Moving Alabama Toward a World-Class Education System

In order for Alabama to prepare all students for the Knowledge Economy of the 21st Century, Alabama must create an education system that meets students' diverse needs. This work includes numerous stakeholders, and cannot be accomplished by one organization alone.

A+ Education Partnership's 2017 Policy Agenda aligns its work in Alabama to the National Center for Education and the Economy's August 2016 report *9 Building Blocks for a World-Class Education System*. This report distills years of international research on high-performing education systems and lays out a framework for states that want their education systems to be among the best in the world.

We hope this agenda provides the basis for a discussion about how to change the trajectory of all students' educational progress. We encourage other organizations and individuals to identify their own contributions.

Together we can create a path forward toward an educational system that ensures all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, graduate prepared to excel in the global knowledge-based economy of the 21st Century.

All items included under the Building Blocks are important and interconnected, but A+'s top 2017 priorities fall under Building Blocks 3 and 9:

3. **Develop world-class, highly coherent instructional systems.**
   a) **College and Career Ready Standards**: Protect and fully implement the College and Career Ready Standards.
   b) **Aligned Assessments**: Ensure Alabama employs high-quality, aligned assessments that allow for year-over-year analysis of students' performance.
   c) **Strategic Plan to Improve Instruction**: Support development of strategic plans for math, science, technology and reading education to improve instruction across Alabama.

9. **Institute a governance system that has the authority and legitimacy to develop coherent, powerful policies and is capable of implementing them at scale.**
   a) **State Longitudinal Data System**: Collaborate with other stakeholders to further develop a State Longitudinal Data System and support other means of improving transparency and data-driven policymaking in Alabama's education and workforce systems.

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2017 A+ Education Partnership Policy Agenda

1. **Provide strong supports for children and their families before students arrive at school.**
   - **Pre-k:** Advocate for expansion of state-funded, high-quality First Class pre-k classrooms to increase the number of students entering school ready to learn.
   - **Campaign for Grade-Level Reading:** Launch a statewide grade-level reading campaign to increase support for students reading on grade-level by third grade.

2. **Provide more resources for at-risk students than for others.**
   - **Per Pupil Funding Formula:** Advocate for improvement of Alabama's school funding formula by shifting to a weighted, per pupil-based formula.
   - **After-School and Summer-Learning Programs:** Promote after-school and summer-learning programs to increase learning time and opportunities for at-risk students and foster innovation in school systems.
   - **Increased Wrap-Around Services:** Support efforts to improve wrap-around services for students in Alabama schools.
   - **High-Speed Internet Connectivity:** Support efforts to expand high-speed wireless Internet connectivity in schools.

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   - **Strategic Plan to Improve Instruction:** Support development of strategic plans for math, science, technology and reading education to improve instruction across Alabama.

4. **Create clear gateways for students through the system, set to global standards, with no dead ends.**
   - **College and Career Readiness Indicators:** Advance implementation and expand awareness of the six College and Career Readiness Indicators to encourage development of multiple pathways of success for students, whether they are going to college or straight into a career. This includes further expansion of Advanced Placement course offerings to students statewide. (A version of this point is also included under Building Block #7.)

5. **Assure an abundant supply of highly qualified teachers.**
   - **Teacher Pipeline:** Advocate for policies and support initiatives that recruit, train, retain and support high quality teachers. This includes but is not limited to:

     - *Teacher Preparation: Raising standards for recruitment and admission to, and graduation from, teacher preparation programs.*
     - *Alternative Route Certification: Supporting and expanding programs like Teach For America that recruit top college graduates and successful professionals to become teachers.*
     - *Equitable Distribution of Teachers: Providing financial incentives and support for teachers who commit to work in hard-to-staff schools and high-need fields.*
     - *School-Based Rewards: Creating financial incentives for schools that achieve improved high-level student results.*
     - *National Board Certification: Expanding support for National Board Certification.*

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6. **Redesign schools to be places in which teachers will be treated as professionals, with incentives and support to continuously improve their professional practice and the performance of their students.**
   - **Teacher Evaluations:** Support implementation in all school systems of a teacher evaluation system that uses multiple measures of student performance, encourages professional growth, and can ultimately inform employment decisions. These evaluations should be accompanied by support for improving effectiveness for teachers entering and continuing in the field, including mentors for new teachers.
   - **Career Pathways for Teachers:** Advocate for the creation of professional pathways and school staffing models that allow educators to grow professionally while remaining in teaching roles.
   - **Public Charter Schools and Traditional Public School Innovation:** Foster innovation in education through support of flexibility waivers and creation of public charter schools that experiment with what works best for students.

7. **Create an effective system of career and technical education and training.**
   - **Six College and Career Readiness Indicators:** Advance implementation—and expand awareness of—the six College and Career Readiness Indicators to encourage development of multiple pathways of success for students, whether they are going to college or straight into a career. This includes expanding opportunities for industry certification. (A version of this point is also included under Building Block #4.)

8. **Create a leadership development system that develops leaders at all levels to manage such systems effectively.**
   - **Leader Pipeline**: Support efforts to identify, recruit, train, and support school leaders.

9. **Institute a governance system that has the authority and legitimacy to develop coherent, powerful policies and is capable of implementing them at scale.**
   - **State Longitudinal Data System:** Collaborate with other stakeholders to further develop a State Longitudinal Data System and support other means of improving transparency and data-driven policymaking in Alabama's education and workforce systems.
   - **School and District Turnaround:** Support efforts to improve schools and systems' academic performance through intervention by the Alabama State Department of Education.
   - **Performance-Based Budgeting:** Support a return to performance-based state budgeting, as endorsed by PARCA.
   - **Transparency:** Increase transparency of the state's education system. This includes:
     - *Data Flipbook: Creating and disseminating Alabama Public Education at a Glance, and promoting PARCA's district-level data analysis.*
     - *Scholarship Accountability: Advocating for improved data transparency around performance of students who attend private schools with the help of tax credits and scholarships.*