



ALABAMA CAMPAIGN *for* Grade-Level Reading

RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNOR KAY IVEY





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STATE OF ALABAMA

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My fellow Alabamians:

In February of 2018, I announced the formation of the Alabama Campaign for Grade-Level Reading (ACGLR), a comprehensive effort comprised of educational experts that seeks to increase the number of Alabama public school students who are proficient, grade-level readers by the end of the third grade. This group was tasked with developing a roadmap that local communities across Alabama could use to address third-grade literacy. The ACGLR focuses on five primary areas: school readiness, preventing chronic absenteeism, restoring the Alabama Reading Initiative to fidelity, increasing summer learning opportunities for P-3 students, and improving childhood health. The goal of the Campaign is that all of Alabama's students will enter the fourth grade as proficient, grade-level readers.

The ACGLR is an extension of my Strong Start, Strong Finish education initiative, which integrates Alabama's early childhood education, K-12 education, and workforce development efforts into a seamless educational journey for all Alabamians. The initiative's progress will be measured by five benchmarks designed to ensure that all Alabamians are progressing through their education journey—no matter what phase of life they may find themselves. The five benchmarks are: (1) pre-k readiness to ensure that all of Alabama's four-year-old children are prepared for an excellent early education experience; (2) school readiness to ensure that all of Alabama's five- and six-year-old students enter kindergarten and/or first grade with advanced skills; (3) literacy and numeracy by age eight to ensure that all of Alabama's students are prepared to persist through difficult coursework; (4) career exploration and discovery so that all students understand how to connect their interests and aptitudes with academic skills they learn in the classroom; and (5) college and/or career readiness so that all students graduate high school prepared to enter postsecondary education or into an in-demand occupation. The ACGLR is focused on helping to achieve the first three of the Strong Start, Strong Finish benchmarks.

Alabama's comprehensive approach to early childhood education and literacy will allow us to achieve the Strong Start, Strong Finish benchmarks together and ensure that all our students are proficient readers by the end of the third grade. I ask you to join me in making the recommendations contained in this report true for our children by mobilizing your community through joining your local Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. We can only improve as a state if we are all committed to education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kay Ivey".

Kay Ivey
Governor

Why Literacy Matters

One of the most important predictors of a child's academic and future success is the ability to read by the end of the third grade. Children are learning to read through the end of third grade; beginning in fourth grade, students are reading to learn.

Students who are unable to make this transition in elementary school are likely to struggle throughout the middle and high school years, and sadly, many may never catch up. This weakness is manifested in the student's inability to comprehend more complex texts and a limited capacity to think critically and solve problems, all higher-level skills needed to thrive academically and throughout life.

As a result, a student who is not a proficient reader by the end of third grade is four times less likely to finish high school. Nationwide, students without a high school diploma or equivalent are forty-seven times more likely to be incarcerated than a college graduate. It is estimated that half of all Americans on public assistance are dropouts.¹ Low literacy is said to be connected to over \$230 billion a year in health care costs.² And, in Alabama, more than half of the inmates in state prisons lack a high school diploma or equivalent.³

Never learning to read also has a multi-generational effect. A parent who lacks basic literacy skills is unable to read to their child. As a result, children whose parents have low literacy levels have a 72 percent chance of being at the lowest reading levels themselves, creating a perpetual cycle of illiteracy.⁴

Additionally, low literacy costs the country at least \$225 billion each year in non-productivity in the workforce, crime, and loss of tax revenue due to unemployment.⁵ Struggling to read makes it more challenging to complete a job application, complete the coursework necessary to obtain a GED, or to gain employment that provides a livable wage.

With a strong start and a high-quality foundation in literacy, however, children are more likely to experience success in the classroom and remain engaged in school.

In 2019, the Alabama Legislature approved, with broad bipartisan support, the Alabama Literacy Act (Act 2019-523). This law aimed to give schools more resources to help third graders enter fourth grade as proficient readers. To address this gap, the Alabama Literacy Act seeks to refocus the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI), provide additional support for educator professional learning in reading, and strengthen support for struggling readers. The Alabama Literacy Act passed the State House of Representatives, 93-2-2; the State Senate, 26-0; and was signed into law by Governor Ivey on June 10, 2019.

The Alabama Campaign for Grade-Level Reading recommendations build upon the momentum started with the passage of the Alabama Literacy Act. It encourages new collaborations and programs aimed at improving reading instruction for all students.

Alabama has dedicated, caring teachers, yet many lack the intensive training in the science of reading necessary to effectively teach reading. Struggling readers pose even greater challenges to under-prepared teachers. Concerned parents in Alabama love their children but don't always know how to serve as their child's "best and first teacher." Churches and nonprofits want to help, but often aren't part of the "system."

Alabama's Campaign for Grade-Level Reading offers solutions to these problems.

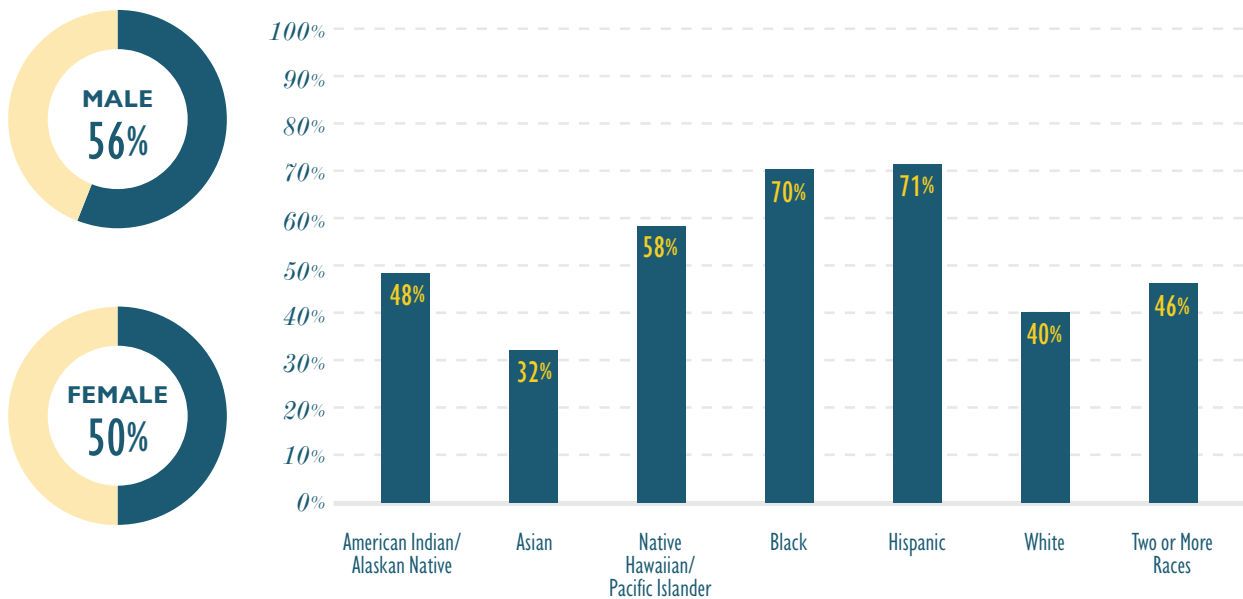
One of the most important predictors of a child's academic and future success is the ability to read by the end of the third grade.

Literacy in Alabama

The single greatest obstacle that can hamper a child’s educational progress is lacking the ability to read, and Alabama is falling behind the rest of the nation in reading proficiency. All of Alabama’s adjacent states – Mississippi, Florida, Georgia, and Tennessee – are ranked higher according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. If this trend is not reversed, it will have disastrous effects on Alabama.

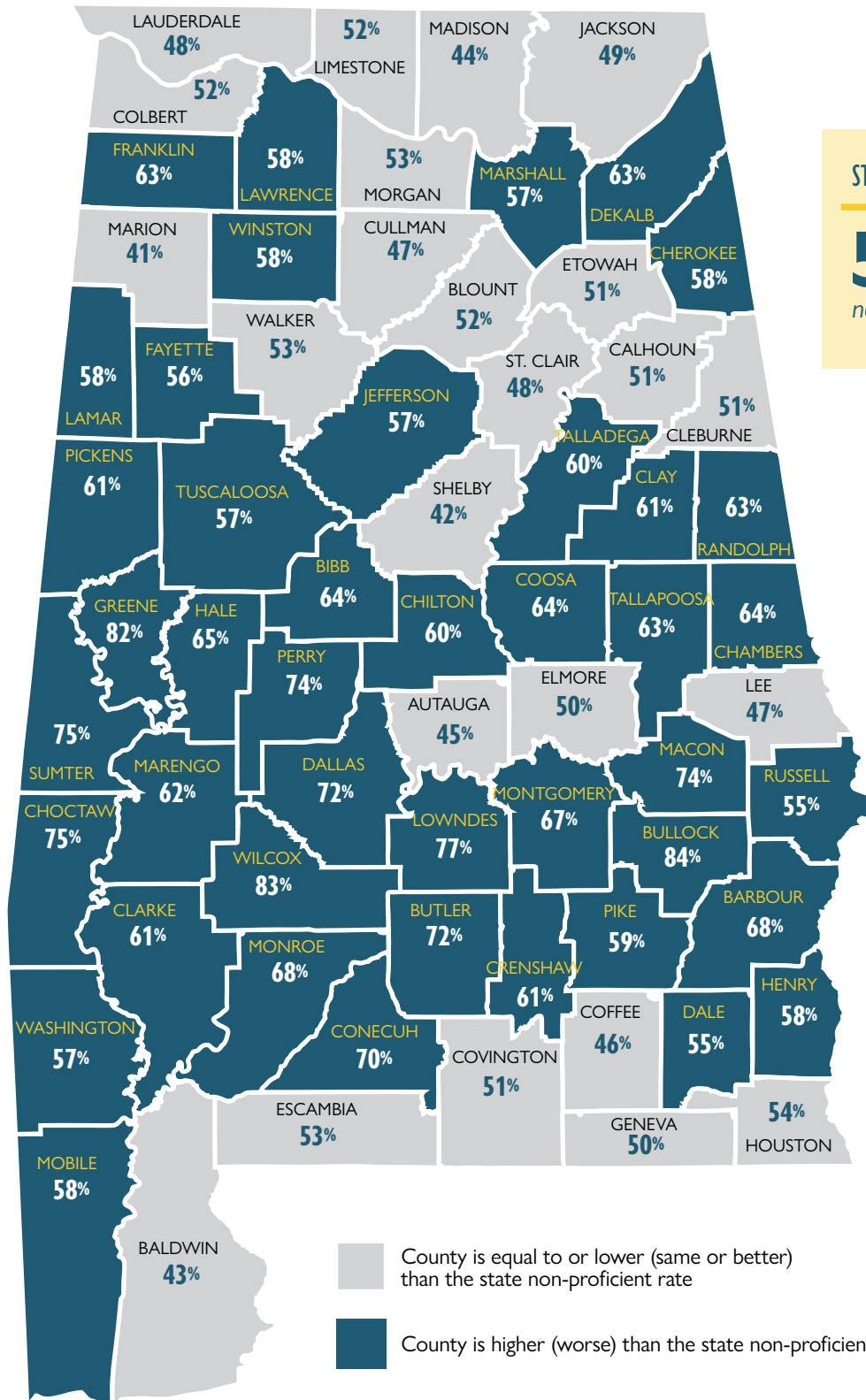


PERCENTAGE OF ALABAMA 4TH GRADE STUDENTS NOT PROFICIENT IN READING⁹



Percentage of Alabama Students (All Grades) Not Proficient in Reading in 2019¹¹

BY COUNTY



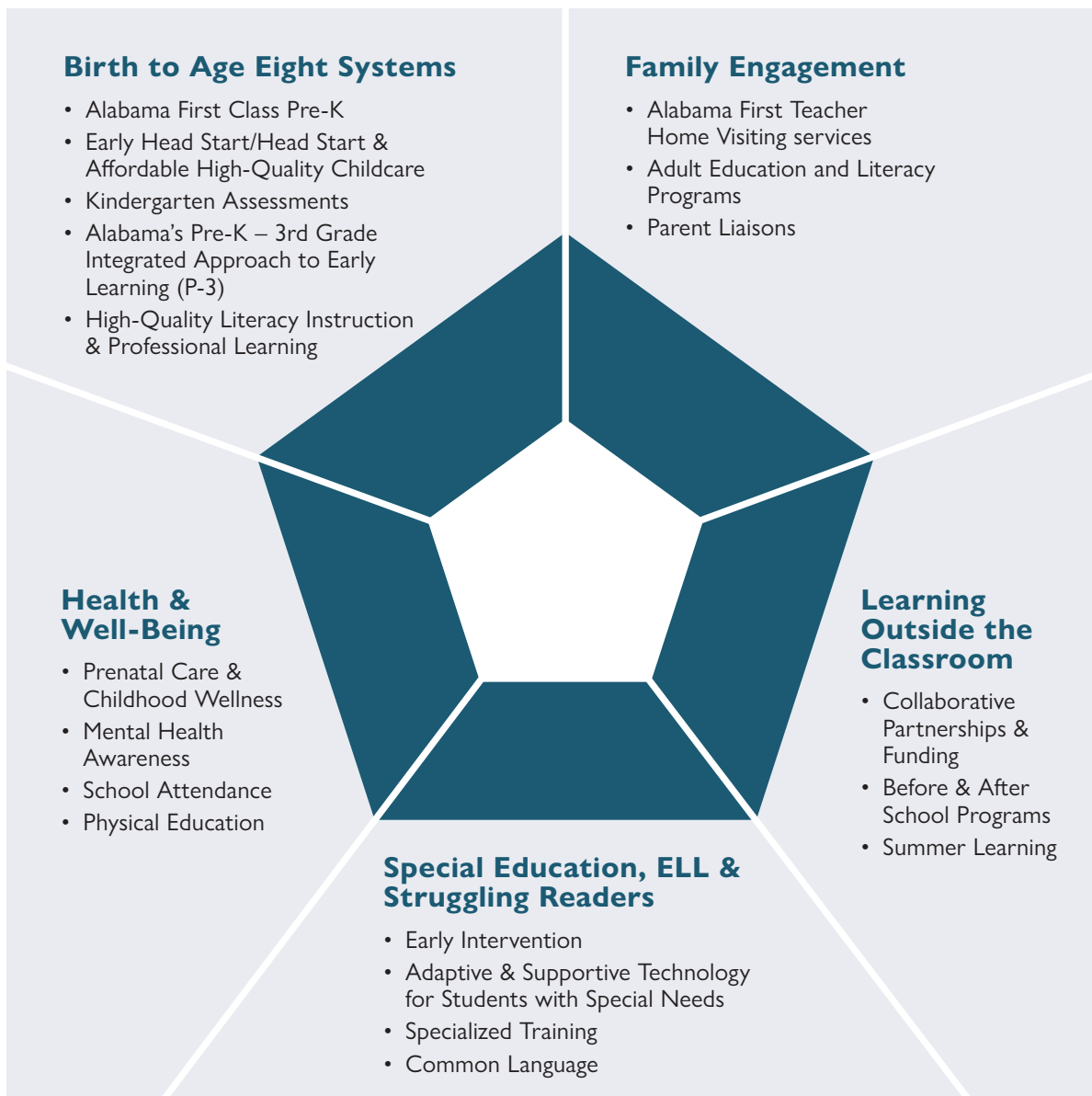
STATE AVERAGE
54%
not proficient
in reading

- County is equal to or lower (same or better) than the state non-proficient rate
- County is higher (worse) than the state non-proficient rate

Measures of Success Framework

Improving third grade reading requires a coordinated birth through age eight approach including clearly aligned policies and practices focused on the whole child. This visualization demonstrates how the Campaign's focus areas – high-quality birth to age eight systems; family engagement; health and well-being; learning outside the classroom; and children with special needs – are intertwined.

Many factors contribute to low literacy achievement in Alabama. This framework is not an exhaustive list of everything that moves the needle on grade-level reading, nor does it capture everything that impacts each outcome. The framework does, however, present specific measures that the Alabama Campaign on Grade-Level Reading recommends for Alabama and provide specific focus for the Alabama Committee on Grade-Level Reading to concentrate its work.



Birth to Age Eight Systems

To reach the goal of every Alabama student reading on grade level by the end of the third grade, Alabama should create a comprehensive, aligned system of high-quality birth through age eight early education and care programs. This system must include intentional strategies to reduce inequities that children and families face during the earliest stages of language and literacy development.

Ninety-five percent of a child's brain is developed through age five. Yet, Alabama has traditionally only focused on K-12 initiatives when addressing reading challenges.

The Alabama Reading Initiative had a positive impact on reading achievement in the earliest years when the program was fully funded.¹² Although this work is important, the state must adjust this paradigm and combine it with significant new research-based investments that demonstrate the positive impact of high-quality early learning experiences.

Everything that happens in a child's life in the early years has a lasting impact on their future potential. In the first year of life, what children hear from those around them will greatly influence the development of their language skills between 18 and 30 months of age.¹³ This foundation will ultimately dictate what language abilities and pre-literacy skills they demonstrate by the age of five.

Although progress has been made, Alabama does not yet have a comprehensive aligned system of high-quality birth to age eight education and care to fully support all children during the critical early stages of development.

At the urging of Governor Ivey, the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education, along with 100 other state agencies and non-governmental organizations, applied for federal funding to address the policies and practices impacting children from birth through age eight. This team completed a comprehensive assessment of early care and education needs in the state of Alabama and constructed a strategic plan to address strengths and limitations in current birth to eight efforts. This work aligns with the Governor's Strong Start, Strong Finish initiative, a comprehensive education-to-workforce plan with a focus on the birth-to-five continuum. Additional federal funding has been awarded to continue aligning efforts and coordinating all birth to age five systems. Support is being provided to existing programs in the delivery of high-quality early education and care while expanding access to programs that support all children, especially low-income, rural, and children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Alabama's expanded approach to early learning and care is rooted in the strength of its high-quality, voluntary First Class Pre-K program, managed by the Office of School Readiness under the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education. Over the last decade, Alabama has made significant investments to expand its state-funded, voluntary pre-kindergarten program to serve more families. The state is just beginning to realize the positive benefits of this effort.

A report released in 2019 shows that the Alabama First Class Pre-K is one of only four state-funded pre-kindergarten programs in the country that "comes close to having all the elements of a strong pre-k program."¹⁴ The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has found that Alabama's

Everything that happens in a child's life in the early years has a lasting impact on their future potential.

program fully meets 14.5 of the 15 “essential elements” characterizing high-quality pre-k programs. This is one reason why NIEER ranks Alabama’s First Class Pre-K program as the nation’s highest quality program for 13 consecutive years. Additional research conducted by the University of Alabama at Birmingham and the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama shows that students who participate in a First Class Pre-K program outperform their peers in reading and math in every grade level through the middle school years.¹⁵

Today, the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE), Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR), and the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) are applying the lessons learned building and maintaining the nation’s highest quality pre-k program to include the entire birth to five continuum. Most prominently, this mindset is embodied in the collaborative efforts to increase the quality of services in the state’s licensed child care providers and in the recently launched Pre-K – 3rd Grade Integrated Approach to Early Learning (P-3).

The Alabama Campaign for Grade-Level Reading recommends the state continues to build the infrastructure needed across state agencies to support all children from birth to age eight. This includes aligning public investments into First Class Pre-K; Early Head Start/Head Start and Affordable High-Quality Child Care; Kindergarten Assessments; the Alabama’s Pre-K – 3rd Grade Integrated Approach to Early Learning (P-3); and High-Quality Literacy Instruction and Evidence-based Professional Learning.

ALABAMA FIRST CLASS PRE-K

Ensure all families in the state have an opportunity to voluntarily enroll their four-year-old in a First Class Pre-K classroom in a setting preferred by the parent.

Alabama’s high-quality, voluntary First Class Pre-K program is recognized by the National Institute of Early Education Research as the nation’s highest quality pre-kindergarten program in the country.¹⁶ Studies show that students who participate in high-quality pre-k are more likely to attend school regularly and outperform their peers in reading and math, and are less likely to be retained or receive disciplinary referrals.¹⁷ In the 2019-2020 school year, only 38 percent of the state’s four-year-old children were able to participate in the state’s high-quality, voluntary First Class Pre-K program. The state should continue to provide funds so that all families have an opportunity to participate in a high-quality, voluntary pre-k program in a setting in which they are most comfortable.

EARLY HEAD START/HEAD START & AFFORDABLE HIGH-QUALITY CHILD CARE

Identify ways to help families receive high-quality, affordable childcare in their communities.

Alabama families must have access to high-quality and affordable early care and education services for their young children. The Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education is leading a significant effort to identify areas in the state with little or no access to high-quality childcare. Increasing the number of high-quality and affordable early care and education services allows more adults to enter the workforce knowing that their child is receiving the highest quality early care. Addressing this gap is essential to rural families and families living in child care deserts. A child care desert is a community that lacks child care options, or has so few providers that there are more than three children per licensed slot.



KINDERGARTEN ASSESSMENTS

Put in place a statewide Kindergarten entry assessment to determine school readiness.

Children who enter Kindergarten with basic foundational learning skills have a greater likelihood of becoming a proficient reader by the third grade. Alabama currently does not have a state-wide Kindergarten entry assessment that determines what a child knows in the five domains of child development: (1) cognitive; (2) approaches to learning; (3) language and literacy; (4) physical health and motor development; and (5) social emotional development. This entry assessment information is critical to addressing literacy challenges at the earliest stages possible.

ALABAMA'S PRE-K – 3RD GRADE INTEGRATED APPROACH TO EARLY LEARNING (P-3)

Expand Alabama's P-3 approach to all public elementary schools.

Now in the third year, the state's Pre-K – 3rd Grade Integrated Approach to Early Learning (P-3) establishes an early learning continuum aligning instructional practices, assessment, and leadership from First Class Pre-K through the third grade. Establishing an early learning continuum allows for a successful transition, building upon the student success and identifying next steps to narrow the achievement gap. From an initial pilot of eight districts, seven schools and 13 classrooms in 2017 the P-3 approach has expanded to 124 classrooms in 14 school systems and 23 public schools, both traditional and public charter across the state.¹⁸

HIGH-QUALITY LITERACY INSTRUCTION AND EVIDENCE-BASED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Widen access to evidence-based professional development for early care and education professionals on the science of reading and language.

The Alabama Literacy Act compels state education agencies to provide ongoing professional development to help birth through grade 3 educators teach every student the basic language and literacy skills necessary for school success. Currently, the state is offering an assortment of scientifically based reading programs, including Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS), Read Right from the Start, Talk With Me Baby, and Multisensory Structured Language Education (MSLE). These intensive learning experiences are provided, on a voluntary basis, for P-3 educators and coaches statewide. The World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Early Years/WIDA Consortium has also been enlisted to support teachers of dual language learners. Participation in these programs is limited due to funding. All of these opportunities must be expanded to include all birth to age eight teachers of language and literacy.

Family & Student Engagement

To reach the goal of every Alabama student reading on grade level by the end of the third grade, Alabama should enhance support services and resources to help parents and guardians, regardless of socioeconomic status, improve their literacy skills. Well-informed parents are better able to advocate for their children and obtain high-value jobs where they make a livable wage, allowing them to provide adequate support.

Parent involvement is the number one predictor of early literacy success and future academic achievement. With most of a child's brain developing in the first five years of life, it is vitally important for families to help children develop during those critical years before Kindergarten.

A report by the National Endowment for the Arts found that there are more literate people in the United States who don't read than those who are actually illiterate.¹⁹ If a child's parents rarely read to them, the child's reading experience is severely impacted, and their ability to excel is limited. Reading in the home is the foundation for reading in school and in life. Unfortunately, many parents are not aware that reading and talking to their child are ongoing activities in which they should be engaged with their children.

Launched by Governor Ivey, Born Ready™ is an initiative from the Department of Early Childhood Education focused on raising awareness among Alabama parents of the importance of early brain development and high-quality early care and education. Born Ready is not only developed to inform parents, it's developed to empower them and give them access to the tools they need to be their children's first and best teacher.²⁰

In 2019, Alabama was awarded a technical assistance grant of \$25,000 from the National Governors' Association to improve pre-k readiness and childhood health of Alabama's children from birth to age three through bolstering Alabama First Teacher Home Visiting services, well-child visits, Early Head Start – Child Care Partnership, and the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.²¹

There is still more to be done to support Alabama families. Personal coaching through First Teacher Home Visiting is an effective way to help parents understand the methods of teaching their child how to read. It has contributed to decreases in many risk factors experienced by Alabama families. According to the 2019 Maternal and Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting Benchmark Data report, more than half of all measures showed performance improvement including decreases in preterm birth, emergency department visits for child injuries, and child maltreatment investigations.²² Alabama has also seen improvement in the following areas: numbers of mothers who breastfeed, parents who use safe sleep positioning and an increase in continuity of insurance coverage, increases in parent-child interactions and increases in the number of children receiving developmental screenings. Families also saw an increase in number of children who have been read to, sung to, and told stories to everyday.²³

The goal of home visiting services is to establish scalable, sustainable interventions within all programs that propel children's healthy development. This includes building upon the internal capacity and existing strengths of families, parents, caregivers, providers, and communities to create sustainability within families to find solutions. The same is true of in-school parent liaisons. Parent liaisons are vital to Family Engagement efforts in Alabama schools. Many schools utilize parent liaisons to assist parents who need assistance navigating the resources and programs already available to them.

The Alabama Campaign for Grade-Level Reading recommends the state supports parents in serving as their children's first and most important teacher and advocate. This includes aligning public investments into Alabama First Teacher Home Visiting services; Adult Education and Literacy Programs; and Parent Liaisons.



FIRST TEACHER HOME VISITING

Increase access to high-quality home-visiting programs to model best practices for families.

High-quality home visiting programs provide a continuum of voluntary services from prenatal care through Kindergarten to improve family health, child development, and school readiness. Alabama currently has several home visitation models that promote parents as their child's first and most important teachers and advocates. These include three national evidence-based home visiting models administered through the Department of Early Childhood Education, the state's lead designated agency for home visitation programs – Nurse Family Partnership (NFP), Parents as Teachers (PAT) and Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPPY). Due to a lack of funding, however, fewer than 3,000 families statewide can participate in one of the three models.

ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAMS

Coordinate Alabama's adult education and family literacy programs with youth literacy programs to cultivate a two-generation approach to family literacy to support children and parents together.

Alabama's adult education and literacy programs – including remedial education, ESL, GED preparation, Read Right from the Start, Talk With Me Baby, Born Ready, and Language Environment Analysis (LENA) Brain Building Through Early Talk – must be properly supported and funded in order to provide a comprehensive offering of program opportunities for adults, especially parents. Particular consideration should be given to establishing programs in geographical areas where gaps exist and where families have high needs with a focus on intentionally creating opportunities that address children and adult needs together. The five key components of the 2Gen approach must be employed to support the well-being of the entire family with the following: (1) Postsecondary Education and Employment Pathways; (2) Early Childhood Education and Development; (3) Economic Assets; (4) Health and Well-Being; and (5) Social Capital.

PARENT LIAISONS

Establish a cohort of specially trained parent liaisons to assist families in navigating resources and services available to them to facilitate with their social and economic needs.

Alabama families have shared, during focus groups, that they don't always have knowledge about how to access the resources available to support them in meeting their goals to support their children, receive adequate health care and screenings for their child, advance their education, and achieve economic mobility to support their family.²⁴ These concerns are even more evident in underserved communities and in families experiencing poverty. Alabama should provide staff parent liaisons in schools and other community centers to coordinate services with parents to address their unique social and economic needs, so they can have a greater impact on their child's education.

Health & Well-Being

To reach the goal of every Alabama student reading on grade level by the end of the third grade, Alabama should increase opportunities for children to be fully present at school by focusing on strategies that consider the whole child. Children who are impacted by negative health, social, or emotional wellness issues experience more barriers than their peers academically.

Influences from outside the walls of school have a major impact on a student's academic performance.

Missing meals and experiencing hunger impairs a child's development. A child with asthma, dental issues or other chronic illnesses often misses school more frequently than healthy students. A child with undiagnosed vision issues will struggle to recognize shapes and letters when learning to read.

These are just a few of the health and nutritional concerns jeopardizing a student's ability to be fully present in the classroom. Recognizing these influences, which are often not considered to fall within the scope of formal education, will have a direct impact on educational advancement across the state. Various research demonstrates that students who are not physically active or well-nourished are more apt to be distracted in class, have poor behavior, and attend school less frequently. And, according to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, children who are chronically absent in pre-school, Kindergarten, and first grade are much less likely to read at grade level in the third grade.²⁵

Numerous state and community organizations have taken steps to increase access to basic health and medical screenings. In 2017 and 2018, the Alabama Early Intervention Service (AEIS) executed a Public Awareness initiative for identifying new children for early intervention services in each of the seven districts of the Alabama Early Intervention System. These efforts resulted in an increase of 361 referrals made in 2018 and another increase of 726 referrals made in 2019. Through a partnership with the Department of Early Childhood Education, AEIS will expand these efforts to specifically targeted counties with a low health index and higher poverty rates and other communities of high need. Help Me Grow Alabama administers the Ages and Stages Questionnaire® free of charge, and provides resources, referrals, and care coordination for children and families who require further support.

Still, the number of Alabama students challenged academically because of undiagnosed health and nutritional issues remain too high.

The health and well-being of many students across the state is further limited from adverse trauma they are experiencing at home or in the community. Cumulative instances of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can result in a lack of attention by students, as well as amplifying other barriers to learning. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, ACEs have a direct correlation to educational achievement.²⁶ Unfortunately, Alabama educators and schools are not adequately trained and resourced to support students experiencing distress.

Alabama cannot afford to focus its efforts to improve reading proficiency on academic initiatives alone. Academic progress of a child doesn't depend solely on what happens in the classroom. A recent study found that fourth graders who entered Kindergarten with inadequate social-emotional skills were 80 percent more likely to have been retained in a grade, more likely to have received special education services, and seven times more likely to have been suspended or expelled at least once.²⁷

The Alabama Campaign for Grade-Level Reading recommends that the state reinforces efforts to address the health and well-being of children in school. This includes aligning public investments into Prenatal Care & Childhood Wellness; Mental Health Awareness; School Attendance; and Physical Education.



PRENATAL CARE & CHILDHOOD WELLNESS

Increase access to prenatal care for expecting and new mothers and child wellness visits.

The best way to promote a healthy birth is to have a healthy pregnancy. Parents can improve their chances for a healthy birth by receiving comprehensive early and regular prenatal care. Once the child is born, it is important for families to schedule routine wellness visits for their child. This includes scheduling regular preventative health screenings including a review of height, weight, vision, hearing, speech, social and emotional progress and overall development.

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

Require trauma-informed training as part of ongoing teacher preparation.

Many of the challenging behaviors observed in students are linked to adverse childhood experiences. Too many teachers are unprepared to properly respond to the child's conduct. The seriousness of this issue is illustrated in the number of young children expelled from school and child care. An intentional focus on mental health awareness training for teachers is needed. In Alabama, the Department of Early Childhood Education and the Department of Mental Health partner to provide Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) as an intervention. IECMHC promotes the healthy social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development of children through supporting nurturing relationships. Mothers who receive quality prenatal care increase their chances of having healthy birth weight infants and improve child mortality outcomes.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Develop community-based initiatives to address chronic absenteeism.

School attendance is critical to academic success. In Alabama, students miss more than 6 million days annually.²⁸ State law requires students aged six to seventeen to attend school daily.²⁹ Yet, more than 11 percent of students statewide miss at least 18 days a year.³⁰ This equals one month of missed classroom learning opportunities.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Ensure local education agencies are in full compliance with the state's daily physical education requirement.

Fitness-based physical education (PE) programs positively impact test scores, improve reading proficiency, and reduce absenteeism. Alabama requires daily physical education for all students in grades Kindergarten through grade eight. For grades 1-6, the law requires at least 30 minutes per day. Schools are applying for and receiving waivers from this requirement, however. All schools must be held accountable to current law.

Learning Outside the Classroom

To reach the goal of every Alabama student reading on grade level by the end of the third grade, Alabama should explore gaps in learning services and collaborate with regional, state, and community based organizations to enrich the quality of experiences they can offer outside of the classroom.

The Alabama Literacy Act encourages a renewed focus on high-quality summer learning and other high-quality programs outside of the classroom. The law rightly sees these initiatives, when implemented strategically, as a way to provide extra support to struggling learners to build on what they are learning during the regular school term.

This is especially true in the summer.

Children regress when they don't practice their academic skills over the summer months.³¹ This is known as summer learning loss. Children from low-income families lose two to three months of grade equivalency in both math and reading every summer. The loss is cumulative.

Alabama schools cannot alone shoulder the burden of improving reading proficiency. To successfully address the goal for children to read on grade level, the state must commit to engaging with other providers outside of the public school system. There are a number of successful before and after school and summer programs located across the state that are managed by entities outside of traditional public schools. These include programs organized by the Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs and YWCAs, faith-based entities, and private businesses, among others. These programs are collaborative, combine public with private funds, and work to incorporate the best of summer camp activities with school.

On average, students participating in high-quality, collaborative, community-based summer learning programs in Alabama have gained 1.7 months in reading every year over the last three years.³² Students in these programs make even greater gains in math.

The success of community-based programs is rooted in a belief that summer school cannot mirror traditional school. Since attendance is not mandatory, programs must think creatively and employ intentional strategies that motivate parents to encourage students to participate in “school” over the summer. What these programs ultimately look like has taken on many forms. Some have centered around specific topics of interest, such as STEM, sports or the arts. Others have organized around providing additional support to struggling readers and students learning english as their second language. However, what is common across all successful programs, regardless of their location or convening purpose, is a commitment to rigorous academics, ongoing assessment, and the nurture of their students’ mind, body, and spirit.

This commitment is also true in before and after school programs. The existence of these programs are not only an important workforce development tool, providing a safe space for children of while their parents work, but also an untapped opportunity to close the academic achievement gaps among students if the state is intentional in its efforts.

Unfortunately, too many before and after school programs lack quality and structure.

The Alabama Campaign for Grade-Level Reading recommends the state works to maximize participation in community-based, high-quality enrichment programs outside of the classroom. This includes aligning public investments into Collaborative Partnerships & Funding; Before & After School Programs; and Summer Learning.



COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS & FUNDING

Leverage community-based before and after school and summer learning programs to offer additional learning opportunities for struggling readers.

The most successful out-of-school programs in Alabama combine the academic rigor of school with the fun of camp. Most local education agencies in the state lack the resources and knowledge base to undertake this approach alone. Instead, many systems have found success combining their financial, intellectual, and social resources with churches, schools, youth organizations, non-profits, government agencies, civic leaders, and others that are already providing summer and before and after school enrichment opportunities. This collaborative, community-centric approach allows each community the flexibility to provide out-of school programming that best meets the unique needs and interests of their children.

BEFORE & AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Adhere to proven research-based markers of quality.

Families and communities benefit greatly by having quality before and after school programs. Parents miss less time from work, communities are safer, and children have better grades and attendance in school. Since two-thirds of Alabama children under the age of six have both parents participating in the workforce, there is a considerable need for safe and engaging places for children to spend their out-of-school time.³³ There are five specific components that should be present in before and after school programs: (1) Fostering positive relationships between students and staff; (2) Blending academic and skill activities; (3) Promoting high levels of engagement; (4) striving for student mastery of knowledge and skills; and (5) providing some structure and opportunities for choice.³⁴

SUMMER LEARNING

Adhere to proven research-based markers of quality.

Alabama has summer programs, but many lack the rigor needed to make measurable progress towards helping students become proficient readers. A review of successful summer learning programs in Alabama have identified five essential markers of quality: (1) Utilize research-based curriculum that is specifically designed for summer learning, relevant to student interests, supports the healthy development of the whole child, and aligns with Alabama's academic standards; (2) Administer a nationally normed and formative pre- and post-assessment of students; (3) Work with certified teachers and use a 1:12 or better ratio of staff to students; (4) Incorporate 72 or more hours of academic instruction; and (5) Engage in a peer-system of continuous quality improvement, collaborative problem solving, and pooling of resources.³⁵

Special Education, English Language Learners (ELL) & Struggling Readers

To reach the goal of every Alabama student reading on grade level by the end of the third grade, Alabama should create a comprehensive system of high-quality, research-based services and strategies for supporting children who have special needs, speak a second language, or have reading challenges.

In Alabama 80,000 students have special needs and 20,000 students speak English as a second language. 70 percent of Alabama's general education students are not proficient on the fourth grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).³⁶

Alabama students with disabilities currently receive an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).³⁷ The IEP provides services, accommodations, measurable annual goals and strategies to support student success. Although the IEP is mandated by law, Washington University reports that 92.8 percent of families in Alabama with a child with special needs faced significant out of pocket expenses beyond what was covered by their insurance provider.

Annually Alabama must report progress made by children with disabilities. All of Alabama's school districts have failed to meet the annual proficiency goal for students in special education, according to the State Performance Report/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR). There were nearly 44,000 students with IEPs in grade 3 through 12 included in state assessments. The number of those students proficient in reading was 6,853; 7,714 were proficient in math; and close to 37,000 students were not proficient in either reading or math, or both.³⁸ The ALSDE State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) outlines the low achievement levels of children with special needs to date, yet the state does not have a strategic plan aimed at improving these results. As part of the special education efforts, Alabama committed to increasing the number of infants and toddlers served through Alabama's Early Intervention System, focusing on assisting identified young children in making progress in the social-emotional domain.

Alabama educators are investing resources in addressing the needs of the emergent bilingual and English language learner (ELL) population, including using the WIDA Early Years/WIDA Consortium to support ELL teachers with professional learning. Alabama Superintendents share that they are underfunded, understaffed and under-resourced for addressing the needs of ELL students. Several districts across the state with large ELL student populations have formed ALA-EL, a coalition that advocates for services for ELL students in Alabama. This group is now an affiliate of the Council of Leaders of Alabama Schools (CLAS), and they are also working with the American Institutes for Research in partnership with ALSDE. Studies suggest that children learning an additional language tend to score better on standardized tests because learning languages develops listening, observation, problem-solving and critical thinking skills. These are transferable skills that are of life-long benefit, both personally and professionally.³⁹

When children face difficulty in reading, schools implement Response to Instruction (RtI) to identify and monitor students at risk, use problem-solving and data-based decision making to provide research-based interventions and adjust the intensity of interventions based on the student's response. RtI shows promise in supporting all students, especially those at risk of failing to achieve state performance standards. Screenings are also a critical part of RtI. Students with dyslexia-related learning challenges or difficulties can be serviced before special education services are required. Students with dyslexia often experience difficulties with reading, writing, and spelling that are unexpected in view of their other abilities.

The Alabama Campaign for Grade-Level Reading recommends that local education agencies provide teachers with the resources and training necessary to correctly identify students who need additional reading services. This includes aligning public investments into Early Intervention; Adaptive & Supportive Technology for Students with Special Needs; Specialized Training; and Common Languages.



EARLY INTERVENTION

Expand early intervention efforts to identify learning deficits at the earliest stages.

As early as 18 months of age, low-income children begin to fall behind in vocabulary development and other skills critical for school success. Instead of addressing the underlying developmental needs, oftentimes these students are mislabeled with a learning disability. This misdiagnosis can be avoided through high-quality developmental screenings.

ADAPTIVE & SUPPORTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Equip more communities with the adaptive and supportive technology needed to address special needs.

Assistive technology (AT) is defined as, “Any item, piece of equipment, or system, whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized, that is commonly used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.”⁴⁰

SPECIALIZED TRAINING

Establish a cohort of regional, special education and ELL coaches to provide additional classroom support for teachers serving students in these populations who experience reading challenges.

The state has experienced success improving student outcomes by supporting instructional coaches directly within the classroom environment. These coaches not only ensure there is an additional qualified educator in the classroom, but they also assist with reflective, individualized assessments of a teacher’s instructional practices. This model provides educators with immediate feedback and opportunities to adjust their instructional approach. Additional resources must be provided to establish a cohort of regional support staff to provide language and literacy teachers with special education and ELL coaching.

COMMON LANGUAGES

Create a common ontology of terms to prevent confusion stemming from duplicative terminology.

Alabama should develop a formal structure for terminologies relating to language and literacy instruction, specifically for the terminology relating to special education, ELL, and struggling readers. This will ensure term usage is consistent across agencies and partners, and will avoid the duplication of efforts while maximizing collaboration, integration, and alignment of resources and materials across overlapping entities and state education agencies.

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Committee Reports

Birth to Eight	25
Communications	35
Family and Student Engagement	39
Health, Wellness, and Poverty Reduction.....	47
Summer Learning	81
Special Education, English Learners, and Struggling Readers	93
Data Collection, Data Management and Research.....	99

ACGLR Birth to Eight Education Committee Report

ACGLR Birth to Eight Education

Purpose of attached report:

To recommend to the Alabama Campaign for Grade Level Reading a strategic plan for birth to eight education with best practices for meeting the needs of all children and families.

Actions required of the ACGLR:

1. Build upon existing efforts and invest in quality professional development that is aligned from birth through age eight.
2. In order to invest in quality professional development for teachers and caregivers serving children from birth through age eight, our state must first address and commit significant public investments to fill gaping holes in Alabama's birth through five system of early care, learning and family engagement, including but not limited to:
 - i. Child care licensing and research-based quality improvement initiatives;
 - ii. The expansion of home visiting programs to reach all low-income parents with young children (or expecting mothers) in our state through the evidence-based Nurse-Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers and HIPPIY models;
 - iii. Additional parent engagement and awareness initiative(s), such as the Talk With Me Baby campaign, to convey the importance of talking, reading and singing with babies and young children;
 - iv. The expansion of Alabama's nationally-recognized, high-quality, voluntary First Class Pre-K program to all four-year-olds in our state.
3. Integrate birth through four initiatives into the state's existing Strategic Plan for Literacy (K-12)

Implications:

- By December 2019, have the Alabama Developmental Standards complete and aligned with birth through four standards and K-12 standards.
- By December 2019, produce a set of state policy and investment priorities for improving Alabama's system of early childhood education and care to recommend to the Alabama Legislature, including but not limited to child care licensing, investment and research-based quality improvement initiatives (based on best practices from other states and within Alabama), investments in the expansion of Home Visiting and First Class Pre-K, and additional parent engagement and awareness initiatives.
- By December 2020, participation in LETRS and Read Right from the Start is significantly increased
- By December 2020, integrate birth through four initiatives into the state's existing Strategic Plan for Literacy (K-12). An intentional alignment of systems will lead to improved program quality while maintaining availability of services, expanding parental choice and knowledge about existing programs, and enhancing school readiness.

ACGLR BIRTH TO EIGHT EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT

Purpose of this report

To recommend to the Alabama Campaign for Grade Level Reading a strategic plan that provides policy makers, educators and communities with best practices and resources to address the reading readiness of young children and the needs of at-risk and struggling readers and their families.

Recommendations

1. Build upon existing collaborative efforts between the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE), the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) and the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) to invest in quality professional development that is aligned from birth through age eight. LETRS® (pre-k – 3rd grade) and Read Right from the Start (birth- pre-k) are examples of promising, evidence-based professional development programs for educators that have the potential to move the needle on reading success in Alabama. However, there is not yet an aligned system of high-quality birth to five education, care and family engagement set up in our state to receive this level of professional development. Alabama must address - and commit significant public investments to build this infrastructure.
2. In order to address the gaping holes in Alabama's birth through five system, the Campaign for Grade Level Reading must produce a set of state policy and investment priorities for improving Alabama's system of early care, education and family engagement to recommend to the Alabama Legislature. This plan should include but not be limited to:
 - i. Removal of the religious exemption for child care licensure in order to ensure that all child care providers in Alabama are, at a baseline, meeting minimum standards for health, safety and training hours.
 - ii. A system of supports and investments to dramatically improve the quality and qualifications of child care providers statewide. Improvement efforts may include best practices from other states or within Alabama communities. Some examples include tiered reimbursement for child care subsidies; reimbursement at 100% of the market rate; and wage improvement initiatives, such as tax credits, for early childhood educators in child care settings. This system should include policies and guidance to support the recruitment, preparation, hiring and onboarding of early childhood professionals.
 - iii. The expansion of voluntary, evidence-based home visiting programs to reach all low-income families in Alabama that want support in their role as their child's first and best teacher in the critical first thousand days of life.
 - iv. Additional parent engagement and awareness initiative(s) to help families understand the importance of high-quality early childhood education. One promising initiative is the Talk With Me Baby campaign (originating in Georgia but now being made available to other states), which emphasizes the importance of talking, reading and singing with babies and young children. Such initiatives should include outreach to direct service providers such as OBGYNs, birthing hospital staff, child care providers and pediatricians.
 - v. The expansion of Alabama's nationally-recognized, high-quality, voluntary First Class Pre-K program, which currently reaches just 32 percent of four-year-olds in our state, to reach all four-year-olds in Alabama whose families desire them to attend.
3. Integrate birth through four initiatives into the state's existing Strategic Plan for Literacy (K-12). As part of this effort, the Alabama Campaign for Grade Level Reading should:
 - i. Revise the Alabama Developmental Standards and align them with Birth through Four Standards and K-12 standards.
 - ii. Study the effectiveness of and explore the expansion of Alabama's Pre-K through Third Grade Integrated Approach to Early Learning.

Background / Key Issues

As the saying goes, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” However, for decades, reading initiatives and investments have been designed to treat, rather than prevent, reading challenges. To ensure that all children are reading on grade level by the third grade in Alabama, we must flip the outdated script that focused exclusively on teaching practices at the elementary and secondary level. While K-12 initiatives are still vitally important, they must be combined with significant new research-based investments in early childhood education and care, professional development for early childhood educators and caregivers, and parent and family engagement and support. As it is being built, Alabama’s system of early childhood education must be meaningfully connected with the early grades in a seamless continuum of developmentally-appropriate, research-based standards and professional development.

An explosion of brain development research starting in the 1990s – and continuing today with Dr. Patricia Kuhl’s groundbreaking studies examining young children’s early processing of language – has significant implications for the work of this subcommittee. This research indicates that early intervention is the key to improving reading outcomes for all students, and especially for low income students and others who are at risk of reading difficulties. It is more effective to build a reading brain from birth than to remediate a struggling reader. Prevention and early investment will also reduce later financial costs and the socio-emotional damage caused by a repeated failure to learn.

Just as there is an achievement gap in children’s reading performance on state and federal assessments, there is a school readiness gap that separates disadvantaged children from their more affluent peers. As early as 18 months, low-income children begin to fall behind in vocabulary development and other skills critical for school success. Parents play an enormous role in closing this gap, as do child care providers, pediatricians and other health care providers, pre-k programs, and the broader community.

By three years of age, there is a 30 million word gap between children from the wealthiest and poorest families (Hart & Risley, 1995). A recent study shows that the vocabulary gap is evident in toddlers. By 18 months of age, children in different socio-economic groups display dramatic differences in their vocabularies, and by two years of age, the disparity in vocabulary development has grown significantly (Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder 2013).

Recent breakthroughs in neuroscience suggest that the complexity and diversity of early words heard affect development in the language area of the brain (Kuhl, 2011). This means it is not necessarily children’s socio-economic status, but the quality of their early experiences and relationships with adults, that leads to disparities. The implication of this new science is that the trajectory of a child’s life can be dramatically altered if they are engaged from birth in language-rich environments filled with warm, loving conversations with adults.

This relatively new understanding of early literacy development complements the vast body of research supporting the critical role of early experiences in shaping brain development (Zero to Three). Since ninety percent of a child’s brain is developed in the first five years, the impact of adult-child interactions on the brains of infants and toddlers is unmatched by any other stage of development. This when children form the neural “connections that build brain architecture – the foundation upon which all learning, behavior and health depend” (Center for the Developing Child, Harvard University).

Based on this research, our subcommittee recommends that Alabama explore significant new investments in parent awareness and engagement, and quality, evidence-based professional development for teachers and caregivers serving children from birth through age eight. To do this, our state must first address gaping holes in our birth through five system of early care, learning and family engagement.

These holes include a chronic lack of public investment in child care quality and a dual child care system that leaves around half of Alabama's child care programs exempt from licensure for health and safety. Approximately two-thirds of children under the age of six in Alabama have both parents in the workforce (Annie E. Case Foundation Kids Count Data Center, 2018). By improving the quality of child care in Alabama, we can provide the early experiences and vocabulary needed for children to be ready to read.

Child care licensing is a foundational first step upon which quality professional development can build. Without licensing, too many child care programs are not required to follow any standards for teacher training, criminal background checks and the adult-child ratios necessary for age-appropriate learning. License-exempt child care programs are consistently excluded from much-needed teacher professional development and improvement investments, such as the state's Quality Stars initiative and the Read Right from the Start stipend program.

Another building block necessary for spreading quality professional development and information to caregivers of young children is the expansion of the state's First Teacher Home Visiting program, which engages at-risk parents of young children through the Nurse-Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers, and HIPPI home visitation models. Rigorous evaluations of high-quality home visiting programs have shown a reduction in child abuse and neglect, an improvement in birth outcomes such as decreased pre-term births and low-birthweight babies, improved school readiness for children and increased high school graduation rates for mothers participating in the program (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019). Evaluations of Alabama's First Teacher Home Visiting program found similar outcomes.

According to the National Home Visiting Resource Center, there are 273,300 families in Alabama who could benefit from home visiting. Of those, 31%, or 84,723 were low income. In 2017, 3,742 families were served. Assuming that all of them were low income, that would mean that just 4.4% of the low income families that could benefit from home visiting received service. That leaves 80,981 low income families without home visiting services.

While Alabama's First Class Pre-K program is nationally recognized for its quality, current state investments only allow the program to serve 32 percent of four-year-olds in our state. Students who attended the First Class Pre-K program in Alabama are more likely to be proficient in reading and math compared to other students - and this academic advantage persists over time. This is the key finding of an ongoing study of Alabama First Class Pre-K conducted by researchers from the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama, the UAB School of Public Health, and the UAB School of Education, funded by the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education. The researchers found that the academic benefit of First Class Pre-K persisted through the middle school years and did not fade out, or decrease, over time. These findings add to previous findings that showed students receiving Alabama First Class Pre-K demonstrate higher readiness for kindergarten; are less likely to be chronically absent; are less likely to be held back a grade; and are less likely to need special education services in K – 12 (Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education).

We want to be clear that it is not important that all children are *reading* in pre-k or kindergarten; what is important is that all children in our state have the quality early childhood experiences that they need to meet critical developmental milestones in early language, literacy, print awareness and social-emotional development so that they are *ready to read* proficiently when it matters – by the end of the third grade. Without a strong focus on the above initiatives designed to improve reading readiness, Alabama will remain in the current vicious cycle of trying to implement reading interventions for frustrated children that are drastically unprepared – neurologically and developmentally – through no fault of their own.

As it is being built, Alabama's system of early childhood education and family support (birth to age four) must be meaningfully connected with kindergarten and the early grades in a seamless continuum of developmentally-appropriate, research-based learning standards and professional development.

Alignment of learning standards across the birth through age eight continuum is critical for providing continuity in learning and program quality and supporting children as they transition between settings and learning environments. Developmentally appropriate standards set expectations for what young children should learn and the concepts they should understand. Early learning standards, also often referred to as early learning guidelines, typically reflect expectations within domains of development and learning, such as socioemotional competence, cognitive development, general learning competencies, and specific content areas, including literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, and arts. These standards provide teachers with guidance for developing activities and lessons that reinforce these expectations. Early learning standards also have other implications for educators and for instructional practice as they can shape expectations for educator competencies and quality standards for programs, services, and schools, as well as the policies needed to support those standards and expectations.

Thus, aligning early learning standards is one way to improve multiple dimensions of practices, systems, and policies, and is an important lever for supporting quality and building continuity among and within systems—provided that the standards reinforce a shared vision, are built on a shared foundation, and are aligned for all ages, including K-3 academic standards (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013; Bornfreund et al., 2014; Kauerz and Coffman, 2013).

Just as we need aligned standards, Alabama educators deserve quality professional development. LETRS® and Read Right from the Start are examples of promising, evidence-based professional development programs that have the potential to move the needle on reading success in Alabama. LETRS® is a professional development course that bridges deep, meaningful research into practical classroom success. LETRS provides educators with the background, depth of knowledge, and tools to teach language and literacy skills to every student. LETRS can be used regardless of the literacy program or curriculum in use. The Rollins Center for Language & Literacy at The Atlanta Speech School developed Read Right from the Start—a comprehensive, effective professional development initiative focused on strengthening and enriching the language and literacy development of young children (birth to age 8). The Rollins Center's online Cox Campus now offers free, video-based courses and resources for early childhood educators, families, leaders, and community members. These courses are based on proven language and literacy practices that can immediately be used to make a difference in the lives of children.

With Governor Ivey's strong support for extending the First Class Pre-K (FCPK) principles and approaches into the K-3rd grade education system, the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education and the Alabama State Department of Education are working collaboratively to pilot the Pre-K- 3rd Grade Integrated Approach for Early Learning. The Pre-K – 3rd Grade Approach continues the developmentally appropriate practice of pre-k into the first few years of elementary school. This will help produce a seamless learning experience for children from age four through grade three. The three focus areas of this approach are: leadership, instruction, and assessment. Our committee recommends examining the effectiveness of this pilot with an eye for whether and how to expand the program to scale.

Investment

Children who do not read proficiently by the fourth grade are not likely to graduate from high school, and every student who does not complete high school costs our society an estimated \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes, and productivity (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). While the costs estimated below to help reverse our state's third grade reading costs are not insignificant, the cost of doing nothing is far higher.

At an average cost of \$4,000 per family our state would to invest approximately \$200 - \$300 million to expand Alabama's First Teacher Home Visiting Program to reach all low-income families that wish to participate. Cost-benefit analyses show that high quality home visiting programs offer returns on investment ranging from \$1.75 to \$5.70 for every dollar spent due to reduced costs of child protection, K-12 special education and grade retention, and criminal justice expenses (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019).

Alabama First Class Pre-K currently reaches just 32 percent of the state's four-year-olds with a total state investment of \$96 million. Estimates show that another \$100 million, added over the next four years, would fully fund this program to reach all four-year-olds whose families wish for them to enroll.

LETRS training costs approximately \$1,427 per teacher. The approximate total cost to train all Pre-K – 3rd grade teachers in LETRS is \$61.6 million.

More research is needed to explore the cost of expanding Read Right from the Start, through a combination of online courses and in person training and coaching, to reach all educators in our state serving children birth through five. This training is also beneficial to home visitors, health providers, parents and others working with young children. The Alabama Partnership for Children (APC) is currently leading a pilot project to create model Read Right from the Start classrooms in child care centers in four regions in the state. Teachers in the model classrooms are receiving intensive coaching on Read Right from the Start strategies and supplementing with online coursework. APC and the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education are also providing \$100 incentives to child care providers and other early childhood professionals to take the free Read Right from the Start coursework on the online Cox Campus. The impact of both the coaching and online coursework is being evaluated by UAB.

The approximate cost of revising the early learning standards is \$500,000, and this is being covered by Alabama's federal Preschool Development Birth to Five Grant.

More research is needed to understand the cost of expanding the pilot Pre-K through 3rd Grade Integrated Approach, implementing the various child care quality improvements (to be decided), and parent engagement and awareness campaigns.

Risk Factors, Challenges, Obstacles

- The major challenge in implementing many of the recommendations in this report is funding. While state investments are a significant obstacle, we have a good model in Alabama First Class Pre-K for studying the cost of fully funding an evidence-based program, educating decisionmakers about the importance of investing, and gradually increasing investments in the program in a way that does not harm or pull from other important investment priorities.
- Another major challenge of our committee is explaining and promoting the critical role that early childhood plays in laying the foundation for reading readiness and success. To overcome this challenge, we propose that the Campaign for Grade Level Reading's public awareness and outreach efforts emphasize the importance of a child's first five years of life.
- Current leaders across state agencies have developed strong relationships and collaborations. However, if critical leaders of state agencies or other partner organizations change, this work could be put at risk. We recommend formal agreements making these partnerships permanent so that access for families to services is simplified, administrative burdens on local agencies are minimized, and children enjoy a smooth pathway of birth through third grade teaching and learning.

Accountability, Outcomes and Impact

1. By December 2019, have the Alabama Developmental Standards complete and aligned with birth through four standards and K-12 standards.
2. By December 2019, produce a set of state policy and investment priorities for improving Alabama's system of early childhood education and care to recommend to the Alabama Legislature, including but not limited to child care licensing, investment and research-based quality improvement initiatives (based on best practices from other states and within Alabama), investments in the expansion of Home Visiting and First Class Pre-K, and additional parent engagement and awareness initiatives.
3. By December 2020, participation in LETRS and Read Right from the Start is significantly increased
4. By December 2020, integrate birth through four initiatives into the state's existing Strategic Plan for Literacy (K-12). An intentional alignment of systems will lead to improved program quality while maintaining availability of services, expanding parental choice and knowledge about existing programs, and enhancing school readiness.

Sustainability

Sustainability of funding of these initiatives must be planned for, with an eye to future potential downturns in the economy and state revenue.

Course of Action

How this information be disseminated to support the Local Campaigns for Grade-Level Reading? Will one pagers, infographics, or other media be created to highlight strategies that support the work of this subcommittee?

Information about the standards, early childhood policy and investment priorities, LETRS and Read Right from the State professional development and the redesigned Strategic Plan for Literacy should be shared with the local campaigns in one pagers, infographics, presentations and other means, to be determined.

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Communications Committee

Communications Committee

Purpose of this Report:

This report describes actions taken and actions recommended to further the goals of the Communications Committee.

Primary Recommendations

1. To maintain steady progress and consistency of messaging the committee should be guided by a vision and mission for the committee:
 - i. Vision
Alabama's young readers, parents, teachers, and childcare providers understand, appreciate, and utilize Alabama's Campaign for Grade Level Reading to be sure all children are reading at grade level by the third grade.
 - ii. Mission
The Communications Committee for Alabama's Campaign for Grade Level reading shall develop a memorable and easily understandable brand for the campaign, develop a promotion plan for the campaign, support campaign engagement activities, and respond to requests from the media.

Strategies and Recommendations to Support the Mission and Vision

1. Brand — Primary
 - i. R.O.A.R. — Raising Outstanding Alabama Readers shall be the campaign's brand with Alabama's Campaign for Grade Level Reading displayed immediately below and part of the official brand.
2. Brand — Support Materials and Actions
 - i. ROARY the Happy Lion shall be the mascot of R.O.A.R.
 - ii. R.O.A.R. Champion Awards shall be given to parents, teachers, childcare providers, schools, cities, and other organizations supporting the campaign.
 - iii. R.O.A.R. Pride Awards shall be given to young readers to encourage them to participate and work hard to achieve.
 - Alabama Public Television will produce on-air and online spots to recognize young readers and the various Prides that are achieving goals.
 - iv. Prides shall be the title given to various subdivisions of the State of Alabama that are participating in the campaign.
 - The Pride of Tuscaloosa,
 - The Pride of Birmingham,
 - The Pride of Albertville,
 - Etc., Etc., Etc.,
 - v. Digital Files shall be provided by Alabama Public Television for the State Level and Pride Level campaigns to use for print and digital needs as the Prides are able to create campaign support materials.
 - Primary R.O.A.R. logo digital files will be provided
 - Digital Files for use on R.O.A.R. stationary or business cards shall be provided
 - Digital Files to produce Champion and Pride achievement awards shall be provided.
 - Digital Files to utilize the R.O.A.R. logo on t-shirts and other items shall be provide.

Public Service Announcements and other Special Programming

1. PSAs - Alabama Public Television shall create Television and Radio Public Service Announcements about R.O.A.R. at no charge.
 - Governor Ivey will be featured in one of the spots where she will be reading to children.
 - Children will be featured reading and talking about reading books.
 - i. Funding - It is recommended that state funding be provided to purchase commercial television time for R.O.A.R. Public Service Announcements as part of the Alabama Broadcasters Association's PEP Television and Radio spot program.
 - Recommendation: enter a year-long PEP contract with the Alabama Broadcasters Association:
 - PEP Cost: \$100,000 — Guaranteed Value of Spots \$400,000 ■ Note: This is the level that the Bicentennial Commission has utilized per-year in support of the Alabama Legacy Moments ● The Alabama Broadcasters Association will present quarterly reports to the campaign stating the value received. It has been my experience that the actual value often exceeds the guaranteed value.
 - It is important to know that PEP spots actually run on commercial Television and Radio stations when standard PSAs are often not run at all or run in very late-night programming.
 - ii. Alabama Public Television is a non-commercial licensed broadcaster and does not participate in the commercial television PEP program; however, ● Alabama Public Television will run the spots on our primary and secondary channels throughout the day with special emphasis on our children's educational programming.
 - iii. Alabama Public Television shall produce special programming and will include regular updates and interviews with campaign experts in APT's quarterly Spotlight on Education program and on APT's Capitol Journal program. The campaign experts can inform the public and teachers about any and all aspects of the campaign.
 - iv. Alabama Public Television's Education Division shall develop regular notifications to its vast network of educators across the state to routinely inform them of campaign activities and opportunities.
 - v. Alabama Public Television's Digital and Social Media Assets shall be utilized to support the efforts of the campaign and the Communications Committee will seek other campaign partners to do the same.
2. Media/News Relations
 - i. The Communications Committee shall work with the Governor's Communications Office to develop an initial media statement detailing the campaign.
 - ii. The Communications Committee shall develop media press kits and campaign update kits that can be personalized for each Pride to utilize with their local media outlets.
 - iii. Local Prides will be encouraged to utilize the R.O.A.R. materials to notify their local print, broadcast, and on-line media of events and accomplishments in their area. This should provide opportunities for unearned media as news outlets utilize the stories.
3. Special Note
 - i. It is important to note that as of the last full gathering of the leadership for Alabama's Campaign for Grade Level Reading, the originally listed members of the Communications Committee either transferred to other committees because that is where their expertise could be better utilized or did not attend the meeting.
 - ii. By default, Roy Clem took on the duties of the committee chair as he awaits recommendations from ACGLR Leadership for additional members to join the committee.
 - iii. Mike McKenzie the Director of Public Affairs for Alabama Public Television agreed to join the communications committee.
 - iv. Randy Johnson, the Creative Director for Alabama Public Television agreed to join the committee and created the visuals for the R.O.A.R. logo.

Family and Student Engagement Committee

FAMILY AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Strengthening Family and Student Engagement in Support of Grade Level Reading

Purpose of attached report:

The purpose of this report is to identify strategies for supporting Family and Student Engagement and make recommendations about development of those strategies as well as dissemination and implementation of existing strategies.

Actions required of the AGLR:

1. Disseminate information identified or created as a part of this committee's work, including resources available through: i) Alabama Partnership for Children's (APC's) Early Language and Literacy Program, ii) Alabama Public Television (APT), iii) information on family access to resources such as Alabama Food Banks, Family Resource Centers and strategies and organizations addressing barriers to school attendance, including the Helping Families Initiative and Early Warning, iv) disseminate updated Alabama State Department of Education Action Plan for Literacy, once it is complete.
2. Work with stake-holders to determine if the program "ReadyRosie" is a Family Engagement Tool which might be appropriate for use in Alabama. This program is video based and encourages parent and child learning interactions. The program spans early childhood learning through elementary school. Two primary considerations in determining whether this program is a fit for Alabama are cost and standards alignment. The APC Early Language and Literacy Program has video-based parent engagement resources. The video-based format of "ReadyRosie" may provide a familiar platform for family engagement as students transition into Kindergarten.
3. Focus on maintaining family and student engagement through the transition from early learning settings to elementary school. The P-3 initiative, currently led by the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education, in collaboration with the Alabama State Department of Education, is an excellent example of how strategies can be integrated to support student achievement from birth through age eight. Resources for helping children make the transition into elementary school are available on APC's recently updated website.
4. Maintain a repository for program and evaluation information all where stake-holders can post information on an ongoing basis.

Implications:

1. Information to be disseminated should be housed on an online platform for ease of access by stake holders.
2. A timeline should be developed for studying the "ReadyRosie" program. This should be done in conjunction with the roll-out of APC's Early Language and Literacy Program. There is a possibility of "ReadyRosie" serving as a bridge to maintain Family Engagement from early childhood into elementary school.

Purpose of this report:

The purpose of this report is to identify & strategies for supporting Family and Student Engagement and make recommendations about further development of those strategies or dissemination and implementation of existing strategies.

Families are the foundational support for learning. For the purposes of this report “Family Engagement” begins with parent (“parent” in this report refers to the child’s primary caregiver) and child interaction, from the earliest moments of a child’s life, and continues with parental involvement in a child’s learning throughout life. As a child grows older, Family Engagement includes parental interaction with a child’s teachers and with other professionals who help children to achieve optimal development.

“Student Engagement” begins with a child’s earliest moments of learning, and continues throughout life, guided first by parents, and then by teachers and others who help to create effective learning interactions, activities, and environments. Parents, teachers and other adults in a child’s life hold the keys to unlocking a child’s potential for the critical milestone of reading on grade level by third grade.

Recommendations:

It is evident from the work of ACGLR and this committee that there are many resources already available to facilitate family and student engagement for Alabama families. The recommendations identified by the committee are all opportunities to use and build on what is already available. Using and growing the resources currently available will provide continuity for families and students.

1. Stay abreast of the development of the APC online parenting guide, Handbook for Alabama Parents. This is a comprehensive guide which provides new parents with research-based information on parenting and information about state and local supports for families. Handbook will be available online and as an app. The online and app versions of the Handbook can be easily disseminated by ACGLR partners.
2. Disseminate information identified or created as a part of this committee’s work, including resources available through: i) APC’s Early Language and Literacy Program, ii) Alabama Public Television (APT) and, iii) information on family access to resources such as Alabama Food Banks, Family Resource Centers and strategies and organizations addressing barriers to school attendance, including the Helping Families Initiative and Early Warning, iv) disseminate updated Alabama State Department of Education Action Plan for Literacy, once it is complete.
3. Work with stake holders to evaluate the program “ReadyRosie” as a possible Family Engagement Tool. This program is video based and encourages parent and child learning interactions. The program spans early childhood learning through elementary school. Two primary considerations in determining whether this program is a fit for Alabama are cost and standards alignment.
4. Focus on maintaining family and student engagement through the transition from early learning settings to elementary school. The P-3 initiative currently led by the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education, in collaboration with the Alabama State Department of Education should be an excellent example of how strategies can be integrated to support student achievement from birth to age eight. Resources for helping children make the transition into elementary school are available on APC’s recently updated website.

Background:

Eight different but interconnected areas of work were assigned to this committee:

1. Develop a Parenting Kit: The Alabama Partnership for Children produces a Parenting Kit filled with information and supplies. The kit is delivered to new parents at several birthing hospitals across the state and via several community-based organizations. Availability of the kit depends upon funding in local communities. The core component of the Parenting Kit is the Handbook for Alabama Parents, which provides evidence-based information on parenting and information on how to connect with services in

Alabama. The resources identified in the handbook cover many domains of parenting, including, but not limited to, nurturing, child brain development, safety, health and mental health.

Alabama Partnership for Children has recently updated the Handbook for Alabama Parents, making it available through the APC website. The Handbook will also soon be available as an App for parents to use.

2. Develop literacy plans for families: Early childhood teachers, elementary school teachers and community-based organizations provide a variety of resources to support literacy in the home. Specifically, many programs include family engagement materials to go along with child learning. For instance, Alabama Public Television (APT) provides a wealth of resources through PBS kids. These are rich **interactive** resources which provide opportunities for families to engage in learning together. Please see the American Academy of Pediatrics Recommendations for Children's Media Use (aap.org).

Some strategies that families can use to support early literacy are: i) have a special place for books that is easily accessible and model how to organize and use books, ii) engage in family storytelling, iii) write notes to family and friends, and iv) use the library as a family (www.viv.getreadytoread.org).

Where feasible, resources already aligned with curricula used in early learning classrooms, pre-k classrooms and elementary schools should be used to foster family literacy. For instance, the Sondag System, by Winsor Learning, is currently being piloted in elementary schools in Alabama. The Sondag System incorporates family engagement through take home learning activities, but there are additional materials, including Family Readers, which can be purchased along with the Sondag System. Consider checking the feasibility of purchasing these take home books to promote family engagement and strengthen the home/school connection.

Classroom teachers are powerful influencers in developing family literacy habits for the students they teach. Examples of strategies from one Alabama 3rd grade teacher, in her own words, are:

- Family Reading Nights where students and their families come to the school to learn about different reading strategies to take home for practice with their own children. Teachers only have so much time during the day to teach certain skills, so any extra help that students can get at home from their parents/guardians is a wonderful idea to assure success in learning.
- Classroom Teachable booklets are wonderful to create with students on certain skills to be able to take home as a study guide. For example; Different Genres flip book to show the different types of books along with an explanation of what each genre is to help reinforce reading skills being taught in the classroom. Booklets and journals can be used in all subjects. I have seen how beneficial this has been to my students.
- Goal Setting Charts are used with my students each year to show their improvement over the year in all subjects. I use goal setting charts that my students create, and they complete them on their own, and then they share them with their parents, so that their parents can see their progress. We have STAR reading goal charts, State Testing goal charts, AR goal charts. This gives my students accountability for their learning. These charts also help families and teachers see what areas need extra attention in learning.
- Reading Open House is a great event to showcase new curriculum that will be taught during a given year. For example; we adopted the Reading Horizons phonics curriculum, and parents came to learn all about what their children would be learning with this new phonics program. They learned the markings and most common words, so that they could better help their children at home with study time. This important to do, so that parents and other family members along with their children can ask questions to have a better understanding.
- Literacy Folders/Bags are used with students who need a little extra literacy practice on certain reading skills. My students choose either a reading story folder or a reading bag to take home and work with their family. My students love taking the folders/bags home, because they get really excited about teaching their parents and other family members what they are learning in reading.

Additional examples of strategies promoting family literacy include:

- An APT Two-Generation STEM Learning (With WGBH in Boston). For this project, APT staff members worked with parents and young children participating in parenting classes as part of the HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters) program associated with SAFE (Sylacauga Alliance for Family Enhancement, other family education and adult education programs. Parents, children, and educators viewed Ruff Ruffman STEM videos and then completed hands-on activities.
 - Also, APT is providing 5 little libraries to be placed in locations in each community. These libraries will be regularly stocked with books that support the development of early literacy and learning in these communities. APT will continue to work with teachers, families and children involved in Head Start, First Class Pre-Ks, and after school programs located at Carbon Hill Jr High and Oakman Middle Schools until Fall 2020.
3. Help quantify and define student engagement: There are several formal definitions of “student engagement” which, for purposes of this report are summarized as “students enjoy learning and feel motivated to behave in ways that help them to learn more.” Student engagement increases when it is nurtured by the child’s family, community, and school. Specifically, family literacy activities nurture student engagement in a powerful way, helping children to feel the joy of learning with the people who love them most. Everyone can play a role in nurturing student engagement during their everyday interactions with children.
 4. Create a plan to support adult education efforts: The Alabama Literacy Alliance provides a network of resources to support adult literacy. Specifically, the Learn to Earn toolkit, provides resources for both adult learners and instructors to improve adult literacy and learning for the workforce. The toolkit is available at learntoearn toolkit.org. The Alabama Community College System supports Adult Education Providers at 25 sites across Alabama. A listing of sites, with contact information, can be found at www.accs.edu under the Adult Education tab. Parents sometimes receive help with adult education while they are receiving support to help their child learn. This is often called a 2-generation or multigeneration model, because the whole family is receiving services to support learning. The 2-generation model is used by many organizations including Family Resource Centers, Career Centers, and multi-agency hubs, funded by the Women’s Fund of Birmingham.

There is a great deal of work being done in the state to support adult learning and work readiness. The Alabama Works Success Plus Report (www.alabamaworks.com/successplus/) describes the state plan and goals for developing an educated workforce.

5. Support best practices guide for home visiting: Alabama is fortunate to have strong Home Visiting work funded through two state agencies, the Department of Early Childhood Education and the Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention. The Home Visiting models funded through these state organizations are very structured, making them likely to be implemented with a high degree of fidelity. The models most widely used in Alabama are Parents as Teachers, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) and Nurse-Family Partnership. In addition to the structure provided by the chosen Home Visiting models, competencies needed for effective Home Visitors are identified in Alabama First Teacher Competencies (Turner-Henson, UAB). Please see Appendix A.

The committee identified an online platform called Canva. This is a free, simple to use publishing tool, which is a possible tool for create a Home Visiting Guide. More information about Canva is available at www.canva.com.

6. Create a menu of best practices for LEAs to reduce chronic absenteeism: Attendance Works provides free toolkits for reducing absenteeism. Attendance Works strategies focus on tools for data sharing and tracking, tools to empower Principals, and tools to address absenteeism in pre-school and through kindergarten transition. These resources are available at www.attendanceworks.org.

Additionally, providing interventions for students and families with chronic absenteeism can help to identify and reduce barriers to attendance. There is a broad array of interventions available through schools and community-based organizations. Often attendance issues can be addressed through the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) process used by Alabama public schools. (www.PBIS.org). Additional information about the 3-tier system of interventions used to prevent and intervene in chronic absenteeism can be found at alsde.edu. Specific programs which have been effective in Alabama are The Helping Family Initiative and Early Warning.

7. Develop recommendations for reducing chronic teacher absenteeism-
 - The McRel International North Central Comprehensive Center (nccc.mcrel.org) conducted a literature review regarding student and teacher absenteeism. The findings regarding teacher absenteeism focused on three broad areas: i) Incentives, 2) Policy and iii) Work Environment, Stress, and Health.
 - Incentives can be effective, showing teachers that their time and efforts are valued. Some schools in Alabama have had success with providing attendance bonuses. However, not all schools can afford to do this.
 - Policy at the school level, the district level and the state level can all impact teacher attendance. Data driven assessment of teacher absenteeism can provide much needed information regarding policy needs. Among the policy recommendations in the McRel literature review is a recommendation to allow teachers to carry over unused sick days as means of eliminating a “use it or lose it” mentality.
 - Work environment and teacher stress level and health all have an impact on teacher attendance. Key takeaways include: Invest in educators’ physical and emotional wellness and encourage positive and supportive professional relationships.
8. Develop relationships with external stakeholders: Numerous external stakeholders came to the attention of this committee. These stakeholders bring many flexible resources to address barriers to third grade reading level attainment. Examples of stakeholders and the services they provide include:
 - i. Alabama Food Bank-This organization reduces food insecurity for children and families by making nutritious food available for children and families through a variety of community-banks. When children are hungry, it is very difficult for them to be engaged learners.
 - ii. Helping Families Initiative-This program works with families whose children are missing school on a regular basis. Once absenteeism is identified, the County District Attorney sends a letter to the family reminding them that school attendance is compulsory and legal consequences could occur if the child continues to miss school. If there are additional absences, the family receives individualized services to help address barriers to attendance.
 - iii. Family Resource Centers-FRCs provide a wide variety of support services to families to address family needs. Families with children of all ages can receive services to support child and family learning.
 - iv. APT-Alabama Public Television offers a wide variety of programs and materials to support family and student engagement. An annotated bibliography will be provided for articles examining the impact of PBS kids programming and resources.
 - v. Alabama Cooperative Extension System-offers the Parent-Child Reading Enhancement program. (Please see brochure in Appendix B)

This committee’s work will support a repository for resource links and one-page summaries from external stakeholders describing their services which support the goal of students reading on grade level by Yd grade.

Key Issues:

Due to the nature of this committee’s assignments, there are no key issues which require an argument for specific proposed actions.

Cost-Benefit:

There will be possible costs associated with purchase of additional family engagement resources to support home learning activities tied to classroom learning. However, by weaving classroom and home learning experiences together, students and families will have the opportunity to engage at a deeper level.

Risk Factors, Challenges, Obstacles:

The obstacles associated with achieving family and student engagement can be addressed through family support services, collaborative work to disrupt the cycle of poverty, working to meet the needs of special populations and collaborating across systems to address challenges as they occur.

New resources to support inclusion are in development through the Health Opportunity and Equity (HOPE) Initiative, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

While likely addressed by other committees, it is worth noting that this committee discussed post-partum depression as a particular concern for families. This leads to the need to effectively address Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) through family supports such as the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework, led by the Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention and APC.

First 5 Alabama @ Alabama Association for Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health is another example of collaborative work between state level partners working to help families address challenges (first5alabama.org). The founding partners of First 5 Alabama @ are:

- Alabama Partnership for Children (smartstartalabama.org)
- Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention (ctf.alabama.gov)
- Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education (children.alabama.gov)
- Alabama State Department of Education (alsde.edu)
- Alabama Department of Human Resources (dhr.state.al.us)
- Alabama Department of Mental Health (<https://mh.alabama.gov>)
- Alabama Department of Public Health (<https://alabamapublichealth.gov>)
- Alabama Department of Rehabilitative Services-Early Intervention (www.rehab.alabama.gov/individuals-and-families/early-intervention)

Accountability, Outcomes and Impact:

The primary goal of this work is to facilitate information sharing about effective strategies and programs within the 8 target areas addressed by the committee.

Sustainability:

There are two recommendations for exploring the feasibility of purchasing/using new family engagement resources: ReadyRosie and Sondag System family readers. If either or both of these options are chosen, a funding plan will need to be developed.

Course of Action:

This committee will develop an annotated bibliography will be to highlight positive public media resources supporting early literacy.

This committee will support the identification and maintenance of a repository for resources. These resources will include one-page program summaries from external stakeholders describing the work they do to help students achieve grade level reading by third grade.

Health, Wellness & Poverty Reduction Committee

The Crucial Role of Good Health in School Success in Alabama

Purpose of this report

This report is the result of a five-month process to prioritize and address health determinants as a crucial and integral part of Alabama's plan for school success as defined by all children reading at grade-level by the third grade, and to address three of the five Alabama Campaign for Grade-Level Reading (ACGLR) pillars—reducing chronic absenteeism, addressing school readiness and ending childhood poverty. The committee's goal was to develop a plan for sustainable wellness and prevention practices and resources for families and young children living in rural and underserved communities in Alabama, with emphasis on: Adverse Child Experiences (ACE), including mental health issues, nutrition and physical activity, asthma, vision and hearing, and reduction of chronic absenteeism. Through this process and this report, we urge the ACGLR and the Governor to take this opportunity to fully understand the inextricable link between health and education of our youngest citizens, and thereby take into account the need for removing silos between the education and healthcare provider communities that care for them. The pediatric medical home cares for more than 90 percent of Alabama's children from birth to five years of age – the same children who grow up in our state's educational system. It only makes sense that we must consider the whole child – their health and their education – for them to ultimately achieve success in school and read at grade-level, which are critical to their success as adults.

Background

Although not often seen as part of the education system, the health of students plays a critical role in cognitive development and academic achievement. To fully participate in their education and developmental opportunities, children need to be healthy. Children thrive when they develop good health habits, have access to medical and support services, and access to nutritious foods. This committee looked at numerous health issues that impact a child's school readiness and a young student's ability to learn and progress in reading and development, as well as factors that contribute to chronic absenteeism, which is defined by the U.S. Department of Education (U.S.DOE) as missing 15 or more days over the course of a school year. The causes of chronic absenteeism fall into three categories:

1. Health-related reasons and family/housing instability (poverty/adverse childhood experiences);
2. Avoidance of bullying, unsafe conditions and harassment; and
3. Lack of knowledge or apathetic attitude toward school attendance.

If children are not in school, they cannot learn or achieve. Chronic absenteeism puts students at risk for poor school performance, which in turn, puts them at risk for unhealthy behaviors as adolescents and young adults as well as poor long-term health outcomes. Poverty and its resulting adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), the main contributors to chronic absenteeism, are the greatest predictors of lack of school success.

Supporting evidence and state-specific data, if known:

Chronic Absenteeism

A snapshot of absenteeism in Alabama is below:

- Each year in Alabama, there are greater than 13 million school absences.
- In most Alabama counties, the chronic absenteeism rate is 5 to 15 percent of the total public school population (U.S. Department of Education),

- Health-related contributors to school absence include: influenza infection, pharyngitis, gastroenteritis, poorly controlled asthma, Type 1 diabetes, chronic pain (headaches and stomach aches), poor oral health, and mental health conditions.
- In Alabama, the collection of data is variable by school system, and often does not include the reasons why children are chronically absent.
- School nurses (those school personnel who can have the greatest positive impact on a child's health while in school) play a significant but underutilized role in student success and attendance in Alabama. More often than not, school nurses do not have access to information on absences and reasons for absences.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

A growing body of research has made it increasingly apparent that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are a critical public health issue. ACEs is the term given to describe all types of abuse, neglect, and other traumatic experiences that occur to individuals under the age of 18. They can have negative, lasting effects on health and well-being in childhood or later in life.

- ACEs can disrupt brain development and limit social, emotional and cognitive functioning. Trauma changes the architecture of a developing child's brain and physiology and these changes impair academic efforts.
- Changes in a child's neurobiology often result in a student having difficulty in regulating his or her emotions and reading social cues, which, in turn, compromise their ability to pay attention, follow directions, work with teachers and make friends with other students.
- In Alabama, 48 percent of children have has at least one ACE and 27 percent have had at least two ACEs. (2016 National Survey of Children's Health)

Asthma

Children with asthma have difficulties controlling their breathing and may have repeated episodes of wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness and nighttime or early morning coughing. These episodes can be exacerbated by environmental triggers in their home or school.

- 11.5 percent of school-aged children have asthma in Alabama. (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2012)
- Poorly controlled asthma interferes with children's daily activities and education. When children have uncontrolled asthma, they are more likely to miss school and have difficulty making up work.
- One of the widely accepted methods of language development and literacy skill development is reading aloud. Children with uncontrolled asthma may have difficult controlling their breathing while reading aloud. However, the impact of asthma on reading comprehension has not yet been extensively studied beyond the effects of absenteeism.
- More than 95,000 school children in Alabama have respiratory issues, including asthma (Alabama State Department of Education School Nurse Reports).

Vision and Hearing

For a child to read on his or her current grade level, vision and hearing issues must be addressed. Vision and hearing issues affect other parts of life as well, including language development, learning, and communicating.

- State government funds vision screening for all public kindergarten, second grade, and fourth grade students in public schools.
- Those students identified as having vision needs are assisted in seeing that these needs are satisfied. Those without means for securing the needed attention or equipment are referred to Sight Savers, through which approximately 50,000 Alabama children receive resources to meet these needs each year.

- Based on a national survey, in 2017, approximately 46,710 individuals under 5 years of age had vision difficulty, representing .46 percent of children in that age group. This is compared to .30 percent in Alabama of that population in our state. https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5YR_B18103&prodType=table (Table B18103, Sex by Age by Vision Difficulty, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-year estimates).
- Based on a national survey, in 2017, approximately 101,389 individuals under 5 years old had hearing difficulty, representing .57 percent of those in that age group. This is compared to .42 percent in Alabama of that population in our state. https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5YR_B18102&prodType=table (Table B18102, Sex by Age by Hearing Difficulty, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-year estimates).
- Currently, all newborns in Alabama undergo a hearing screening through the collaboration of the Alabama Newborn Hearing Screening Program and the states' healthcare providers. If this screen is failed, children are referred for rescreening. In 2016, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 49,349 newborns in Alabama were screened for hearing difficulties, Per the Alabama Department of Public Health, approximately 2,000 newborns fail the initial newborn hearing screening at birth. Of those, on average, approximately 70 infants are confirmed with hearing loss each year. This does not include numbers of older infants and children who may be identified with delayed, late-onset, or progressive hearing loss. In 2018, the confirmed number of infants with hearing loss was 76.
- Children with hearing difficulties achieve on levels of one to four grades lower than their peers and/or achieve skills no higher than third or fourth grade (readingrockets.com). If difficulties are not identified early or not at all, reading achievement will not be possible.

Nutrition

Tufts University has shown a link between nutrition and cognitive development. Food Insecurity (FI) has also been associated with poor health and academic outcomes (Healthy People 2020). Children in underserved areas tend to have higher food insecurity, but if families are provided food assistance (SNAP, school lunch, etc.), they have a much lower food insecurity and identify as healthier.

- Children in FI households are 1.4 times more likely to have asthma.
- Children in FI households have 2.0-3.0 increased odds of having anemia (Gunderson, 2015). Anemia is known to cause difficulty in learning and cognitive development.
- 46 percent of children in Alabama receive some type of food assistance (Kids Count Data, 2015)
- School breakfast is linked to numerous health and educational benefits, including improved dietary intake, reduced food insecurity, better test scores and improved student health (Food Research and Action Center, 2019).
- For the 2017-2018 school year, Alabama ranked 17th in the country in terms of the number of students eligible for free and reduced foods who partake of school breakfast (96 percent)
- Only 81 percent of Alabama students who are eligible for free and reduced meals participated daily.
- Children who eat breakfast have a lower Body Mass Index.
- 15-20 percent of Alabama students do not eat breakfast.
- Barrier associated with school breakfast are timing of arrival, convenience and stigma associated with eating breakfast at school (Food Research and Action Center, 2019).
- The current rate of students receiving breakfast every day in Alabama is 59 for every 100 who eat school lunch. If that number was raised to 70 students per 100, it would bring an additional \$11,454,332 into the state. (Food Research and Action Center, 2019).

Summer Feeding:

When school is dismissed for the summer, millions of low-income children in the U.S. lose access to school breakfasts, lunches and after-school snacks and meals they receive during the regular school year. Summer Nutrition Programs help fill this gap by providing free meals and snacks to children who might otherwise go hungry.

- Many different organizations can and do serve as summer feeding sponsors and sites, including public/private non-profit schools, non-profit organizations, government units and non-profit universities.
- However, many counties have limited resources to provide summer feeding programs.
- Currently, Alabama reaches only 10 out of every 100 children who participate in the national school lunch program every summer.

Community Eligibility Programs:

These programs allows high-poverty schools and districts to offer breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students. Schools that use community eligibility have seen increases in participation in school breakfast and school lunch and reduced administrative costs as community eligibility schools no longer have to collect school meals applications.

- Currently, 457 of Alabama schools are eligible for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) --with a rate of 50 percent or higher free and reduced lunch enrollment--but only 297 of those schools have adopted CEP (Food Research and Action Center, 2019).

Physical Activity

- The benefits of physical activity on brain health occur immediately after a session of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (acute effect), such as reduced feelings of state anxiety (short-term anxiety), improved sleep, and improved aspects of cognitive function.
- Alabama code 16-40-1- (Administrative Code 290-3-2-02) requires daily physical education for all students in grades k-8.
- For grades 1-6, the law requires at least 30 minutes per day.
- The law allows no exemptions and no substitutes. However, schools are applying for and receiving waivers. Also, some schools are opting to teach physical education just two to three times a week (data unavailable on number of schools).

Key Issues

The key health issues raised in this report affecting children's ability to read are ACES, asthma, chronic absenteeism, nutrition, physical activity, and vision & hearing.

1. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Because ACEs can affect children's memory systems, their ability to think, organize priorities and learn, they need to be screened and assessed early and in partnership with local healthcare providers, schools and community partners.
2. Asthma: Lack of education on controlling asthma, incorrect use of medication, lack of healthy indoor school air quality and need for consistent school policies regarding inhalers can all contribute to chronic absenteeism for children with asthma.
3. Chronic Absenteeism: Absenteeism is a problem that must be addressed with a strong partnership between the underutilized school nurse, the health community, educators, parents and the community at large.

4. Nutrition: Well-nourished students have higher test scores and improved classroom behavior. School environments, including school meal programs, play an essential role in addressing the health of students.
5. Physical Activity: Fitness-based physical education (PE) programs improve test scores, reading scores, and reduce absenteeism. Although Alabama already has a law in place that requires students in grades K-6 to have at least 30 minutes of PE per day, school systems must hold each school accountable and remove the majority of waivers to this law that currently exist.
6. Vision & Hearing: Although Alabama babies and students in public schools are screened for vision and hearing loss, schools and communities must become more aware of and promote available resources for these children, particularly in health professional shortage areas and in the private school arena.

Recommendations, Accountability, Outcomes and Impact and Cost

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

RECOMMENDATION #1:

Increase education and parental/public understanding of the science of ACEs, their impact on health and well-being, and how to mitigate their effects

Goal:

Strengthen prevention and training efforts through multi-disciplinary approaches that allow a variety of educational, health, and social welfare groups to create community-based interventions at the local level, like the existing Troy Resilience Project.

Measurable Objectives:

- Increase Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect grant funding of statewide programs to increase training and lead prevention efforts, including Strengthening Families, in communities throughout the state.
- Conduct at least one training in each targeted ACGLR communities by 2022, to include school personnel, parents, and community leaders
- Develop and complete materials for community toolkit

Intended outcome:

Empower communities to create community-based interventions, e.g. the Troy Resilience Project.

Impact:

All Alabama communities are educated on the science of ACEs and have included considerations for addressing ACEs in their local school readiness/grade-level reading coalition efforts so that children of families with ACEs are supported and enter school ready to learn.

RECOMMENDATION #2:

Increase identification of children and families affected by ACEs in Alabama

Goal:

Promote identification and early intervention of ACEs through universal screening or assessment within early childhood and family-service systems and healthcare provider settings

Measurable Objectives:

- Increase Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect grant funding of statewide programs to increase training efforts on screening
- Implement presentation to Alabama health insurance payors on reimbursement for ACES screening

Intended outcome:

Empower providers who work with young children and their families to address ACES on the individual level

Impact:

All Alabama children affected by ACEs are identified so that they and their families are supported and they can improve their ability to learn in school.

TOTAL ACEs Projected Costs/Fiscal Note:

\$2 million per year

Asthma

RECOMMENDATION #1:

Provide school-based asthma education programs utilizing asthma certified educators to educate parents, teachers, coaches and school nurses on ways to better manage children's asthma symptoms and reduce school absences

Goal:

Reduce asthma triggers, improve asthma medication adherence, and reduce asthma incident reports in schools by improving education and awareness of children's caregivers and school staff

Measurable Objective:

- Increase the number of elementary school systems that conduct asthma education programs annually.

Intended Outcome/Impact:

The understanding of asthma management techniques by school staff and caregivers is increased through training opportunities.

Projected Cost/Fiscal Note:

\$20,000 to employ a .25 FTE asthma educator to provide staff and caregiver workshops/trainings in 10 elementary school systems annually.

RECOMMENDATION #2

The State of Alabama mandates that all school systems have an Indoor Air Quality management policy

Goal:

Reduce asthma triggers in schools

Measurable Objective:

- Reduce the number of asthma-related events in schools by 10 percent by reducing the asthma environmental triggers.

Intended Outcome/Impact:

Children learn in healthier school environments.

Projected Cost/Fiscal Note:

The CDC Asthma in Schools: National Asthma Control Program offers low-cost tools for making schools asthma-friendly. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) offers an EPA Indoor Air Quality Tool for Schools to address indoor air quality (IAQ). Costs will vary depending on IAQ issue.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Work with community healthcare providers, school nurses and school administrators to develop guideline-based medical management, including increased access and adherence to asthma medication and devices

Goal:

Improve asthma self-management and decrease asthma incidents in school

Measurable Objective:

- Create clear and consistent protocols and policies in 10 elementary schools on access and adherence to asthma medication and devices
- Educate parents/caregivers/coaches/school nurses and school administrators through PTA meetings, school communications, school athletic meetings and community healthcare provider offices at these schools so that they are all aware of the asthma policies

Intended outcome:

The incidence of asthma attacks will decrease due to clear protocols and policies on access and adherence to asthma medication and devices.

Projected Cost/Fiscal Note:

None

Chronic Absenteeism

RECOMMENDATION #1

Establish and support community coalitions to education on, evaluate and address chronic absenteeism and develop local solutions

Goal:

Conduct town forums, Chambers of Commerce education roundtables, children's policy councils etc. to encourage communication between local school personnel at the central office level (school nurse or superintendent), PTA representatives and community leaders to discuss patterns within their community and determine solutions that are appropriate for the needs of local families and students

Measurable Objectives:

- Increase the number of communities who use the Attendance Works toolkit parents and communities: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/for-principals-leading-attendance/creating-a-local-toolkit/>
- Use existing home visiting, Strengthening Families, parenting classes, and other means to promote the importance of school attendance

Intended Outcome:

Communities will be educated on the preponderance of chronic absenteeism in their local area and will be working together to address root causes and establish solutions.

Projected Costs/Fiscal Note:

\$50,000 per year per community for a local coordinator to drive the success of this initiative.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Educate the families of young children seen in primary care on the importance of school attendance

Goal:

Increase the number of pediatricians and family physicians who routinely address school absences during preventive care and sick visits

Measurable Objectives:

- Develop talking points (AL-AAP) for pediatricians, including asking families about chronic health issues and if they have an action plan at school
- Address chronic absenteeism in 2018-2019 AL-AAP school health collaborative
- Develop handouts for parents
- Expand use of the well-child visit early literacy promotion model, Reach Out and Read, to promote the importance of school attendance among parents and promote their engagement in the process of language and literacy development, which will lead to increases in school attendance

Intended Outcome:

Providers who work with young children and their families will be empowered to address chronic absenteeism on the individual level.

Projected Costs/Fiscal Note:

\$25,000 per year to purchase Reach Out and Read books for summer reading campaign/event around the importance of school attendance;

\$2,000 per year for promotional materials for use in primary care offices

RECOMMENDATION #3:

Support ALSDE's establishment of PowerSchool EMR in 2020 to track health reasons why a child is absent and support school nurses' ability and empowerment to use this data to effectively mitigate health reasons for chronic absenteeism in elementary schools

Goal:

Assure access to high-speed internet access in all Alabama counties so that schools will be able to log in to PowerSchools

Measurable Objective:

- Pass legislation to expand Broadband Access to all rural areas of Alabama

Goal:

Assure state/federal funding to establish and maintain PowerSchool EMR for the long-term

Measurable Objective:

- Maintain funding through the Education Trust Fund for PowerSchool EMR beyond 2020

Intended outcome:

All school nurses will have the data needed to determine reasons for chronic absenteeism among the school student population in Alabama.

Impact of All Three Recommendations:

Chronic absenteeism should increase if awareness is improved, communities are educated and school nurses have the data necessary to mitigate the health causes of absenteeism.

Projected Costs/Fiscal Note:

Annual costs of funding PowerSchools EMR and broadband internet in all counties.

Nutrition

RECOMMENDATION:

Provide access to healthy foods that provide nutrition for development and learning to all children in Alabama

Goals:

1. Reduce health disparities by providing all students with access to healthy breakfast, lunch and meals during summer breaks
2. Provide children with health education to empower them to make healthy choices to improve their health and nutrition

Measurable Objectives (see evidence/data section above for current data):

1. Continue to increase breakfast after the bell programs with the goal of serving 70 low-income students' breakfast for every 100 who eat school lunch.
2. Increase the number to 20 out of every 100 children who participate in summer feeding program (This would bring millions of federal dollars into the state.) (Food Research and Action Center, 2019).
3. Expand the CEP program to all eligible schools. The program is a win for everyone - administrators, students, families and school nutrition staff.
4. Increases by 20 percent the number of elementary schools in Alabama who adopt HEAL (Healthy Eating Active Living), which incorporates nutrition, physical activity and wellness.
(Background: 1) HEAL, Inc. will launch approximately 180 schools in 2019/2020. Increasing this number by 20 percent would put HEAL at 216, which allows for controlled growth; 2) Students participating in HEAL have been shown to significantly improve their dietary behaviors, reduce their sugar-sweetened fluid intake and increase physical activity over students in schools not participating in HEAL 3) HEAL provides a family education piece on healthful nutrition and being physically active via their monthly calendars that are sent home.)

Intended outcome:

The nutritional intake of Alabama's most vulnerable children is improved and they are ready to learn.

Impact:

By leveraging federal dollars and programs (e.g., school breakfast, school lunch, Community Eligibility programs,) and increasing existing state programs (e.g., HEAL, non-profits and communities to help with summer programs and community eligibility), Alabama will increase the overall health of Alabama's children.

Projected Costs/Fiscal Notes:**Breakfast**

- 1 FTE in the Child Nutrition Program to work with local and district child nutrition programs to increase services and assist with reporting. Food cost will be covered by USDA reimbursement.

Summer Feeding

- 1 FTE in the Child Nutrition Program to work with summer feeding sites to initiate summer programs convenient to underserved areas and to ensure USDA compliance and reporting
Note: Many different organizations can serve as summer feeding sponsors and sites, including private, non-profits schools, non-profit organizations, government units, community sites and non-profit universities.

Community Eligibility

- Sharing 1-2 FTE(s) from the breakfast and summer programs in the Child Nutrition Program to work with schools to apply for the Community Eligibility program. The state already partners with many non-profits and advocacy groups willing to help the state staff and expand this program

HEAL

- Costs are \$4,000-5,000/school (or \$24.00/student), which includes two teacher trainings/year, teacher manuals, student workbooks, family engagement (monthly calendar/education), heart rate monitors and classroom teaching tools. This equates to \$180,000 for 36 new schools. Currently, HEAL, Inc and 501 (c) 3 organizations raise money (individual donations, grants, foundations, Department of Education) to provide HEAL at no cost to schools, but providing it to the schools at no cost is dependent on funding.

Physical Activity

RECOMMENDATION:

Implement the US physical activity guidelines for all children in K-6 in Alabama

Goal:

Improve the health and learning ability (improvement in test and reading scores and reduce absenteeism) by implementing a fitness-based physical education (PE) program in all elementary schools

Measurable Objectives:

1. Provide 60 minutes of physical activity in all k-6 schools (30 minutes of PE and 30 minutes of recess/activity).
2. Reduce the number of waivers to schools that allow schools and/or students to opt out of PE

Note: State law only requires 30 minutes/day, but an example to increase activity is Brain Boosters, which are usually five to 10 minutes of movement in the classroom and have shown increases in attentiveness and learning.

Intended Outcome:

The health and well-being of Alabama's most vulnerable children is improved so that they are ready to learn to the fullest extent of their ability and grade level.

Impact:

By meeting the state standards and abiding by the state law, all children will receive fitness education for lifelong healthy behaviors.

Projected Costs/Fiscal Note:

No real costs as schools should already be doing this based on state law. However, funding for HEAL, Inc (see above) will provide teachers with training and materials to implement fitness-based physical activity.

Vision & Hearing

RECOMMENDATION #1:

Encourage parents to use health insurance benefits and/or community sources to have vision and hearing screenings performed and follow-up medical care conducted to correct and aid those children with difficulties

Goal:

Increase the number of screenings performed, which, in turn, will increase the number of children identified with difficulties

Measurable Objective:

- Increase in the number of reported number of screenings (measurable through claims data)

Intended Outcome:

Follow-up visits will increase.

Impact:

Parents will be assured that their children with vision and hearing difficulties are not feeling socially, emotionally, or educationally isolated or behind their peers.

RECOMMENDATION #2:

Encourage funding and the same requirement of hearing screenings as vision screenings among kindergarten, second-, and fourth-grade public school students.

Goal:

To increase the number of screenings performed, which, in turn, will increase the number of children identified with difficulties

Measurable Objectives:

- Increase the number of reported screenings
- Develop online hearing tests parents and/or providers can use to initially determine if there is a difficulty

Intended Outcome:

More children will be identified and services can start earlier for those children who are identified with vision and hearing difficulties.

Impact:

Children will be able to achieve more success in reading and school than without these early services.

RECOMMENDATION #3:

Encourage expansion of organizations, such as Sight Savers America, of screenings performed to include children in private school settings

Goal:

Increase the opportunities for vision and hearing screenings through qualified screening providers

Measurable objectives:

- Increase awareness of these organizations and their available services among the private school community

Intended Outcome:

More children will be identified and services can start earlier for those children who are identified with vision and hearing difficulties.

Impact:

Children will be able to achieve more success in reading and school than without these early services.

Projected Costs/Fiscal Note:

Any new services added to the Children's Health Insurance Program (ALL Kids) or Medicaid would require new funding and a clear path of funding.

Cost-Benefit

See projected costs/fiscal notes in each section of recommendations above, where known. Cost-benefit analysis cannot be performed without more data collection and knowledge of communities targeted.

Risk Factors, Challenges, Obstacles

Risks, challenges and obstacles include:

1. Lack of understanding, education and skills about the issues addressed in this report on the part of educators, school nurses and parents at the local level;
2. Silos that exist between agencies at the state level as well as the local level that result in a lack of coordination of necessary health-related services and programs;
3. Lack of understanding among the education community about the importance of health and wellness as indicators of school success;
4. Silos that exist between school nurses, physical educator coaches and educators within the same school systems;
5. Lack of state staff in order to support communities to implement these policies/changes at the community level; and
6. Current policies and laws that exist that are either not enforced or create barriers to the success of these recommendations

These issues can be mitigated by:

1. Resources for coordinated school health protocols and policies;
2. Resources for community education and awareness programs;
3. A top-down commitment to eliminating silos and unnecessary policies that continue to exist as barriers to success; and
4. Adequate funding at the state level for staff to support communities in carrying out and sustaining these initiatives

Sustainability

A sustained partnership between the Alabama State Department of Education, the Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect, the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education, the Alabama Department of Public Health, and the Alabama Department of Mental Health, as well as healthcare providers who see children, will be required for the continued success of this initiative, with adequate centralized staff support and funding to support local communities in achieving the outcomes associated with these recommendations.

Course of Action

This information is provided in an accompanying in-depth report and a statewide infographic. We recommend use of results- and data-driven infographics for local communities to access their data, along with practical and easy-to-use tools/resources to implement these health recommendations.

HEALTH WELLNESS AND POVERTY REDUCTION COMMITTEE

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Key Issues:

A growing body of research has made it increasingly apparent that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are a critical public health issue. ACEs is the term given to describe all types of abuse, neglect, and other traumatic experiences that occur to individuals under the age of 18. They can have negative, lasting effects on health and well-being in childhood or later in life. ACEs can disrupt brain development and limit social, emotional and cognitive functioning. Trauma changes the architecture of a developing child's brain and physiology and these changes impair academic efforts. They affect children's memory systems, their ability to think, to organize multiple priorities (executive function)—in other words their ability to learn. Furthermore, changes in a child's neurobiology often result in a student having difficulty in regulating his/her emotions and reading social cues, which in turn compromise their ability to pay attention, follow directions, work with teachers and make friends with other students. For educators, students who have experienced multiple adversities can be more difficult to engage consistently, require additional supports and often need more attention thus reducing instructional time for other students. With many students and their families experiencing adversity, schools can face challenges in addressing them without local partner services and supports from the larger community.

Evidence/Data:

There are nearly 30,000 child abuse and neglect reports annually in Alabama. Understanding how many children have experienced ACEs helps to determine what interventions or policy changes are needed. In Alabama, 48% of children have has at least one ACE and 27% have had at least two ACEs. (2016 National Survey of Children's Health)

Source: <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/prevalence-adverse-childhood-experiences-nationally-state-race-ethnicity>

Potential Interventions:

- Stable, nurturing relationships with caring adults can prevent or reverse the damaging effects of toxic stress. Parent engagement and mentoring programs are effective solutions.
- Parent education and home visiting programs have been shown to address some “changeable” parental risk factors associated with ACEs, such as inadequate parenting skills, attitudes about child rearing, and dysfunctional parenting habits.
- Increase education and public understanding of ACEs and their impact on health and well-being.
- Promote identification and early intervention of ACEs through universal screening or assessment within early childhood and family-service systems.
- Nutrition, exercise, and mindfulness practices are additional solutions to mitigating the effects of toxic stress.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION #1:

Increase education and parental/public understanding of the science of ACEs, their impact on health and well-being, and how to mitigate their effects

Goal:

Strengthen prevention and training efforts through multi-disciplinary approaches that allow a variety of educational, health, and social welfare groups to create community-based interventions at the local level, like the existing Troy Resilience Project.

Measurable Objectives:

- Increase Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect grant funding of statewide programs to increase training and lead prevention efforts, including Strengthening Families, in communities throughout the state.
- Conduct at least one training in each targeted ACGLR communities by 2022, to include school personnel, parents, and community leaders
- Develop and complete materials for community toolkit

Intended outcome:

Empower communities to create community-based interventions, e.g. the Troy Resilience Project.

Impact:

All Alabama communities are educated on the science of ACEs and have included considerations for addressing ACEs in their local school readiness/grade-level reading coalition efforts so that children of families with ACEs are supported and enter school ready to learn.

RECOMMENDATION #2:

Increase identification of children and families affected by ACEs in Alabama

Goal:

Promote identification and early intervention of ACEs through universal screening or assessment within early childhood and family-service systems and healthcare provider settings

Measurable Objectives:

- - Increase Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect grant funding of statewide programs to increase training efforts on screening
- - Implement presentation to Alabama health insurance payors on reimbursement for ACES screening

Intended outcome:

Empower providers who work with young children and their families to address ACES on the individual level

Impact:

All Alabama children affected by ACEs are identified so that they and their families are supported and they can improve their ability to learn in school.

TOTAL ACEs Projected Costs/Fiscal Note:

\$2 million per year

Best Practices/Resources that currently exist in Alabama

- Department of Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention's Resilience Film Screenings to educate communities about ACEs. View trailer here: <https://vimeo.com/137282528>

- Department of Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention's grants to implement community-based programs focused on ACEs education.
- Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework Training provided by the Alabama Partnership for Children, Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers, and the Department of Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention.
- ACEs Connection webpage and community tracker that shares ACES resources, as well as tracks all the presentations on ACEs occurring in the state: <https://www.acesconnection.com/g/first5alabama-aces-connection>
- Troy Resilience Project: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/TroyResilience/about/>

Asthma

Statement of Need:

11.5 percent of school-aged children have asthma in Alabama. (BRFSS 2012). Poorly controlled asthma interferes with children's daily activities and education. When children have uncontrolled asthma, they are more likely to miss school and have difficulty making up work.

Children with asthma have difficulties controlling their breathing and may have repeated episodes of wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness and nighttime or early morning coughing. These episodes can be exacerbated by environmental triggers in their home or school.

One of the widely accepted methods of language development and literacy skill development is reading aloud. Children with uncontrolled asthma may have difficult controlling their breathing while reading aloud. The impact of asthma on reading comprehensive has not yet been extensively studied beyond the effects of absenteeism. Lack of education on controlling asthma, incorrect use of medication, lack of healthy indoor school air quality and lack of bronchodilator school policy can all contribute to chronic absenteeism for children with asthma.

Existing Resources for Communities:

- Stock Bronchodilator Policy - American Lung Association has model policy for school districts to consider regarding self-carry and self-administer asthma medications. Protocols and procedures would need to compliment the policy.
- CDC Asthma in Schools: National Asthma Control Program - Tools for Making Your School Asthma-Friendly
- CDC Asthma in Schools: Initiating Change: Creating an Asthma-Friendly School – Toolkit to help advocates and community members understand how to present information at PTA meetings, school staff meetings, community groups etc. It includes PowerPoint slides that are customizable and video.
- American Lung Association has resources for creating coordinated school health policies addressing Asthma including Asthma Action Plans for all students with Asthma, establishing standard emergency protocols, district policies for educating all school personnel (especially physical educators and coaches) for community advocates, and informing parents of the quick relief medication laws for Alabama.
- EPA Indoor Air Quality Tool for Schools – how to control common Asthma triggers found in schools. Additional resources for children are available including Dusty the Asthma Goldfish.

- Provide school-based asthma education programs utilizing asthma educators to educate parents to better manage asthma symptoms and reduce school absences.
- Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America - Alabama report card on Asthma showing state policies that need to be addressed include:
 - State requiring that schools maintain an asthma incident report that includes reactions, attacks and medication administration
 - State policy mandates schools to identify and maintain records for students with chronic conditions including asthma
 - State has mandated that all schools must have Indoor Air Quality management policies.
 - State limits school bus idling time and establishes proximity restrictions.
 - State requires schools to notify parents of upcoming pesticide applications.

Best Practices for Communities

- EXHALE -
 - Educate parents and school staff on asthma self-management
 - X-tinguish smoking and secondhand smoke
 - Home visits for trigger reductions and asthma self-management and education
 - Achievement of guidelines-based medical management including increased access and adherence to asthma medication and devices,
 - Linkages through care coordination, environmental practices to reduce asthma triggers
 - Environmental practices to reduce asthma triggers
- Create an Asthma community network with parents, teachers, and health care providers to identify your community's asthma needs, resources, and barriers.
- Create an Asthma home visitation program in the community
- Identify and train asthma certified educators to work with the community and school systems

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION #1:

Provide school-based asthma education programs utilizing asthma certified educators to educate parents, teachers, coaches and school nurses on ways to better manage children's asthma symptoms and reduce school absences

Goal:

Reduce asthma triggers, improve asthma medication adherence, and reduce asthma incident reports in schools by improving education and awareness of children's caregivers and school staff

Measurable Objective:

- Increase the number of elementary school systems that conduct asthma education programs annually.

Intended Outcome/Impact:

The understanding of asthma management techniques by school staff and caregivers is increased through training opportunities.

Projected Cost/Fiscal Note:

\$20,000 to employ a .25 FTE asthma educator to provide staff and caregiver workshops/trainings in 10 elementary school systems annually.

RECOMMENDATION #2

The State of Alabama mandates that all school systems have an Indoor Air Quality management policy

Goal:

Reduce asthma triggers in schools

Measurable Objective:

- Reduce the number of asthma-related events in schools by 10 percent by reducing the asthma environmental triggers.

Intended Outcome/Impact:

Children learn in healthier school environments.

Projected Cost/Fiscal Note:

The CDC Asthma in Schools: National Asthma Control Program offers low-cost tools for making schools asthma-friendly. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) offers an EPA Indoor Air Quality Tool for Schools to address indoor air quality (IAQ). Costs will vary depending on IAQ issue.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Work with community healthcare providers, school nurses and school administrators to develop guideline-based medical management, including increased access and adherence to asthma medication and devices

Goal:

Improve asthma self-management and decrease asthma incidents in school

Measurable Objectives:

- Create clear and consistent protocols and policies in 10 elementary schools on access and adherence to asthma medication and devices
- Educate parents/caregivers/coaches/school nurses and school administrators through PTA meetings, school communications, school athletic meetings and community healthcare provider offices at these schools so that they are all aware of the asthma policies

Intended Outcome:

The incidence of asthma attacks will decrease due to clear protocols and policies on access and adherence to asthma medication and devices.

Projected Cost/Fiscal Note:

None

Chronic Absenteeism in Alabama

Key Issues:

With 13 million school absences in Alabama per year, absenteeism is a problem that must be addressed with a strong partnership between the health community, the education community, parents and the community at large. Nationally, the causes of chronic absenteeism (defined by the US Department of Education as missing 15 or more days over the course of a school year) fall into three categories: 1) health-related reasons and family/housing instability; 2) avoidance of bullying, unsafe conditions and harassment; and 3) lack of knowledge or apathetic attitude toward school attendance. Health-related contributors to school absence including: influenza infection, pharyngitis, gastroenteritis, poorly controlled asthma, Type 1 diabetes, chronic pain (headaches and stomach aches), poor oral health, obesity, often with accompanying mental health conditions. In Alabama, the collection of data is variable by school system, and more often than not, school nurses (those school personnel with who can have the greatest positive impact on a child's health while in school) do not have access to information on absences and reasons for absences. School nurses play a significant but underutilized role in student success and attendance in Alabama.

Evidence/Data:

- Based on U.S. Department of Education data, most Alabama counties see chronic absenteeism at a rate of 5 to 15 percent of the total public school population (2015-2016 school year) Searchable data map by county: <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/chronicabsenteeism.html#three>
- One county, Mobile County, which has an in-hospital school classroom for chronically ill children, has a chronic absenteeism rate of 4.2 percent for the total student population (2018-2019 first semester), and a lower rate (2.2 percent) for the elementary schools during that same time period. Of those, 38 percent were due to reported medical conditions and 51.6 percent were due to truancy (unexcused absences).
- “Present, Engaged, and Accounted For The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades,” Report, Hedy N. Chang, Mariajosé Romero, September 2008, National Center for Children in Poverty http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_837.pdf, pages 11-19
- <https://awareness.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/Research2016.pdf>: sampling of national articles on the subject
- “The Link Between School Attendance and Good Health” *Pediatrics*, Mandy A. Allison, MD, MSPH, FAAP, Elliott Attisha, DO, FAAP, February 2019, COUNCIL ON SCHOOL HEALTH, American Academy of Pediatrics <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/143/2/e20183648.full.pdf>
- “School Absenteeism in Children and Adolescents,” *American Family Physician*, Claudia W. Allen, PhD, JD; Sharon Diamond-Myrsten, MD, MS; and Lisa K. Robbins, PhD, University of Virginia School of Medicine, Charlottesville, Virginia, December 2018 <https://www.aafp.org/afp/2018/1215/p738.html>

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION #1:

Establish and support community coalitions to education on, evaluate and address chronic absenteeism and develop local solutions

Goal:

Conduct town forums, Chambers of Commerce education roundtables, children's policy councils etc. to encourage communication between local school personnel at the central office level (school nurse or superintendent), PTA representatives and community leaders to discuss patterns within their community and determine solutions that are appropriate for the needs of local families and students.

Objectives:

- Increase the number of communities who use the Attendance Works toolkit parents and communities: <https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/for-principals-leading-attendance/creating-a-local-toolkit/>
- Use existing home visiting, Strengthening Families, parenting classes, and other means to promote the importance of school attendance

RECOMMENDATION #2:

Educate the families of young children seen in primary care on the importance of school attendance

Goal:

Increase the number of pediatricians and family physicians who routinely address school absences during preventive care and sick visits

Objectives:

- Develop talking points (AL-AAP) for pediatricians, including asking families about chronic health issues, if they have an action plan at school,
- Address chronic absenteeism in 2018-2019 AL-AAP school health collaborative
- Develop handouts for parents
- Expand use of the well-child visit early literacy promotion model, Reach Out and Read, to promote the importance of school attendance among parents and promote their engagement in the process of language and literacy development, which will lead to increases in school attendance

RECOMMENDATION #3:

Support ALSDE's establishment of PowerSchool EMR in 2020 to track health reasons for why a child is absent and support school nurses' ability and empowerment to use this data to effectively mitigate health reasons for chronic absenteeism in elementary schools.

Goal:

Assure access to high-speed internet access in all Alabama counties so that schools will be able to log in to PowerSchools.

Objective:

- Support legislative efforts to expand Broadband Access to all rural areas of Alabama

Goal:

Assure state/federal funding to establish and maintain PowerSchool EMR for the long-term

Objective:

- Maintain funding through the Education Trust Fund for PowerSchool EMR beyond 2020

Additional Resources:

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/chronic-absence/success-stories/>

<https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/toolkits/for-principals-leading-attendance/creating-a-local-toolkit/>

Nutrition

Food Insecurity has been associated with poor health and academic outcomes (Healthy People 2020). Children in disadvantaged areas tend to have higher food insecurity, but if families are provided food assistance (SNAP, school lunch, etc.) they have a much lower food security.

- Children in FI households are 1.4 times more likely to have asthma
- Children in FI households have 2.0 – 3.0 increased odds of having anemia (Gunderson, 2015). Anemia is known to cause difficulty in learning
- Children who are FI have a higher rate of obesity, which many attributes to less healthy food choices and lack of regular meals (Kaur, 2015)
- 46 percent of children in Alabama receive some type of food assistance (Kids Count Data, 2015)

Child Nutrition Programs

School breakfast is linked to numerous health and educational benefits including improved dietary intake, reduced food insecurity, better test scores and improved student health (Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), 2019)

- For the 2017-2018 school year Alabama Ranked 17th in the county with the number of students eligible for free and reduced foods who partake of school breakfast (97 percent)
- Only 81 percent of Alabama students who are eligible for free and reduced meals participated daily.
- Children who eat breakfast have a lower BMI (EAT, Neumark-Sziennner, 2012)
- 15-20 percent of Alabama students do not eat breakfast (YRBS, 2016)
- Barrier associated with school breakfast are timing of arrival, convenience and stigma associated with eating breakfast at school (FRAC)
- Eating Breakfast, Including at School, Helps Improve Student Academic Performance and Behavior (<http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/breakfastforlearning-1.pdf>)
- Students who participate in school breakfast show improved attendance, behavior, and academic performance as well as decreased tardiness.
- Providing breakfast to students at school improves their concentration, alertness, comprehension, memory, and learning.
- Children who eat breakfast show improved cognitive function, attention, and memory.
- Consuming breakfast improves children's performance on mathematical tasks, vocabulary tests, demanding mental tasks, and reaction to frustration.
- Research showed that Universal Free Breakfast was more advantages for children who were from disadvantaged areas. (USDA)

Recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION #1:

Continue to increase breakfast after the bell programs with the goal of serving 70 low income students' breakfast for every 100 who eat school lunch

Current data:

The current rate of students receiving breakfast every day in Alabama is 59 for every 100 who eat school lunch. If that number was raised to 70 students per 100, it would bring an additional \$11,454,332 into the state. (FRAC)

Summer Feeding

When school lets out, millions of low-income children lose access to the school breakfasts, lunches and afterschool snacks and meals they receive during the regular school year. The Summer Nutrition Programs help fill this gap by providing free meals and snacks to children who might otherwise go hungry. Many different organizations can and do serve as summer feeding sponsors and sites, including public or private nonprofit schools, nonprofit organizations, government units or nonprofit universities.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Increase the number to 20 out of every 100 children that participate in summer feeding program (This would bring millions of federal dollars into the state. (FRAC)

Current data:

Currently Alabama reaches only 10 out of every 100 children who participate in the national school lunch program every summer.

Costs to State:

Potential staff time to recruit and oversee summer feeding sponsors and sites. Many groups are willing to host summer programs.

Community Eligibility

Community eligibility allows high-poverty schools and districts to offer breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students. Schools that use community eligibility have seen increases in participation in school breakfast and school lunch and reduced administrative costs as community eligibility schools no longer have to collect school meals applications.

- Currently 457 of Alabama school are eligible for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) – with a rate of 50 percent or higher free and reduced lunch enrollment – but only 297 of those schools have adopted CEP. (FRAC)

RECOMMENDATION #3

Expand of the CEP program to all eligible schools. The program is a win for everyone – administrators, students, families and school nutrition staff

Costs:

Staff time (from Child Nutrition, non-profits, community organizations) to work with schools to apply for CEP program, however the state already partners with many non-profits and advocacy groups willing to help the state staff expand this program.

Resources

- Food Insecurity by County – Alabama <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/8406-food-insecurity-total-population-and-children-under-18?loc=2&loct=5#detailed/5/119-184,7613/false/573,869,36,868,133/381,3497/17024,17025>
- Food Insecurity by County – Alabama <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/8406-food-insecurity-total-population-and-children-under-18?loc=2&loct=5#detailed/5/119-184,7613/false/573,869,36,868,133/381,3497/17024,17025>
- SNAP or Food Assistance – 0-17 Years of Age <http://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=5578&r=2>
- USDA.gov- universal free breakfast research

Healthy Nutritional Intakes

Well-nourished students have higher test scores & improved classroom behavior. School environments—including school meal programs—play an essential role in addressing the health of students.

(Healthyschoolcampaign.org, 2017)

- Underserved communities are particularly affected by lack of access to healthy foods
- Only 10.2 percent of students meet recommendations of milk/dairy each day (3 is the recommendations) (YRBS, 2016)
- 12.2 percent of youth did not eat any vegetables and only 14.8 percent ate the recommended amounts
- Only 22.4 percent ate fruit or drank fruit juice at recommended amounts (2.5 servings/d) (YRBS)
- Intake of one soda per day in youth increased from 22.3% in 2014 to 26.6% in 2015 (YRBS)
- Implementing strategies that help students stay healthy through eating healthy foods and being physically active can result in decreased rates of student absenteeism, fewer behavioral problems, and higher school-wide test scores and grades (CDC, 2018)
- Evidence supports a relationship between healthy eating habits, physical activity and academic performance. (Mckenzie, 1999)
- School based intervention programs that combine nutrition, physical activity and address behavior change show improved health behaviors and increased sustainability (Gonzalez-Suarez (2009)

RECOMMENDATION #4:

Increase by 20 percent the number of elementary schools in Alabama who adopt HEAL (Healthy Eating Active Living). HEAL will launch approximately 180 schools in 2019/2020. Twenty percent would put us at 216. This would be a good increase with controlled growth.

Current data:

- HEAL research has shown that students participating in HEAL significantly improve their dietary behaviors, reduce their sugar sweetened fluid intake and increase physical activity over students in schools not participating in HEAL.
- The HEAL curricula is credited by the Alabama State Departments of Education and Public Health for helping schools satisfy multiple wellness components with one curriculum. HEAL education components include nutrition, physical activity, sleep, disease prevention, self-worth, respect and care for others, and reading aloud. HEAL also provides methods and materials to engage family members. State supported professional development trainings are provided by HEAL to further support healthy lifestyle behaviors for school teachers, faculty, and staff. HEAL educates and motivates students and adults to make healthy eating choices. HEAL promotes beginning each day with a healthy breakfast
- The HEAL Family Education component (monthly newsletters and “Home Play” family activities) informs and motivates family members to support one another by leading caregivers to provide healthy meals, participate in physical activities, and establish nurturing family time reading and eating together. HEAL family component also offers solutions and motivation for engaging in physical activity and provides awareness of supportive resources. (SEE MORE ABOUT HEAL Physical Activity below)

Costs:

The HEAL program costs approximately \$4,000- \$5,000 per school and /or approximately \$24.00 per student. The HEAL program is given to schools at no cost and the funding is raised by HEAL Inc. through multiple sources including individual donations, grants, foundations, and the Alabama State Department of Education. HEAL Inc. is a nonprofit, 501 © 3, tax deductible organization.

References/resources

Hart, KD. An evaluation of the Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Alabama program for the prevention of childhood obesity among 5th grad students. UMI Dissertation Publishing. ProQuest, LLC, Ann Arbor, MI. 2014.

McKenzie TL, Ston EJ, Feldman HA, EPPING JN, Yan M, Strikmiller PK. Effects of the CATCH physical education intervention.. American Journal of Preventive Medicine. 1999; 21(2): 101-109.

Gonzalez-Suarez C, Worley A, Grimmer-Somers K, Dones V. School based intervention on childhood obesity: a meta-analysis. Am J. Prev Med. 2009;37 (5), 418-427

www.cdc.gov focus on comprehensive school health

School gardens

- Most recent data show more than 50 schools in Alabama have school gardens, but 33% of school districts participate in a farm-to-school program where they buy locally grown foods.
- Increase in healthy foods improve students' health and ability to learn.
- Students and families can work gardens as part of science class.
- Child Nutrition Programs can utilize the produce.
- During summer growing, if families work the garden, they can take produce home. (note: one school child nutrition director works the garden in the summer and freezes vegetables for use during the school year)
- Numerous grants available to schools to begin a garden.

RECOMMENDATION #5:

Increase number of school gardens by 20 percent

Data:

Most recent data shows more than 50 schools in Alabama have school gardens,

Costs:

schools provide an area for the garden (usually on school grounds), water from school, and cost of seeds and top soil. Most school gardens in rural areas have support from the community.

Resources

- MyPlate.gov
- Team Nutrition <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/about-team-nutrition>
- <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-gardening>
- http://m.alfafarmers.org/stories/publications/magazines/publications_neighbors/march-spring-2014-neighbors/where-does-your-garden-grow-at-school
- http://alfafarmers.org/uploads/files/Garden_Grants_Updated_Nov_17.pdf – state grants for school gardens
- <https://farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/find-your-school-district/alabama>

Physical Activity

Fitness-based physical education programs improve test and reading scores, and reduce absenteeism (John Ratey-SPARK).

- Alabama code 16-40-1- (Administrative Code 290-3-2-02) Requires daily physical education for all student in grades k-8.
- For grades 1-6 the law requires at least 30 minutes per day.
- The law allows no exemptions and no substitutes. However, we know schools are applying for and receiving waivers. We also know schools are opting to teach physical education just 2-3 times a week. (data unavailable on number of schools).
- The benefits of physical activity on brain health occur immediately after a session of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (acute effect), such as reduced feelings of state anxiety (short-term anxiety), improved sleep, and improved aspects of cognitive function.
- Children need 60 minutes of physical activity on most days (US Physical Activity Guidelines 2019).

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION #1:

All k-6 schools provide 60 minutes of physical activity in schools (30 minutes of PE and 30 minutes of recess/ activity).

For Example Brain Boosters should occur every hour that a student does not have recess or physical education. (Brain boosters are usually 5-10 minutes of movement and have shown increases in attentiveness and learning. Can be done in the classroom or as part of recess or before school.

Costs:

None except educating teachers and providing them with ideas

RECOMMENDATION #2:

No waivers or exemptions for required daily physical education.

Costs:

Nothing. Schools should already be doing this based on current Alabama law.

Additional Data:

1. Since schools struggle with maximizing on the time allotted for PE, we recommend implementing the HEAL curriculum. HEAL provides health focused and active PE programming with heart rate monitoring which surpasses state standards for physical education. HEAL recommends brain break activities throughout the day, active recess, and afterschool physical activities. HEAL has the power to energize full school potential.
2. HEAL trains teachers to provide fitness-based physical education and motivation. HEAL equips teachers with state-of-the-art methods and materials including heart rate technology which supports total inclusion and empowers teachers to ensure every student has a meaningful experience. Teachers and students' efforts are rewarded with significant measurable outcomes and testimonies. HEAL provides lesson plans that are teacher friendly. Teachers can follow HEAL lessons on a daily basis and can integrate HEAL with existing lesson plans.

COSTS:

As described above under “Nutrition Recommendations,” HEAL supports the whole child and addresses all imperative needs for children to enjoy good health and academic success. The HEAL program costs approximately \$4,000- \$5,000 per school and /or approximately \$24.00 per student. The program is given to schools at no cost. HEAL is a non-profit 501C3 organization. HEAL raises funding to provide HEAL at no cost to schools through multiple sources including individual donations, grants, foundations and the Alabama State Department of Education.

Resources

The CDC document on physical activity and academic performance-page https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/health-academic-achievement.pdf

Robert Wood Johnson

https://activelivingresearch.org/sites/activelivingresearch.org/files/ALR_Brief_ActiveEducation_Jan2015.pdf

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; supports the benefits of 60 minutes of physical activity for children ages 6-13, “is improved cognition (performance on academic achievement tests, executive function, processing speed and memory.”

Hearing & Vision

Vision in Alabama

Statement of Need

Vision disorders, which can occur at any age, are the most prevalent and treatable condition for children in the U.S.; as many as one in five children have a vision problem (Kemper, et, al, 2004). Eighty percent of what a child learns is processed visually, therefore, good vision is vital to a child’s social and academic development (Ferebee, 2004). Identification of vision problems is paramount as poor vision can affect performance in reading, writing and concentration. For some diseases and conditions, such as amblyopia, early intervention and treatment is vital or vision can be permanently lost in the affected eye. Addressing vision problems at an early age can help a child’s reading scores increase and their classroom performance improve, resulting in a better overall quality of life.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that untreated vision problems may affect a child’s cognitive, emotional and physical development, which can lead to delinquent behavior. Up to 70 percent of juvenile offenders in the U.S. have an undiagnosed vision problem (Barber, 2002). Furthermore, the academic impact for children with uncorrected vision problems is significant. A study on school-aged children in Kentucky found that up to 80 percent of children with reading disabilities have visual deficits (Kemper, Fant & Badgett, 2003). The most common vision disorders in children are refractive errors (hyperopia, myopia and astigmatism). Fortunately, these conditions can be corrected in most cases with a comprehensive eye exam and the appropriate treatment.

Community Funding for Vision Screening and Case Managed Follow-Up Eye Care in Alabama

Throughout Alabama, most children in Head Start Centers, day cares, and preschools in every county in Alabama are vision screened by Impact America’s Focus First Program. This covers children from birth until the age of 5. Every child failing this vision screening is referred to Sight Savers America, an Alabama-based nonprofit organization, for case-managed follow-up eye care services.

State Funding for Vision Screening and Case Managed Follow-Up Eye Care in Alabama:

The Alabama State Legislature appropriates funding for every kindergarten, second-grade, and fourth-grade public school student in Alabama to receive a vision screening each year and for each child failing the vision screening to receive case-managed follow-up eye care.

This vision screening is conducted by Vision Research Corporation, which screens approximately 160,000 Alabama K/2/4 students each year. Approximately 25,000 of these children fail the vision screening each year and are referred to Sight Savers America. This program ensures that our children have reoccurring eye care throughout their elementary school-aged years in order to have their best vision possible.

The Alabama State Legislature also appropriates funding for additional vision screenings and case-managed follow-up eye care for children in Alabama's Black Belt. In the Black Belt, sixth grade public school children as well as children in Head Start programs, day care facilities, and preschools are vision-screened. Those failing the vision screenings are referred to Sight Savers America for follow-up eye care services.

The Benefits of Sight Savers America's Eye Care Case Management:

Sight Savers America is the national eye care model for children's case-managed follow-up eye care. Each child referred is assigned a case specialist to manage his/her eye care needs from start to finish. Parents are informed of the screening results and educated about the importance of recurrent eye care. Case specialists at Sight Savers America schedule comprehensive eye exams with local eye care providers, remind parents of appointments, and arrange transportation as needed. They coordinate prescribed treatments including, but not limited to: prescription eyeglasses, eye patching for amblyopia (can cause permanent vision loss if left untreated), surgery, medications, and vision therapy or other continuing care. All follow-up eye care data is collected by Sight Savers America. They keep records on each child and establish eye care homes for children to visit throughout their childhood.

Sight Savers America has worked to strengthen the ability of children to perform to their fullest potential in school by addressing uncorrected vision problems. Their role in improving the vision of Alabama children is unique and it is the only program of its kind on a statewide scale in the U.S. In the absence of case-managed follow-up, studies show that approximately 30 percent of children failing a vision screening actually receive the eye care they need (Kimel, 2006, Manny, et al., 2012, Parrott, et al., 1999, Preslan & Novak, 1998).

To address this lack of eye care, Sight Savers America developed an effective case management follow-up protocol to ensure that these children receive the eye care needed to correct their academically disabling vision problems. Sight Savers America's follow-up eye care program has been monitored and evaluated by the Department of Epidemiology and the Johnson & Johnson Community Health Scholars Program at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, MD and was found to be a leading example of an evidence-based program. Because of the one-on-one case management provided, Sight Savers America's success rate is over 72 percent (a 140 percent increase in reported outcomes compared to without their program) in reaching parents and ensuring children referred receive the necessary eye care.

Conclusion

Alabama has the most comprehensive children's vision screening and follow-up eye care program in the country. We are the national leader in the early detection and treatment of children's eye care issues. This success is the result of the State of Alabama-funding vision screenings and case-managed follow-up eye care each year. The major eye care players in Alabama, including the EyeSight Foundation of Alabama (the largest non-state funder of vision programs in Alabama), strongly believe that any vision screening program must also include a strong follow-up eye care component in order to ensure that children failing a vision screening actually receive the care they need. Sight Savers America is the very best in the country at linking children to follow-up eye care services.

Across Alabama, there are multiple vision-screening agencies, but they all have two things in common. They all vision-screen different children to ensure that a child does not receive duplicate vision screenings during a school year AND all of these vision-screening agencies refer each child failing the vision screening to Sight Savers America.

Due to the strong emphasis on children's eye care from the State of Alabama and the coordination between the major eye care players in our state, vision issues should no longer be considered a main contributor to sub-par third grade reading skills in Alabama. With Alabama providing this "Gold Standard" in vision care for children, it is clear that the single best practice is the existing program of providing annual screenings and follow-up assistance to K/2/4 students.

There is still an opportunity for additional vision screenings and follow-up eye care for children in private schools. It is important for those efforts to also be well coordinated and for the children failing the screening to also be case-managed to ensure that they actually receive the eye care treatment they need.

Existing Resources for Communities

1. Annually required vision screening and case managed follow-up eye care of all kindergarten, second grade, and fourth grade public school students is the most important existing resource for communities.
2. Sight Savers America's case managed follow-up eye care program schedules comprehensive eye exams with local eye care providers, reminds parents of appointments, and arranges transportation as needed. Sight Savers America coordinates prescribed treatments including, but not limited to: prescription eyeglasses, eye patching for amblyopia (can cause permanent vision loss if left untreated), surgery, medications, and vision therapy or other continuing care.
3. Impact America's FocusFirst Program provides free vision screenings to children, ages six months to five years, in child care centers across Alabama using high-tech, digital screening cameras. All children failing the screenings receive free follow-up care through Sight Savers America. Approximately 50,000 children are screened annually.
4. The EyeSight Foundation of Alabama is the largest provider of grants to the nonprofit organizations that have created Alabama's collaborative children's vision program. This funding supports public education regarding vision screening, case managed eye care, and preventive and low vision rehabilitation services.
5. ALL Kids provides low-cost healthcare coverage for Alabama's children and teens whose family incomes are above Medicaid eligibility, but below 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. ALL Kids' comprehensive benefit package covers vision care, but often is not utilized without a case management process that ensures that children actually receive the eye care they need.

Evidence/Data:

- Based on a national survey, in 2017 approximately 46,710 individuals under 5 years of age had vision difficulty, representing .46 percent of children in that age group. This is compared to .30 percent in Alabama as compared to that population in our state. See source below.

Table B18103, Sex by Age by Vision Difficulty, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.
https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5YR_B18103&prodType=table

Hearing in Alabama

Statement of need/key issues:

For a child to successfully read on his or her current grade level, any health issues that could prevent this success must be addressed, including hearing issues. Hearing issues affect other parts of life as well, including language development, learning, and communicating. Seeking care for these issues is key to establishing a good foundation for a confident student and adult.

Evidence/Data:

- Based on a national survey, in 2017 approximately 101,389 individuals under 5 years old had hearing difficulty, representing .57 percent of those in that age group. This is compared to .42 percent in Alabama as compared to that population in our state. See source below.
Table B18102, Sex by Age by Hearing Difficulty, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_17_5YR_B18102&prodType=table
- In 2016, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 49,349 newborns in Alabama were screened for hearing difficulties, thanks to the Alabama Newborn Hearing Screening Program and the states' healthcare providers. Per the Alabama Department of Public Health, approximately 2,000 newborns fail the initial newborn hearing screening at birth. Of those, on average, approximately 70 infants are confirmed with hearing loss each year. This does not include numbers of older infants and children who may be identified with delayed, late-onset, or progressive hearing loss. In 2018, the confirmed number of infants with hearing loss is 76.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION #1:

Encourage parents to use health insurance benefits and/or community sources to have vision and hearing screenings performed and follow-up medical care conducted to correct and aid those children with difficulties.

Goal:

To increase the number of screenings performed as this will increase the number of children identified with difficulties.

Measurable Objectives:

The reported number of screenings and follow-up visits will increase.

Impact: Parents will be assured that their children with vision and hearing difficulties are not feel socially, emotionally, or educationally isolated or behind their peers.

RECOMMENDATION #2:

Encourage funding and the same requirement of hearing screenings as vision screenings among kindergarten, second-, and fourth-grade public school students.

Goal:

To increase the number of screenings performed as this will increase the number of children identified with difficulties.

Measurable Objectives:

- Increase the number of reported screenings
- Develop online hearing tests parents and/or providers can use to initially determine if there is a difficulty

Impact:

More children will be identified; services can start earlier for those children who are identified with vision and hearing difficulties; and children will be able to achieve more success in reading and school than without these early services.

RECOMMENDATION #3:

Encourage expansion of organizations, such as Sight Savers America, of screenings performed to include children in private school settings.

Goal:

Increase the opportunities for vision and hearing screenings through qualified screening providers.

Measurable objectives:

- Increase awareness of these organizations and their available services among the private school community

Impact: More children will be identified; services can start earlier for those children who are identified with vision and hearing difficulties; and children will be able to achieve more success in reading and school than without these early services.

Projected Cost/Fiscal Note:

Any new services added to CHIP or Medicaid would require new funding and a clear path of funding.

Purpose of this report

To recommend to the Alabama Campaign for Grade Level Reading a strategic plan and provide educators and communities with best practices and resources to address the needs of at risk and struggling readers and their families.

Recommendations

Adopt the Strategic Reading Committee Report (2017) as a framework to address literacy issues for K-12 educators.

Establish a standing task force of classroom teachers, special education teachers, interventionists, dyslexia specialists, ELL instructors, reading specialist, and administrators who have extensive knowledge of the science of how children learn to read to evaluate core programs, interventions, assessments, screeners, and professional learning for PreK-3 teachers. (taken from Strategic Reading Report, 2017)

All current K-3 teachers should be provided training on the characteristics of struggling readers and how to provide diagnostic and prescriptive instruction.

All preservice teachers should be required to take a minimum of 9 credit hours of reading/literacy classes to include specific training on foundational reading skills, characteristics of struggling readers and how to provide diagnostic and prescriptive instruction.

Seek a grant to fund diagnostic reading screening for those who are in Specialized Treatment Centers.

Provide a comprehensive list of definitions and characteristics to be used in identifying reading difficulties for all stakeholders.

Strengthen partnerships between higher education and K-12.

Construct a specific continuum for teacher development in reading and literacy and align this continuum with expectations for teacher preparation, instructional delivery, curriculum, and professional learning.

Create a list of essential standards and benchmarks in foundational reading which students must master to be promoted to the next grade.

Support a preventative model of reading instruction which is essential to improving reading outcomes in Alabama. Prevention will reduce financial costs and will reduce the socio-emotional damage caused by repeated failure to learn.

Background

Too many students in Alabama struggle to read. NEAP scores indicate reading scores in Alabama have ranged between 69-71% below proficient from 2007-2017. The importance of establishing a strong foundation in beginning reading skills cannot be overstated. Early intervention is the key to improving reading outcomes for students who are at risk of reading difficulties. Prevention will reduce financial costs and will reduce the socio-emotional damage caused by repeated failure to learn. Research indicates it takes four times as many resources to help a student revolve a literacy problem in year 4 as it does in year 1 (Dyslexia Fact sheet).

Teachers need training in the science of reading to support the needs of all students. Many colleges of education do not include structured literacy, as defined by the International Dyslexia Association, as part of their curriculum.

Scantron data provided by ALSDE to the subcommittee indicates there is a pattern of standards which have not been mastered by students statewide. (https://www.dropbox.com/sh/j7p0trvok5cb4ij/AABluhY3T_k20qKVoomft-QLa/Statewide%20only?dl=0&preview=ALSDE+Standards+Report_State_Reading_ALL.pdf&subfolder_nav_tracking=1). Farther research into the cause is suggested.

Key Issues

- Parents and teachers face the challenge of translating a dizzying array of terms which sometimes essentially mean the same thing. Outside clinicians often add another layer of terms which creates more confusion. Educators use language which comes from state and federal laws. Those laws define the criteria under which students are provided services and supports in schools. Parents often find that their children may be identified as having dyslexia or a reading disorder and still not qualify for services in the school setting.
- English Language Learners and students of poverty come to school many times without any prerequisite reading skills. Individualizing reading instruction during these integral years is extremely important but almost impossible for teachers to do when the difference in readiness level is so vast.
- There are no state guidelines outlining specific criteria for qualifications required to identify dyslexia. Outside practitioners offer testing services and diagnosis students as having reading difficulties such as dyslexia, but there are no guidelines to govern their practice.
- There is a lack of training on the characteristics of struggling readers and how to differentiate instruction to address their needs.

- Trauma has a major impact on child development and behavior. A large number of children in the United States have experienced or are still experiencing some type of trauma, chronic stress, or violence. Research shows two out of three students in the United States have been or are victims of these damaging experiences. This statistic provides challenges for educators who deal with these children on a daily basis.
- Many systems, through a partnership with local mental health agencies, employ a full-time mental health counselor. The needs are so vast, that it takes one counselor 40 hours per week to “try” to meet the needs of our students. Until we are able to improve mental health in our state, it will be extremely difficult to teach all students to read on grade level. Before these partnerships, the extensive needs of students were not met.

Cost-Benefit

- Increase funding for school mental health counselors or care coordinators to help increase partnerships between schools and outside agencies.
- LETRS training - approximately \$1400 per teacher (cost-benefit is related to how many years each trained teachers will continue to work and how many students will be in each class)
- Dyslexia Specialists/Therapists training - \$5,000 per therapist (See attached summary presented to ALSDE in 2013: 76 MSLE trained Dyslexia Therapists impacted 14,318 students = $\$5,000 \times 76 = \$380,000 / 14318 = \$26.54$ per student)
- Qualified Instructor training for Dyslexia Therapy program - \$30,000 (approx.) This QI will be qualified to train Dyslexia Therapists/Specialists in Alabama which will reduce the cost of training referenced above.
- Seek funding to create a documentary on struggling readers and their impact on economy (in partnerships with Alabama Public Television).
- Increase funding for ELL teachers to 1 for 15 students.

Risk Factors, Challenges, Obstacles

- Underperforming schools with significant special area populations, should not be placed on failing schools list and not provided with resources. These are the schools where the resources must be abundant if we are ever to close the gap.
- Poverty, special education students, and ELL students all slow the overall reading progress in general education classrooms. While we cannot and should not segregate these students from the general education classroom, appropriate resources must be provided when the numbers of any of these populations become more than an occasional occurrence in the classroom, or the overall reading progress of the class will be severely hampered. Resources for each of these populations could be allocated differently or at a higher level if we intend to close the grade-level reading gap.
- Districts with high populations of ELL students need funding for ELL Pre-K and ELL teachers in order to pull those students up to the same level of other beginning readers. If these resources are not provided, the reading progress of middle class to affluent students who are on grade level, will be slowed down or even halted.
- Many teachers are trying to teach K-3 students to read and the students do not speak or understand English. While many may not understand this issue in areas like Russellville City and Albertville as many 25% of students entering school are ELL. It becomes extremely difficult to teach students who do not have these barriers to overcome along with those who can't speak English.

- Many outside practitioners and physicians do not understand the referral and eligibility process for special education. This often frustrates parents since an outside clinical diagnosis of a disability does not guarantee students are eligible for special education services.
- The growing shortage of affordable rental housing and a simultaneous increase in severe poverty are two trends which are contributing to homelessness. Homelessness has a devastating impact on a child's education, health, and general well-being. High mobility disrupts the student's education significantly.

Accountability, Outcomes and Impact

1. By December 2020, participation in LETRS and Read, Write from the Start will have increased.
2. By December 2020, an intentional alignment of systems will lead to improved program quality while maintaining availability of services, expanding parental choice and knowledge about existing programs, and enhancing school readiness.
3. By December 2019, a certification pathway for dyslexia specialists will be created by ALSDE.
4. By December 2020, underperforming schools with significant special area populations, will not be placed on failing schools list and if not provided with resources. (e.g. The national average for funding of ELL students is approximately \$1400 per student. In Alabama, those same students are funded at approximately \$130 per student.)
5. By December 2019, guidelines and materials for identifying students at risk for dyslexia and other reading difficulties will be created and shared with educators, medical professionals, mental health workers, and parents.

Sustainability

- Grade Level Reading committee should be continued with funding for travel to oversee the implementation of the literacy plan for Alabama.
- Funding for special population teachers and resources should be increased to meet the national average.
- Colleges of Ed must have a Qualified Instructor to meet the requirements of International Multisensory Structured Language Education Council and the International Dyslexia Association.
- LETRS facilitators must be trained to sustain the training in Alabama.

Course of Action

- One page documents for parents with strategies to work with their children at home
- include info about parents reading to and with children, importance of talking and communicating
- Infographics for educators and community stakeholders with definitions and characteristics of specific reading issues
- Video links with examples of activities for parents
- Documentary by Alabama Public Television on dyslexia and struggling readers in Alabama

Summer Learning Committee

SUMMER LEARNING COMMITTEE

Purpose of attached report:

The Summer Learning Subcommittee Report recommends strategies for using non-state sponsored summer learning programs to help close the academic achievement gap of Alabama students and in so doing assist in meeting ACGLR goals for 2022 and beyond.

Actions required of the ACGLR:

The Summer Learning Subcommittee recommends that community-based, rigorous summer learning (as defined in our report) be endorsed by the ACGLR as the “gold standard” for summer learning programs.

It further recommends that community-based, rigorous summer learning be implemented throughout Alabama as a public-private partnership with a blend of public and private funding. Specific steps to implement these recommendations are included in our report

Implications:

The ACGLR goal of all students proficient in reading by 2022 is, to put it mildly, challenging. Expanding rigorous academics into the summer is an essential strategy in meeting the goal. As with any complex initiative, there is a learning curve. It will take time to expand throughout the state, and it will take time for new programs to reach peak performance. Thus, funds must be allocated in 2019 so that communities can be organized and programs implemented beginning in 2020, with further growth (both in numbers and proficiency) going forward.

Purpose of this report to

The Summer Learning Subcommittee Report recommends strategies for using non-state sponsored summer learning programs to help close the academic achievement gap of Alabama students and in so doing assist in meeting ACGLR goals for 2020 and beyond.

We emphasize that our recommendations call for a re-imagining of education in the summer rather than incremental change. These strategies, as we elaborate in following sections, have been proven effective around the US and here in Alabama, produce significant and measurable academic impact, and are cost effective, while traditional “summer school” does not meet these standards. We ask the Committee of the Whole and the Governor’s representatives for education policy to review our recommendations thoughtfully and with an open mind. We will be happy to engage in discussions with all affected organizations to facilitate moving forward.

Recommendations

The Summer Learning Subcommittee recommends that community-based, rigorous summer learning (as defined later in our report) be endorsed by the ACGLR as the “gold standard” for summer learning programs.

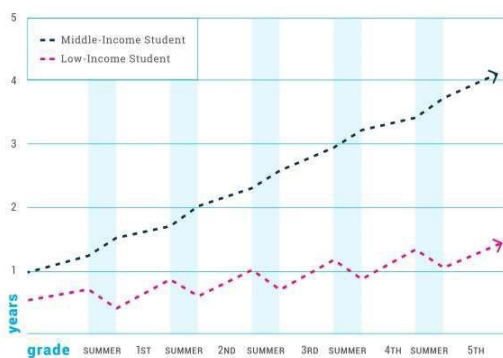
It further recommends that community-based, rigorous summer learning be implemented throughout Alabama as a public-private partnership with a blend of public and private funding, by the following steps:

1. Designate a state-wide backbone organization with a proven track record (e.g., SAIL)
2. Charge the backbone organization with proposing a detailed plan and schedule of implementation to spread summer learning to communities throughout the state.

- i. The plan shall incorporate a matching grants process which distributes state funding to communities based upon their submission of satisfactory applications. The first cycle should be conducted in 2019 to support summer programs in 2020.
 - ii. The plan shall incorporate the accountability measures outlined in Section 7.
3. The ALSDE or other suitable state agency should provide state-funded STAR licenses in the summer of 2019 as a first step
4. State funding for the matching grants should be secured for three years to allow stable, predictable funding flows to the new summer learning communities.
5. The ALSDE, the state-wide backbone organization, and higher-education faculty should collaborate to integrate summer learning into teacher professional development and pre-service teacher education programs. Models such as the Brain Forest program can serve as examples for such collaboration.

Background

Children regress when they don't practice their academic skills over the summer. This is known as summer learning loss, or informally as the summer slide. Children from low-income families lose two- three months of grade equivalency in both math and reading every summer, year after year, and the loss is cumulative. The following chart depicts the impact.



The research on summer learning loss is compelling. In 2007, Johns Hopkins University published the results of its landmark Beginning School Study. The purpose of the study was to gain insight into the academic achievement gap of children from low-income families. They found that these students enter the first grade already behind and fall further behind each year. In this study, the gap was two years by the end of the sixth grade and three years at the end of the ninth grade. They found that the gap did not arise during the school year: 1/3 of the gap was present when the students entered the first grade, and 2/3 was attributable to summer learning loss. Further, they found that summer learning loss was the primary driver of later undesirable outcomes; failure to graduate, attend college, and successfully enter the workforce. For more depth on the study, visit this link:

<https://www.summerlearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/SummerCanSetKidsOnTheRightOrWrongCourse.pdf>

These children face other challenges over the summer; many do not eat well, do not exercise, and lack a safe environment free from bad influences. Parents consistently cite summer as the most difficult time to ensure that their children have productive things to do.

Key Issues

Current Situation

Alabama has many summer programs; some provide academic programming, often referred to as enrichment. But for summer programs to make measurable progress in moving Alabama students to grade level, they must provide rigorous academics (as defined later in this section).

There are a few summer programs providing rigorous academics scattered around Alabama. One group, SAIL (Summer Adventures in Learning), operates as a collective impact network whose mission is to grow the number and effectiveness of these programs. SAIL began in 2012 in Birmingham, and has since expanded to the Black Belt and Huntsville. In 2018, SAIL conducted 45 programs at 62 different locations with 2,449 students enrolled.

SAIL programs incorporate research-based, summer-specific curriculum, certified teachers, and the STAR assessment to support academic growth. In 2018, SAIL programs offered on average 40 hours of literacy/reading instruction and 33 hours of math instruction with the following results:

Subject	Average Gain per Student	Average Impact per Student
Literacy/Reading	2 months	4+ months
Math	2.7 months	4.7+ months

Note: Impact considers the “summer slide” that students experience when they do not practice their academic skills over the summer. Research shows this effect to be 2+ months loss in both literacy/reading and math.

SAIL’s 2018 Program Summary (attached) provides more depth on SAIL and its programs.

We do not highlight SAIL solely because it conducts effective summer learning programs. A brief examination of existing programs will help illustrate what sets SAIL apart:

- The vast majority of existing summer programs simply do not offer rigorous academics, thus are not intended to help close Alabama’s academic achievement gap,
- Some programs are rigorous but not designed to be deployed on a wide scale, e. g., some require highly specialized teachers who are in short supply,
- Some programs are rigorous but too expensive for the families who most need them, and
- These programs have neither a vision and a plan for, nor a successful track record in, spreading around Alabama.

We highlight SAIL because of its proven strategies for deploying effective summer learning programs throughout Alabama. Simply put, SAIL organizes communities to implement rigorous summer learning using collective impact principles. These terms will be defined in more depth later in this report. We also note that there are well-regarded collective impact initiatives in other parts of the US, e.g., Dallas ([Big Thought](#)) and Pittsburg ([APOST](#)).

Community-based Summer Learning

Community-based summer learning is a collaborative approach in which organizations and individuals who care about the children of the community (churches, schools, youth organizations, non-profits, government

agencies, civic leaders, and so on) combine their resources (financial, intellectual and social) to provide summer programming of high quality that would be difficult if not impossible for any of them to offer acting alone. The merits of this approach are developed in following sections, but these two points capture them in brief:

- Effective summer learning must be a hybrid of school and summer camp; to do this well requires skills and experience seldom found in any single organization.
- Each of these organizations has financial resources (often being used for summer programs that provide little or no academic benefit) which can be refocused so as to add to total spending on education.

Community-based summer learning allows each community the flexibility to develop programs that best meet its needs, but defines Markers of Quality and provides assessment systems to assure that target outcomes are met. It is worth noting that the National Summer Learning Association has recently launched a national initiative to encourage the community-based approach.

Summer Learning with Rigorous Academics

Rigorous summer learning programs have the features needed to consistently deliver significant academic impact. These features, or “markers of quality”, are listed below. They originated in standards published by the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA), the only organization which provides research on effective summer learning strategies and promotes best practices across the US. NSLA standards have been expanded and adapted based upon the experience of SAIL in Alabama.

Overall Markers of Quality

These SIX markers are essential, and may not be obvious to those who approach summer learning from a traditional mindset.

- First and foremost, programs must combine the best elements of summer camp and school. Students should be enjoying their time at camp even as they grow academically. This means that summer learning must nurture the whole child. The following chart illustrates a common format for a “school within a camp”:

Each week will repeat the same basic format					
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
7:45 - 8:15	Students Arrive				
8:15- 9:00	Breakfast & Community-building Time				Field Trips: Service Day, McWane Center, Zoo, Railroad Park, Museum of Art, Civil Rights Institute, College Campus Visit
9:00 - 12:00	Reading & Literacy Instruction Math Instruction				
12:00 - 1:00	Lunch & Community-building Time				
1:00 - 4:00	Enrichment, Sports and Physical Activity, Character-Building Lessons, Gardening & Nutrition, Reading, Storytelling, Music, Arts & Crafts, Playground Time -Fun Activities Reinforcing the Morning Academic Work-				
4:00 – 4:30	Students Depart				

- Programs must operate within a community which assembles the different knowledge bases and skills for both school and camp. The community must pool its financial, intellectual, and social capital to maximize investment.

- A system of assessment and continuous improvement is essential. Program metrics must be collected and used to develop strategies for improvement. Peer learning has proven especially effective for SAIL in disseminating key knowledge throughout the community.
- Stable, predictable funding is essential for programs to plan and execute smoothly over time.
- Program excellence is a learning curve.
- Programs must carefully plan and prepare for the coming summer. Program planning should occur in the fall, funding arrangements should be completed by the beginning of the year, and recruiting of staff and families should begin in the first quarter.
- Student academic growth is a primary target of summer learning programs. This can and should be measured each summer, but longer-term assessment of the impact of summer learning on school-year outcomes is needed. This requires a longitudinal data base merging data from summer programs and school systems. Because it takes several years to draw conclusions from such data, data collection must begin as soon as possible. SAIL has contracted with PARCA (Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama) to begin building such a data set for its programs; the subcommittee recommends using the SAIL model as a starting point.

Academic Programming Markers of Quality

- An academic assessment tool which is both nationally normed and formative, that is, provides information on the concepts the student has not yet mastered so that lesson plans can be developed to close the gaps. Renaissance Learning Systems STAR Assessment Suite has become a de facto standard for summer programs, and is used by SAIL. PARCA (Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama), who conducts SAIL's annual assessment, selected STAR in an evaluation of available products. Pre- and post-tests should be administered.
- Curriculum that is research-based, designed for summer, aligned with Alabama standards, relevant to student interest, and based in project-based, experiential learning.
- Certified teachers (not necessarily all, but some), high ratio of staff to students (1:12 or better), and rigorous staff training/development. Summer is an opportune time for teachers to practice innovative classroom techniques.
- 72 (or more) hours of combined instruction in reading and math.

General Programming Markers of Quality

- Total programming of 150-180 hours (or more) spread over five to six weeks.
- Curriculum for social-emotional learning, character development, service learning, etc.
- Curriculum for physical activity, ranging from sports instruction and PT to unstructured play.
- Healthful meals, ideally breakfast, lunch, and an afternoon snack.
- A unifying annual theme which ties the activities together.
- Accessibility for target families (affordability and often transportation must be provided).
- Mature practices for managing enrollment, attrition, and attendance. Family engagement is an essential component because attendance is not required during the summer; if the students and their families do not enjoy and perceive benefit, attendance will lag.

System (or Community) Level Markers of Quality

As discussed earlier, the community-based approach to summer learning requires activities that bind individual programs together for the common good.

- Formal and informal education where programs in the community convene, with emphasis on peer-to-peer learning.
- Formal approach to continuous improvement, including:
 - Collection of comprehensive metrics on student and program performance,
 - Publishing the metrics within the community,
 - Structured exercises to review performance and plan improvement in a peer setting, and
 - Using single-year results (for near-term adjustments) in combination with three-year results (for overall assessments) to smooth out year-to-year variations.
- Collaborative approach to solving common problems and developing common resources
- A proactive approach to engaging families in the design and operation of the programs in the community
- An organization to conduct these system-level activities and support the network. In collective impact terminology, this is called the backbone organization.

One marker of quality listed above bears additional discussion: stable, predictable funding. Excellent programs begin planning for the next summer in the fall and begin recruiting the families who will attend and the staff who will conduct the program in January. These activities will not flow smoothly if funding levels are not known around the first of the year. In addition, year-to-year retention of families and especially of staff is crucial to program quality and improvement over time. This requires relatively stable funding levels from year to year. For these reasons, SAIL advises the programs of funding levels for the next summer in December.

Cost-Benefit

Community-based summer learning has extremely attractive economic attributes.

Doubled Impact of Learning During the Summer

Since summer learning loss of 2-3 months (in both reading and math) occurs when children don't use their academic skills, there is a compound benefit to rigorous summer learning. Preventing summer learning loss provides a positive impact of 2-3 months (Impact = outcome of a particular program – outcome expected absent participation in academic activity during the summer). A gain of 2 months produces an impact of 4-5 months.

Summer Learning Makes Schools More Effective

Schools lose precious time each fall because of summer learning loss. Research from the Wallace Foundation shows that 90% of teachers report spending a minimum of three weeks reteaching the lessons of the prior year. Three weeks equates to 8% of the school year; eliminating summer learning loss should improve school-year outcomes accordingly. If we also consider the gains obtained by SAIL in 2018, school-year outcomes should be increased by 15% or more. Note that 15% of annual cost per pupil is around \$1,000, yet in 2018 SAIL programs operated at an average cost of \$675 per student.

Community-based Summer Learning Attracts New Resources to Education Community-based summer learning attracts both cash and in-kind contributions to its programs.

To illustrate, in 2018 SAIL provided support of \$1,097,521 to 45 programs. Its sources were:

- 89% --Foundations, businesses, churches, etc.
- 8% --Public funds: school systems, government agencies, etc.
- 3% --Individuals, families, donor-advised funds, crowdfunding, etc.

Because SAIL's model attracts funds from the private sector, total spending on education is increased.

Not reflected in these figures is the value of in-kind resources: staff who volunteer or work for less than scale out of love for their community, their church, etc. Retired teachers often seek out summer programs. With proper planning, community-based summer learning could be aligned with the strategies of colleges of education for pre-service and service-learning requirements. For these reasons, community-based programs have low costs.

In addition, there are sources of revenue for summer learning programs which school-sponsored programs seldom realize. Many programs charge fees, usually on a sliding scale, which partly offset the cost of their program. Full-day programs (as most are) eliminate the need for child care, and thus families can afford to pay these fees from their childcare budget. For low-income families, this cost is subsidized. More research is needed to estimate the revenue potential, but it does reduce program cost, especially for programs serving low-income children. Coordination with the appropriate child welfare agencies is needed to ensure childcare subsidies can be captured where appropriate.

Community-based Summer Learning Redirects Spending to More Effective Uses

As discussed earlier, there are many summer programs in Alabama, requiring a large funding stream; unfortunately, the vast majority of the programs are not helping to close our academic achievement gap. The collaboration inherent in the community-based model enables the conversations in which communities realize they are missing an opportunity, and adapt accordingly. In particular, ESSA encourages school systems to use its Title I funds in cooperation with proven community partners, but few systems in Alabama have done so yet. Title I funds can be a major source of local funding, as can 21st Century Community Learning Center monies. Other sources include municipal agencies (e.g., parks and recreation), churches, youth organizations, and higher education (where present in the community).

Community-based Summer Learning is an Effective Platform for Teacher Development Summer learning programs provide an ideal environment for teachers to learn and practice new, innovative teaching strategies. If the ALSDE and school systems align their professional development requirements with summer learning programs, it will strengthen both teachers and summer programs. The teachers will earn as they learn, and the students will benefit during the entire year. This concept is in operation in the Brain Forest program operated by the Montgomery Education Foundation. We should also explore ways to collaborate with higher education and its pre-service teacher education programs for ways to collaborate to meet practice and service-learning requirements during summer learning programs.

Cost of Rigorous Summer Learning Programs

In 2018, SAIL programs spent (on average) \$675 per student for the academic portion of their camps. This excludes transportation, meals, and facilities (which are often available from local schools without out-of-pocket expense). Costs vary significantly. Some programs have access to funding streams in addition to SAIL grants, and are able to offer richer experiences to their students. Some organizations, especially those in rural setting, do not have this option, and find ways to provide effective programming for a remarkably low cost. As described above, coordination of student teaching and teacher professional development requirements with summer learning programs offers the potential of cost savings and synergies. Assuming funding for summer learning will be insufficient to serve all Alabama students to participate, these strategies for lowering cost become crucial.

Net Economic Impact of Community-based, Rigorous Summer Learning

To summarize, the "gross" cost of rigorous summer learning is \$700 per student (rounded based on experience in 2017-18). The net cost will be reduced by program fees and cost saving strategies, but their impact is difficult to quantify. It is the net cost which must be borne by a combination of public and private funds. To estimate the portion of this cost paid from public funds, we use the First-Class Pre-K formula

(75% state, 25% local); this indicates that the cost from public funds will be around \$500 per student. This compares favorably to the \$1,000 cost of reteaching in the fall. Strategies for redeploying existing funding streams and lowering costs are available when funding levels are known.

Projecting the Cost of Summer Learning in Alabama

In 2018, Alabama's public-school Scantron results (all schools, Grade 3) were as follows:

Percentages for Grade 3				
	In Need of Support	Close	Ready	Exceeding Subject
Math	14.6%	27.9%	36.6%	21.0%
Reading	23.6%	28.6%	27.1%	20.7%

Roughly half of our students scored “close” or “in need of support” for reading. Extrapolating these scores to Alabama's 2018-19 enrollment in Grades K-3 of 221,000, over 100,000 students need high- quality summer learning. Rounding the 2018 cost per student to \$700, we can calculate an annual cost of \$70,000,000, a level of funding well above any realistic expectation.

We also note that the need is not limited to Grades K-3. Summer learning loss occurs at all grades, so we must estimate the true, total need by considering our student population for all grades, or 722,000.

Thus, the most important point in our economic summary is two-pronged:

- We must be careful stewards of the resources that we can marshal, so that as many children as possible can benefit
- Community-based, rigorous summer learning is the lowest cost and most effective way to be careful stewards

Backbone Organizations

The term “backbone organization” originated from the collective impact model, which has become the gold standard for tackling complex problems like education. The model explains that effort is required to build an effective team, e.g., establishing agreement on priorities and goals, supporting frequent communication, and supporting the collection of metrics, peer-learning, and continuous improvement activities. These efforts are above and beyond those necessary to conduct programs. Experience shows that failure to provide adequate backboned support is one of the most common reasons these initiatives do not achieve their goals. For planning purposes, backbone support will require about one half-time person for a larger summer learning community. In addition, there is a need for a state-wide backbone organization. The statewide will provide leadership, coordination among the communities, serve as the voice of summer learning, and manage the statewide grants process we recommend. For planning purposes, this will require about one full-time employee.

Limits of the Community-based Model

SAIL has learned, as have similar initiatives, that limits to private funding exist. One dynamic in the philanthropic community that will eventually surface is “donor fatigue”, which occurs when donors feel that they stand alone in addressing a problem that government should take on and reduce/abandon their funding in frustration. In addition, the potential for private funding decreases as we move from urban, relatively affluent communities to rural, less affluent communities. This suggests that the ideal funding model for summer learning is a public/private partnership with public funding used as both an incentive to attract private funds and a means of achieving scale. We believe the best way to implement this partnership is a matching grants program. The First Class PreK program uses the matching concept effectively, with 75% of the funds coming from the state of Alabama and 25% from local sources.

However, our recommendation differs from the First Class PreK model in that the grants would be made to communities, not individual programs. This strategy is essential in incenting the communities to break down their silos and join forces for the sake of their children. Fortunately, experience proves that the children are the strongest unifying force in most communities.

Risk Factors, Challenges, Obstacles

Changing the Paradigm

Rigorous, community-based summer learning is not like anything currently found in most communities; the biggest initial challenge is spreading the new paradigm.

- Summer is no longer just for fun, or perhaps for enrichment, nor is it “time off” from the school year; it is a valuable time to advance students academically and in so doing help schools achieve their objectives.
- Families must understand that children not meeting academic targets should be enrolled in rigorous summer learning, and then must arrange their summer schedules so that the children attend daily, beginning to end.
- Communities (educators, churches, non-profits, government agencies, etc.) must build effective partnerships to conduct programs that incorporate the best features of camp and school
- All must understand the metrics and processes needed to ensure that programs are meeting objectives.

These challenges can be met through strong backbone organizations, led by the state-level organization which will link the communities as an effective network. One primary role of the state-wide organization will be to spread the best practices developed in the earlier communities to the later communities.

State Funding as an Incentive and Enabler

- Startup for community-based summer learning will be daunting for some, especially smaller, lower-income communities who perhaps lack an established civic organization, such as a United Way. An initial grant of funds from outside the community is an essential incentive and enabler for them to undertake the necessary efforts.
- We have learned through SAIL's experience that success is a learning curve; first summers do not always meet objectives. SAIL's continuous improvement processes have been effective in mitigating this risk, but a second or even a third summer may be needed. For this reason, the initial funding for a community should be a three-year commitment (so long as the community is making a good faith effort).
- Insufficient planning and preparation are the most frequent reasons that programs underperform. Uncertain, inconsistent funding flows prevent good planning. Funding commitments must be stable and predictable, and must be confirmed around the first of the year so preparation can begin.

Sustained Impact

Not all of Alabama's past investments in education have been successful. Even those that are initially successful may falter over time. The reasons vary, but include:

- Failure to insist on proven markers of quality;
- Failure to maintain discipline and fidelity, allowing the initiative to drift away from its original priorities; and
- Gradual decline in funding that squeezes quality over time

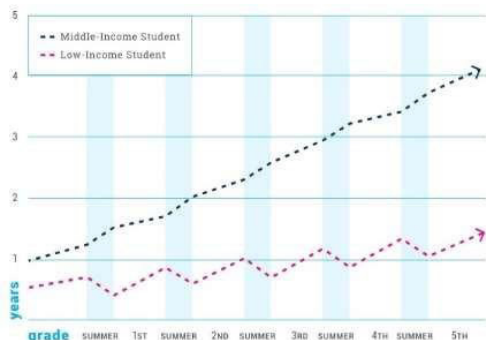
If we implement summer learning using this traditional approach (that is, allocating public funds to initiatives carried out only by government agencies), it will equate to “doin’ the same ole thing the same ole way, and gettin’ the same ole results”. We can and must do better for Alabama's children with our limited funds.

The strategies recommended by the Summer Learning Subcommittee are built upon collective impact principles, and promise long-term, sustained benefit. The precept of our recommendations is that communities should begin taking ownership of educating their children, with government acting as enabler and

supporter. Our recommendations include markers of quality and a proven quality assurance framework to enable long-term success. We strongly believe the strategies we recommend will play a necessary and major role in meeting the goals of the ACGLR.

Longer-Term Challenges

It is worth noting that summer learning loss occurs at all grade levels. If and when all Alabama third-grade students are reading on level, the following chart (repeated from earlier in our report) reminds us that they will be likely fall behind again from learning losses in subsequent summers. Thus, Alabama needs a comprehensive long-term summer learning strategy, covering all grades.



Accountability, Outcomes and Impact

The community-based approach requires strong emphasis on metrics, assessment, and continuous improvement. This is so for many reasons, but especially because it brings together people with many different backgrounds and skillsets, so the members of the community must learn to cooperate in new ways. The Summer Learning Subcommittee believes that two separate systems of evaluation are required:

- Key performance indicators (KPIs)
- Process quality assessments (PQAs)

Key performance indicators (KPIs)

Key performance indicators (KPIs) record program outcomes, e. g., attendance and academic gains. KPIs should be used at the program, community, and state levels to understand performance and inform strategies for improvement. SAIL has a mature KPI system, and the Committee endorses it as a starting point.

SAIL programs submit standard reports at the end of the summer, which include:

- Enrollment by grade, school, demographic categories
- Percentage eligible for free/reduced lunch
- Percentage having special needs
- Percentage of seats filled, attendance, and attrition
- Percentage taking both pre- and post-test
- Beginning percentiles by subject
- Program length and hours of instruction, by subject
- Academic gains by subject and grade
- Staffing levels, certified teachers, amount of staff training, and staff feedback results
- Parental involvement

- Key non-academic accomplishments
- Key lessons learned, and highlights of improvement over prior years
- Feeding program data
- Cost data

SAIL compiles the data and publishes it to inform continuous improvement at the program, the community, and the state levels. 2018 KPIs from SAIL programs are available in these tableau visualizations: <https://public.tableau.com/profile/jim.wooten#!/vizhome/SAILProgramMetricsACGLR/2018Summary>

The Subcommittee believes it is reasonable to expect that new communities adopting SAIL's model would in time be able to obtain the outcomes detailed in the Tableau visualizations. Based on 2016-18 results, we might expect:

- "Seats" filled > 90%
- Average daily attendance > 85%
- Completion (graduation) rate > 90%
- Average Gain per Student
 - Literacy/Reading: 1-3 months
 - Math: 1-3 months

Process quality assessment (PQAs)

A process quality assessment (PQA) toolset uses trained assessors to observe programs and evaluate their processes and procedures against established norms and models of excellence. Constructive feedback is provided, so that programs have useful aids for addressing any issues. At present, the Committee is not aware of a suitable PQA toolset in use by Alabama summer programs. The Committee is familiar with a recent toolset jointly developed by the National Summer Learning Association and the Weikart Center, known as the Summer Learning Program Quality Intervention (SL PQI). It has received good reviews by early adopters, and the Committee feels it is worthy of a trial in Alabama. For more information, visit the Weikart website: <http://cypq.org/SummerLearningPQI>

Sustainability

The primary challenges to sustainability have been addressed earlier, but to recap:

- Public funding is required in order for private funding to be committed over long periods, i. e., combatting donor fatigue
- Public funding must be stable and predictable so that communities can plan adopt a longer-term mindset
- Backbone organizations must be adequately funded.

Course of Action

Collateral will be adapted from materials already used by SAIL. In addition, two Alabama groups (Tuscaloosa City Schools and SAIL Birmingham) are evaluating a Summer Learning Program Planning Toolkit developed by the Wallace Foundation. It is designed for just the type of expansion that the Subcommittee recommends; pending the results of the trial, it could provide valuable assistance for starting a summer learning community.

Special Education, English Learner,
and Struggling Readers Committee

SPECIAL EDUCATION, ENGLISH LEARNER, AND STRUGGLING READERS COMMITTEE

Purpose of attached report:

The report shares information on the background, key issues, and best practices in addressing the needs of students at risk or identified as struggling readers.

Actions required of the AGLR:

1. Support efforts to create parent and educator resources by seeking a grant or funding to provide travel expenses and funds to publish materials created
2. Support efforts to increase participation in LETRS, dyslexia therapy training, and Read, Write from the Start
3. Advocate for schools labeled as underperforming, failing, or “D” or “F” schools which have not been provided with resources to address needs.

Implications:

1. By July 2021, resources for parents and caregivers of students who are at risk or identified as struggling should be available statewide. Schools systems, medical caregivers, mental health workers, and parents all need to use the same terms and vocabulary to reduce the confusion created when we work in silos.
2. By December 2021, participation in LETRS and Read, Write from the Start will have increased. AGLR will need to advocate for funding from legislators or seek grants to fund this training.
3. By December 2021, underperforming schools with significant special area populations, will not be placed on failing schools list and if not provided with resources. (e.g. The national average for funding of ELL students is approximately \$1400 per student. In Alabama, those same students are funded at approximately \$130 per student.)

Purpose of this report:

- To recommend to the Alabama Campaign for Grade Level Reading a strategic plan and provide educators and communities with best practices and resources to address the needs of at risk and struggling readers and their families.

Recommendations:

- Adopt the Strategic Reading Committee Report (2017) as a framework to address literacy issues for K-12 educators.
- Establish a standing task force of classroom teachers, special education teachers, interventionists, dyslexia specialists, ELL instructors, reading specialist, and administrators who have extensive knowledge of the science of how children learn to read to evaluate core programs, interventions, assessments, screeners, and professional learning for PreK-3 teachers. (taken from Strategic Reading Report, 2017)
- All current K-3 teachers should be provided training on the characteristics of struggling readers and how to provide diagnostic and prescriptive instruction.
- All preservice teachers should be required to take a minimum of 9 credit hours of reading/literacy classes to include specific training on foundational reading skills, characteristics of struggling readers and how to provide diagnostic and prescriptive instruction.
- Seek a grant to fund diagnostic reading screening for those who are in Specialized Treatment Centers.

- Provide a comprehensive list of definitions and characteristics to be used in identifying reading difficulties for all stakeholders.
- Strengthen partnerships between higher education and K-12.
- Construct a specific continuum for teacher development in reading and literacy and align this continuum with expectations for teacher preparation, instructional delivery, curriculum, and professional learning.
- Create a list of essential standards and benchmarks in foundational reading which students must master to be promoted to the next grade.
- Support a preventative model of reading instruction which is essential to improving reading outcomes in Alabama. Prevention will reduce financial costs and will reduce the socio-emotional damage caused by repeated failure to learn.

Background:

Too many students in Alabama struggle to read. NEAP scores indicate reading scores in Alabama have ranged between 67-71% below proficient from 2007-2019. The importance of establishing a strong foundation in beginning reading skills cannot be overstated. Early intervention is the key to improving reading outcomes for students who are at risk of reading difficulties. Prevention will reduce financial costs and will reduce the socio-emotional damage caused by repeated failure to learn. Research indicates it takes four times as many resources to help a student revolve a literacy problem in year 4 as it does in year 1 (Dyslexia Fact sheet). Teachers need training in the science of reading to support the needs of all students. Many colleges of education do not include structured literacy, as defined by the International Dyslexia Association, as part of their curriculum. Scantron data provided by ALSDE to the subcommittee indicates there is a pattern of standards which have not been mastered by students statewide. https://www.dropbox.com/sh/j7p0trvok5cb4ij/AABluhY3T_k20qKVoomft-QLa/Statewide%20only?dl=0&preview=ALSDE+Standards+Report_State_Reading_AL_L.pdf&subfolder_nav_tracking=1). Further research into the cause is suggested.

Key Issues:

- Parents and teachers face the challenge of translating a dizzying array of terms which sometimes essentially mean the same thing. Outside clinicians often add another layer of terms which creates more confusion. Educators use language which comes from state and federal laws. Those laws define the criteria under which students are provided services and supports in schools. Parents often find that their children may be identified as having dyslexia or a reading disorder and still not qualify for services in the school setting.
- English Language Learners and students of poverty come to school many times without any prerequisite reading skills. Individualizing reading instruction during these integral years is extremely important but almost impossible for teachers to do when the difference in readiness level is so vast.
- There are no state guidelines outlining specific criteria for qualifications required to identify dyslexia. Outside practitioners offer testing services and diagnose students as having reading difficulties such as dyslexia, but there are no guidelines to govern their practice.
- There is a lack of training on the characteristics of struggling readers and how to differentiate instruction to address their needs.
- Trauma has a major impact on child development and behavior. A large number of children in the United States have experienced or are still experiencing some type of trauma, chronic stress, or violence. Research shows two out of three students in the United States have been or are victims of these damaging experiences. This statistic provides challenges for educators who deal with these children on a daily basis.

- Many systems, through a partnership with local mental health agencies, employ a full-time mental health counselor. The needs are so vast, that it takes one counselor 40 hours per week to meet the needs of our students. Until we are able to improve mental health in our state, it will be extremely difficult to teach all students to read on grade level. Before these partnerships, the extensive needs of students were not met.

Cost-Benefit:

- Increase funding for school mental health counselors or care coordinators to help increase partnerships between schools and outside agencies.
- LETRS training - approximately \$1400 per teacher (cost-benefit is related to how many years each trained teachers will continue to work and how many students will be in each class).
- Dyslexia Specialists/Therapists training - \$5,000 per therapist (See attached summary presented to ALSDE in 2013: 76 MSLE trained Dyslexia Therapists impacted 14,318 students = $\$5,000 \times 76 = \$380,000 / 14318 = \$26.54$ per student).
- Qualified Instructor training for Dyslexia Therapy program - \$30,000 (approx.) This QI will be qualified to train Dyslexia Therapists/Specialists in Alabama which will reduce the cost of training referenced above.
- Seek funding to create a documentary on struggling readers and their impact on economy (in partnerships with Alabama Public Television).
- Increase funding for ELL teachers to 1 for 15 students.

Risk Factors, Challenges, Obstacles:

- Underperforming schools with significant special area populations, should not be placed on failing schools list and not provided with resources. These are the schools where the resources must be abundant if we are ever to close the gap.
- Poverty, special education students, and ELL students all slow the overall reading progress in general education classrooms. While we cannot and should not segregate these students from the general education classroom, appropriate resources must be provided when the numbers of any of these populations become more than an occasional occurrence in the classroom, or the overall reading progress of the class will be severely hampered. Resources for each of these populations could be allocated differently or at a higher level if we intend to close the grade-level reading gap.
- Districts with high populations of ELL students need funding for ELL Pre-K and ELL teachers in order to pull those students up to the same level of other beginning readers. If these resources are not provided, the reading progress of middle class to affluent students who are on grade level, will be slowed down or even halted.
- Many teachers are trying to teach K-3 students to read and the students do not speak or understand English. While many may not understand this issue in areas like Russellville City and Albertville as many 25% of students entering school are ELL. It becomes extremely difficult to teach students who do not have these barriers to overcome along with those who can't speak English.
- Many outside practitioners and physicians do not understand the referral and eligibility process for special education. This often frustrates parents since an outside clinical diagnosis of a disability does not guarantee students are eligible for special education services.
- The growing shortage of affordable rental housing and a simultaneous increase in severe poverty are two trends which are contributing to homelessness. Homelessness has a devastating impact on a child's education, health, and general well-being. High mobility disrupts the student's education significantly.

Accountability, Outcomes, and Impact:

1. By December 2020, participation in LETRS and Read, Write from the Start will have increased.
2. By December 2020, an intentional alignment of systems will lead to improved program quality while maintaining availability of services, expanding parental choice and knowledge about existing programs, and enhancing school readiness.
3. By December 2019, a certification pathway for dyslexia specialists will be created by ALSDE.
4. By December 2020, underperforming schools with significant special area populations, will not be placed on failing schools list if not provided with resources. (e.g. The national average for funding of ELL students is approximately \$1400 per student. In Alabama, those same students are funded at approximately \$130 per student.)
5. By December 2019, guidelines and materials for identifying students at risk for dyslexia and other reading difficulties will be created and shared with educators, medical professionals, mental health workers, and parents.

Sustainability:

- Grade Level Reading committee should be continued with funding for travel to oversee the implementation of the literacy plan for Alabama.
- Funding for special population teachers and resources should be increased to meet the national average.
- Colleges of Ed must have a Qualified Instructor to meet the requirements of International Multisensory Structured Language Education Council and the International Dyslexia Association.
- LETRS facilitators must be trained to sustain the training in Alabama.

Course of Action:

- One-page documents for parents with strategies to work with their children at home to include info about parents reading to and with children, importance of talking and communicating.
- Infographics for educators and community stakeholders with definitions and characteristics of specific reading issues.
- Video links with examples of activities for parents.
- Documentary by Alabama Public Television on dyslexia and struggling readers in Alabama.

Data Collection, Data Management, and Research Committee

DATA COLLECTION, DATA MANAGEMENT, AND RESEARCH COMMITTEE

a.) Description of the subcommittee charge, responsibilities, and/or defined objectives:

The Data Collection, Data Management, and Research Committee is tasked with creating a map of Alabama's social determinants of reading proficiency, creating partnerships with research institutions, developing population studies, and conducting longitudinal studies of ACGLR's impact on student achievement. The committee is primarily responsible for identifying, analyzing, and utilizing data in support of the overarching goals of the ACGLR.

b.) Evaluation of the key issues identified and background information on the key issue(s):

The key issue identified in committee discussion is the perceived lack of early childhood assessment data. Data does exist and will be discussed in the body of the report; however, it is not population level data.

c.) Discussion of what actions or decisions need to be taken to address the key issue(s):

Several prospective early grade level assessments were discussed during the committee meeting but no consensus was reached on which assessments were most appropriate for providing the necessary data. Subsequent to the last committee meeting the Alabama legislature passed the Alabama Literacy Act. As a result of that legislation the State Department of Education will be announcing a Request for Proposals seeking to identify 3-4 providers of high-quality K-3 assessments and supporting curriculum materials.

d.) Assessment of the consequences of taking, or not taking, such proposed actions or decisions

Failure to determine effective tools for providing objective, valid and reliable data to inform educational policy and practice will thwart the aims of the ACGLR and the Alabama Literacy Act. Though effective practice is being implemented in many Alabama classrooms, an enhanced level of data is required to ensure such practices exist in all classrooms across the state.

e.) Conclusions

Though data sources focused on the reading levels of K-3 students do exist, no source is utilized universally in Alabama public schools. The Alabama Reading Initiative has re-focused its efforts on early grades reading but its impact could be aided by the development of a state level assessment(s) whose outcomes would guide and inform the initiative.

f.) Recommendations

Augment existing sources of early grades reading data with a more universal source. Utilize those data in correlation studies aimed at identifying multiple factors, both educational and environmental, that contribute to reading success.

Existing Challenges and Possible Solutions for Increasing Alabama’s Third Grade Literacy Rate

Purpose of attached report:

The purpose of this report is to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the data currently available for measuring student literacy in grades K-2. It will also provide insight into opportunities for future partnerships that exist.

Actions required of the ACGLR:

The primary actions required of the ACGLR will occur after sufficient data has been collected and analyzed. In addition, the Data Collection, Data Management, and Research Subcommittee and the Alabama State Department of Education stand ready to provide existing data to any other ACGLR subcommittee in support of their work.

Recommendations

The consensus among the committee was that there is a definitive need for a valid, reliable, and easily implemented measure of student literacy that is appropriate for grades K-2. Table 1 provides an overview of the number and percentage of students in grades K-2 that have been assessed on the ALSDE’s current formative assessment, Scantron Performance Series.

Table 1

Though the table above clearly indicates that a large percentage of second graders in Alabama are currently being assessed in both reading and math, it also highlights how few kindergarten and first grade students are being similarly assessed. From a summative perspective, all second grade students will be assessed in reading and math beginning in the spring of 2020; however, the kindergarten and first grade challenge will remain. Subsequent to the last Data Collection, Data Management, and Research Subcommittee meeting, the Alabama legislature passed the Alabama Literacy Act. As a result of that legislation the State Department of Education will be announcing a Request for Proposals seeking to identify 3-4 providers of high-quality K-3 assessments and supporting curriculum materials. The outcomes of this effort will provide the critical early grades literacy data and corresponding curriculum resources to support increased student success.

Background

The obvious purpose of this effort is to increase the literacy rate of students prior to the completion of their third-grade year. Third grade has been singled out as being a particularly important juncture in the development of a student. It is generally accepted that during grades K-3 students are learning to read where in all grades thereafter, students are reading to learn. That being the case, Table 2 clearly underscores the need for improvement of our state’s third grade literacy rate.

Table 2

Research from The Reading Foundation further clarifies the importance of ensuring that all students can read on grade level by the end of third grade. Without a strong foundation in reading, children are left behind at the beginning of their education. They lag in every class, year after year because more than 85 percent of the curriculum is taught by reading. And by the end of third grade, 74 percent of struggling readers won’t ever catch up. In fact, one of the most important predictors of graduating from high school is reading proficiently by the end of third grade. <https://www.readingfoundation.org/third-grade-reading-matters>

The last sentence in the quote from The Reading Foundation is particularly impactful. If the third-grade literacy rate is indeed a predictor of high school graduation, it carries with it tremendous societal implications. Noted demographer, Harold Hodgkinson once stated, “The correlation between dropping out of high school and crime is stronger than the correlation between smoking and lung cancer.” If so, our efforts on behalf of students at an early age can minimize some of the most damaging outcomes associated with school failure.

Key Issues

Though the impact of a strengthened literacy focus within the classroom is of critical importance, it is not the only arena within which support is needed. There is a very strong negative correlation of $-.773$ between reading proficiency and poverty (as measured by Direct Certification status). Such a strong correlation means that higher poverty rates are strongly tied to reduced literacy. Poverty is an issue that must be addressed holistically and comprehensively. It is obviously not within of purview of education to effect any immediate change to poverty within the state. What does remain within the control of schools and systems in Alabama is the rate in which students are suspended or expelled. Thankfully, that is not a tremendous issue by third grade but, in general, there is a relatively robust negative correlation of $-.401$ between reading proficiency and suspensions/expulsions. Collectively, the data indicate that student literacy is not only tremendously important; it is an issue for which there exists many contributing factors. In order to determine which contributing factor, or factors in concert with one another, have the greatest impact on student literacy, it is vital that we have access to comprehensive, valid and reliable literacy data.

Cost-Benefit

Literacy research and support is an existing component of the ALSDE. The procurement and implementation of effective tools for assessing and supporting increased student literacy in grades K-3 constitute the predominant costs associated with these recommendations.

Risk Factors, Challenges, Obstacles

A primary challenge associated with any new dataset is the ability to effectively analyze said data. The ALSDE, DECE, and Post-Secondary Education already have strong relationships with the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA), who is well-known for their research capacity. It is the vision of the subcommittee that the research and analysis associated with this effort will be another product of the strong public/private partnership that is already in place.

Accountability, Outcomes and Impact

The ultimate outcome of this effort is increased literacy rates among our third-grade students. In support of that goal, our initial objective is to release the RFP seeking to identify 3-4 providers of high-quality K-3 assessments and supporting curriculum materials. Those providers should be identified by the beginning of 2020. The resources provided via those vendors, coupled with the coaching and curricular support to be provided by ARI, will result in the anticipated outcomes.

Sustainability

Sufficient ETF funds must remain available to support this effort. Otherwise, no sustainability issues noted.

Course of Action

Outcome data will be made available through websites, white papers, and infographics.

