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## ***Credits/Acknowledgements***

### ***Introduction***

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### ***Chapter 1: Accountability, Assessments, and Standards***

The key to sparking and sustaining improvements in education is alignment between rigorous standards that specify what students should know and be able to do, assessments that accurately measure student learning, and an accountability system that rewards progress and establishes consequences for schools that persistently fail to raise student achievement. This chapter explains the elements of Alabama’s courses of study, statewide assessment system, and statewide accountability system and how the three work in tandem to improve teaching and learning.

### ***Chapter 2: Achievement***

This chapter provides a quick reference for the assessments given in Alabama to measure student achievement at the international, national and state levels and where to find this data. The Appendix to this chapter is a report entitled “Education Watch: Alabama” written by The Education Trust, a Washington-D.C.-based advocacy group for poor and minority students. This report provides trend data for Alabama on several national assessments and performance indicators.

### ***Chapter 3: Closing the Achievement Gap***

Alabama, like other states in America, has documented achievement gaps between low-income and non-low-income students; African-American and white students; Hispanic and white students; and special education and general education students. However, research and practice show that all children, regardless of socioeconomic background, can learn at high levels when taught to high levels. This chapter provides a snapshot of Alabama’s achievement gaps and discusses in detail initiatives and programs that are closing these gaps.

### ***Chapter 4: Finance and Funding***

Who pays for public education in Alabama? How is revenue utilized in Alabama? How does Alabama education finance compare to the South and Nation? What are some barriers to effective school financing in Alabama? This chapter answers these questions and explores the intricacies of financing and funding Alabama’s schools. Included are discussions of federal, state and local funding, as well as a detailed description of Alabama’s foundation program for funding K-12 schools.

## **Chapter 5: Governance and Policymaking**

Who runs Alabama's schools? This chapter analyzes Alabama's education governance arrangements, from the role of the federal government to responsibilities of state officials and local school boards. Also discussed are trends in education governance, including reconstitution, P-16 systems, and charter schools.

## **Chapter Six: Math, Science and Technology**

Across the nation and in Alabama, students must be prepared for the demands they will face in an increasingly complex world. In today's global society, high school graduates need higher-level skills and knowledge in order to compete and to succeed. This chapter analyzes Alabama student performance in math and science and discusses statewide initiatives to improve student achievement in these areas. It also looks at the use of technology in Alabama's classrooms and provides information on the state's Career Technology Program.

## **Chapter 7: No Child Left Behind (Elementary and Secondary Education Act)**

This chapter explains the requirements of the federal *No Child Left Behind* Act and provides details on Alabama's implementation. Alabama has a unique timeline for implementation of NCLB to allow the state to fulfill requirements of a Compliance Agreement under the 1994 version of ESEA, more commonly known as Improving America's Schools Act.

## **Chapter 8: Reading and Writing**

Reading and Writing are critical skills for every student to master. Alabama is making strides in improving student achievement in both subjects, primarily because of the nationally recognized Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI). This chapter provides details on the ARI, the federally funded Alabama Reading First Initiative, and the statewide measures in place to ensure that student writing receives the attention it deserves.

## **Chapter 9: School Choice**

This chapter delineates the varying types of school choice available to students in the nation, the region, and the state. Alabama, unlike other Southern states, has not passed charter or voucher legislation. However, the state is confronting other school choice issues as it meets new NCLB requirements for intra-district choice for those students attending low-performing schools.

## **Chapter 10: School Leadership**

Simply put, where you find a successful school you find a successful principal. After a thorough analysis of the current standards for principals and administrators, the chapter finds that the state must improve and support its leadership development initiatives to sustain high-performing schools. This chapter also details the current initiatives underway to prepare and train school leaders.

## **Chapter 11: Teaching Quality**

Providing a well-prepared, qualified and caring teacher in every classroom in Alabama is critical if the state is to meet the goals of *No Child Left Behind* and allow all children to graduate from high school with a meaningful degree. This chapter examines the teaching continuum in Alabama, including recruitment, preparation, certification, retention, professional development and teacher leadership.

## **Education-ary**

This section provides definitions to the education-related terms and acronyms used throughout the primer.

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Founded in 1991, the A+ Education Foundation is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that advances policies, programs and initiatives in Alabama's K-12 education system that result in high achievement by every child. To accomplish this, A+ works with the Governor, the State Board of Education, the State Department of Education and individual schools and school districts. A+ provides information on school improvement to educators, the media, community-based groups and the business community through a variety of publications and forums. A+ is located in Montgomery.

The Peabody Center for Education Policy at Vanderbilt University in Nashville exists to enhance education policy and practice through research, service, and communications. The center provides policy research, technical assistance, symposia, workshops and initiatives to education professionals, policymakers, scholars, foundations, and families and communities with the goal of raising expectations and standards in public education systems. Areas of scholarship include public opinion, race and education, public- and private-sector relations, education reform, policy formation and implementation, governance, and resource allocation.

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