



EDUCATION
PARTNERSHIP



RAISE Act Implementation Toolkit

Supporting English Learners

RAISE Act Implementation Toolkit



About this Toolkit

This toolkit is for district and school leaders, school board members, families, and community members to learn about the Renewing Alabama's Investment in Student Excellence (RAISE) Act implementation. It includes information about the 2025 legislation, the district budgeting process and how to get involved, and how Alabama's districts and schools can support the student groups identified in the RAISE Act.

Here is a preview of what you will see:

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Overview of the RAISE Act

What is the RAISE Act? How does it benefit students?

For 30 years, Alabama schools were funded based on how many students attended, instead of what those students needed. The RAISE Act of 2025 updated the old formula by adding more money for students who need it most. More funds for students can be transformational, with research showing that additional dollars translate to better outcomes for students. RAISE funds are flexible, and districts can decide how to spend them in ways that best help their students. Districts can now hire aides or tutors, run summer and afterschool programs, or pursue other resources that directly support students with the RAISE Act. Districts started receiving RAISE Act funds in the 2025-2026 school year.

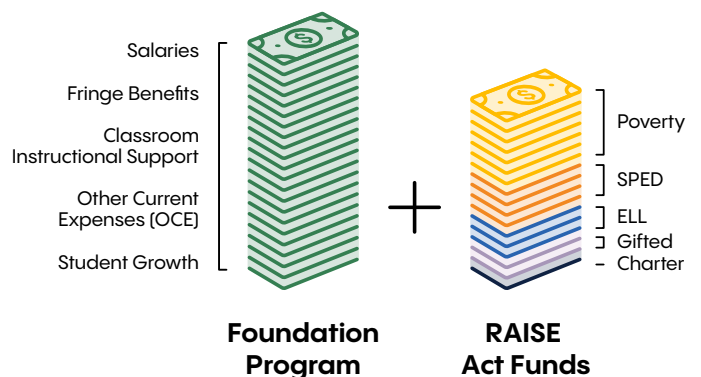
Why should I get involved?

RAISE funds must be used on student needs. The RAISE Act increased the funding available for students in poverty and English language learners, and generated funds for special education students at the state level for the first time in Alabama's history. We must make sure that districts are using this money to give students the resources they need. **To do that, districts need to hear innovative and effective ideas that have worked in Southern schools – and the voices of parents, families, students, and communities need to be heard and valued in the decision-making process.**



How much money does the RAISE Act invest in students?

The Foundation Program remains Alabama's primary school funding formula, while the RAISE Act provides additional funding for student needs. In its first year (2025-2026), \$166 million was sent to districts for five student groups: students in poverty, special education students, English learners, gifted students, and charter school students. In the second year, \$191 million was appropriated. The Alabama Legislature is committed to the RAISE Act, and these funds will keep supporting students long-term.



How is the RAISE Act funded?

The RAISE Act is funded through the annual Education Trust Fund budget and a dedicated reserve fund. The RAISE Fund was started with \$375 million in FY26 and grew to \$700 million in FY27 using money transferred from the Education Opportunities Reserve Fund. The RAISE Fund will grow over time through transfers and investments to fund future years.

How are RAISE Act funds calculated for each school district?

The RAISE Act established five student groups. Each student group has a weight, which is a percentage of the base amount that determines their additional funding. Here is the formula to determine how money flows from the state to districts for RAISE funds:

1. The state's Foundation Program per-pupil funding average from the previous year is the "base" amount. The base is defined each year in the Education Trust Fund (ETF) budget. In the 2026–2027 school year, the base was \$7,829.
2. Each student group is assigned a weight, which is a percentage of the base amount, that determines their additional funding. Weights are set in the ETF budget annually.
3. Districts receive their RAISE Funds based on the number of students they have in each group. The Alabama Department of Education releases the official totals for each district for each student group.

STUDENT GROUP	FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026			FISCAL YEAR 2026–2027		
	Weighted Allocation	Funding/ Student	Statewide Funding	Weighted Allocation	Funding/ Student	Statewide Funding
Students in Poverty	2.25%	\$170	\$68.2 million	2.75%	\$215	\$86.8 million
Special Education: Tier 1	2%	\$151	\$48.8 million	2.5%	\$196	\$54.1million
Special Education: Tier 2	10%	\$755		10%	\$783	
Special Education: Tier 3	75%	\$5,660		75%	\$5,872	
ELL Students: Districts under 9% ELL	7%	\$528	\$33.5 million	7%	\$548	\$34.4 million
ELL Students: Districts over 9% ELL	10%	\$755		10%	\$783	
Gifted Students 5% of ADM	4.50%	\$340	\$12.2 million	4.75%	\$372	\$13.6 million
Charter School	2%	\$151	\$1.1 million	2%	\$157	\$1.4 million
Base Factor	\$7,547			\$7,829		
TOTAL	\$166 million			\$191 million		

How do I find out how much money my district received?

Each year, the Alabama Department of Education will release a memo to districts outlining the RAISE funds they will receive for the upcoming school year. The memo for 2026 is accessible [here](#).

How will the state ensure that districts are investing RAISE funds well?

All RAISE Act funds must be spent on the students who generate them. Planned accountability measures include:

- Districts will annually report their yearly plan covering student achievement goals, how RAISE funds will be spent, and progress updates.
- The ALSDE will create a statewide application by fiscal year 2028 to align with state priorities and meet federal and state requirements.
- A RAISE Act Accountability and Implementation Board will be set up by July 1, 2028, to monitor districts and make sure funds are spent effectively.
- A Review Committee will track the overall progress of the RAISE Act and suggest improvements.

Who is supported by the RAISE Act?

The RAISE Act provides funds for five specific student groups: students in poverty, special education students, English language learners, gifted students, and charter school students. These groups were chosen based on Alabama's needs, and based on evidence that shows how additional funds lead to improved outcomes.

According to 2025–2026 student demographic data:

59%

of Alabama's students are living in poverty.

Students in poverty face additional challenges compared to their peers, which can lead to lower reading, math, and graduation rates.

14.4%

of Alabama's students receive special education services.

Special education students can receive a wide range of services tailored to their specific needs.

7%

of Alabama's students are English language learners.

English language learners have specific needs based on their first language and their fluency levels.

1.3%

of Alabama's students attend public charter schools.

When we look at all local, state, and federal dollars per student, charter school students experience up to a \$5,000 gap when compared to traditional public school students.

5%

of Alabama's students are considered gifted.

Prior to RAISE, Alabama's education budget supported limited grants to some schools' gifted student programs — but we know there are gifted students in all schools.

Supporting English Learners

In this section, we will dive into who Alabama's English Learners (ELs) are, and how RAISE funds can be used to support them at the district level.



Who are Alabama's English Learners?

About 48,000 students, representing 6.65% of all students in Alabama, are English Learners (ELs). Alabama's EL population has nearly doubled since 2017.¹ EL students include all students who are still building their English proficiency skills. This includes children born in the U.S. whose first language is not English, and newcomers to the U.S.²

EL populations and languages spoken across the state vary widely by community. Common languages spoken by students include Spanish, Korean, Mayan languages, and dozens more. Some districts have much higher concentrations of ELs than others.³ The RAISE Act differentiates between concentrations, based on each district's total percentage of EL students.

For the first year of the RAISE Act, \$34.4 million went to EL students.

In districts where the EL population is less than 9% of the overall population,

EL students had a 7% weight (\$548 per student).

In districts with an EL population that is over 9% of the overall population,

EL students had a 10% weight (\$783 per student).

Why do English Learners require additional funding?

EL students are learning English and keeping up with grade-level content in every subject at the same time. Because they are doing both of these tasks simultaneously, extra support—which requires additional funding—is needed. Some federal funds are provided to support EL students,⁴ but these funds are assigned to specific programs and they are rarely enough to cover what districts actually need.⁵ Flexible funding through the RAISE Act is impactful because it gives districts additional resources to fill the gap.

*"An English language learner that doesn't speak English costs more to educate than a (child) from an English-speaking home, and so we want to help those school districts [with additional resources]."*⁶

—Alabama Senator Arthur Orr

National testing data shows that EL students generally score lower than their peers on average. This is often due to how tests are administered—students are being tested on the English language while simultaneously being tested on the subject material.⁷ However, research also shows that once EL students reach proficiency, they perform as well as or better than their English-only peers.⁸ Challenges understanding testing data for EL students make it difficult for districts to track progress and target support.

English Learners (ELs) bring valuable languages and cultures to their schools and communities. At the same time, EL students face real challenges learning English while keeping up with grade-level content in every subject. The practices below show how districts can use RAISE funds to support EL students.

Practice 1: Explicit Literacy Instruction and the Science of Reading

Teachers at every grade level should use the Science of Reading to deliver direct, step-by-step instruction to build key reading and writing skills for EL students. This includes phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing.⁹ Explicit literacy instruction gives elementary ELs clear learning benefits across key reading skills like phonics, vocabulary, and fluency.¹⁰

RAISE funds can be used to:

- ✓ Provide ongoing coaching and professional development for teachers on the science of reading and evidence-based literacy instruction for ELs.
 - The Alabama Literacy Act has resulted in most K–3 teachers being trained in the Science of Reading through Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS Training).
 - For EL students, it is important that all K–12 EL teachers are trained in the Science of Reading.
- ✓ Purchase EL-specific instructional materials to support students in both their first language and English.
 - Comprehensive, evidence-based literacy curriculum and lessons can target phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, oral reading fluency, comprehension, and writing.
- ✓ Support small group tutoring programs, or peer-assisted learning groups.
- ✓ Fund screening and benchmark assessments to identify EL students who need additional literacy support.



Highlight: The Alabama Literacy Act aims to make sure all students read proficiently by the end of 3rd grade.¹¹ The Alabama Department of Education provides guidance to districts on using EL portfolios, alternative reading assessments, and age-appropriate curriculum.¹² EL students with fewer than three years of English instruction may qualify for a good-cause exemption from the 3rd grade retention policy.¹³

Practice 2: Integrated English Language Instruction

Teachers should build English skills into every subject including math, science, social studies, and the arts, rather than waiting until students are fluent before teaching content. All subjects can include English speaking, listening, reading, and vocabulary skill development, and research shows that integration has positive impacts on content-area learning.¹⁴ Effective approaches include building background knowledge, creating opportunities for student discussion, and using visual tools like videos and graphic organizers.¹⁵

RAISE funds can be used to:

- ✓ Purchase digital tools like translation services and closed captioning resources that give ELs access to content across subjects.
- ✓ Provide professional development for teachers on EL instructional strategies, Individual English Language Plans (I-ELPs), and strategies to stratify assignments and assessments.
- ✓ Purchase resources that support EL language practice in various subjects.
- ✓ Purchase visual aids or video platforms to support content learning in science, social studies, and other subjects.
- ✓ Fund co-teaching models that pair EL specialist teachers with classroom teachers in the same room.



Highlight: Gadsden City Schools requires all content teachers to use strategies that deliver language instruction alongside subject content.¹⁶



Highlight: The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) published an *English Learner (EL) Guidebook for 2025–2026*, which recommends sheltered instruction. Sheltered instruction is a specific integrated teaching approach that supports EL students by using visual aids, hands-on activities, clear language, and the classroom environment to build vocabulary across subjects and learn English while learning subject matter at the same time.¹⁷

Practice 3: Targeted Supports and Interventions

Teachers should tailor support to each EL student rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach. This may include small-group instruction, peer learning, extra practice with speaking and writing, vocabulary support, tutoring, or targeted academic interventions. The goal is to help students build English skills faster.

RAISE funds can be used to:

- ✓ Hire additional staff trained in EL support who can work with small groups to build English skills.¹⁸
- ✓ Purchase data collection and progress monitoring systems and train EL support staff on how to use them.
- ✓ Purchase intervention curriculum that complements Tier 1 classroom instruction.
- ✓ Create afterschool or summer programs that complement the school curriculum and are staffed by community members who reflect students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds.



Highlight: ALSDE guidance says Student Reading Improvement Plans for ELs should include evidence-based reading intervention, additional instructional time, daily targeted small-group instruction, and explicit and systematic instruction.¹⁹



Practice 4: Culturally Responsive Instruction

Teachers should recognize students' home languages, experiences, and cultural backgrounds as strengths. In practice, this means connecting new content to what students already know, inviting students to use their home language as a bridge to English, and using examples and materials that reflect students' lives. Research shows that instruction drawing on students' home language and cultural assets supports English literacy development.²⁰

RAISE funds can be used to:

- ✓ Provide culturally responsive training aligned with the specific student groups a school or district serves.
- ✓ Purchase culturally relevant and affirming books and instructional materials.
 - This could include bilingual books, materials, and translation services.
- ✓ Hire additional EL teachers and paraprofessionals to support EL classroom activities.
 - This could include hiring members of the local community who are native speakers of the students' languages to support them in the classroom.
- ✓ Develop surveys and home communication materials to better understand students' home language and cultural backgrounds.



Highlight: Russellville City Schools encouraged teachers to learn about EL students' backgrounds and value those differences. After making cultural connection a key focus, the share of 3rd and 5th grade EL students meeting grade-level language proficiency jumped from around 33% in 2020–21 to about 71% in 2021–22.²¹



Practice 5: Dual Language Opportunities

Schools should give EL students regular, meaningful opportunities to build skills in both English and their home language. This can include dual language immersion programs, classroom activities, peer interaction, and family engagement that value students' first language while building English proficiency.

RAISE funds can be used to:

- ✓ Create dual language immersion programs within a school or district.
 - Bilingual programs can close the achievement gap between English speakers and EL students over a few years.²²
 - EL students in dual language immersion programs were more likely to be designated English proficient by 6th grade.²³
- ✓ Recruit and train bilingual and multilingual paraprofessionals and teachers.
- ✓ Purchase high-quality dual language instructional materials and assessments.
- ✓ Create afterschool language clubs where students can use their home language in a relaxed setting while continuing to build English skills.
- ✓ Redesign the school or district model to include a dual language immersion program.



Highlight: In 2025–26, Booker T. Washington K–8 in Birmingham City Schools launched Alabama's first dual language immersion program.²⁴ Floreer Community School, set to open in fall 2028, will be Alabama's first dual language charter school.²⁵



Practice 6: Family Engagement

Schools and districts should build strong, two-way relationships with EL families and involve them as partners in their student's learning. This means communicating in families' preferred languages, learning from families about students' strengths and backgrounds, sharing strategies families can use at home, and inviting families to help shape their children's goals and supports. Family involvement is linked²⁶ to better academic, social, and behavioral outcomes for EL students, and the connection is strongest when families have high expectations.²⁷

RAISE funds can be used to:

- ✓ Create surveys and conduct interviews with families on their experiences and needs.
 - The ALSDE's EL Guidebook for 2025–2026 requires a home-language survey upon enrollment, and recommends interviewing families to learn about their educational background, culture, and any special circumstances.
- ✓ Provide family engagement programs that bring parents in as partners in student learning.
- ✓ Improve school-to-home communication through text messaging, apps, or multilingual communication platforms.
- ✓ Offer translation services for school communications and meetings.
- ✓ Provide childcare for siblings so parents can fully participate in school activities.
- ✓ Partner with community organizations, higher education institutions, or other groups with immigrant expertise to offer comprehensive support for EL families.



Highlight: Madison City Schools provides EL families with translation tools including website translation, Google Translate, YouTube auto-translate, and ParentSquare. These language services are used for I-ELP meetings and other communications.²⁸



Highlight: Lee County Schools' English as a Second Language department is committed to communicating with parents in their home language.²⁹



The Local Budget Process

The RAISE Act sends funds to school districts called Local Education Agencies, or LEAs, for student needs. From there, money flows to schools, classrooms, and students. These funds support student needs above and beyond the Foundation Program, which is still the main vehicle Alabama uses to fund schools. RAISE funds are flexible, but must be budgeted, so understanding your local budget process is important.

Local Budgeting and Planning Requirements

- ✓ *Each year, Alabama LEAs are required to develop and adopt an annual budget (AL Code § 16-13-140).*
 - Annual LEA budgets must include RAISE Act funds. Since budgets need to reflect all available funding, this includes the additional money allocated for targeted student groups.
 - Budgets must include staffing and operating expenses by category (e.g., instructional materials, maintenance) for each school.
 - LEAs are required to hold two public information sessions before the final budget adoption on October 1.
- ✓ *All funds received from the RAISE Act Fund must be used to serve the student groups that generated them (AL Code § 16-13-362).*
 - RAISE funds are based on the number of students in each of the five targeted groups that the LEA serves.
 - LEAs may shift RAISE Act funds across student groups to meet local needs, but per state guidance, must obtain State Superintendent approval if reallocating 10% or more. Funds are not eligible for carryover.
- ✓ *Each LEA must produce an accountability plan and report by November 1 of each year, starting in 2026 (AL Code § 16-13-365).*
 - These reports must include goals and proposed expenditures for each of the five targeted student groups.
 - Starting in 2027, the reports must also include an analysis of prior-year progress for those student groups.

Budgeting and Planning Timeline

1 MARCH–JUNE: SPRING PLANNING

👉 LEA Requirements And Actions

- Begin LEA planning and gather relevant input and data on students needs, LEA priorities, and budget conditions
- Consult RAISE Act Guide, issued **June 1**, to understand allocations, allowable uses, and planning requirements

👉 How Advocates Can Engage

- Meet with district leadership to share priorities and input
- Advocate for inclusive stakeholder engagement strategies

2 JULY–AUGUST: BUDGET DEVELOPMENT

👉 LEA Requirements And Actions

- Submit budget requests to LEA finance office
- Finalize revenue projections
- Complete budget presentations using ALSDE guidance

👉 How Advocates Can Engage

- Provide input on how RAISE Act funds are allocated and prioritized
- Advocate for evidence-based strategies aligned to targeted student groups

3 SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER: PUBLIC BUDGET REVIEW AND SUBMISSION

👉 LEA Requirements And Actions

- Hold [two public hearings](#) on proposed budget
- Conduct 20-day ADM data collection (start of school year)
- [Submit budget to ALSDE](#) by **Sept. 15**
- Fiscal year begins **Oct. 1**

👉 How Advocates Can Engage

- Testify at public hearings to influence budget decisions
- Advocate for transparent use of RAISE funds aligned to student needs

4 NOVEMBER: ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPORTS

👉 LEA Requirements And Actions

- Complete RAISE Act annual accountability plan and report by **Nov. 1**, which must include goals, strategies, spending, and outcomes

👉 How Advocates Can Engage

- Advocate for clear goals, metrics, and transparency in accountability plans
- Review how impact and outcomes will be measured

ONGOING

👉 LEA Requirements And Actions

- Implement RAISE Act-funded strategies
- Monitor budget against actual expenditures
- Track program implementation and progress

👉 How Advocates Can Engage

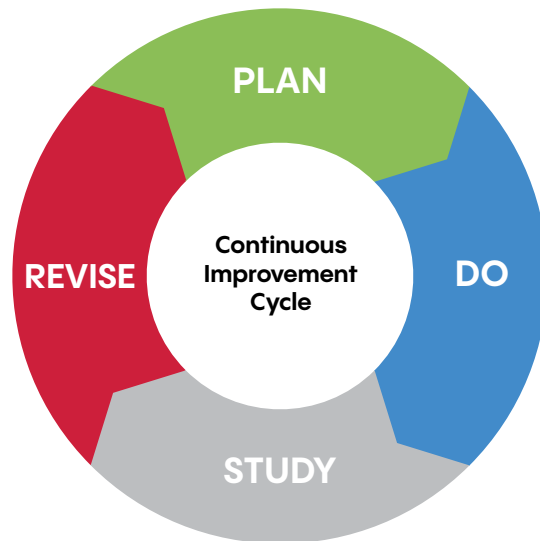
- Monitor implementation, spending, and progress toward goals
- Share feedback and recommend course corrections based on data

What's Next for District Leaders?

LEAs and district leaders have an opportunity to allocate RAISE Act funds to improve outcomes for students. Families, community members, teachers, and students should be meaningfully involved. This involvement could look like:

- Conduct surveys and interviews, hold town halls, and create other outreach opportunities.
- Publish board meeting schedules and minutes, and share the public hearing process.
- Share the budget plan and justification of program spending.
- Publish a plan for how RAISE funds will be used, and how they are intended to improve outcomes.
- Share information through newsletters, PTA meetings, school and district websites, events, and board meetings.

Continuous Improvement Cycles can help track the implementation of programs funded by the RAISE Act through a Plan-Do-Study-Revise model.



PLAN

- Identify RAISE funding levels, and which students are supported.
- Explore the needs and challenges of each student group.
- Consider schoolwide and targeted strategies.
- Choose the strategy or strategies to fund.

STUDY

- Collect academic outcome data, survey stakeholders, and observe.
- Determine how effective the strategy was for students supported by RAISE.
- Use data to identify strengths, gaps, and early signs of progress.

DO

- Fund the strategies that will support students.
- Implement the strategy by reallocating funding, staff, time, and supports so schools have what they need.
- Troubleshoot during the year if needed.

REVISE

- Expand effective strategies that show evidence of improving outcomes for students.
- Adjust, redesign, or shift away from less successful approaches, reallocating resources to support continuous improvement over time.

What's Next for Advocates?



Step 1: Get informed.

- Look at your LEA's budget from previous years to see where RAISE dollars are being spent.
- Review the LEA's RAISE Accountability Plan, which will first be submitted in the fall of 2026.
- Check out your LEA's website for information on new programs for the student groups identified through RAISE.



Step 2: Get Inspired.

- Read through the RAISE Act Implementation Toolkit to learn about best practices and possible options for spending RAISE funds.
- Each LEA receives different levels of funds, based specifically on the students they serve. Consider what your community wants and needs based on your specific district.



Step 3: Get Active.

- Respond to any surveys or public requests for comment by your district or your school.
- Call or email your local superintendent or other district administrator with your ideas on how to spend RAISE dollars.
- Speak with your principal or school leader about new programs your child could participate in.
- Review upcoming school board agendas found on each district's website, and attend when budget discussions are being prioritized.
- Participate in meetings and public hearings where the budget is discussed. These are usually part of August or early September school board meetings.

Ask questions like:

- How much RAISE Act funding does the district expect to receive for each of the five targeted student groups?
- How will the district decide which programs or schools will receive RAISE Act funds?
- How does the district plan to use RAISE Act funding for specific groups of students (e.g., additional staff, new programs, expanded services)?
- How will the district measure whether those investments improve outcomes for the students the funding is intended to support?



Share this resource with other families and district leaders.

Endnotes

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