

2004 Annual Report to Contributors

A+ Education Foundation and the Alabama Best Practices Center

The work of the A+ Education Foundation and the Alabama Best Practices Center (BPC) is made possible by generous contributions from individuals, corporations and foundations. These investments yielded positive results in 2004. Below are details of last year's work in three key areas and a list of our priorities for 2005.

CREATING SUPPORT AND DEMAND FOR STRONG PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Working Toward Excellence –

- The free journal of the BPC provides in-depth information and stories about educational best practice.
- Two issues were published in 2004: *Today's Effective Schools Have High-Capacity Leadership* (Spring 2004) and *Can Alabama Lead the U.S. in Reading Achievement?* (Summer/Fall 2004).
- It is mailed to a growing subscriber list of 15,000. When money is available, it is mailed to all certificated educators (approximately 70,000) in the state.

The Alabama Education Policy Primer –

- A+ and the Peabody Center for Education Policy at Vanderbilt University produced the *Alabama Education Policy Primer*, an objective, research-based resource for policymakers, opinion leaders, media and the community-at-large.
- The primer consists of 12 easy-to-use chapters that provide research on and analysis of such education issues as accountability, assessments, No Child Left Behind, and teaching quality.
- The primer has been distributed to key policymakers, members of the media and education leaders in the state.

“No Child Left Behind” Training –

- A+ hosted a communications workshop on “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) for reporters, education writers, school communicators, and superintendents.
- The goal was to shift focus from discussions about the technicalities of the federal law to the opportunities the law creates for students in Alabama.
- Jay Mathews, noted education writer for *The Washington Post*, served as moderator for the day. Guest speakers included policy analysts from The Education Trust and the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality.
- Work continues with state policymakers and opinion leaders to increase understanding and awareness about the successes our state is having as a result of NCLB funding and requirements.

Outstanding Educators Symposium –

- A+ and the BPC conducted this day of professional learning for more than 150 highly accomplished teachers
- Each veteran teacher nominated for the symposium was accompanied by a first-or-second-year teacher, giving novice teachers a unique opportunity to learn from and network with experienced educators who are leaders in their schools.
- This year's focus was on the teacher's role in creating high-performing schools. Guest speakers included 2003 National Teacher of the Year Betsy Rogers and State Superintendent Joe Morton.

PROMOTING BEST PRACTICES FOR SUCCEEDING WITH ALL STUDENTS

Powerful Conversations About Professional Development –

- Through the “Powerful Conversations about Professional Development” project, the BPC connects teachers to the best information and research about effective teaching practices.
- Currently, more than 150 schools in the state have participated in the project.
- Participating schools meet quarterly to focus on teaching and learning and to share best practice.

At-Risk Leadership Network –

- Launched and facilitated by the BPC, the At-Risk Leadership Network connects administrators in charge of programs serving “at-risk” students to proven programs and research-based information.
- The BPC coordinated and sponsored an annual conference for the network and published an At-Risk Coordinator’s Manual to provide tools and models for developing a successful at-risk program.

Alabama Reading Initiative –

- A+ drove the creation of the nationally recognized Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI), which is helping Alabama’s educators teach all students to read at grade level.
- A+ continues to work with the ARI staff to strengthen evaluation and reporting of results and to ensure that the original schools can sustain success.
- A+ is pressing for statewide funding and implementation of the Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative.

TRANSLATING BEST PRACTICES INTO STATE AND LOCAL POLICY

Strengthening School Leadership –

- A+ assisted in the launch of the Governor's Congress on School Leadership.
- A+ staff and board are involved with management of this initiative to develop new policies and practices for recruiting, preparing, supporting, evaluating and retaining highly effective principals and superintendents.

Improving Teaching Quality –

- In September 2004, A+ published a policy brief entitled *Exploring Aligned Teacher Compensation*.
- The report suggests ways to allocate scarce resources to appropriately compensate teachers while supporting improvements in teaching quality.
- It has been distributed to education leaders, policymakers and members of the media.

Providing Research and Counsel –

- A+ continues to provide research and support to the State Department of Education, the State Board of Education and the Governor as they complete a new generation of research-based policies and practices that focus on results.
- Our policy efforts include
 - o assisting in the design of the new statewide accountability and assessment systems
 - o advocating for funding to reward schools that raise student achievement and for the legal authority for the state to reconstitute the personnel in schools that fail to improve despite assistance.

Our specific goals for 2005 include:

CREATING SUPPORT AND DEMAND FOR STRONG PUBLIC SCHOOLS

1. **Publication of two issues of *Working Toward Excellence*:** Research currently is underway for issues on creating professional learning communities in schools and on “no-excuses” schools that insist on doing what it takes to get high achievement from all students.
2. **Promotion of the *Alabama Education Policy Primer*:** A+ continues to meet with the media and groups of policy makers to encourage use of the primer in their work. We will develop and conduct training for candidates seeking local and state office, with the primer serving as the “textbook.”
3. **Measure and report on the “status of public education” in Alabama:** A+ will work closely with the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama to identify and report on progress toward key educational benchmarks using national benchmarks and “SMART budgeting” performance indicators.

PROMOTING BEST PRACTICES FOR SUCCEEDING WITH ALL STUDENTS

1. **Integration of “Powerful Conversations About Professional Development” into the Alabama Reading Initiative:** The BPC will partner with the State Department of Education to conduct self-assessments in each ARI school to build the leadership needed to sustain progress and success. Each ARI school will then have access to the follow-up training and networking opportunities provided by the BPC to schools who participate in the “Powerful Conversations” project.
2. **Ensure sustainability of At-Risk Leadership Network:** The BPC will work with the State Department of Education and the Children’s Policy Councils to transfer ownership and management of the At-Risk Network activities. BPC staff will continue to serve as advisors to the network to ensure a successful annual conference and updates to the At-Risk Coordinator’s Manual.

TRANSLATING BEST PRACTICES INTO STATE AND LOCAL POLICY

1. **Work for passage of a sound education budget:** A+ firmly believes that the surplus and growth in the Education Trust Fund should be directed to programs, policies and initiatives that will directly improve student achievement. Our goals include:
 - Investments in the continued expansion of the Alabama Reading Initiative and in the future expansion of the Alabama Math, Science and Technology Initiative
 - Repayment of the Rainy Day Fund and school operations (known as “Other Current Expense”)
 - Funding for incentives to teachers who agree to teach in hard-to-staff schools and school systems
 - Funds to reward school teams that make progress with all students
 - A pay raise for teachers that is not funded with one-time money
2. **Promote the education-reform agenda:** The Governor and key legislative leaders have introduced strong reforms, including strengthening financial accountability and moving all administrators, not just principals, from tenure to performance contracts. A+ will continue to work for passage of this legislation.

4. Support enactment of the recommendations to be made by the Governor's Congress on School Leadership: A+ will work to implement the recommendations made by the Congress' task forces. Expected outcomes include an emphasis on developing leaders who know how to use data to drive improvements and manage change and offering incentives for meeting performance goals.

5. Participation in the Alabama Commission on Teaching Quality: A+ will continue to play a key role in efforts to improve teaching quality in our state. We will work closely with Alabama's 2003 National Teacher of the Year Dr. Betsy Rogers as she leads the Alabama Commission on Teaching Quality through exercises to identify and recommend strategies for

- retooling teacher preparation programs to ensure that future graduates are well-prepared to teach all students
- creating the working conditions that will allow the state to recruit and retain caring, capable teachers
- supporting the teaching of current and future educators
- rewarding them for making progress with all students

6. Focus on high schools: Nationwide, education leaders and progressive policymakers have made high-school reform a top policy priority. Governors and such national groups as ACHIEVE, the National Governors' Association and the Gates Foundation are leading the conversation about improving teaching and learning at the high-school level. A+ will synthesize the latest research on reforming high schools and develop a policy brief to be published in late 2005.

All of our current publications, including the *Alabama Education Policy Primer* and *Working Toward Excellence*, can be downloaded for free from our websites:

<http://www.aplusala.org>
<http://www.bestpracticescenter.org>

Hard copies of our publications may be ordered by calling (334)279-1886.

A+ Education Foundation

WORKING FOR EXCELLENCE IN ALABAMA

We're Non-Profit. We're Non-Partisan. We're Non-Political.
Our only goal is to ensure that every Alabama student has the opportunity to succeed in school.