

# **Governor's Commission on Quality Teaching**

## **Overview**



**Office of Governor Bob Riley**

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## **Introduction**

All good schools have one thing in common: good teachers. Top-quality teaching fosters high student achievement—and high achievers can harness their talents and energies to become successful, contributing citizens. Across the globe, the most vibrant and stable economies draw their strength from a well-educated, highly skilled citizenry.

Through the Alabama Reading Initiative, the Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative, and the doubling of schools that met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) between 2003 and 2004, Alabama has made progress and must keep the momentum moving.

Alabama's educational challenges underscore the far-reaching stake we all have in the quality of our schools. On the social front, dramatic achievement gaps—whether by race, socioeconomic status, or compared to other states—undermine the American promise of upward mobility through education. In economic terms, our state cannot afford a poorly educated labor force incapable of supporting continued growth. Economists explain that in a competitive global economy, all citizens must continually reach to obtain new, higher skills, just to stay in place relative to other populations. Moreover, the costs of a poorly educated population are huge. As a state, Alabama spends millions of dollars every year on programs that seek to compensate for the shortcomings of our education system.

In conjunction with the needs of students, federal law now also requires more from states to strengthen teaching and student achievement. The “No Child Left Behind” Act of 2001 seeks to improve student performance and ensure a “highly qualified” teacher for every classroom. The law has set the ambitious target of bringing all children to academic proficiency by 2014—an admirable goal that will require extraordinary efforts and leadership to reach.

Perhaps most importantly, teaching, our nation's most valuable profession makes a powerful difference in a child's education. Research has demonstrated that the single most important factor in increasing student achievement is the effectiveness of the classroom teacher. A study of student performance in Texas found that the teacher's ability was a critical determinant of student success.<sup>1</sup> A different study in Tennessee found that students who had good teachers three years in a row showed a significant increase in their rankings on state examinations—regardless of socioeconomic factors.<sup>2</sup> Other recent research has singled out efforts to improve the

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<sup>1</sup> John Kain, “The Impact of Individual Teachers and Peers on Student Achievement,” University of Texas at Dallas, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> W.L. Sanders and J.C. Rivers, Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement, University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center, 1996.

quality of teaching as a primary reason for the consistent gains in student reading achievement in Connecticut and North Carolina.<sup>3</sup>

Public opinion and research converge on the importance of quality teaching. A major 2005 national poll conducted by The Teaching Commission found that: "The general public says the quality of teachers is the single most important factor in determining students' academic performance, ahead of parental involvement, school resources, and other factors."<sup>4</sup>

According to the same poll, there is overwhelming support for comprehensive initiatives to strengthen the teaching profession among both the general public and teachers:<sup>5</sup>

- Nine in ten members of the general public (90 percent) support a multi-faceted approach to improve the teaching profession
- Eight in ten teachers (79 percent) support a multi-faceted approach to improve the teaching profession

Bolstering teacher quality is certainly not the only challenge when it comes to strengthening public education. There are social problems, financial obstacles, and facilities issues, among other concerns. But quality teachers are a **critical** factor in helping young people overcome the damaging effects of poverty, lack of parental guidance, and other challenges. Kati Haycock, one of America's most respected education researchers points out,

*"A decade ago . . . we believed that what students learned was largely a factor of their family income or parental education, not of what schools did. But recent research has turned these assumptions upside down. What schools do matters enormously. And what matters most is good teaching."<sup>6</sup>*

While Alabama has many outstanding teachers, the state must do more to efficiently recruit the best and brightest into the teaching profession, prepare a world-class league of educators, support these teachers through their careers, and retain them in schools with the highest needs. At the same time, we must bring greater focus to results by providing rewards for improvements in student achievement.

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<sup>3</sup> Linda Darling-Hammond, "Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence," *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, Volume 8 Number 1, Jan. 1, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> "Teaching Poll," The Teaching Commission, April 6, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> "Teaching Poll," The Teaching Commission, April 6, 2005. This poll defined changes to the teaching profession as: "including enhanced professional development, more rigorous teacher training and subject knowledge tests, better mentoring programs for new teachers, more authority for principals, and the salary innovations detailed above."

<sup>6</sup> Kati Haycock, "Closing the Achievement Gap," *Educational Leadership*, March 2001.

All of Alabama’s children deserve the best. At stake is not only the future of each student, but also the future of our entire state.

## **Formation of Commission**

### **A. Mission**

The Governor’s Commission on Quality Teaching (CQT) shall examine, recommend, and work to implement laws, policies, and practices affecting teachers and teaching effectiveness to ensure student success in Alabama. The commission shall promote the aggressive recruitment, preparation, support, retention, and growth of qualified, skilled teachers in order to raise student achievement in Alabama.

### **B. Guiding Principles**

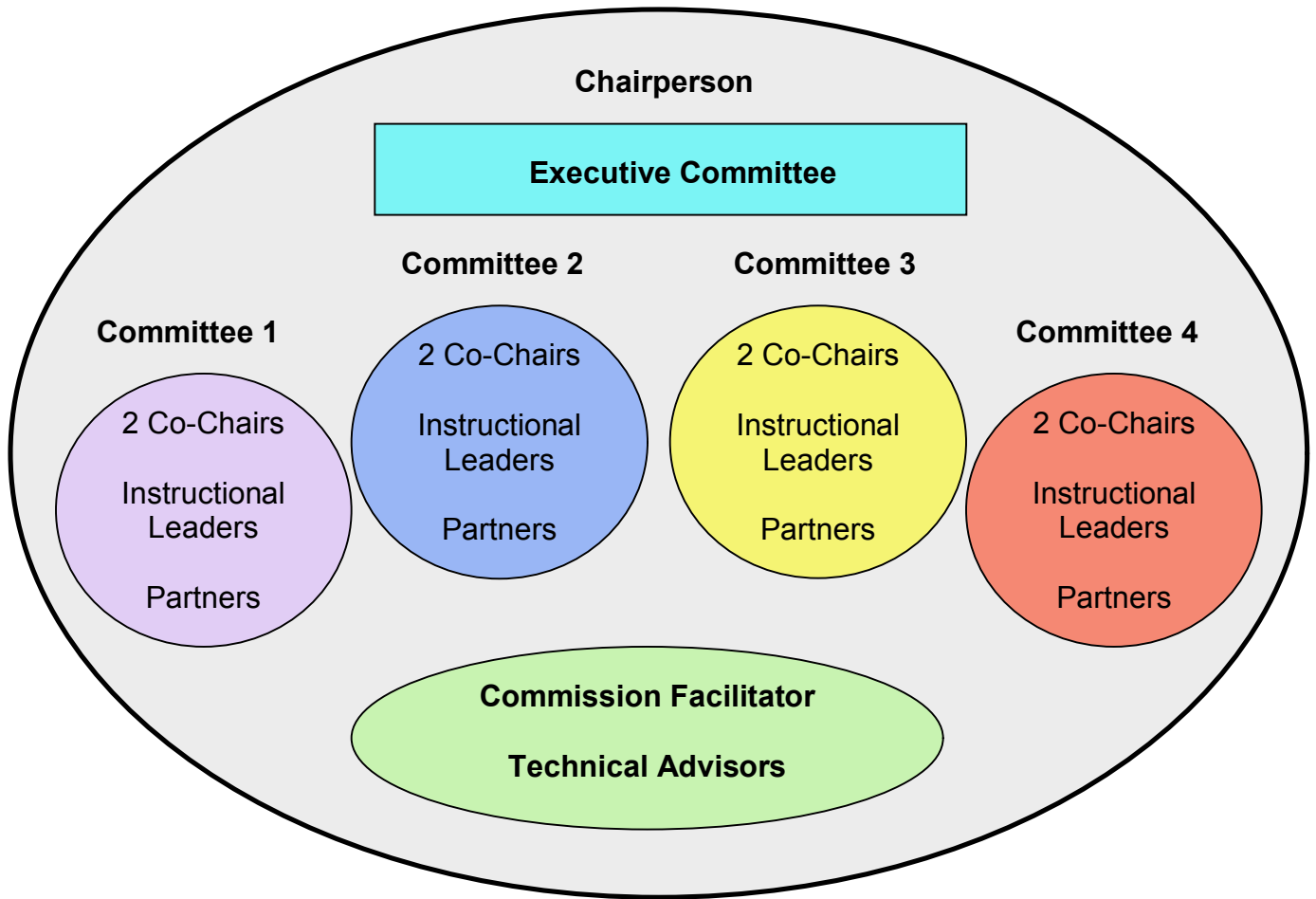
- Assemble broad and diverse involvement from all state education stakeholders.
- Perform a comprehensive assessment of all state policies related to teaching quality.
- Find cost-effective solutions to the challenges of ensuring all Alabama students have access to the best teachers.
- Identify opportunities to re-allocate existing resources to implement cost-effective solutions.
- Align and collaborate with other successful Alabama efforts such as the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) and Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI).
- Closely coordinate efforts with the Governor’s Congress on School Leadership, Gov. Riley’s initiative to strengthen the role of principals and education leadership in Alabama.
- Make regular recommendations to the Governor, State Board of Education, and Legislature concerning the charges to the committees.
- The Commission is charged to not only recommend, but also to guide the implementation of its recommendations.
- The Commission will sunset after 5 years.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Governor Riley wishes to see bold and innovative recommendations to dramatically improve student achievement in Alabama. The Governor believes this issue to be so important that it must continue beyond his current administration. This is why the Governor has proposed a five-year lifespan for the commission.

### C. Commission Structure

**Figure 1: Structure of Governor’s Commission on Quality Teaching**



#### 1. Chairperson

**Dr. Betsy Rogers**, 2003 National Teacher of the Year, has been appointed by the Governor to serve as Chairperson of the Commission. After being named Alabama Teacher of the Year and National Teacher of the Year in 2003, Dr. Rogers returned to the classroom. She currently serves as Curriculum Coordinator at Brighton Middle School in Jefferson Co. Brighton is a historically low achieving school with 93% of students classified as low-income.

## **2. Executive Committee**

The Commission's Executive Committee will consist of thirteen members, including the eight committee co-chairs. The Commission's four committees will present proposals to the Executive Committee for a final vote.

## **3. Committees**

Committees will be comprised of a diverse group of education stakeholders and leaders from across the state. Committees will be led by co-chairs and will make recommendations to be voted on by the Executive Committee and submitted to the Governor, State Board of Education, and Legislature concerning their charge from the Governor. In addition to making recommendations, committees will be responsible for working with the Governor and other stakeholders to implement recommendations. Committees will consist of the groups and entities outlined below.

### **a. Co-Chairs**

Each Committee will have two chairs who will jointly serve as co-chairs. Co-chairs will be selected by the Governor and will lead each of the committees. Each co-chair will also serve on the thirteen-member Executive Committee.

### **b. Instructional Leaders**

Because the charge of the commission is to improve teacher quality, instructional leaders who have experience in the classroom will play a strong role on each of the committees. This category includes teachers, principals, superintendents, school administrators, professors, and deans. These education leaders will serve with partners on the four committees. The instructional leaders will be selected from across Alabama. Each should have strong background in classroom leadership. These educators will be full members of the committees and provide a vital perspective.

### **c. Partners**

The Commission will also be led by a group of 'partners' representing the education profession and stakeholders in strengthening the teaching profession in Alabama. Partners will lend a wealth of experience and a diverse set of perspectives on the issues. Partners will be selected by the Governor and will serve on one of the committees. The following partners will serve on the Commission:

- A+ Education Foundation
- Alabama Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE)
- Alabama Association of School Boards (AASB)
- Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE)
- Alabama Conference of Educators (ACoE)

- Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education
- Alabama Education Association (AEA)
- Alabama Parent Teacher Association (PTA)
- Business Council of Alabama (BCA)
- Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS)
- Eagle Forum
- National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT)
- Business Accountability Tax Coalition (BATC)
- School Superintendents of Alabama (SSA)
- State Department of Education (SDE)

#### **4. Technical Advisors**

Each of the following regional or national education organizations have expertise in some or all issues affecting teacher quality and have committed to partnering with Governor Riley in this effort. The combination of these technical resources will place Alabama at the national forefront of efforts to strengthen the quality of teaching. Examples of technical advisors include the following:

- Education Commission of the States
- Center for Teaching Quality
- Southern Regional Education Board
- SERVE

#### **5. Commission Facilitator**

The Commission Facilitator is a contract position appointed by the Governor. The individual will help guide the work of the Commission, providing administrative support to the four committees.

## **Scope of Work**

### **Committee 1: Teacher Pipeline and Preparation**

For multiple reasons it has become increasingly difficult to attract qualified, capable individuals to the teaching profession. At the same time, we need to do more to upgrade teacher preparation. A 1996 study by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future found that teacher preparation in the United States "has historically been thin [and] uneven" compared to other countries.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, two in three teachers nationally (66%) described the value of the teacher preparation coursework they received before entering the classroom as simply "okay" or "not good." Only one in three (33%) said the preparation was "very good."<sup>9</sup> There is also strong support among both the public (62% favorable) and

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<sup>8</sup> "What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future," National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (Washington, D.C.: 1996).

<sup>9</sup> The Teaching Commission, 2005.



teachers themselves (49% favorable) for making teacher preparation programs more rigorous. Like other states, Alabama must focus on strengthening teacher preparation and its schools of education, which will in turn enhance the quality of learning that our students receive.

### **Guiding Questions:**

1. How well do we currently recruit and prepare teachers in Alabama?
2. What can university systems and other stakeholders do to recruit more and better candidates into the teaching pipeline? How can we attract the most talented Alabama citizens to the teaching profession?
3. How can we better prepare Alabama's teachers to help all students reach high academic standards?
4. How can we effectively measure efficacy of teacher preparation programs in Alabama?
5. How can we impart the knowledge and skills to new teachers that will enable them to be effective in the classroom?
6. How can we better integrate successful teaching practices, such as the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) and the Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI) into teacher preparation programs?
7. How can we help teacher preparation programs collaborate more effectively with school systems?

### **Committee 2: Teacher Certification and Licensure**

A teacher becomes certified – or licensed – when he or she meets all state requirements to teach in a particular state. Nationally, only 13% of principals and 7% of superintendents believe that certification in their states guarantees that the typical teacher “has what it takes” to make it in the classroom.<sup>10</sup> Much must be done to build confidence in teacher certification and ensure that teachers can grow professionally through the certification process. Additionally, teacher certification should not restrict capable educators from entering the profession.

### **Guiding Questions:**

1. How effective is our current certification and licensure system?
2. How can we improve the certification and licensure system to promote improved student achievement?

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<sup>10</sup> “Certification/Licensure Issue Site,” Education Commission of the States, [www.ecs.org](http://www.ecs.org), 2004.

3. How can we encourage professional growth through teacher certification?
4. How can we improve opportunities for non-traditional candidates to enter the teaching profession?

### **Committee 3: Teacher Professional Development, Working Conditions, and Retention**

Not only is it difficult to attract young people to the teaching profession, it has become increasingly hard to keep them in the classroom after they begin teaching. According to a recent study, in Alabama almost one out of every five teachers leaves the profession after the first two years teaching. Turnover rates are even higher in subjects such as science (26% turnover after two years) and special education (22% turnover after two years).<sup>11</sup>

While there are challenges in supporting teachers, there is strong support among the public and teachers to better support teachers after they enter the classroom. This support may be different depending on the school, community, or school system. Nationally, teachers have strong concerns about working conditions and the quality of professional development:<sup>12</sup>

- 41% of teachers nationally believe the professional development they received from their school or school district either “left something to be desired” or was “a waste of time.”
- Only 11% of teachers said their professional development was “first rate.”

Further, there is strong support nationally among both teachers and the public for strengthening professional development for teachers:<sup>13</sup>

- 87% of the public supports providing high-quality professional development and ongoing training to teachers.
- 88% of teachers support providing high-quality professional development and ongoing training to teachers.

#### **Guiding Questions:**

1. How effective are our existing professional development, working conditions, and retention policies and systems?

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<sup>11</sup> Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> The Teaching Commission, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> The Teaching Commission, 2005.

2. What should be done to assure that all teachers are provided with professional development that continually increases the subject matter knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to help their students reach high academic standards? How do we ensure that these opportunities are available throughout their teaching careers in a cost-effective manner?
3. What steps should be taken to align professional development opportunities with Alabama's academic standards and student assessments?
4. What should be done to ensure the successful transition of new teachers from their preparation programs to effective classroom teaching with a firm understanding of the results their students are expected to achieve?
5. What should be done to create and maintain positive school and classroom working conditions, as well as supportive communities, that help and encourage students to learn, and that help attract and retain qualified teachers?
6. How can we create more opportunities to empower teachers in decision making and leadership roles that build learning communities to help all students succeed?
7. When efforts to help teachers improve fail and a given teacher is still doing a poor job in the classroom, what should be done to swiftly and effectively remove the teacher from the classroom?
8. How can student achievement data be collected and disseminated more effectively to help teachers share their strengths, address their weaknesses, and accelerate learning gains?

#### **Committee 4: Teacher Compensation and Incentives**

Alabama must do more to attract the best to the teaching profession and reward outstanding classroom performance. While most professions including law, engineering, and business offer strong opportunities for professional growth, the teaching profession offers few such opportunities. Teachers are paid according to a rigid lock-step salary matrix that compensates only in terms of years of service and degrees held. Teachers deserve more.

Alabama teachers seem willing to explore new and innovative approaches to attracting talented young people to the teaching profession and ensuring they meet the needs of students across the state. According to a 2003 poll conducted by the Alabama Education Association, 79% of Alabama teachers favor giving financial incentives to teachers working in challenging schools while 63% of Alabama teachers favor giving financial incentives to teachers who specialize in hard-to-fill subjects such as science and math. This same poll found that 60% of Alabama teachers support giving financial rewards to teachers who raise student

achievement.<sup>14</sup> This information is particularly striking because Alabama teachers are significantly more receptive to these compensation ideas than teachers in the U.S. as a whole.

### **Guiding Questions:**

1. How effective do we currently promote professional growth in the teaching profession in Alabama?
2. How can we attract more high-quality candidates to hard-to-staff urban and rural schools and hard-to-staff subject areas such as mathematics, science, and special education?
3. How can we rethink teacher compensation in a comprehensive way to compensate teachers based on knowledge, skills, relevant experience, willingness to teach in hard-to-staff subjects and schools, and student learning gains?
4. How can we better recognize and reward teachers who successfully increase student achievement, especially in challenging school environments? How can we use this information to target appropriate resources and professional development opportunities to improve future performance?
5. How can we strengthen professional growth opportunities for teachers through compensation and other methods?

### **Conclusion**

Student achievement in Alabama has remained at the bottom of nearly every national list. However, research has powerfully demonstrated that classroom teachers are the single most important factor in a child’s educational success. Efforts to improve education must be built upon the best research in order to offer opportunity and life skills for students today. While we struggle just to attract the best and brightest to the teaching profession, those that do go into teaching often exit shortly after entering. When teachers decide to make a career of working in the classroom, they find little opportunity for professional growth or reward for a job well done. From recruitment to retention to professional growth – there are many opportunities to improve the teaching profession in Alabama, and, thus improve student achievement.

The Governor’s Commission on Quality Teaching will pave a new path for Alabama’s teachers. The Commission will set the highest standards as it conducts the challenging work of establishing bold, yet achievable recommendations. One notable aspect of this Commission is its charge to not only recommend, but also

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<sup>14</sup> “Alabama ‘Stand by Me’ Teacher Survey,” Capital Research Center, Alabama Education Association, 2003.

work to implement its recommendations over a five-year period. The Commission will not last forever, but it will be around long enough to make a difference. Transforming an entire profession takes more than a report or presentation from a committee. It takes the diligent pursuit of a vision. This commission will pursue the vision to its reality.

## **Appendix: Executive Committee Contact List**

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