

Operational Study and Analysis of the Alabama Department of Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

March 13, 2020



PUBLIC
CONSULTING GROUP

I. INTRODUCTION

Under the direction of the State of Alabama Department of Examiners of Public Accounts, Public Consulting Group, Inc. (PCG) conducted an organizational review and analysis of the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE). The following research questions guided our analysis:

1. What are the core functions of the ALSDE?
2. How does the current delivery model support the core educational functions of the ALSDE?
3. How can the ALSDE function more efficiently and effectively?
4. Does the ALSDE provide appropriate support to LEAs to improve student outcomes?
5. How does the ALSDE's organizational structure and function compare to the educational systems in top performing states?

PCG developed an understanding of the ALSDE's current state through qualitative data collection through interviews and document review, analyzed current staffing allocations and organizational structures, and performed a comparative analysis with states whose educational systems are considered highly performing on national measures to form the recommendations found in the report. All data collection and analysis occurred between October 2019-March 2020. The report makes recommendations for improvement to the ALSDE's policies, function, programs, funding, and organizational structure. Given the breadth of this scope and ambitious timeline for this work, PCG was not able to review all programs with the same level of intensity. As such, our recommendations highlight specific program areas we believe warrant deeper review.

The review seeks to document the organization and operation of the ALSDE at a moment in time. However, data collection and analysis have occurred alongside daily operations in the Department and the changing education landscape in the state. During our work, the ALSDE continued to make changes in administration and supports provided to LEAs to increase student achievement. The report endeavors to present the clearest portrait of the Department given this dynamic situation.

This Executive Summary is a high-level overview of our findings, the 5 key recommendations, and the 46 additional recommendations. The complete 167-page report provides a more comprehensive and detailed analysis on the current organization of the ALSDE and the comparative analysis used to inform PCG's final recommendations.

ALABAMA'S CURRENT CONTEXT

This organizational review of the ALSDE is timely given several converging factors.

1. **Stable Leadership.** The Department has had unusual turnover in leadership, particularly in the State Superintendent position over the past decade. There have been over a dozen Organizational Charts produced over that time, none of which reflect any real focus on priorities or strategic direction. Leadership instability has contributed to stagnate progress. Dr. Eric Mackey was appointed State Superintendent almost two years ago in April 2018. As the former Executive Director of the School Superintendents of Alabama, Dr. Mackey deeply understands the state's educational context and is respected by school district leaders.
2. **New Standards.** The December 2019 vote by the State Board of Education to approve the new Mathematics Course of Study developed by Alabama's educators is an important action step. These new standards follow the 2016 adoption of the state's Reading Course of Study. New statewide tests will be used to measure student growth to meeting these standards beginning school year 2020-21. These new standards raise expectations for student learning and should be used as a change lever to strengthen accountability.
3. **Proposed Changes to Governance Structures.** The proposed creation of the Alabama Commission on Elementary and Secondary Education signals a significant desire to increase oversight of Alabama's educational system. Currently, Alabama is one of only six states with an

elected school board that appoints a superintendent. The proposed change would eliminate the Alabama State School Board, replacing it with a Commission with members who are appointed by the Governor to a six-year term. It is intended that the Commission's appointed members would reflect the geographical, gender, and racial make-up of Alabama's public schools. Alabama voters will vote on this state constitutional amendment in March 2020 prior to the release of the report. Regardless of the outcome, this action represents a legislative desire for more planful and strategic state level accountability.

- 4. Committed Legislature.** The state legislature has demonstrated a strong interest in improving Alabama's educational system through funding, legislation, and other activities. The State Legislature recently passed the largest appropriation in history for Alabama public education. The Alabama Literacy Act of 2019 and proposed upcoming math and student wellness legislation further demonstrate this commitment.

These conditions indicate a clear readiness and commitment to implement the recommendations found in the report.

PCG supports change management through the careful analysis of functions and outcomes. PCG believes the report, and the updates that will hopefully follow, offers the Department a tremendous opportunity to move the state's reform priorities forward, target supports, and align planning efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of ALSDE programs. This, in turn, will align with the ultimate goal of improving educational outcomes in districts and schools.

Key Recommendations

PCG saw ample evidence that the ALSDE has a foundation on which to build. As noted throughout the report, the Department has many notable strengths including its willingness to participate in this review as part of a continuous improvement cycle.

However, without a sense of urgency and an unrelenting commitment to implementing the recommendations in the report with fidelity, the ALSDE will stagnate. Enacting change, the kind of change that will fundamentally improve outcomes of all students, requires focus, a strong vision from the State Superintendent enacted by senior leadership staff, an appropriate allocation of resources, mandated professional learning, and clear, non-negotiable accountability measures. This type of reform requires the involvement and commitment of every staff person and a willingness to establish high expectations for districts, schools, and students.

The following are PCG's key, non-negotiable recommendations. Without faithful implementation of these five recommendations, all other organizational recommendations will have limited to no impact.

1. Take the lead.

The ALSDE must take full ownership and accountability for student progress across Alabama. The ALSDE is responsible for both the academic and social/emotional success of students, with the end goal of ensuring all graduates are prepared for life after high school. The ALSDE must establish its proper role as the state educational authority in Alabama and perform accordingly.

The ALSDE leadership must be bold but also collaborative. There are times when the ALSDE must take charge and bear full responsibility for aspects of reform, and other places where the ALSDE must set the conditions for others to assume leadership. Like an expert conductor, the ALSDE may not have the expertise to play all the instruments, but through a combination of the use of outside experts, significantly involving the people in schools and districts that do the hardest work, and partnering with as many involved groups as possible, the Department can and should be able to move the State of Alabama forward in significant ways.

2. Develop and implement a strategy to action plan.

The ALSDE tends to be reactive primarily because it does not have a clear plan of action, leading to inconsistent decision-making. Decisions are in response to external pressure and appear to be quick fixes without regard to long term ramifications or connections to other initiatives within the Department or the State.

The ALSDE must develop a comprehensive, detailed, and transparent *Strategy to Action Plan* with defined steps and activities, financial implications, milestones, deadlines, and results. This *Strategy to Action Plan* should guide the implementation of all recommendations in the report. As a first step, the ALSDE will need to inventory and consolidate all existing plans to ensure all staff are working towards the same goals. To ensure transparency and partnership, the ALSDE must institute routine and public progress updates. An iterative Strategic Communications Plan should be developed and implemented to communicate the *Strategy to Action Plan*. Regular progress updates should be provided to the Governor's Office, the Alabama State Legislature, the State Board of Education, Superintendents, and all of Alabama's citizens.

3. Focus first on the priorities.

There is much to address, but beginning with a few clear, critical initiatives is the only way to galvanize the State to move in the right direction. The *Strategy to Action Plan* must drive this prioritization.

STANDARDS: For the next year, the core focus must be on the adoption of the Reading and Math Course of Study at the local level. If teachers understand these standards and align their instruction to them, student achievement will improve. The ALSDE must implement a detailed Communications, Professional Learning, and Technical Assistance Plan to support standards adoption. Equally, state testing should be used as an improvement tool to ensure instruction is aligned to the standards. The ALSDE needs to begin immediately to prepare to analyze the results of the new state tests and provide critical data to schools and districts. The ALSDE must ensure local educators have detailed data to examine test results and to connect the test items to the standards. The release of test items will also be an important tool for local educators. The ALSDE should also look for ways to disseminate classroom teaching practices that are working across the state to get results.

STUDENT INFORMATION SYSTEM: The pending PowerSchool implementation has the potential to substantially impact how schools and districts function. For the first time, all systems, schools and teachers across Alabama will have access to the same learning management, student information, reporting and analytics tools. The scale of this initiative is huge. A prioritized focus must be placed on this roll-out to ensure implementation success.

4. Hold schools and districts accountable.

Student performance and compliance with state and federal requirements is the responsibility of local schools and districts. The ALSDE must hold all schools and districts accountable for their performance in an actionable way. Current accountability structures do not incite needed urgency at the local level. For example, only 38% of all students and 20% of Black students statewide were considered proficient in Science by Alabama measures in 2019, yet the state received a letter grade of B on the State Report Card. Accountability and assistance must be closely linked to produce continuous and sustainable improvement. Strengthen the ALSDE's ability to provide targeted, coordinated and deep technical assistance for schools and districts that have demonstrated the inability to do it on their own.

5. Significantly reorganize the ALSDE internally.

Substantial structural changes must occur at the ALSDE to implement the recommendations in the report. The organizational structure should align with the *Strategy to Action Plan* and the core function of every program must be to improve student outcomes. All staff employed by the ALSDE should have the core

skills and competencies needed to do their job well. There needs to be a significant focus on the professionalization of staff, including a deep investment in staff training. The current hiring process also needs to be revisited in collaboration with the State Personnel Office. Outdated internal systems and paper-based practices are unnecessarily time-consuming and limit productivity. Streamlining procedures and moving to electronic systems across the ALSDE have the potential to significantly improve outputs

II. ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Below is a complete list of PCG's more detailed recommendations. There are 46 additional recommendations.

STANDARDS, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND ASSISTANCE

1. **Accountability.** Accountability and assistance must be closely linked to produce continuous and sustainable improvement.
 - a. Modernize data and analytics systems, improve analytic capabilities, and place data at the center of all policy discussions in public education.
 - b. The Accountability unit primarily functions as an internal data analytics shop. Broaden the role of accountability to focus on policy, research, and district guidance to drive the school improvement conversation.
 - c. There is a wealth of data used to produce School Report Cards. Develop data reports, policy briefs and analytics tools that can support local decision-making. These should be publicly available.
2. **Report Card.** The current School and District Report Card Develop should be refined to improve stakeholder clarity and ensure accurate understanding.
 - a. Be more explicit about the formula that is used to calculate a school or district's letter grade on the Record Card.
 - b. Review state-level formula inputs to reconsider if state letter grade should be a "B." If deemed appropriate, Report Card should more clearly justify how this letter grade was determined.
 - c. Use icons such as arrows to demonstrate upward or downward growth.
 - d. Provide comparative data to allow for end users to understand how a school or district performs against other districts and the state overall.
 - e. Develop user guides and videos to orient stakeholders to better understand how letter grades are calculated and how to interpret data shared.
 - f. Determine if there is the ability to suppress certain data fields that are not relevant to certain grade spans (i.e., graduation rates at the elementary level). The inclusion of the term "no data" can be misleading to some end users.
 - g. Consider how assigned letter grades align to other accountability systems.
3. **Education Funding.** Alabama's education funding model does not differentiate based on student need or poverty level.
 - a. Review impact of adopting a weighted student-based funding model (foundation formula model) to align to national best practice.
4. **Graduation Rates.** The current graduation rate in Alabama is 90%, yet a quarter of all students must take remedial courses in Alabama's colleges. Given NAEP scores and remedial course taking rates, determine if requirements for graduation are too low.
5. **School Improvement.** Strengthen the scope and capacity of this team to better drive school improvement.
 - a. The CSI team charged with providing the support is small and under resourced. Most NAEP states reviewed have a cadre of staff to support this function. In addition, these states augment with outside partners who have expertise, experience and success working with low performing schools, both in rural and urban areas.

- b. Create incentives to ensure schools and districts use their resources to improve student outcomes rather than fill in budget gaps within the districts.
- 6. **Innovation.** Create an Innovation Unit to allow districts and schools flexibility to implement practices that best support their community and incubate new ideas. Increased accountability measured by student outcomes must be a non-negotiable component of granting increased flexibility.
- 7. **Compliance Monitoring.** Monitoring is solely focused on compliance indicators. Determine if there are opportunities to augment monitoring elements to emphasize results/student outcomes.
 - a. The ALSDE uses a risk score to determine onsite monitoring each year. Consider how districts that are frequently identified as high risk would benefit from more intensive or mandated technical assistance from compliance monitoring or other program staff.
 - b. Compliance reports (outside of special education) are not currently posted online. Not sharing this data inhibits accountability and transparency. This is particularly true for Correction Action Plans (CAPs).
 - c. PowerSchool may help to streamline the monitoring process.

GOVERNANCE

- 8. **State Board of Education.** Facilitate annual board retreats and other board trainings to set board expectations, priorities and roles. The Chief of Staff should serve as the first point of contact for board inquires and questions.
- 9. **State Leadership.** Strengthen two-way communication with the State legislature. Communication should be frequent, meaningful and led by the State Superintendent.
- 10. **Strategic Plan.** Finalize and disseminate the draft Strategic Plan as a *Strategy to Action Plan*.
 - a. Be explicit on strategic actions
 - b. Set metrics and track progress towards goals
 - c. Provide regular public updates on plan progress

INTERNAL FUNCTIONS

- 11. **Reorganization of the ALSDE.** Implement the significant organizational changes outlined in the report to better align the ALSDE to its core functions. These include:
 - a. Expand Chief of Staff role to 1.0 FTE (currently at 0.5).
 - b. Expand current Communications Director role to encompass board communications, legislative affairs and oversight of a Problem Resolution unit.
 - c. Legal: Move legislative affairs out of this team.
 - d. Dissolve the current Professional Learning Team. Move these duties to other sections.
 - e. Create a true Data Analysis, Strategy, and Internal Audit Division to inform policy and practice and ensure the ALSDE's efficacy of practice.
 - f. Reconfigure Division of Instruction to align to core functions: 1) Implementation of Educational Standards; 2) LEA Accountability and Assistance; 3) Educator Quality and 4) Prepared Graduates.
 - g. Create a District Accountability and Assistance unit that has significantly more reach and responsibility than the current School Improvement Team.
 - h. Expand the role of Teaching and Leading to include all aspects of Educator Quality.
- 12. **Personnel.** In close collaboration with the State Personnel Office, relax personnel requirements for a 24-month period to allow the ALSDE to have the most effective staff in place to support the implementation and delivery of all recommendations in the report. Monitor activity closely to ensure appropriate staffing decisions.
- 13. **Regional or Satellite Offices.** Many programs are heavily field-based and staff waste significant time on travel. Regional satellite centers may support efficiency and increase the pool of quality job candidates. Conduct a cost analysis study to determine the long-term feasibility of a regional model.
- 14. **Current Facilities.** The current space in the Gordon Persons building is not conducive to a collaborative or productive working environment. Staff are siloed, spread across multiple floors with

another Agency wedged between, and the layout is confusing and not welcoming to visitors. Develop a plan to move to a facility that better supports the core functions of the ALSDE. Consider how a building move might be coupled with a regional office approach.

- 15. Human Resources.** Realign the work of Human Resources to make its core focus the professionalization and development of staff. Consider if some existing job functions could be transferred to the Payroll Office to better support this repositioning of responsibilities. Duties at a minimum should include:
 - a. Onboarding Program for Staff
 - b. Professional Learning Program, differentiated by staff role, experience and learning needs
 - c. Performance Monitoring and Employee Growth
 - d. Technology Training
 - e. Written documentation on staff expectations, job descriptions, human resources policies and procedures.
- 16. Job Ladders.** Determine if there is opportunity for internal professional growth and advancement through greater stratification in job titles.
 - a. Enhance opportunities for clerical staff that excel at the ASA III level
 - b. Differentiate roles at the Education Specialist level to include at least an Education Specialist II position
- 17. Legal Services.** Develop systems to ensure better tracking of activities to allow for consistent practices and more informed decision-making.
 - a. Procure a Case Management System to create a shared database that allows for document sharing, better record keeping, time tracking and trend analysis.
 - b. Log calls received and resolution from school districts, families and other stakeholders. Conduct regular analysis of issues received by type, district and outcome to determine areas where Agency guidance, policies or other proactive measures might lessen or eliminate concerns.
 - c. Review Board of Adjustment claim activity over the past 24 months, including frequency of low dollar claims, to determine if policy changes should be made to current practices.
 - d. Analyze type and frequency of legal support provided directly to school districts to determine if many of these activities should be local obligations. Develop written guidance around when legal services should be provided at the state level versus district managed.
- 18. Information Technology.** Continue to set the expectation that the role of IT is to function as an internal Fee for Service unit for the ALSDE programs. Program staff must own all business requirements development, system design, and final approval of all IT development activities.
 - a. Several IT solutions are developed and hosted internally. Before new design updates occur, consider if existing technologies can be procured that fit system requirements. For example, the Child Nutrition application needs to be rewritten. Consider off-the-shelf solutions through an RFI process prior to developing in house.
 - b. Analyze purchasing trends over the past 24 months to determine if a P-Card would expedite purchasing turnaround time on low dollar items.
 - c. The IT department reported challenges in recruiting qualified staff under current State Personnel practices. As such, several employees are in long-term contract positions. Consider if current hiring procedures should be revised to better attract more qualified candidates to these positions.
 - d. Adopt Agency-wide internal document sharing practices to allow for better collaboration amongst staff and with school districts. For example, use of Microsoft SharePoint, Teams and OneDrive would greatly increase collaborative work habits.
 - e. Agency staff would benefit from additional training in Microsoft Office Applications and other technology use. Target ASA and Education Specialist staff first. This function should be an HR responsibility with IT input.
- 19. Written Procedures.** There is an absence of written policies, procedures, manuals and guidance used to drive internal work. Ensure procedures have written documentation that is consistent

across programs (where relevant) and is regularly updated. This should be housed in an electronic format in a location that is readily accessible to all staff.

- 20. Emergency Management.** Practice safety drills with an emergency management internal team. While the ALSDE is focused on upgrading security and ensuring safety drills are being held in schools and districts around the state, the ALSDE has been remiss with that same focus with their own building and staff.
- 21. Purchasing/Procurement Process.** Streamline the purchasing/procurement process to reduce the number of steps and signatures.
 - a. The ALSDE is working on a technology requisition system with a targeted completion date of summer 2020. Confirm this system will increase timeliness and ease of procurement process.
- 22. Memo Routing Processes.** Streamline the routing processes for memos, letters and contracts to improve internal efficiencies and communication with school districts.
 - a. Convert paper-based memo writing process to an electronic format. Electronic routing will allow for better standardization, internal tracking for timeliness, and reduce the risk of lost or misplaced documentation.
 - b. Reduce the number of required signatures to only those whose review is critical.
 - c. Develop a Style Guide and Memo Template so that all staff are aware of memo writing formatting expectations.
 - d. Provide training to all new staff on memo writing processes to ensure consistent practices.
- 23. Child Nutrition Program.** Conduct an in-depth review of the current structures and function of this program to ensure efficacy, compliance and aligned practices. The Child Nutrition Program currently oversees several programs that are provided elsewhere in other states.
 - a. Consider moving all non-school based nutrition programs to the Department of Agriculture or other suitable agency. This would likely include: Commodity Supplemental Food Program, Emergency Food Assistance Program, and the Child and Adult Care Program.
 - b. Review internal operations that adhere to federal regulations. Many recent audit findings, while easily correctable, are due to a lack of oversight within the section.
 - c. Consider reviewing the expectations of the staff and section leadership. The Child Nutrition Program currently oversees a staff of 37+ and oversees more than 11 programs without an administrator assigned to lead the section. Making changes to roles and responsibilities within the section may ensure more oversight leading to less audit findings.
 - d. Ensure a customer service orientation to all aspects of Child Nutrition program delivery.

COMMUNICATIONS

- 24. Complaint and Inquiry Management.** There is not a centralized location for families and other stakeholders to call when there are a potential concerns or questions. In its absence, multiple individuals are answering calls that are outside of their core work, callers are often bounced around or receive misinformation, and there is no centralized knowledge of the types of calls received.
 - a. Create a unit to receive inquiries and complaints from families and other stakeholders to streamline process for callers. This unit should set up systems to ensure appropriate logging of calls, consistency of communication, and ensure problem resolution.
 - b. Elevate calls to appropriate individuals in other units as needed.
 - c. Conduct trend analysis to identify greatest areas of concern for callers.
- 25. External Communications to All Stakeholders.** Create a Strategic Communications Plan that ensures consistent, frequent and targeted messaging to all constituents. The Strategic Communications Plan should be regularly revisited and updated to reflect current messaging needs. At a minimum this Communication Plan should include:
 - a. An updated, website that is friendly to all end users.
 - i. Include a plan for how the website will be maintained and frequently updated.
 - ii. New website should be mobile-friendly and meet accessibility standards.

- iii. Develop content guidelines to ensure all information on website serves a purpose, is informative, and accurate
 - iv. The new website is in development with a target roll out date of July 2020. Track progress to ensure an on-time launch.
 - b. A social media strategy to target messages around key reform initiatives to engage stakeholders, educate and build community.
 - i. See Tennessee's #TNBestforALL campaign as an example.
 - c. A media relations strategy to ensure calculated deployment of media to tell the ALSDE's story.
 - d. Identification of metrics and tracking of these metrics to determine awareness, engagement and consumers. Web-based applications such Google Analytics to track website traffic and Hootsuite for social media management can support metric analysis.
 - e. Update logo and Style Guide to communicate a more contemporary, energized message to stakeholders.
 - f. Presentation (i.e., PowerPoint) and report templates to ensure consistent and professional materials are used.
 - g. Targeted communications plans should be developed for all key and new initiatives, and should including branding, identification of target audiences, messaging and metrics. These should be mutually owned by the Communications Department and the respective program area.
- 26. Communications to Districts.** Current written communications to Superintendents and other school district leaders comes in the form of disparate memos. Develop a streamlined newsletter that can be used to communicate overall messaging and strategy, along with formal guidance.

EDUCATOR WORKFORCE

- 27. Teacher Certification Process.** Significant changes must be made to the current teacher certification and recertification process to remove inefficient processes, redundancies and opportunities for human error. Improvements should also reduce the reliance on paper-based processes. The LeanFrog Report was comprehensive, and recommendations are aligned to PCG's findings.
- a. Release an RFI to determine if a vendor solution may meet the ALSDE needs prior to implementing a web-based solution in house.
- 28. Educator Effectiveness.** Finalize and implement the new Teacher Evaluation System. Develop a detailed implementation plan that includes a comprehensive Communications Strategy and Professional Learning Approach so that all teachers understand new expectations prior to roll-out.
- 29. National Board-Certified Teachers (NBCT).** Review effectiveness of National Board-Certified Teacher pay supplemental to determine if program has intended outcomes. Revise policy as necessary depending on data review. At a minimum, analyze:
- a. Achievement outcomes for students taught by an Alabama NBCT versus others.
 - b. % of those receiving the NBCT pay supplemental who are current classroom teachers versus in those other positions.
 - c. Efficacy of the additional \$5,000 supplement for NBCT teachers in identified struggling schools.
 - d. Distribution of NBCT teachers across the state by school demographics.
- 30. Teacher Recruitment and Retention.** Prioritize and implement the 33 recommendations from the Teacher Taskforce Report.
- a. Develop an implementation roadmap to develop a multi-year plan and ensure accountability to timelines.
 - b. Determine if there is the opportunity to implement a statewide alternative certification and consider other outside of the box approaches to teacher retention.

DISABILITY DETERMINATION SERVICES

- 31. Disability Determination Services (DDS).** DDS processes claims for Social Security and Supplemental Security Income disability claims. It does not perform a direct K-12 educational function. Given this and the below data, PCG recommends moving DDS to another Agency outside of the ALSDE.
- a. DDS is an outlier to the ALSDE. The section provides different services than any other section but uses many ALSDE resources. The resources include:
 - i. Finance- Reports and is supervised by CFO. Receives services from the SDE Business and Support Services
 - ii. Human Resources- Manages all aspects of 406 employees (almost the size of the rest of the ALSDE). Hires from 8 different registers.
 - iii. Legal- Reviews all contracts, which may be 50+ in a month
 - iv. Accounting
 - v. Procurement- Ordering goes through the ALSDE procurement process
 - vi. IT Department
 - b. The ALSDE staff report the unit to be high functioning and well-managed, with indirect costs covering all operational expenses. However, the DDS Director has served in the Department for 45 years and PCG's assumption is retirement will be forthcoming. It is highly likely that shifting to new leadership will put a strain on the ALSDE and initially impact services.
 - c. In analyzing NAEP states, the DDS programs are not located under the State Departments of Education with the exception of NH, which has it under Vocational Rehabilitation Services at the DOE. The list of states are as follows:
 - i. Florida- Department of Health
 - ii. Mississippi- Department of Rehabilitation Services
 - iii. Massachusetts- Office on Disability
 - iv. Tennessee- Department of Human Services' Division of Rehabilitation Services
 - v. NH- Department of Education- Voc Rehab Services
 - vi. Wyoming- Department of Health
 - vii. New Jersey- Department of Human Services
 - viii. Minnesota- Department of Human Services
 - d. Uncoupling a department that has been with the ALSDE for 50+ years will be complicated and may take legislative involvement. However, making changes that align with other successful NAEP states will ensure that all services being provided are focused on education, which must become the priority.

COORDINATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

- 32. Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE):** The work of DECE directly impacts a student's learning trajectory.
- a. Strengthen communication with the DECE's Office of School Readiness to ensure for greater policy alignment and more streamlined experiences for families and schools specifically as it relates to Pre-K and the PK-3 Early Learning Continuum.
 - b. Ensure coordination between Early Intervention and Special Education to better support families of children who qualify for these services.
 - c. Develop intentional partnership strategies with DECE to promote overall school readiness.
- 33. Department of Mental Health.** Expand to school-based mental health collaboration to increase access to mental health professionals across the state.
- 34. Alabama Commission on Higher Education.**
- a. Strengthen partnership to increase student access to and participate in dual enrollment opportunities.

- b. Increase data sharing to allow for better tracking of students' post-secondary outcomes.

IMPROVED INSTRUCTION AND SUPPORTS TO DISTRICTS

35. Career Readiness and Workforce Readiness.

- a. Leverage external initiatives to expand current focus. The Governor's "Strong Start, Strong Finish" initiative prioritizes the education to workforce pipeline. Perkins V requires intensified focus on academic standards and alignment to workforce development.
- b. Calling the unit "CTE" limits the vast scope of workforce preparation activities this office can and should perform.
- c. The CTE Director role is currently vacant. This provides an opportunity to broaden role to greater encompass "college, career, and life" readiness.
- d. Develop a P-20W statewide longitudinal data system to support tracking of post-secondary outcomes.
- e. Develop a statewide system for K-12 career exploration and planning.
- f. Require individual career plans for all students in grades 6-12.
- g. The Graduation Tracking System serves as an early warning tool to identify students off-track to graduate at the local level. It is unclear to PCG how and if this is still used.
- h. Deploy CTE pathway-aligned models of work-based learning and dual enrollment.
- i. Credentials tracked for the CCR Accountability metric should be aligned to regional labor market data and tied to high-growth, high-demand, and high-wage sectors.
- j. Partner with the Alabama Office of Apprenticeship to increase work-based learning opportunities for students.

36. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). An MTSS Taskforce formed this year to begin to develop state guidance on an MTSS framework. MTSS is a decision-making framework that enables schools to proactively identify student's strengths and needs based on data and use of evidence-based practices. MTSS address both academics and student's social-emotional needs. MTSS should be a core component to how school districts build the necessary supports to ensure the success of all students.

- a. Develop written guidance for districts to understand the philosophy, model and required components.
- b. Design a professional development strategy that ensures training is provided to all districts.
- c. Given the complexity of this work, consider engaging with a national expert to facilitate framework design and implementation strategy.

37. Mathematics

- a. Aggressively disseminate the new Math standards across the State. Since they represent what Alabama students should know and be able to do in Mathematics at the various grade levels, the most important audience are teachers, local administrators, and parents. Less detailed documents need to be shared across the State with families, community members and other stakeholders.
- b. Lead the initiative of unpacking the new math standards and use all resources available to train coaches and teachers to implement the standards with fidelity. With the support of regional centers, all schools throughout the state should have access to the support it needs to adhere to the more rigorous standards. Data should lead this roll out process with the districts serving the bottom 6% of schools receiving priority.
- c. Track AMSTI impact on teacher practice. Create systems for data collection using multiple measures outlined below to monitor progress throughout the implementation. Link multiple data sources and monitoring progress toward measurable goals.
 - i. Define the strategies needed to achieve the ALSDE's vision of improved student achievement in mathematics as well as measure whether the instructional strategies are effective.
 - ii. Ensure strategies are in place to ensure long-term, sustainable results.

- iii. Identify the current performance for both teacher effectiveness and student achievement against the measures (baseline data) and the target performance desired at predetermined points.
 - iv. Recognize when strategic shifts are needed to accomplish the ALSDE goals without a big lapse in time.
 - d. Break down the silo between AMSTI and Instructional Services. While one of the Instructional Services tasks is to develop Courses of Study (standards), there appears to be a lack of communication and collaboration between members of each team.
 - i. Schedule consistent time set aside for the math and science education specialists to collaborate and plan to provide supports to the LEAs.
- 38. Gifted Education.** Gifted Education only has one staff member. As a result, the predominant focus is on compliance.
- a. Prioritize the hiring on current vacancy to allow for a greater focus on technical assistance and professional learning.
 - b. Determine if this role should remain housed within special education or stand on its own.
 - c. Gifted Education is not on the Cognia system for Compliance monitoring. For a lack of another system, monitoring data reports are currently shared via email. Move to a more secure data/document sharing platform.
- 39. English Language Learners.** The number of English Language Learners in Alabama is growing. Current services are disjointed and spread among multiple sections. Hire a statewide ELL administrator to develop a strategic approach to support this population.
- 40. Special Education.** Consider how all activities of this section work to help school districts raise the level of and access to high levels of rigor as well as generate a culture of academic optimism for students with IEPs.
- a. Under the revised Results-Driven Accountability (RDA) framework, the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has sharpened its focus on what happens in the classroom to promote educational benefits and improve outcomes and results for students with disabilities. The accountability system that existed prior to the new one placed substantial emphasis on procedural compliance, but it often did not consider how requirements affected the learning outcomes of students.¹ RDA offers a strategic opportunity for Special Education to shift programmatic emphasis and monitoring towards a greater emphasis on outcomes.
 - b. Monitor state IEP system in PowerSchool to ensure it supports reporting and monitoring needs.
- 41. Regional In-Service Centers (RICs).** Conduct a feasibility study to determine if the functions of the RICs can and should be moved in-house to the ALSDE. In the interim, do the following:
- a. Expect all Regional In-Service Centers to align to the 2019 Accountability Standards. They should be posted on every website and RICs should be held accountable to meeting them.
 - b. Set minimum expectations for all websites. There should be an easily accessible and updated monthly professional development calendar. Expecting educators to spend time searching for professional learning on a RIC website will not encourage them to sign up for learning that they need to support student achievement.
 - c. Provide more focus on supporting training for ALSDE's initiatives. It is difficult for educators to travel hours to attend a training in Montgomery. The advantage of RICs is that all Alabama educators have the same opportunity to receive high-quality professional learning no matter where they are located. With the Alabama Literacy Act in effect, teachers need as much support as possible to achieve the lofty goal of all students reading on grade level by the end of third grade. Every Regional Center should be contributing to this effort.

¹ April 5, 2012, RDA Summary, U.S. Department of Education. www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/rdasummary.doc

- d. Build a stronger collaboration with the ALSDE. The oversight and accountability of the RICs is difficult to understand. Many are unclear as to “who is in charge.” Set the expectations for all Regional In-Service Centers and how will those expectations be measured.
- 42. Whole Child Wellness/Prevention and Support Services**
- a. Create mission and vision for a comprehensive approach to whole child wellness and align resources and services to that mission.
 - b. Develop stronger communication and collaboration between Prevention and Support and other sections such as special education and instructional services.
- 43. MEGA Conference.** The MEGA Conference provides many different educator groups with an opportunity to gather, connect, and learn. While the sessions are large in number, the focus and goals of the Conference are not clear. There is substantial effort on the ALSDE staff to support this conference.
- a. Review the goals of the MEGA conference and determine if the current delivery format meets those goals.
 - b. All MEGA Conference sessions should explicitly link to the ALSDE’s goals as well as align to the Alabama’s professional learning standards. When educators choose which session(s) to attend, they should clearly know what goal and/or strategy that is aligned to the session(s). Including a vast array of short professional learning sessions that are limited in their connection to the Department’s initiatives is a missed opportunity.
- 44. Virtual Learning.** The ACCESS virtual learning program provides equal access to high quality instruction to all student learners across the state.
- a. Continue to expand to capacity to increase course enrollment.
 - b. Continue to expand AP and other advanced course offerings. Based on the ACCESS course catalogue, there are 10 AP courses offered out of the 39 available from the College Board.
 - c. Use data to drive program design. Analyze and publish course success rates and enrollment trends to refine offerings. Determine course taking impact on college and career readiness.
- 45. PowerSchool Implementation.** The implementation of PowerSchool statewide has the potential exponentially improve educator, school, and district practice. By summer 2020, the Student Information System will be fully implemented statewide. By school year 2020-21, educators are expected to fully use all modules in the system. Statewide technology implementations are challenging, particularly ones that requires a dramatic shift in educator practice. Thoughtful and focused attention and long-term scenario planning must be given to ensure adoption success. While current PowerSchool training will focus on access to and use of the technologies, it is imperative that the ALSDE is developing subject matter guidance and complementary professional learning that will ensure deep adoption and long-term impact.
- a. Ensure educators and administrators have multiple and relevant opportunities for system trainings that focus on practical applications.
 - b. Develop structures and guidance to support a data culture and inquiry-based thinking in schools and districts.
 - c. Develop a training plan to ensure educators, administrators, and technology coordinators know how to understand and apply data.
 - d. Create canned reports to encourage appropriate usage of analytics tools among less experienced end users and to create efficiencies among all end users.
 - e. Develop criteria to determine professional learning quality control on the Learning Management System.
 - f. Embed PowerSchool into all professional learning opportunities offered by the ALSDE. Ensure that RICs are doing the same.
 - g. Require all ALSDE staff to participate in end user training to ensure system understanding.

- h. Launch a Communications Campaign that brands the tool specific to Alabama, generates system awareness, and creates excitement.
- 46. Charter Schools.** The Alabama School Choice and Opportunity Act passed by the legislature in 2016 ensures the likelihood that charter schools will be part of the educational landscape within Alabama in the upcoming years. Although the law was passed four years ago, charter school openings are still in their infancy stage with currently only four (4) opened and operated within the state. With that said, more charter school applications are in progress and the ALSDE anticipates three (3) additional openings in the near future. Currently, the ALSDE has one person serving in the role of liaising between the ALSDE, the charter school operator, and the Alabama Public Charter School Commission. As the state begins to support these new schools, consider the following:
- a. Communicate internally the role that the ALSDE has in the support and oversight of charter schools. When probing about charter schools with ALSDE staff, there was a lot of confusion regarding roles and responsibilities of staff.
 - b. Separate charter schools from virtual schools on the ALSDE website as well as internally. There is a lot of information focused on charter schools, but it is confusing when both entities share the same webpage. As more potential operators need pertinent information to launch a new charter school, that page will become a lifeline.
 - c. Design a plan to build out the ALSDE staff for this team. One person as the liaison, but also providing technical assistance to new charter schools is unsustainable as the numbers grow.