the top 10 percent of Alabama's K-12 schools in improvement or achievement on state assessments.

**Bottom Line: Teachers represent the state's largest and most important educational investment. Investments to encourage greater teaching quality underline the fundamental fact that teachers matter.**

## Recruit and Train

### The Best Teachers Where They are Most Needed

We are setting higher standards for our students. We are asking more from our teachers. Alabama's teacher preparation programs must ensure that they graduate teacher candidates who are talented, well-trained, and prepared to adapt and change throughout their careers in Alabama's public schools. We also must encourage more teachers to teach where they are needed most: in high-demand fields like math, science, and special education and in hard-to-staff schools, which are frequently the schools where students are struggling and great teachers can make the biggest difference.

**Table 1. Alabama Teacher Preparation Programs**

<b>Teacher Preparation Program</b>	<b>Traditional Program Completers, 2012-13</b>	<b>Alternative Program Completers, 2012-13</b>	<b>Total Completers, 2012-13</b>
Jacksonville State University	322	25	347
University of Alabama	294	34	328
Auburn University	293	28	321
Athens State University	284	0	284
Troy University	210	30	240
University of Alabama at Birmingham	111	94	205
University of South Alabama	145	31	176
University of North Alabama	121	23	144
University of Montevallo	68	71	139
Auburn University - Montgomery	60	44	104
Samford University	50	42	92
Alabama State University	64	21	85
University of West Alabama	55	21	76
Alabama A&M University	41	20	61
University of Mobile	47	8	55
University of Alabama in Huntsville	27	4	31
Spring Hill College	25	4	29
Faulkner University	17	7	24
Birmingham-Southern College	22	0	22
Oakwood University	19	0	19
Concordia College	15	0	15
Miles College	15	0	15
Huntingdon College	12	0	12
Stillman College	12	0	12
Judson College	4	0	4
Tuskegee University	3	0	3
Talladega College	1	0	1

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education.

Nationally, over the past decade, there has been a strong push to raise the quality of candidates entering the teaching profession. The teacher preparation accrediting body, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), and advocacy organizations like the National Center for Teacher Quality (NCTQ), have recommended that teacher preparation programs raise requirements for admission and graduation.

Currently, Alabama sets a low bar for admission to and graduation from teacher preparation programs in comparison to other states. Alabama should raise its standards and is taking action in that direction. The State Department of Education has proposed, and the State Board of Education is soon to vote on, new standards for colleges that produce certified teachers for Alabama schools. Among other things, the new standards will raise entry and exit requirements for teacher candidates. These changes should be applauded and encouraged. In some cases, further steps should be taken.

### **Higher GPAs to be Required for Admission to Teaching Programs**

Entry into a teacher preparation program occurs at the beginning of the junior year. Currently, college students with a 2.5 Grade Point Average (GPA) can be accepted into traditional undergraduate teacher preparation programs in Alabama. The State Board of Education is considering a proposal to require applicants to have a 2.75 GPA to enter teacher preparation programs. Current standards assume “C” average teachers are adequate to deliver the results needed to propel Alabama forward educationally and economically. That assumption is flawed.

Additionally, under Alabama’s proposed new standards, the average GPA of each entering cohort (class) of students admitted into a teacher preparation program would have to be 3.0 or above. Mississippi has both the 2.75 minimum GPA for individuals and the 3.0 cohort average in place for its schools of education. Officials there say they have not noted a decline in enrollment since that state raised its standards.

Six teacher preparation programs in Alabama have already raised the minimum GPA required for admission to 2.75 or above, and another (University of Montevallo) has decided to take this step in 2016. The other programs remain at the 2.5-GPA minimum, as shown in Table 2. Institutional reports to the U.S. Department of Education, reflected in the table, indicate that the median GPAs of individuals accepted to Alabama’s teacher preparation programs actually exceeded the 2.75 minimum in 2013 for all but one institution, and even exceeded 3.0 for most institutions. The reports showed that the median GPAs for program completers were higher still. These results are in line with research showing that GPAs campus-wide, among all students at public universities, exceed 3.0.<sup>2</sup>

The State Board of Education should adopt the proposal to raise the minimum GPA for admission to 2.75, and should set a goal of moving at some time in the near future to an even higher minimum GPA (3.0) for entry to teacher preparation programs, in the interest of drawing top students into the teaching profession. The target for consideration should be a GPA minimum that reflects rather than trails the performance of all students campus-wide, which suggests a 3.0 minimum GPA to be admitted.

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<sup>2</sup> Teachers College Record, Date Published: March 04, 2010 <http://www.tcrecord.org> ID Number: 15928, Date Accessed: 3/4/2010 1:46:08 PM



Oklahoma, Utah, and Delaware already have adopted a 3.0 minimum GPA for all candidates entering teacher preparation programs. Alabama should monitor their results and consider moving to this standard no later than 2020.

**Table 2. Current Minimum GPA Set by Institutions.**

Teacher Preparation Program	GPA Standards and Averages		
	Minimum GPA Required for Admission*	Median GPA of Individuals Accepted, 2013	Median GPA of Completers, 2013
Alabama A&M University	2.50	3.13	3.39
Alabama State University	2.50	3.10	3.25
Athens State University	2.50	3.23	3.43
Auburn University	2.50	3.15	3.53
Auburn University - Montgomery	2.50	3.02	3.23
Birmingham-Southern College	2.50	3.30	3.50
Concordia College	2.50	3.80	3.60
Faulkner University	2.50	2.78	3.19
Huntingdon College	2.50	3.00	3.00
Jacksonville State University	2.75	2.90	3.28
Judson College	2.50	3.49	3.84
Miles College	2.80	3.32	3.43
Oakwood University	2.50	3.36	3.30
Samford University	2.80	3.52	3.60
Spring Hill College	2.50	3.20	3.73
Stillman College	2.50	2.78	3.30
Talladega College	2.50	2.50	2.50
Troy University	2.75	3.00	3.40
Tuskegee University	2.50	3.37	3.05
University of Alabama	2.75	3.42	3.48
University of Alabama at Birmingham	2.50	3.10	3.27
University of Alabama in Huntsville	2.50	2.93	3.46
University of Mobile	2.75	3.00	3.00
University of Montevallo	2.50	3.35	3.57
University of North Alabama	2.50	3.24	3.33
University of South Alabama	2.75	3.32	3.46
University of West Alabama	2.50	3.00	3.23

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education. \* Minimum GPAs for overall work are current as of July 23, as shown on Program web sites.

### Higher Bar Needs to Be Set on Certification Test

Alabama currently requires teacher candidates to pass standardized tests from the national series commonly known as the *Praxis*, to graduate from a teacher preparation program and pursue certification as an Alabama teacher. The required *Praxis* tests include tests of general knowledge and practice, as well as subject-matter tests for candidates pursuing particular certifications. Each state using the *Praxis Series* determines the particular tests it will require and the passing score on each test

Alabama requires applicants for teaching certificates to pass the applicable *Praxis* test of Principles of Learning and Teaching (PLT). There are two PLT tests, one for grades K-6 and another for grades 7-12. Among 22 states using these tests, Alabama has the lowest passing score. Alabama also has low minimum passing scores on some (but not all) subject-matter *Praxis* tests. Table 3 shows how Alabama's passing scores on these tests compare with those of other southeastern states.

**Table 3. Comparison of Minimum Passing Scores**

	<b>Passing Scores on Selected <i>Praxis</i> Tests</b>			
	<b>Principles of Learning &amp; Teaching</b>		<b>Math Content Knowledge</b>	<b>Middle School English</b>
	<b>Grades K-6</b>	<b>Grades 7-12</b>		
Alabama	145	153	145	146
Arkansas	160	157	160	164
Kentucky	160	157	160	164
Louisiana	160	157	160	164
Mississippi	160	157	160	164
North Carolina	160	157	160	164
South Carolina	160	157	160	164
Tennessee	158	155	160	164

SOURCE: Education Testing Service.

The Alabama State Board of Education should raise its minimum passing scores on all *Praxis* tests to national or regional averages.

### **State Has Added a Test of Teaching Skill**

To make sure teacher candidates are prepared for the classroom, the State Department of Education has proposed that teacher candidates be evaluated by observation of their teaching ability, in addition to the traditional tests of content knowledge. The Alabama State Board of Education plans to vote on the proposal in August as part of the proposed revisions to standards for teacher preparation programs.

The chosen evaluation system, known as edTPA, requires that aspiring teachers demonstrate that they have the classroom skills necessary to ensure students are learning. Developed by Stanford University faculty and researchers, edTPA is a nationally standardized evaluation system now in use by more than 600 teacher preparation programs in some 40 states. About a dozen states, including Georgia and Tennessee, use edTPA as part of their teacher certification process.

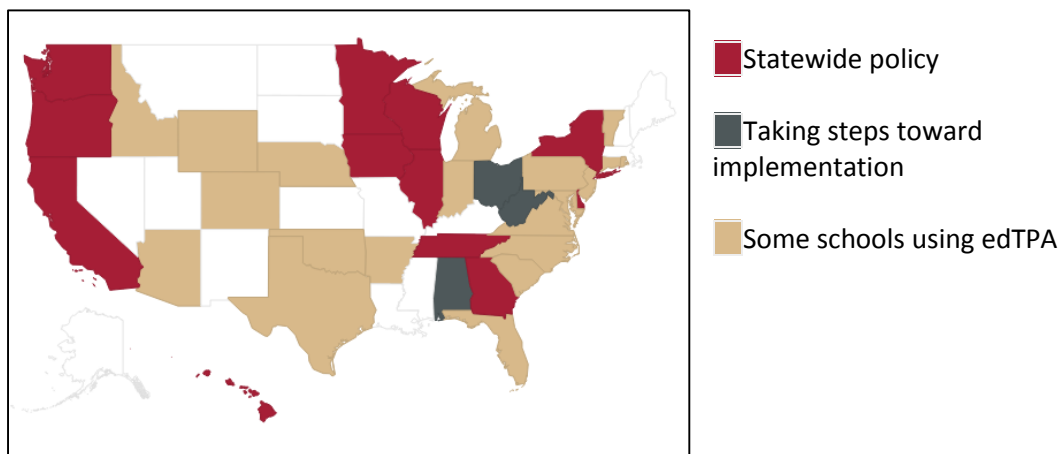
Teacher candidates taking edTPA build and submit portfolios that document how the candidate planned for a lesson and delivered it in a fashion that reached students of diverse backgrounds and learning levels. The portfolio includes videotape of the lesson delivery, with copies of

supporting materials provided. Candidates are also expected to describe how they assess student assignments to determine whether the lesson was effective.

The portfolios are graded by regional teams rather than school faculty, providing an objective, third-party evaluation. The addition of this evaluation of teaching effectiveness complements new accreditation standards being required of teacher preparation programs by the national accrediting body (CAEP).

The state is currently piloting edTPA in cooperation with select schools of education. The requirement for candidates to be evaluated with edTPA goes into effect in 2018. This initiative should be applauded, and every effort should be made to ensure that all teacher preparation programs are brought on-line with edTPA by 2018.

### States and schools using edTPA nationally



### Recruitment and Placement: Targeting High-Need Fields and Difficult-to-Staff Schools

Alabama, like many states, has difficulty recruiting teachers in certain fields, like mathematics and science, and has difficulty staffing academically-challenged systems, particularly in rural areas.

Alabama's Plan 2020 sets high goals for all students and prioritizes closing the academic achievement gap between poverty and nonpoverty students. To make progress on these measures, the state needs an incentive program to draw high-quality teaching veterans and promising new teachers to school systems where the need is greatest.

The state also needs to take full advantage of the spectrum of programs that aim to address these shortage needs. Several federal programs are available that help aspiring teachers pay for college, including TEACH Grants, which are available in exchange for a commitment to teach for five years in hard-to-fill positions, whether they be defined by geography or subject matter. Other options, in addition to the traditional teacher preparation programs, should also be considered for support and expansion to address shortages. Some options (discussed more fully

on page 15) including the University of Alabama at Birmingham’s UABTeach program and the nationally-known Teach for America program.

It should be pointed out that Alabama is a national leader in a creative approach to addressing the teacher shortage gap. As explained in the 2014 BEA report *Obstacles into Opportunities*, Alabama’s Distance Learning initiative, ACCESS, is one of the country’s largest. By FY 2014, statewide enrollment in its 100 different courses topped 27,000. Budget constraints have caused the program to limit its enrollment for the first time. However, thanks to a \$1.3 million increase in the 2016 budget, ACCESS should be able to resume growth.

## The Need

PARCA drew data from the state’s teacher personnel system (LEAPS) to identify patterns and potential problems in staffing schools. PARCA’s examination of personnel data from FY 2015, as well as staffing and hiring surveys conducted by the Alabama Department of Education, show a correlation between hiring and staffing problems and poor performance on state standardized tests. This connection is particularly strong in rural systems.

Table 4 documents the results of the PARCA analysis. The table has four columns:

- 1. The average percentage of students scoring proficient on ASPIRE tests in spring 2014, considering results from grades 3-8, in both reading and math.

The Table includes the ten systems with highest average proficiency, and the 20 systems with lowest average proficiency, on the Aspire. The top ten systems all had student proficiency rates over 50 percent, more than twice the level of the bottom 20 systems, which had proficiency rates at or below 25 percent.

- 2. The percentage of the system’s teachers who are in their first year with that system and who have no previous teaching experience.

The systems with lower student proficiency rates on Aspire tend to have higher percentages of inexperienced teachers. The high-proficiency systems all had low percentages of teachers without previous experience, while a majority of the low-proficiency systems had double-digit percentages of beginning teachers.

- 3. The percentage of those beginning teachers who were hired under an emergency certificate (EM2) to teach a course they didn’t have the qualifications to teach.

Having to hire under an emergency certificate is an indication that the system had difficulty filling a teacher slot. Seven of the high-proficiency systems made no emergency hires, while nine of the low-proficiency systems filled large percentages of positions in this way.

- 4. The percent of classroom teachers in the system who had earned National Board Certification (NBC).

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has created an advanced teaching credential known as National Board Certification. The credential is earned by

veteran teachers through a process of assessment and improvement of professional teaching practice. It is an indication of a high level of teacher qualification. A majority of the high-proficiency systems had more than 10 percent of teachers with National Board credentials, while most of the low-proficiency systems were at 2 percent or less.

**Table 4. Comparison of Performance and Teacher Characteristics**

<b>System Name</b>	<b>Percent of Students Proficient on Aspire, FY 2014</b>	<b>Percent of Classroom Teachers No Experience, FY 2015</b>	<b>Percent Beginning Teachers EM2 Cert., FY 2015</b>	<b>Percent of Classroom Teachers NBC, FY 2015</b>
State of Alabama	39%	5%	8%	4%
<b>Top 10 Systems on Aspire</b>				
Mountain Brook City	81%	1%	0%	19%
Vestavia Hills City	75%	5%	0%	19%
Madison City	73%	3%	0%	5%
Homewood City	71%	1%	0%	16%
Auburn City	62%	5%	4%	4%
Cullman City	61%	4%	14%	11%
Muscle Shoals City	58%	3%	0%	9%
Arab City	57%	6%	0%	11%
Hoover City	56%	1%	0%	15%
Trussville City	55%	6%	23%	9%
<b>Bottom 20 Systems on Aspire</b>				
Anniston City	25%	14%	5%	1%
Dallas County	23%	10%	48%	0%
Choctaw County	22%	2%	0%	1%
Birmingham City	22%	6%	24%	9%
Lowndes County	20%	11%	27%	0%
Tarrant City	20%	10%	0%	9%
Lanett City	20%	21%	0%	0%
Fairfield City	19%	9%	0%	4%
Chickasaw City	18%	26%	7%	0%
Midfield City	18%	7%	0%	2%
Macon County	17%	22%	0%	0%
Sumter County	16%	14%	44%	1%
Greene County	15%	7%	75%	0%
Selma City	14%	10%	0%	3%
Bessemer City	14%	13%	8%	7%
Bullock County	13%	6%	33%	1%
Barbour County	12%	17%	20%	0%
Linden City	12%	6%	0%	0%
Wilcox County	12%	7%	17%	4%
Perry County	11%	8%	57%	2%

SOURCE: LEAPS Database.

Another way to measure the staffing needs of schools is to examine the teacher shortage data collected by the State Department of Education through surveys of systems. These data are submitted to the U.S. Department of Education.

Table 5 lists the ten systems reporting the greatest difficulty filling vacant positions in each of the last three years. To make the comparison between systems, the number of unfilled positions was adjusted for the number of teachers in each school system. Perry County and Roanoke City are on the list in all three years, while 8 others are listed in two of the three years (Bessemer City, Butler County, Conecuh County, Coosa County, Lowndes County, Talladega County, Tarrant City, and Tuscaloosa City). Most of the systems are rural in nature, although the list includes the Bessemer, Tarrant, and Tuscaloosa city systems.

**Table 5. Most Unfilled Positions (adjusted for system workforce size)**

2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013
Roanoke City	Talladega County	Coosa County
Perry County	Perry County	Perry County
Lowndes County	Coosa County	Hale County
Butler County	Tuscaloosa City	Talladega County
Tarrant City	Bessemer City	Opp City
Conecuh County	Conecuh County	Blount County
Bessemer City	Lowndes County	Covington County
Bullock County	Roanoke City	Houston County
Marengo County	Butler County	Roanoke City
Tuscaloosa City	Tarrant City	Chambers County

It is also important to determine what positions school systems are having a hard time filling.

Table 6 presents reported shortage data from two years of surveys. The report likely understates the number of shortages in key fields, because not all systems participated in the survey. However, the data give an indication of the specialties for which it is most difficult to hire.

**Table 6. Fields of Teacher Shortage**

Unfilled Positions Statewide	2014-15	2013-14	2-Year Average
Special Education	128	166	147.0
Math	95	120	107.5
Science	72	48	60.0
Career-Tech	36	69	52.5
Foreign Languages	22	25	23.5
English	18	16	17.0
Guidance Counseling	11	16	13.5
History	6	10	8.0

SOURCE: State Department of Education

Math, science, and the various categories of special education are consistently the highest shortage areas. While teacher shortages in these areas are by no means unique to Alabama, the shortage of math and science teachers is of particular urgency here, because it is in those subjects that Alabama students struggle the most in national comparisons.

In 2007, the State Legislature attempted to address teacher shortages with a scholarship program called the Alabama Teacher Recruitment Incentive Program (ATRIP). When budgets tightened, funding for ATRIP was not renewed.

Additionally, while well-intended and generous, ATRIP had flaws in its design. College students were eligible to apply as freshmen, but this undoubtedly was too early: many of the initial scholarship recipients later changed their minds about going into teaching. The Alabama Commission on Higher Education was tasked with administering the grant program, but the legislation did not give ACHE the legal authority to reclaim the grant award in the event a scholarship recipient decided against teaching. Only 56 of the original 122 scholarship awardees (46 percent) entered teaching.

Clearly, a well-designed scholarship program is an appropriate strategy for reducing the key problem of teacher shortages that hamper success in certain kinds of school systems and for specific subject areas. Scholarships should focus on the last two years of a student's college career, and should coincide with acceptance and entry into a teacher preparation program. Scholarship recipients should incur an obligation to teach in a shortage field for a period of time and in a system that regularly experiences difficulty in filling teaching positions.

The ATRIP program, which was initially funded with \$2 million, should be revived and revised.

One possible model is North Carolina's long-running "Teaching Fellows Program," which drew talented recruits, who produced positive results in the classroom and persisted in teaching longer than is the case for other approaches.<sup>3</sup> Several states, including South Carolina, copied this approach.

Another program worth considering is the federal government's TEACH Program, which is tailored to meet the need identified by the data: drawing academically talented candidates into the profession with scholarship benefits granted in exchange for working in high-need fields and districts.

With TEACH, there is an existing framework for documenting what fields are in shortage and which schools are in the most need. A redesigned ATRIP could complement the money available through TEACH Scholarships in order to maximize available resources.

In addition to scholarships for college students, a revived ATRIP could make money available to local school systems to provide signing bonuses and salary supplements for teachers who sign contracts to teach in high-need districts and difficult-to-staff fields.

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<sup>3</sup> Scholarships to Recruit the "Best and Brightest" Into Teaching: Who Is Recruited, Where Do They Teach, How Effective Are They, and How Long Do They Stay? Educational Researcher April 2012 41: 83-92, doi:10.3102/0013189X12437202  
<http://edr.sagepub.com.ezproxy.samford.edu/content/41/3/83.abstract>

In addition to supporting students in traditional teacher preparation programs, the state should be looking for alternatives that make it easier for students pursuing majors in other undergraduate fields, particularly STEM fields, to get exposure to and training in teaching.

In 2014, UAB brought a first class of students into the UABTeach program, which introduces math and science majors to the teaching field and creates a path for them to graduate with a STEM degree and teaching experience and training, all without adding time or cost to their undergraduate education. Copied from a successful national model (UTEACH from the University of Texas), UAB's version was made possible through funding from national and local foundations interested in improving STEM education. By 2020, UAB hopes to be graduating 40 to 50 STEM teachers per year. That established model could be spread to other universities in Alabama.

Teach for America asks talented college graduates, who don't necessarily major in education, to undergo training and commit to teaching school in low-income neighborhoods for two years. In addition to being paid as a teacher, the program offers access to federal programs that can help pay for college. This year, there will be 130 Teach for America teachers in Alabama schools in the Black Belt, plus urban systems like Birmingham, Huntsville, and Montgomery. The State Legislature provides \$572,000 annually to support TFA in the state.

### **Closer Relationships between Teacher Preparation Programs and Local School Systems Needed**

Both new state standards and new national accreditation standards call for a closer relationship and more communication between teacher preparation programs and local school systems. Teacher preparation programs need feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the new teachers they are producing. School systems need to place teacher candidates in optimal practice teaching environments, where they can learn from the best teachers.

In Alabama, a model for such a relationship is the cooperative partnership developed over the course of 10 years between the University of South Alabama (USA) and the Mobile County School System.

USA supplies over half of the teachers hired by the Mobile County School System. Over the past decade, the school system, USA's School of Education, and the Mobile Area Education Foundation have worked together to re-orient their relationship from one in which the parties simply exchanged services – the school system placing teacher candidates in practice teaching positions and the School of Education producing potential teachers – to one focused on the improvement of education for Mobile County's school children.

The parties worked together to find the best teachers in the Mobile Public Schools and place student teachers with those high-performing teachers, rather than having candidates simply fill in where there was an available slot.

Under this new and deeper relationship, USA established regular communication with the teachers who supervised teacher candidates, which proved helpful in identifying patterns in the level of readiness USA students showed in their practice teaching. The regular communication also provided continuous feedback to the teacher preparation program from the perspective of



the educational front lines, while bringing expertise from USA to bear on problems the system encountered.

When teachers observed that some candidates were having difficulty with the diverse needs of children in the classroom, USA worked to develop a course of study that prepared candidates for certification in both elementary and special education.

The partners were jointly involved in curriculum development. Working together, they also designed and implemented a mentoring program, which pairs veteran teachers with first-year teachers, with the mentors providing support and coaching throughout the crucial transition period for a new teacher. That program served as a model for a statewide version of mentoring, as described later in this report.

Close working relationships between teacher preparation programs and the school systems that employ their graduates are called for in the new national accreditation standards from CAEP. Both the national accrediting body and the revised Alabama state standards currently under consideration describe a robust exchange of data and feedback. Under CAEP's standards, teacher preparation programs must demonstrate that graduates of the program are having an impact on student learning. They must demonstrate that new teachers are satisfied with their level of preparation and that employers are satisfied with their newly hired teachers.

Alabama's revised state standards reaffirm that if a school system determines a new graduate has not been adequately prepared, the teacher preparation program is obligated to provide supplementary education at no cost to the candidate or the school system. The state standards and the accrediting body's standards both call for the collection of multiple measures of the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs.

However, there are as yet no apparent plans in Alabama to compile or publish satisfaction rates or program impact measures for teacher preparation programs. These and other measures of graduate success would be useful information for prospective students, the public, and for policy makers. In the past, the State Department of Education published similar information in the form of a report card for each program. The last posted teacher preparation program report card is for 2009.<sup>4</sup>

With new requirements in place and more robust data soon to be available, the report card format should be revisited, and the public reporting of measures of teacher preparation program performance should resume.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://web.alsde.edu/home/Reports/TeacherPrepReportCards.aspx>

## Review and Support

Alabama is working toward the implementation of *Educate Alabama*, a new system for evaluating the performance and impact of its teachers. A sound performance evaluation system is essential to meeting Plan 2020's objective that "every child be taught by a well-prepared, resourced, supported, and effective teacher." As this goal indicates, the purpose of a sound performance evaluation system is to continuously improve teacher performance, not simply to identify low-performing teachers.

Student growth, the progress a teacher's students make on benchmark tests, will be part of the evaluation, at least for teachers who teach in tested subjects. This is new to Alabama. Most states are ahead of Alabama in implementing a performance evaluation that includes student test data. Here and elsewhere, there continues to be debate over how much weight to put on the various factors that go into evaluations. A discussion of Alabama's weighting factors can be found below. Prior to final implementation, Alabama policy makers should review the developed framework to ensure the weighting system has the right balance among the various factors.

In conjunction with the implementation of an evaluation system, the state needs to see that resources are available to support a culture of continuous improvement in teaching. These include support for the Alabama Teacher Mentoring Program and the development of a system for teachers to advance in the profession.

Prior to the Great Recession, Alabama was building a structure for the support and advancement of teachers with promising early results. These approaches, described in the 2008 report of the Governor's Commission on Quality Teaching, *Innovations in Teaching: Creating Professional Pathways for Alabama Teachers*,<sup>5</sup> should be revived.

### **An Evaluation System in Action: Huntsville City Schools**

To understand the utility of an evaluation system, it is instructive to look at one that is already in place: the Huntsville City Schools' system for evaluating non-tenured teachers in their first three years of service. The system is designed to maximize the quality of teaching that Huntsville students receive.

It begins with the screening process for applicants. Applicants for teaching positions are first screened at the system level. The screening includes a brief test and interviews by a district team. Ratings by the team, evaluation of test results, plus the applicant's academic and work records are evaluated. The top five candidates for open positions are then sent out to schools for further interviews and the completion of the hiring process.

Importantly, the information gathered in the screening process is not simply collected and discarded. Huntsville City Schools compiles and shares with teacher preparation programs the ratings received by the candidates. Those teacher preparation programs can use that

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.aplusala.org/uploadedFiles/File/GCQTIInnovationsinTeachingRpt.pdf>

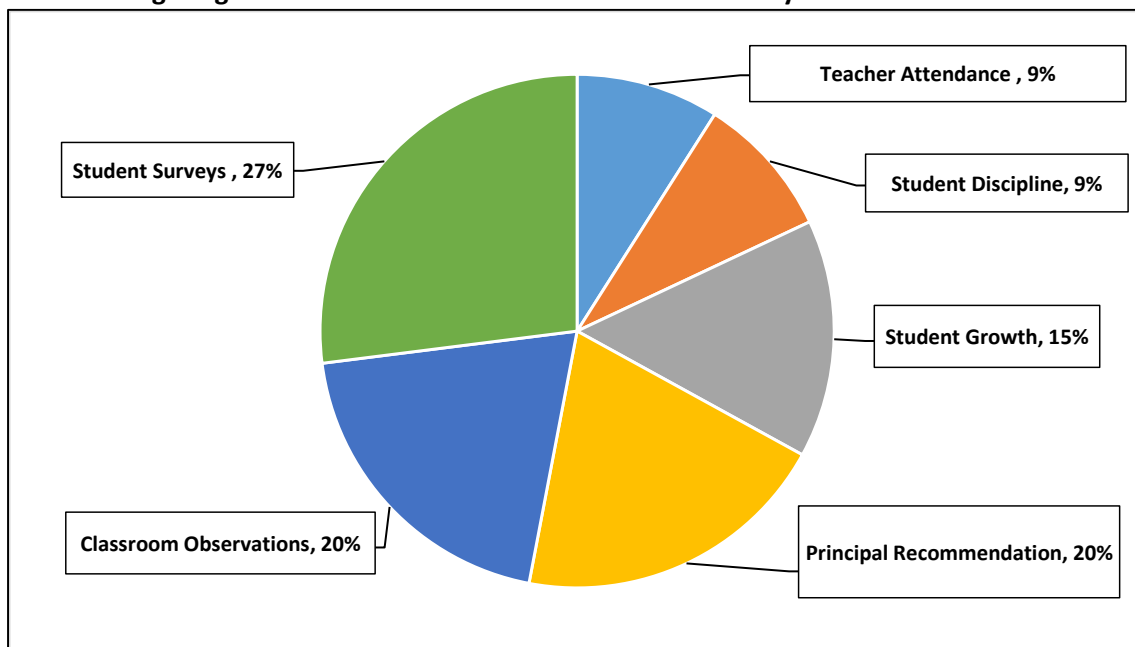
information to improve the preparation of their graduates for the interview and screening process. They can also determine how their candidates perform in comparison to candidates from other schools.

Placing a priority on preparation, Huntsville allocates money for stipends to pay new teachers to attend intensive summer learning and introduction to the system before they start in the fall.

Once in the classroom, non-tenured teachers are evaluated annually. The factors included in the Huntsville teacher evaluation system are shown in Chart 1. Most notably, Huntsville places a much high importance (27 percent) on survey responses from the teacher's students or their parents. Huntsville administrators have confidence that well-structured surveys are a strong indicator of teacher effectiveness, a preference that is supported by research from the national Measures of Effective Teaching initiative.<sup>6</sup>

Observations of teachers in the act of teaching (and of students' reaction to and interaction with the teacher) are a fundamental component of most evaluation systems. Huntsville uses a trained district team to perform the observations. That contrasts with traditional practice, which relies on school-based administrators. Huntsville's method of observation, with a team from outside the school, has been found by research to be valuable. In systems with the resources to do it, this approach should be an option under *Educate Alabama*.

**Chart 1. Weighting of factors in Huntsville's teacher evaluation system**



Huntsville's evaluation scores are fed into a centralized system. Huntsville expects teachers to remediate areas of ineffectiveness through professional development and provides opportunities for that during the summer.

<sup>6</sup>[http://www.metproject.org/downloads/MET\\_Ensuring\\_Fair\\_and\\_Reliable\\_Measures\\_Practitioner\\_Brief.pdf](http://www.metproject.org/downloads/MET_Ensuring_Fair_and_Reliable_Measures_Practitioner_Brief.pdf)

Ultimately, the results can be used in deciding which teachers to retain for employment and for tenure. Over the course of three years, Huntsville has seen an increased retention rate as new teachers are provided the feedback and support they need to improve. In 2011-2012, when the system was first used, only 54 percent of non-tenured teachers were recommended for rehiring the following year. By 2013-2014, 79 percent of non-tenured teachers were recommended for continued service.

The results of the evaluation system are also shared with schools of education, giving those programs more information about the preparation of their graduates.

### **The State's New Evaluation System, *Educate Alabama***

Alabama's new framework for teacher evaluation, *Educate Alabama*, has been constructed by the State Department of Education with the advice and input of stakeholders. During the coming academic year, representatives from the State Department will begin working with school systems throughout the state in a design process that will use the state framework to build teacher evaluation systems for local school districts.

While the state provides guidance and the framework, districts will be able to tailor the framework to fit local needs, resources, priorities, and preferences. The design process is scheduled to take place over two academic years and result in a functional evaluation system for all districts statewide by 2018.

By that time, the state will have several years of data available from newly adopted assessments like Aspire, ACT, and WorkKeys. An understanding of those results will provide a basis for assessing growth in student learning. Student growth data will be included in the evaluation system. Designers have stressed, though, that the evaluation system is intended to give teachers meaningful feedback and a process for improving effectiveness.

In the evaluation system, teachers will receive feedback from evaluators, from student performance data, and from surveys of parents or students. Using this feedback, teachers will engage in self-assessment, identifying their strengths and weaknesses, developing strategies, and setting goals for improvement.

Evaluations can help identify the areas in which constructive and targeted professional development is needed for individual teachers and sometimes for faculties at large. A fair and objective evaluation system can inform hiring and tenure decisions and also can serve as a basis for access to opportunities for advancement.

*Educate Alabama* will judge teacher effectiveness in three realms.

- 1) Professional Commitment (30 percent)
  - a) Self-assessment by the teacher (10 percent)
  - b) The development of a professional learning plan (10 percent)
  - c) Evidence documenting work toward achieving goals identified in the plan (10 percent)

- 2) Professional Practice (35 percent)
  - a) Two observations by administrators (20 percent)
  - b) Documentation of work on and collaboration with other teachers on the design of classroom instruction (10 percent)
  - c) Showcase of professional involvement (5 percent)
- 3) Impact on Engagement and Learning (35 percent)
  - a) Student/ Parent Surveys (10 percent)
  - b) Student growth data (25 percent)

Non-tenured teachers will be evaluated every year on all measures, while tenured teachers will receive a full evaluation every three years. All teachers will be expected to be continuously engaged in self-assessment and planning for improvement.

### **Alabama's Evaluation System in Context**

Across the country, the deployment of enhanced systems of teacher evaluation have become a high priority, but details of how effectiveness is measured have been a source of controversy. Nationally, there has been a strong push to emphasize student growth as a primary measure of teacher effectiveness. Among southeastern states, the evaluation systems of Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Tennessee call for 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation to come from student growth data. Florida requires that one-third of a teacher's evaluation be based on student growth.

As typically understood, student growth data is based on student scores on standardized tests and evidence that a teacher is positively affecting the results. At first blush, *Educate Alabama's* template, which weights student growth at 25 percent of a teacher's evaluation, seems to put a significantly lower value on the student growth. However, a closer examination of other states' systems reveals that the measures that constitute student growth are not exclusively test score data. In some states, a teacher's student growth score might be partially derived from overall school performance on tests. In other states, locally-determined and measured evidence makes up a portion of the student growth component. The Southern Regional Education Board tracks differing state approaches to evaluating teachers on its Elements of Evaluation website.<sup>7</sup> Alabama's approach does appear headed toward putting somewhat less weight on student test score results.

This choice reduces the sense of "high stakes" surrounding the tests that has led to controversy elsewhere. Additionally, as Alabama has just adopted new benchmark tests, there is no track record to judge whether the ACT Aspire is a reliable gauge of teacher effectiveness. Going forward, though, Alabama should pay close attention to the utility of student test data in rating effectiveness. After all, the bottom line result we want to achieve is the improvement of student performance. As that base of experience is established, Alabama should reexamine the weight given to test data to see if more weight should be placed on measures of student achievement.

A final note. More than most states, Alabama is allowing local systems a great deal of leeway in designing a local version of *Educate Alabama*. The hope is that local systems will feel ownership

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.sreb.org/page/1831/elementsofevaluation.html>

of the system and see it as a tool rather than an exercise in compliance. As a result, though, it will be more difficult to obtain comparable data across systems. This will mean that local education leaders will be primarily responsible for seeing that a sound system is designed and put into effective use.

### Support for New Teachers

As the Huntsville evaluation system recognizes, constructive coaching and support is essential for new teachers.

A U.S. Department of Education research study published earlier this year found that among a sample of almost 2,000 teachers nationally who entered the field in the 2007-2008 school year, more than 17 percent of teachers had left teaching by the third year of the survey.<sup>8</sup> However, beginning teachers who were assigned a mentor for support during the first year of teaching were much more likely to stay in teaching than those with no mentor, the study found. Table 7 shows the persistence rates for the two groups of teachers in four follow-up years of the study.

**Table 7. Persistence rates of new teachers hired in 2007**

	2008	2009	2010	2011
Teachers who were assigned a mentor	92%	91%	88%	86%
Teachers who were not	84%	77%	73%	71%

The findings from the 2015 study reinforce earlier work, as well as experience nationally and in the state of Alabama.<sup>9</sup>

In 2007, Alabama began implementation of a state-supported program for mentoring first-year teachers, the Alabama Teacher Mentoring Program (ATMP). The ATMP was built on years of piloting and research and was recommended by the Governor's Commission on Quality Teaching. The Legislature appropriated \$3.95 million for FY 2007-08 to provide mentoring support for every new Alabama teacher. Mentors received a state-funded stipend of \$1,000 per year for each first-year teacher they mentored. Mentors were carefully selected, experienced teachers.

Through regular meetings and personal interchange, mentors were expected to guide novice teachers through the difficulties of adjustment to the profession. The program developed extensive supporting documentation, including advice to the mentors on what they might encounter in the mentoring relationship and how to deal with it.

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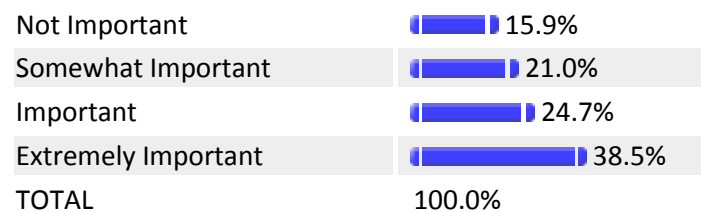
<sup>8</sup> Gray, L., and Taie, S. (2015). Public School Teacher Attrition and Mobility in the First Five Years: Results From the First Through Fifth Waves of the 2007–08 Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study (NCES 2015-337). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>).

<sup>9</sup>See the Alabama Governor's Commission on Quality Teaching, Initial Report and Final Report (2008), <http://www.aplusala.org/governors-commission-on-quality-teaching/>.

Satisfaction with the ATMP was high. In a 2009 survey of first-year teachers who had participated, 63 percent rated the mentoring program as important or extremely important to their transition into the teaching profession. Only 2% of the first-year teachers in the ATMP indicated that they would not continue in the teaching profession. Nationally, the profession loses about 10 percent of first-year teachers.

#### 2009 ATMP Survey Results

**How important has your mentor been to your successful induction into the teaching profession?**



However, with continuous strain on the budget, funding for the Alabama Teacher Mentoring Program decreased and then was eliminated entirely.

FY 2008	\$3,950,000
FY 2009	2,950,000
FY 2010	1,444,549
FY 2011	444,549
FY 2012	0

Preventing teacher dropouts is very cost-effective. A 2007 study sponsored by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future ("The Cost of Teacher Turnover in Five School Districts: A Pilot Study") found that on average, schools spend \$8,000 for replacement and retraining every time a teacher leaves. Low-performing and low-resource school systems often experience higher rates of turnover and are thus disproportionately harmed by this problem.

According to the Local Education Agency Personnel System (LEAPS) database maintained by the State Department of Education, in the fall of 2014 there were 2,731 classroom teachers without any prior experience teaching in Alabama's public school classrooms. These beginning teachers comprised 5.2% of the state's classroom teachers. Individually, these teachers would have benefited from a mentor program such as the ATMP, and the investment required to provide this resource would total about \$2.7 million, assuming the \$1,000 mentor stipend that applied when the ATMP was operational.

An effective mentor program also would benefit the school systems for which these teachers work, and it would affect the performance of students in those schools positively. In some local school systems, far more than 5.2% of the classroom teachers are without prior teaching

experience. Often these are low-performing school systems. These systems and their students would see the greatest benefit from an effective mentoring program.

Table 8 shows the 20 school systems with the lowest results on the spring 2014 administration of the Aspire tests in reading and math for grades 3-8. The table also shows the percentage of classroom teachers in those systems who had no experience in the fall of 2014, according to LEAPS. All but one of these low-performing systems had above-average percentages of classroom teachers with no prior experience; in over half of them, the percentage of inexperienced teachers was two or more times the state average.

**Table 8. Test Results and Teacher Experience**

<b>Teacher Experience vs. ASPIRE Test Results</b>		
	<b>Percentage of Classroom Teachers With No Experience, FY 2015</b>	<b>ASPIRE Percent Proficient, FY 2014</b>
Statewide	5%	39%
Anniston City	14%	25%
Dallas County	10%	23%
Choctaw County	2%	22%
Birmingham	6%	22%
Lowndes County	11%	20%
Tarrant City	10%	20%
Lanett City	21%	20%
Fairfield City	9%	19%
Chickasaw City	26%	18%
Midfield City	7%	18%
Macon County	22%	17%
Sumter County	14%	16%
Greene County	7%	15%
Selma City	10%	14%
Bessemer City	13%	14%
Bullock County	6%	13%
Barbour County	17%	12%
Linden City	6%	12%
Wilcox County	7%	12%
Perry County	8%	11%

SOURCE: LEAPS Database.

These results are only suggestive, but they reinforce the common-sense notion that having experienced teachers work proactively with new teachers to improve their instructional performance has great potential to impact student results in Alabama.

Nationally, 27 states require some form of induction or mentoring, according to a 2012 survey by the New Teacher Center. In 11 states, two or more years of transitional support are required for all new teachers.



## Reward and Challenge

To encourage improvement in the quality of teaching in Alabama, we should put in place incentives that reward good teaching. Teachers should be given pathways to reach more students, influence other teachers, and advance professionally. Such incentives have the potential to add dimension and appeal to the teaching profession. They would be aimed at creating a climate in which quality teaching can be not only identified, but also magnified in impact, with best practices replicated and spread.

Currently, teachers can pursue higher pay and greater responsibility, but the most typical route for advancement is to move into an administrative position within a school system, a step that removes a good teacher from direct contact with instructing students.

As in the case of teacher recruitment, teacher training and teacher evaluation, Alabama's education community has put substantial study and discussion into creating additional career options for teachers, options that would encourage the best teachers to remain in roles that more directly affect learning. Experiments in creating enhanced roles and incentives for advancement in teaching were moving toward implementation, but were interrupted when the recent financial crisis occurred. It is important to revisit them now and to implement the most promising measures, as they are complementary to and natural extensions of previously mentioned initiatives to improve teacher quality.

### The Status Quo

Teachers in Alabama's public schools tend to follow a standard, monolithic career path once they are certified to teach. In most school systems, the options available for them to pursue after gaining professional expertise are limited to (1) remaining in their own classroom, or (2) moving into school or system administration. Administration pays better and offers pathways to career enhancement. What this means is that K-12 education in Alabama lacks incentives for keeping the most talented teachers focused on improving instruction. In fact, the incentives actually are biased away from advanced instructional roles.

Teacher pay is based on a state salary schedule (shown in Table 9) that considers only degrees held and years on the job, without taking into account the varying roles that teachers might play in improving student learning. One teacher is considered the same as another; professional progress is equated with longevity on the job and attaining additional degrees.

**Table 9. Alabama Teacher Compensation, FY 2016 School Year**

<b>State Minimum Salary Schedule</b>					
<b>Classroom Teachers</b>					
<b>Public School Experience - 187 Day Contract</b>					
	<b>Bachelor</b>	<b>Master</b>	<b>6-Year</b>	<b>Doctoral</b>	<b>Non-Degree</b>
	<b>BS</b>	<b>MS</b>	<b>6Y</b>	<b>DO</b>	<b>ND</b>
<b>&lt; 3 yrs</b>	36,867	42,395	45,714	49,032	36,867
<b>&lt; 6 yrs</b>	40,551	46,634	50,283	53,935	40,551
<b>&lt; 9 yrs</b>	42,327	48,675	52,499	56,295	42,327
<b>&lt; 12 yrs</b>	42,894	49,329	53,191	57,051	42,894
<b>&lt; 15 yrs</b>	43,674	50,223	54,155	58,088	43,674
<b>&lt; 18 yrs</b>	44,670	51,371	55,391	59,409	44,670
<b>&lt; 21 yrs</b>	45,247	52,032	56,105	60,179	45,247
<b>&lt; 24 yrs</b>	45,825	52,699	56,822	60,947	45,825
<b>&lt; 27 yrs</b>	46,370	53,245	57,370	61,494	46,370
<b>27+ yrs</b>	46,917	53,792	57,916	62,040	46,917

Professional classification of teachers is based on tenure status. Teachers in their first three years of teaching in a school system are non-tenured. They are subject to dismissal without cause, and some school systems routinely give untenured teachers pink slips at the end of the school year until the system determines that it can afford to retain them for the following year. These working conditions create uncertainty among all non-tenured teachers. It is not a system that places high value on the professional potential of all faculty members.

On the other hand, teachers hired back for a fourth year by the school system are tenured. A tenured teacher can be fired for cause, based on statutory standards, but is protected against routine pink-slipping at year-end. Earning tenure is not tied to demonstrating effectiveness as a teacher, but rather to longevity as an employee. Every teacher is either tenured, with relative job security, or not. There are no additional steps that reflect growth in professional competence and differentiate one tenured teacher from another.

Thus, neither the pay system, which is based on degrees and years on the job, nor the tenure system, which is based on longevity, is currently linked primarily to the quality of an individual's teaching or the role the teacher plays in the school's learning culture.

There is every reason to expect that teaching quality would improve if teachers were provided with incentives to excel at teaching. To improve instruction in Alabama schools, avenues should be made available for teachers to grow professionally, and for the most highly skilled teachers to have an impact on more students and on their fellow teachers.

## New Methods to Advance

This report has already discussed two roles a teacher can play beyond teaching in his or her own classroom.

- In Mobile County Schools, exemplary teachers are identified and asked to coach teacher candidates in training. In that role and in cooperation with the University of South Alabama faculty, they effectively become extensions of the teacher preparation program.
- In the Alabama Teacher Mentoring Program, veteran teachers took on the role of coach and counselor, guiding beginning teachers in their early years in the classroom.

Additional avenues should be created for teachers to advance professionally. These avenues should be formalized as position classifications.

In its 2008 final report, *Innovations in Teaching: Creating Professional Pathways for Alabama Teachers*, The Governor's Commission on Quality Teaching recommended the development of a classification system for teachers that would formally define the instructional roles that teachers could fill in Alabama's public schools.

These new Professional Pathway classifications would recognize increasing levels of responsibility in instruction-related roles beyond the single classroom. As proposed in that report, teachers could advance through the following classifications:

**Apprentice Teacher:** a prospective teacher or intern with classroom duties.

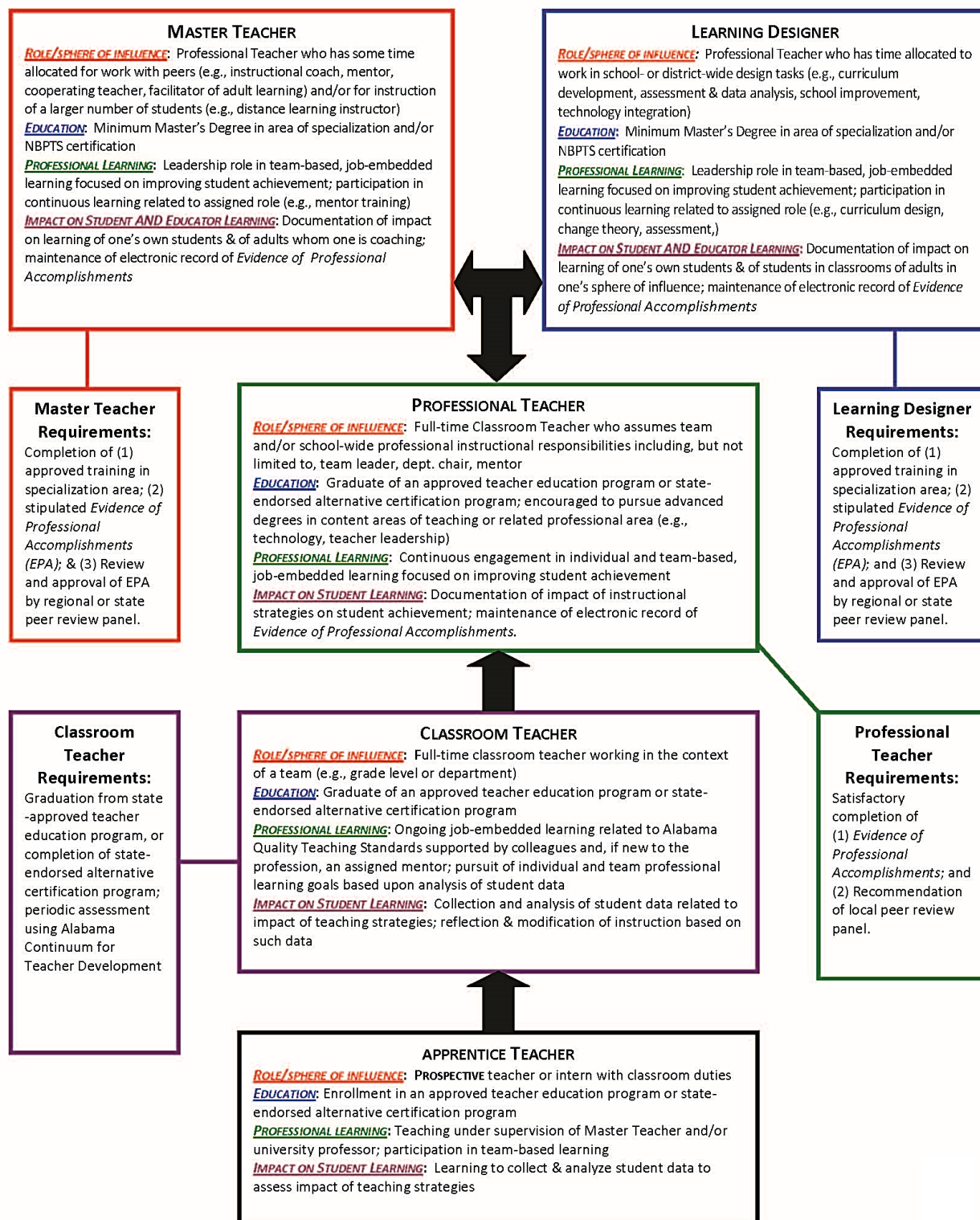
**Classroom Teacher:** a full-time classroom teacher working in the context of a team.

**Professional teacher:** a full-time classroom teacher who assumes team and/or school-wide professional instructional duties (mentor, team leader, department chair, etc.).

**Master Teacher:** a professional teacher who has some time allocated to work with other teachers or to teach a larger number of students.

**Learning Designer:** a professional teacher who has time allocated to work in school or system-level design tasks (curriculum development, data analysis, school improvement, technology integration, etc.).

The following chart, reproduced from the report of the Governor's Commission on Quality Teaching, provides a detailed description of these potential roles.



In 2009, a proposal was made to pilot the Professional Pathways approach in selected school systems, to better understand how the creation of these new roles would impact school culture, to learn lessons for best practices, and explore questions of how to select and compensate

teachers who agree to take on these expanded roles. The goal was to work toward recognition of these new professional roles in the state's system of teacher licensure and certification. An appropriation of \$525,000 was requested, which would have funded three pilots at \$175,000 each. Each pilot would have brought together a partnership consisting of a local school system and a higher education institution. The partnerships would have focused on:

- determining and developing requirements for a proposed Teacher Leader certification;
- defining all roles and responsibilities found in the proposed four-tiered system of certification; and
- developing evaluative components necessary to determine the same.

This pilot approach was not funded due to the onset of the economic downturn, and nothing has been done in the years since.

Since 2009, the concept of tiered licensure and professional pathways for teachers has received a great deal of attention nationally. Extensive research has been published on productive, cost-effective approaches to implementing such policies, and technical assistance is available. For example, the Center on Great Teachers & Leaders at American Institutes for Research, one of seven content centers associated with the U.S. Department of Education, has highlighted the following publications on its website:

**“Teacher Pay and Career Paths in an Opportunity Culture: A Practical Policy Guide**

This policy guide by Public Impact shows how districts can design teacher career paths that will keep excellent teachers in the classroom and extend their reach to more students, for more pay, within budget. The guide discusses how districts, when using these career paths, create opportunities for excellent teachers to reach more students either directly or by leading teaching teams and for all teachers to receive the support and development they deserve.”

**“Creating Sustainable Teacher Career Pathways: A 21st Century Imperative**

Published by the National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY) and the Center for Educator Effectiveness at Pearson, this report provides a vision of teacher career pathways designed to attract and retain excellent Generation Y teachers. The report reviews recent initiatives that promote teacher role differentiation, and, based on the findings, recommends strategies for creating the necessary conditions to develop sustainable teacher career pathways and make teaching a more attractive career option.”

The plan to pilot professional pathways approaches should be revived and supported with funding from the Legislature. Up-to-date research should be consulted, technical assistance sought, and pilot locations should be chosen that offer differing demographic, financial, and geographic circumstances. We believe that \$600,000 should be appropriated for three pilot partnerships, following the 2009 design, but adding the requirement for those partnerships to take advantage of the expanded knowledge base that has been developed in the years since 2009.

## **New Roles Now: Taking Advantage of Opportunities for Innovation**

Since 2009, changes to Alabama law and policy have created an atmosphere conducive to and encouraging of innovation. The Alabama Accountability Act (Act 64 of 2013) allows school systems to request flexibility from the usual rules governing course requirements, educator roles, and prescriptions on how state funding is to be spent. Additionally, charter schools, enabled by 2015 legislation (Act 3 of 2015), will be free to experiment with different models of compensation for teachers.

Using flexibility provisions or the charter schools approach, school systems can create new roles for educators and innovative ways of delivering instruction, even as the state is developing a framework to make it possible statewide.

Adding these additional career advancement options for teachers doesn't necessarily cost the system more overall, according to proponents of the approach. Public Impact's Opportunity Culture initiative, for example, describes its approach as having improved student performance significantly by extending the reach of the best teachers. Those teachers received additional pay, but schools were able to pay them within existing budgets by reallocating resources. (See the link on the previous page.)

Paying the best teachers more for taking on more work and responsibility is relatively non-controversial. These new teacher roles are non-hierarchical and are not necessarily permanent. Another way school systems can encourage the advancement of teacher quality is by providing extended contracts to exemplary teachers. During the summer months, those exemplary teachers could be offered the opportunity to lead summer academies either for students or for teachers wanting to improve their effectiveness.

## **Financial Incentives for High-Performing Schools**

Finding ways to reward individuals who take on extra roles, as described above, is one way to encourage better teaching and better results for students. Another approach is to reward entire faculties at schools that show significant improvement or sustained excellence.

Again, this is an approach that was used in Alabama for several years to encourage school improvement, but which was set aside during lean budget years. While it was active, this incentive program generated much enthusiasm among schools that were rewarded for advancing student achievement.

Plan 2020 calls for the State Department of Education to provide differentiated support to the public schools of Alabama in order to assist them in improving student results. To accomplish this purpose, the Plan identifies three categories of schools – *Priority*, *Focus*, and *Reward*.

Priority Schools achieve the state's lowest results on state assessments and have low graduation rates. Focus Schools have the largest performance gaps between student subgroups on state assessments. The Plan provides for assistance and even intervention to improve results in these schools.

On the other hand, Reward Schools are distinguished by effective practices and by the good results that follow, defined in terms of high achievement and/or high growth in achievement. In other words, the intention in creating this category of schools is to recognize not only schools that have achieved outstanding results already, but also those that are achieving outstanding progress toward such results.

Recognition of such schools is important not only to congratulate them on a job well done, but also to call attention to the effective practices that are responsible for the success, so that other schools may follow in that path. As Plan 2020 points out, “recognition of effective practices that produce results is critical to the sustainability of improvement efforts.”<sup>10</sup> The Plan calls for monetary awards to be given Reward Schools when funds are allocated for this purpose by the Legislature.

In creating a recognition program for Reward Schools that includes monetary incentives, Plan 2020 is entirely consistent with the intent of the Legislature. Act 2012-402, codified as Section 16-6C-3, Code of Alabama, calls for the creation of a Legislative School Performance Recognition Program, with rules to be developed by the State Department of Education. The program is to reward schools that demonstrate either high performance, by being ranked in the top 25 percent of public schools, or exemplary progress, by improving their overall ranking by at least one letter grade. The ranking on which these results are based is to be a letter-grade system (A through F). The legislation calls for monetary awards to the designated schools. The amount will depend on legislative appropriations, with no more than 20 percent going to schools identified by their high performance, and at least 80 percent going to schools identified by increases in their results.

Alabama has experience with monetary incentives. Under rewards plans first adopted by the State Board of Education in 2001, monetary awards were given to schools showing high performance or academic improvement in the years and amounts shown below. The criteria for recognition included progress in closing achievement gaps as well as high performance on state assessments. At the peak in FY 2008, awards were given to more than 200 schools.

FY 2001	\$469,000
FY 2002	469,000
FY 2003	469,000
FY 2004	117,250
FY 2005	117,250
FY 2006	117,250
FY 2007	2,467,250
FY 2008	5,067,250
FY 2009	2,467,250
FY 2010	0

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<sup>10</sup> “Reward Schools,” in ESEA Flexibility Request, June 7, 2012, page 64.

Monetary rewards were ended in FY 2010 due to budget reductions and have not been renewed in the years since.

Beginning in January 2016, Plan 2020 calls for defining two categories of Reward Schools – *High Performing* and *High Progress*.

High Performing Schools are those that demonstrate:

- high performance on state assessments over multiple years in the all-students category and in all student subgroups with 20 or more members.
- a high graduation rate (for high schools).
- closing achievement gaps.

High Progress Schools are those that demonstrate:

- the greatest progress in improving performance within the all-students category over multiple years.
- an increasing graduation rate (for high schools).
- closing achievement gaps.

In keeping with the legislative directives of Act 2012-402, no more than 20 percent of any monetary rewards will go to High Performing Schools, and at least 80 percent of any monetary rewards will go to High Progress Schools.

Perhaps of greatest value to every school recognized as a Reward School is the spending flexibility that accompanies the designation. Under Act 2012-402, every Reward School is “exempt from any statute or regulation related to the prescribed use of funds at the school level, or any categorical spending requirements imposed through the appropriation of funds from the state, except those requirements associated with the receipt of federal funds.” (Act 2012-402, Section f)

Thus, it seems clear that the creation of a category of Reward Schools based on high performance, and the granting of monetary rewards and enhanced flexibility to schools so designated, are high priorities for Alabama policy makers. These policies should be implemented as envisioned by the Legislature and the State Board of Education.

Two key implementation issues are (1) how much money should be invested in awards to Reward Schools, and (2) what limitations should be placed on the use of such funds.

- How much money should be invested in awards to Reward Schools?

There will be a natural tendency to broaden the definitions that result in a school’s attainment of Reward School status, leading to more schools receiving awards. Florida appears to have the best-developed school recognition program. Monetary awards are based on \$100 per student, but in FY 2014 the state recognized 1,553 schools and as a result awarded \$125 million in monetary incentives to them. Inflating the number of schools receiving awards will inevitably



lead either to cheapening the payout, or increasing the financial burden of providing the incentive grants.

Alabama cannot afford an expensive program of monetary incentives, given the low ranking of our basic school finance system that covers all schools. We believe that \$100 per student (Florida's limit) is an appropriate level of monetary award for Reward Schools, but there should be a limit on the number of schools that can receive awards, thereby ensuring that the awards remain valuable.

Ten percent of the state's student body is a reasonable limit on the number of students in schools that receive monetary rewards. Assuming 750,000 students statewide, this would limit monetary awards to a set of schools with no more than 75,000 students, and would limit appropriations to \$7.5 million. If the Legislature chose to appropriate less than the maximum amount, the awards could be prorated accordingly while leaving the number of schools constant.

If there were more schools worthy of recognition in a given year, they could be included as Reward Schools but be awarded only the spending flexibility that accompanies Reward School status. This flexibility in itself is likely to be extremely valuable to such schools.

- What limitations should be placed on use of monetary awards?

We believe that the Florida rules for use of monetary awards are appropriate standards for Alabama to adopt. In Florida, schools may use their awards for one or any combination of the following purposes:

- non-recurring faculty and staff bonuses
- non-recurring expenditures for educational equipment and materials
- temporary personnel to assist in maintaining or improving student performance

Alabama will need to designate who, at the local level, will decide on how the awards will be used. In Florida, each school is required by law to have an advisory council composed of the principal and representatives of teachers, support personnel, parents, and community residents. School employees are elected by their peer groups, parents by their association, and community members by the school board. This council decides how the award will be used, and there are rules to follow in the case of an impasse.

Finally, each school receiving an award should be obligated to identify one or more of its practices that are key to its achievements. The State Department of Education should publicize these best practices and disseminate them to all public schools. Plan 2020 also proposes that teachers and administrators in Reward Schools should be tapped to lead professional learning opportunities for others in their region and statewide. In these ways, Reward Schools can contribute to the improvement of other schools.

## Conclusion

Since the launch of Plan 2020, Alabama has made significant progress toward its goal of a 90 percent high school graduation rate. In 2014, the state's public schools reported an 86 percent graduation rate, up from 72 percent in 2011.

However, the state has a long way to go when it comes to making sure every one of those graduates is prepared for college or career. Only 21 percent of Alabama's 2014 graduates who took the ACT tested college-ready in all four subjects. And, among those 2014 graduates who enrolled in the state's public colleges, 31 percent had to take remedial courses in either math or English or both subjects before they could begin college-level coursework.

From Pre-K through high school, the performance of our students depends to a large degree on the effectiveness of their teachers. Research has shown that no other factor in school matters more than an effective teacher.

Teaching in Alabama can be challenging. The state has one of the highest rates of child poverty in the U.S. Almost 60 percent of Alabama public school students qualify for the federal free and reduced lunch program. As a group, students from low-income households lag behind their nonpoverty peers on academic performance measures.

In order to raise achievement levels for all, we need to recruit bright and talented young people into the profession, particularly those qualified to teach math and science, disciplines where the supply of teachers is tight but the needs for those skills absolutely essential for the 21st century economy.

We need to ensure that teacher preparation programs at our state's colleges and universities are delivering the best training to new teachers, and that those new teachers are adequately supported in their transition to the profession.

We need teachers to be motivated to improve constantly their effectiveness through a data-informed evaluation system that helps identify strengths and weakness.

We need a professional culture in schools that encourages and rewards growth in effectiveness, one that encourages all teachers to learn from one another and gives particularly skilled teachers a pathway to advance professionally and positively influence more students and other teachers.

We must focus on what matters. And teachers matter.

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