



May 6, 2017

The Honorable Kay Ivey, Governor
The Honorable Members of the State Board of Education
The Honorable Michael Sentance, State Superintendent of Education
Montgomery, Alabama

Dear Gov. Ivey, Members of the Alabama State Board of Education, and Mr. Sentance,

We, the undersigned, request that the Alabama State Department of Education and the State Board of Education continue using its current statewide assessment of educational progress, the ACT Aspire, for the 2017-2018 school year to allow for adequate consideration, planning, and implementation of a new assessment system.

In June the State Board is expected to consider whether to cancel or extend for one year its current contract with ACT for the administration and scoring of the ACT Aspire, a set of standardized tests, given to students in grades 3-8 and 10.

There may be valid reasons for dissatisfaction with ACT Aspire. However, rushing into a new assessment system in a compressed timeframe without adequate input from a wide range of stakeholders that includes local educators, parents, assessment experts, school administrators, and others is a recipe for confusion and dissention in both the short and the long term. Those most affected by the assessment system must have opportunity for buy-in. Without a replacement properly vetted and identified, the state would be discarding a testing system familiar to teachers, students, and parents.

We respectfully request a committee of these stakeholders be created by the State Board of Education to make recommendations on the next generation of assessments.

Immediate cancellation of our current assessment will create a break in an established set of data, undermining the state's ability to track trends in educational performance. ACT Aspire scores can be used to indicate potential future performance on the ACT, the college readiness test taken by Alabama high school students.

The state is likely to incur additional costs for a replacement system – costs that are undetermined, and are not accounted for in the fiscal year 2018 Education Trust Fund Budget.

In the same timeframe that the State Board will be considering whether or not to extend the contract with ACT for Aspire testing in grades 3-8 and 10, the board is expected to be presented with multiple alternative proposals for a new assessment system. We understand the State Department of Education is in the process of drafting a detailed Request For Bids, which is expected to be over 120 pages long.

We think the initial work of the representative committee charged with developing the best assessment plan possible for Alabama should be completed before a RFB is released. The committee can then help evaluate those bids once they are returned.

All states are required by federal law to give an annual summative assessment so that school performance can be measured and progress tracked toward goals for educational improvement. If the State Board chooses to pursue the development of a new Alabama-specific test, the timeframe for developing aligned and valid tests would be time consuming.

Some have suggested the state ask the U.S. Department of Education for a one-year waiver in testing to allow for the transition to a new assessment. This is not desirable, because there is no certainty such a waiver would be granted, potentially leading to the hasty implementation in 2018 of a test unfamiliar to educators.

Further, Alabama schools need an annual assessment of academic quality to evaluate progress. School systems need a measuring stick to know whether their improvement efforts are effective. Without a test, we would lose a year of information that can help highlight best practices in schools that are closing achievement gaps.

According to *Education Week*, across the nation in the 2016-2017 school year:

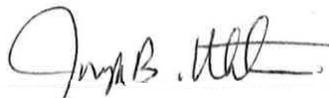
- 27 states are using tests they purchased or designed in collaboration with a vendor. This includes Alabama.
- 20 states and the District of Columbia administered PARCC or Smarter Balanced tests. These tests were developed through multi-state collaboration to reflect the Common Core State Standards
- 3 states give tests that are a blend of their own, home-designed questions and items from PARCC or Smarter Balanced.

The decision of a new assessment is of great consequence and should be made with the advice of a comprehensive committee. Assessments are a cornerstone of an improvement and accountability plan. It is vital that we get this decision right. The decision should be made with broad consensus about how we measure academic performance and what educational goals we, as a state, are pursuing. We are in no way trying to persuade the State Superintendent or State Board to choose one assessment pathway over another. However, we do believe the best pathway on assessments will be easier to see with the guidance of a well-balanced committee. We urge the appointment of a committee as soon as possible to give them ample time to work and report back to the Superintendent and State Board with options.

Respectfully submitted,



Caroline Novak
President
A+ Education Partnership



Joe Morton
Chairman
Business Education Alliance



Ryan Hankins
Executive Director
Public Affairs Research Council of
Alabama