

# Achieving Excellence: Education Reform in North Carolina and Texas

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## PREFACE

### A is for Alabama—and Achievement

Alabamians are achievers. Alabama natives play leading roles in American business and government. Stanley O’Neal runs financial powerhouse Merrill Lynch; Condoleezza Rice serves as President George W. Bush’s national security adviser; and Don Logan guides Time Inc. The state’s honor roll, which includes astronaut Mae Jemison; Howell Raines, executive editor of *The New York Times*; Sam diPiazza, PricewaterhouseCoopers’ top U.S. executive; and Rik Kirkland, editor of *Fortune Magazine*, highlights Alabama’s rich human resources and diversity.

Although we can’t expect every Alabamian to achieve national recognition, the talent pool is limitless nonetheless. But it must be nurtured and nourished. Alabama schools must provide the right opportunities and challenges so that each student can reach his or her full potential. Our responsibility is to ensure that Alabama remains a state of achievers—for all of its public schoolchildren.

In recent years, Alabama has made strides toward meeting this obligation. Significant accomplishments include the passage of the 1995 accountability law. The Alabama State Board of Education and State Superintendent Ed Richardson have worked hard to improve student achievement by

strengthening standards and initiating effective programs like the Alabama Reading Initiative.

It’s an encouraging start, one that begins to move the state toward making our schools among the best in the South. Fortunately, Alabama can build on our first steps by learning from the advances made in neighboring states. North Carolina and Texas are now national leaders in education reform, having demonstrated long-term, consistent improvement in student achievement. These two states, with surprisingly similar demographic profiles to Alabama, made the most significant gains on

the National Assessment of Education Progress in reading and math between 1990 and 1996. The scores also jumped across race, ethnic and income groupings. To do this, North Carolina and Texas invested financial and human resources in **best practices** that produce **real results**.

The success enjoyed by North Carolina and Texas is a result of three key steps. The two states established comprehensive **accountability** for academic standards and measurement; increased **capacity** by developing targeted plans to recruit, train and empower teachers and principals; and ensured **sustainability** by investing social and financial resources in the reform efforts.

North Carolina and Texas ensured greater **accountability** by creating state policies that established academic content **standards** aligned with national standards; state-written **assessments** that precisely reflect the academic content of the standards; **measurement** systems that accurately assess district-, school- and individual-level achievement; positive and negative **consequences** for districts and schools based on student performance; and **public access** to the results of assessments.

On their journey toward academic excellence, Texas and North Carolina created policies to

#### STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT LEADERS: NC & TX

**Improved Scores:** North Carolina 8th graders, equal to Alabama 8th graders in 1990 on a national math test, now score at two grade levels higher.

**Equity in Achievement:** Between 1994 and 2000, the rate of increase for black and Hispanic 5th graders on the Texas reading test was more than twice that of white students. The passing rate for white students went up 6.6%, while the jumps for blacks and Hispanics were 17.5% and 14.5%.

**Higher levels of work:** Texas 8th graders rank second in the nation—to Connecticut—on a national writing test.

enhance and equalize *capacity*. Several of these policies encouraged **entrepreneurial problem-solving** among local systems through decentralization of administrative authority, an increase in local flexibility and inducements to partner with communities, higher education institutions and businesses. These policies also ensured a more **equitable distribution** of revenues among wealthy and low-income school districts and provided **enhanced pre-kindergarten programs**. Finally, the two states ensured the **recruitment, training and retention** of effective teachers by requiring assessment, certification, greater coordination of **professional development** programs and new principal leadership initiatives.

Successful reform efforts are futile without measures to sustain them. Texas and North Carolina learned that *sustainability* for standards-based reform policies requires a strong coalition of business and educators. Business leaders must provide the energy to fuel the effort for change and must have hands-on involvement to sustain the efforts.

Further, **non-governmental or private partnerships** must be estab-

lished to provide business, education and policymaking interests with an “extra-governmental” forum for policy debate and development. Business leaders and educators must be committed to working together and to learning from one another, with educators embracing a greater focus on accountability and business leaders investing in strategies that improve educators’ abilities to teach and students’ abilities to learn.

In terms of the state government’s role in sustaining reform efforts, **governors must show bipartisan-ship**, crossing party lines to support greater accountability and capacity for the education system, and **policymakers must be pragmatic** in their reorientation of state agencies to ensure focus on accountability and capacity.

Alabama can learn from North Carolina and Texas. The Bush Administration already has. In January 2002, President Bush signaled a major change in federal education policy when he signed the *No Child Left Behind* Act of 2001. The bill mandates educational reforms and will provide additional financial support and flexibil-

ity to states that implement successful changes. The new policies—accountability for student achievement, administrative flexibility in local schools and increased funding for programs that boost student achievement—invoke the lessons learned in Texas and North Carolina.

As of this writing, the Bush Administration is in the process of drafting the bill’s specific rules. It is estimated that there will be **more than \$90 million of additional revenue per year available to Alabama**, provided the state meets the requirements of *No Child Left Behind*. Therefore, it is critical that Alabama put in place proven strategies for boosting student achievement in all schools and in all student populations.

The purpose of this report is to illuminate the great strides made by North Carolina and Texas in order to inspire policymakers and opinion leaders as they build on the early improvements Alabama has already made in public education. The last chapter contains A+’s recommendations for accelerating Alabama’s progress on the journey toward education excellence.

## \$90 MILLION QUESTIONS: ALABAMA AND THE BUSH EDUCATION POLICY

- How will Alabama align curricular and assessment standards so that students make “adequate yearly progress” toward high achievement?
- How will Alabama improve the collection and analysis of student performance data to meet the precision required by the U.S. Department of Education?
- How will Alabama use this data to close historical achievement gaps?
- How will Alabama ensure that all teachers are “highly qualified” by 2006?
- How will Alabama ensure that all students are reading “proficient” in 12 years?

## CHAPTER ONE

# Achievement Goal: Number One in the South and in the Nation

Alabama has been moving with a sense of purpose down the road of standards-based reform since 1995. If Alabama continues to boost accountability and expectations for student learning, it can be an education leader in the South. A top ranking in the South increasingly means “being at or near the top in the United States,” according to former Georgia Governor Roy Barnes, who also serves as president of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB).<sup>i</sup>

Other southern states with surprisingly similar profiles to Alabama have overcome persistent obstacles to education reform. Most notably, North Carolina and Texas stand out as models worth studying. In nearly two decades of reform efforts, North Carolina and Texas have increased test scores and sustained those improvements.

North Carolina and Texas have vigorously adopted the SREB principle that the South “must be measured against the same criteria of excellence that are applied everywhere.” The states have created leading-edge assessment and accountability systems and improved teacher training, recruitment and retention. Further, North Carolina has set the ambitious goal of becoming “number one in the nation by 2010.”

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) bears out the story of long-term improvement in North Carolina and Texas. Not only did overall achievement jump; it increased among all demographic groups of students, narrowing historic “achievement gaps.” Students in those states have demonstrated an ability to take on a higher level of work. At the same time, both states have seen significant growth in economic develop-

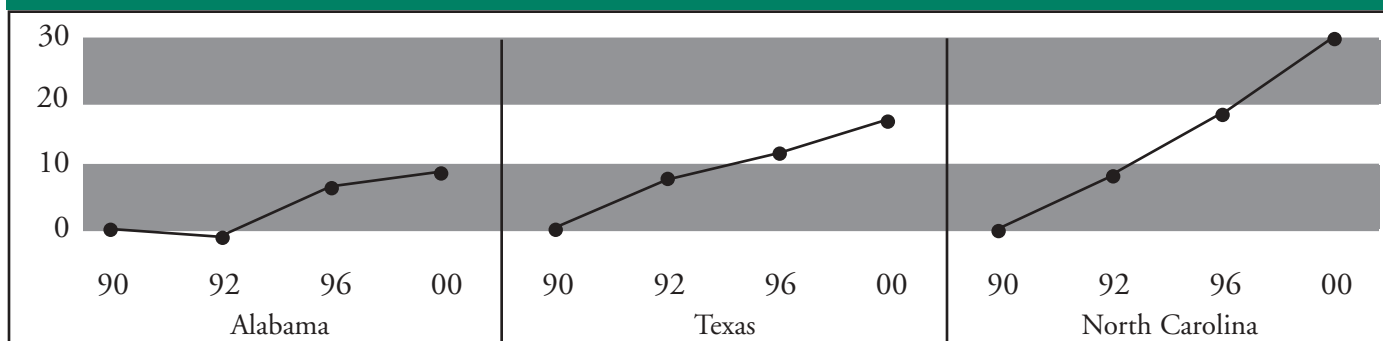
ment and per capita income.

Twelve years ago, scores on the NAEP assessments for Alabama, North Carolina and Texas were almost identical. Yet in the past decade, North Carolina’s and Texas’ progress on the tests have outpaced Alabama’s. In fact, North Carolina and Texas saw the most significant gains nationwide on NAEP reading and math scores between 1990 and 1996.<sup>ii</sup> The states’ students performed well on the 1998 writing assessment and made gains in science. An increase in scores statewide, however, tells only part of the story.

### EQUITY IN ACHIEVEMENT

In both states, highly evolved accountability systems now focus resources on closing the gap in achievement among black, Hispanic and lower-income students. According to a report by the

PERFORMANCE OF 8TH GRADE STUDENTS IN MATHEMATICS  
AL, NC, AND TX—1990 - 2000



A 10-pt difference in the raw score (listed next to each symbol) is roughly equivalent to a grade level of proficiency. Based on that gauge, scores on the 8th-grade math exam—the only NAEP assessment given four times in the last 10 years—have risen roughly one grade level in Alabama, two grade levels in Texas, and three grade levels in North Carolina.

## ACHIEVEMENT GAINS FOR ALL TEXANS

### Percent passing 5th grade reading TAAS (1994-2000):<sup>v</sup>

- Black students increased 17.5%
- Hispanic students increased 14.5%
- Economically disadvantaged students increased 15.6%
- White students increased 6.6%

### Percent passing 8th grade math TAAS (1994-2000):

- Black students increased 46.8%
- Hispanic students increased 43.8%
- Economically disadvantaged students increased 44.1%
- White students increased 21.2%

Education Trust, Texas saw “larger gains for Hispanic and black students than for non-Hispanic white students,” although white students made significant gains too.<sup>iii</sup> Moreover, black students, Hispanic students and white students in Texas almost uniformly finished in the top 10 compared with peers from other states nationwide.<sup>iv</sup>

In North Carolina, state test scores have improved for all black, Hispanic and lower-income students, resulting in a significant reduction in the achievement gap since the implementation of comprehensive accountability in 1996-97.<sup>vi</sup>

### ACHIEVING MORE THAN THE BASICS

In the last 10 years, students in North Carolina and Texas not only have improved at reading and math; they have also begun to stand out—nationally and internationally—for their ability to take on higher levels of work. For example, the number of North

Carolina students taking Advanced Placement, or college-level, courses has grown by 46 percent,<sup>viii</sup> and more than 90 percent of the state’s high schools offer AP classes.<sup>viii</sup>

“The Texas writing results in particular are quite dramatic,” said Craig Jerald, Senior Policy Analyst for the Education Trust. The state’s NAEP writing scores are second only to Connecticut’s nationwide. Furthermore, “20 percent of African-American and Latino 8th graders met or exceeded NAEP’s ‘proficient’ level” on the writing test, highest in the nation and double the national average, according to Jerald.<sup>ix</sup>

Students in Texas and North Carolina also competed favorably in the 1999 Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) against other states with fewer minorities and fewer low-income students. Texas, with the highest rates of low-income and minority students, actually had the second-highest math scores, behind Michigan, which had the lowest proportion of low-income students among participating states. Texas also boasted more students scoring in the top 10 percent and top quarter of all international students than any other U.S. state.<sup>x</sup>

Results from NAEP also suggest relatively large jumps in proficiency among North Carolina and Texas students. A large percentage of students in those states has moved out of the “Below Basic” designation and into “Proficient” and “Advanced” categories. While Alabama is indeed making progress in ensuring student proficiency,

North Carolina and Texas have accelerated student progress.

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In North Carolina and Texas, business leaders became involved in education reform in order to improve business and workforce development. This involvement has proved vital to the successes of these two states and has produced very positive results in the surge of economic development and rise in per capita income. North Carolina ranked first and Texas third in Site Selection’s “Executive Survey of best states to locate a business.”<sup>xi</sup>

Other research has indicated that investing in the academic progress of students produces strong economic gains. “Our real estate agents give us positive feedback [on the school-level data available through the accountability system]. They use it successfully to recruit people to move into an area,” says Jane Worsham, executive director of the North Carolina State Board of Education.<sup>xiii</sup>

### HOW DID NORTH CAROLINA AND TEXAS DO THAT?

The differing results between Alabama and North Carolina and Texas go beyond traditional explanations of differences in K-12 resources. To be sure, North Carolina and Texas have targeted more funds to support reform-oriented policies than Alabama. However, many components of the three education systems otherwise look similar.

Relative to U.S. averages, all three states have below-average per capita wealth and income, with

high concentrations of minority students and relatively low educational attainment among adults. In the aggregate, all three states have similar teacher-pupil ratios and teacher salaries.

For many years, Alabama has focused on increasing teacher compensation and reducing class size.

While both of these issues are important to improving the public education system, by no means should they be the main focus of education reform. Texas and North Carolina learned this lesson during two decades of reform efforts.

Published studies of Texas and North Carolina have revealed that

their successes stems from committing financial and human resources to best practices that produce real results. **These states invested in comprehensive accountability systems, initiatives to improve teaching and learning, and measures to ensure sustainability. These are the keys to success.**

### SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NORTH CAROLINA, TEXAS AND ALABAMA SCHOOL SYSTEMS <sup>XIV</sup>

	North Carolina	Texas	Alabama
% of Black and Hispanic students	35 percent	54 percent	38 percent
% of students eligible for free lunch	39 percent	45 percent	45 percent
Per-pupil revenues for public schools	\$6,321	\$6,999	\$5,596
Average number of pupils per teacher	15.7	14.7	15.3
Average teacher salary (adj.)	\$43,012	\$41,758	\$41,148

<sup>i</sup> Quoted in Southern Regional Education Board, *When it comes to education, who'd want to be No. 1 in the South?* (Atlanta: Southern Regional Education Board), December 2001, 1.

<sup>ii</sup> Ann Flanagan and David Grissmer, *Exploring Rapid Achievement Gains in North Carolina and Texas. National Education Goals Panel* (Washington, D.C.: November, 1998), 6.

<sup>iii</sup> *Rapid Achievement Gains*, 8.

<sup>iv</sup> *Rapid Achievement Gains*, 15-18.

<sup>v</sup> Texas Business & Education Coalition, "*The Texas Success Story*," PowerPoint presentation. Available at <http://www.tbec.org/texasuccess.ppt>: p. 10-14.

<sup>vi</sup> Public Schools of North Carolina, *Minority Achievement Report: Trends in Subgroup Performance 2001* (Raleigh: Department of Public Instruction), p. xiii.

<sup>vii</sup> "AP Participation Rates by State," *The College Board* (New York: n.d.), <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/article/0,1281,150-156-0-2059,00.html>.

<sup>viii</sup> "Quality Counts, 2002," *Education Week Online* (Bethesda: Editorial Projects in Education, Inc.), [http://www.edweek.org/sreports/qc02/tables.ssearch\\_results.cfm](http://www.edweek.org/sreports/qc02/tables.ssearch_results.cfm).

<sup>ix</sup> Craig D. Jerald, *Real Results, Remaining Challenges: The Story of Texas Education Reform*, The Business Roundtable, April 2001, 3.

<sup>x</sup> *Real Results, Remaining Challenges*, 20.

<sup>xi</sup> Ron Starnes, "North Carolina Claims No. 1 Business Climate Ranking," *Site Selection Magazine*, Nov 2001: 1.

<sup>xii</sup> Gerald Carlino, "Highways and education: the road to productivity?" *Business Review*, Sep./Oct. 1993: 21.

<sup>xiii</sup> Jane Worsham, Telephone interview, 23 January 2002.

<sup>xiv</sup> See "Quality Counts 2002: State Data Comparison," *Education Week Online* (Bethesda: Editorial Projects in Education, Inc.), [http://www.edweek.org/sreports/qc02/tables/ssearch\\_results.cfm](http://www.edweek.org/sreports/qc02/tables/ssearch_results.cfm) for all source data except "Per-pupil revenue," which is adapted from National Education Association, *NEA Digest of Education Statistics*, 2001 (Washington: NEA), 39.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Standards-Based Reform Policymaking in North Carolina and Texas

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*A closer look at the common characteristics of the successful standards-based reform efforts in North Carolina and Texas shows that, in many cases, Alabama is indeed moving in the right direction.*

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In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* galvanized national attention to the problem of lapsing achievement among American students. A slowing economy and overseas competition led U. S. businesses to restructure to meet new demands. Business people wanted a more skilled workforce but worried about the low standards of a high school diploma.

Like most southern states, North Carolina and Texas felt an acute sense of crisis. The Texas oil industry was still recovering from price shocks. North Carolina's economy was moving away from traditional small farming, textiles, furniture and tobacco industries toward service and retail sectors. Business leaders in these two states began to ask tough questions of the education systems, and coalitions for change that included business people and educators emerged.

Like in Alabama, court cases in North Carolina and Texas focused attention on the issue of unequal

funding of schools. Economic self-interest and pride were at work among business people and educators alike. Educational politics as well as economies were in flux.

“Education leaders wanted some direction. We were just plain tired of being at the bottom,” in national rankings, says Lynda McCulloch, a former teacher and North Carolina policymaker and Governor Jim Hunt's education adviser.

By 1999, both states could point to signs of success. North Carolina and Texas were the only two states with a “**comprehensive system**” of accountability, according to *Education Week*. Through the cooperation of educators, business leaders and policymakers, the states had created education systems with publicly accessible ratings, rewards for high performance, assistance for low-performing schools and legislative authority to close or assume control of failing schools.

The creation of these new systems resulted in another commonality between North Carolina and Texas in the 1990s: they were the states achieving the most significant gains in NAEP student test scores.

### KEY LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS

Texas and North Carolina undertook a series of legislative

actions between the early 1980s and the late 1990s that, taken together, significantly changed public education. The first phase of education reform efforts responded to economic concerns of the early 1980s by instituting new assessments of teachers, defining learning standards for students and working to ensure adequate funding for all schools. Nevertheless, a lack of objective data on how students were actually performing doomed efforts to assess educator performance accurately. So, by 1995, both states instituted more comprehensive systems of accountability. They also invested in flexibility for districts and individual schools to make the system work on an individual basis, thus introducing the theory of “**one standard**

### CHARACTERISTICS OF A COMPREHENSIVE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

- Clear standards and benchmarks for student learning;
- Criterion-referenced assessments;
- Alignment between standards and assessments;
- Slow and steady implementation;
- Disaggregated examination of student data based on such factors as student race, gender, and economic status;
- Public access to school- and district-level information;
- Both positive and negative consequences for performance.

fits all” as opposed to “one size fits all.”

Between the early 1980s and the late 1990s, leaders in Texas and North Carolina learned, sometimes by bitter experience, what it takes to build an effective accountability system.

Both states maintained a business-driven focus on results; an educator-driven desire to earn respect and reward; and a policy-maker-driven desire to set goals and work together toward them. This type of leadership is essential to building and sustaining any accountability system.

Also important in sustaining these accountability initiatives were simultaneous plans to assist and support educators in their efforts to govern, to teach and to learn.

Still, the demand for accountability brought about a significant mindset change, from input-driven measurement and the belief that some students simply cannot learn to results-driven measurement and a growing belief that all students are capable of learning. This new mindset was by all accounts indispensable to the high performance of students in North Carolina and Texas.

### **DEFINING STANDARDS AND BARGAINING FOR ACCOUNTABILITY**

Education reform in North Carolina began in 1983 when the Legislature directed the State Board of Education to define a basic education program and determine its cost, right down to the price of a classroom chalk. Two years later, the Legislature made its first effort to define classroom standards

through the Basic Education Program (BEP).<sup>i</sup> The BEP established a minimum curriculum, set standards for every school system and provided a funding mechanism so even the state’s poorest counties could teach the full curriculum and reach the standards.<sup>ii</sup> The BEP remains the basis of North Carolina’s Standard Course of Study.<sup>iii</sup>

Texas’ two-decade-long effort to raise academic standards began in the early 1980s with two tests to measure minimum competency: the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABs) and the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimal Skills (TEAMS). These tests assessed students but did not purport to measure—or make accountable—the adults involved in their education.

Accountability efforts gathered momentum in 1983 when Democratic Governor Mark White appointed a commission, comprised of business leaders and chaired by businessman H. Ross Perot, to develop systemic K-12 education reforms. The Perot Commission’s proposals became 1984’s House Bill 72, which revamped education finances, directed revenues to poorer schools, initiated a system of teacher competency testing and increased teacher pay by \$3,000. Other key provisions were full-day kindergarten and subsidized public pre-kindergarten for low-income families.<sup>iv</sup>

Subsequently, both states learned from experience that measuring student performance provided the best measure of educator performance. Efforts to tie teacher

pay raises to performance evaluations—such as North Carolina’s 1985 “Career Ladder” pilot program—proved unwieldy and politically unsustainable because of their complex evaluation methods and reporting requirements.

Although Texas and North Carolina had taken different approaches to begin statewide assessment of education, they had, by the early 1990s, reached the same conclusion: measuring such teacher “inputs” as classroom management skills and subject-area training would never succeed without adequate data on student results.

### **FOCUSING ON RESULTS AND TRACKING PROGRESS**

Policymakers realized that reliable information was a precondition to boosting student performance. “We weren’t obtaining enough information on student performance,” state Rep. Edd Nye of North Carolina says.<sup>v</sup> To that end, the North Carolina Legislature passed the School Improvement and Accountability Act in 1989. The Act relied on performance measures and therefore demanded richer school-level data than had been available in the past.

In Texas, the business community was becoming increasingly frustrated by a lack of objective attendance and performance data in the public education system—a lack that they would never tolerate in managing their own companies. This spurred them to lead the charge in 1986 to create the student information system that

remains the basis for Texas' performance reporting today. The ability to track data set the stage for sweeping education reform legislation that centered on the yearly assessments of student performance.

In 1996, North Carolina's ABCs Program—Accountability; teaching the Basics of reading, writing and mathematics; and increasing Control of schools at the local level—became law.<sup>vi</sup> Its goal was to foster “an education system in North Carolina that will be customer driven, with local flexibility to achieve mastery of core skills with high levels of accountability in areas of student achievement.”

The ABCs Program provided a change from norm-referenced testing, which compares students to one another based on a “norm,” to criterion-referenced testing, which measures individual student performance against a pre-defined body of knowledge.

In simpler terms, criterion-referenced tests are tests based on a state's curriculum that measure how well each student learned the material required to be taught. Benchmarks are set for such performance levels as basic, proficient, and advanced. North Carolina adopted criterion-referenced tests in reading and mathematics in grades three through eight, as well as a writing assessment in grades four and seven and end-of-course tests in other subjects.

Texas' first criterion-referenced test, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), was rolled out in 1991-92 as a requirement

**REFORM IN NORTH CAROLINA:  
ABCs AT A GLANCE**

- Criterion-referenced end-of-grade tests in Grades 3-8 in reading and math and a writing assessment in Grades 4 and 7
- Decentralization of staffing to Regional Support Centers and campus central offices
- Flexibility of means—no state waivers required for schools to reallocate resources to meet needs identified in School Improvement Plans
- Consequences for student performance: bonus pay for teachers for high performance and assistance teams for low performing schools
- A data system accessible to the public
- Disaggregation of results as part of analysis. Schools not formally evaluated based on subgroup achievement
- [www.ncpublicschools.org/abc](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/abc)

**REFORM IN TEXAS:  
TAAS AT A GLANCE**

- Criterion-referenced end-of-grade tests in Grades 3-8 and 10 in reading and math, writing tested in grades 4, 7 and 10
- Decentralization of staffing to Regional Support Centers and campus central offices
- Flexibility of means—no state waivers required for schools to reallocate resources to meet needs identified in School Improvement Plans
- Consequences for student performance: school grants for high performance and assistance teams for low performing schools
- A data system accessible to the public
- Evaluation of schools and districts based on: overall scores, overall yearly progress and scores and progress of each disaggregated “subgroup”: black, hispanic, white and low-income
- [www.tea.state.tx.us](http://www.tea.state.tx.us)

for graduation, but it did not provide the longitudinal student data needed to improve learning outcomes over the long-term. By 1993, Texas, like North Carolina, began assessing basic skills during grades three through eight.

**DEFINING CONSEQUENCES FOR ALL STUDENTS**

Committing to a rigorous testing system set the stage for comprehensive accountability. By measuring student performance on an annual basis, North Carolina and Texas gained longitudinal data that could be used to identify aggregate trends and particular issues facing districts, schools, classrooms and even individual students.

With the ABCs and the TAAS in place, North Carolina and Texas

took steps to measure both success and progress, creating dual-level reporting. Performance has a dual definition, with two paths to excellence: yearly progress or absolute achievement levels, both based directly on student scores.

North Carolina's State Board of Education uses an index-driven formula to set unique annual performance standards for each public school, rather than holding all districts to a single statewide standard.<sup>vii</sup>

In Texas, minimum proficiency was defined for each grade level, with sanctions and rewards for schools based on assessment results. Each school's performance is compared against 40 “peer schools” with similar demographics in terms of student race, ethnicity

and family income.

Both states implemented financial incentives to reward progress of schools and sanction those not progressing. High performance results in across-the-board financial rewards; low performance results in assistance teams being assigned and the possibility of state takeover of schools and districts.<sup>viii</sup> In 2000, Texas was the first state to tie student scores to the job appraisals of teachers and administrators.

In 1994, Texas added a step, considered “nothing short of revolutionary” by the Education Trust’s Craig Jerald, when it disaggregated data to identify and address gaps in school performance. Texas pioneered the idea of tying its measures of school performance to the achievement levels of students across the range of basic subjects (reading, math and writing) and demographic groups.

“For example,” according to Jerald, “this year (2002) schools and districts can avoid being labeled as low-performing only if 50 percent of their students—and 50 percent of their African American, Latino, White and low-income students considered separately—pass the TAAS test.”<sup>ix</sup>

### REPORTING THE RESULTS TO THE PUBLIC

A key component to any reform package is providing accountability to the public. Such accountability requires expert tracking of student data, including attendance, dropout rates and mobility in order to give parents, students and educators accurate information about student performance and to identify areas that need attention. Both Texas and North Carolina included this type of accountability in their reform packages.

The Texas Department of Education contracted with Just for the Kids ([www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org)), an independent organization that collects and analyzes state test data from Texas schools to determine how well individual schools are performing.

“Our data system tracks the performance of each school in Texas against 40 ‘peer schools’—those with similar demographics in terms of race and income levels,” explains Brad Duggan, executive director of Just for the Kids. “And when you see similarly resourced schools performing at different levels, it changes the mindset that all schools do the same thing. Robust data allows you to make the whole system better by spreading proven

practices. It’s like a *Consumer Reports* for education.”

Texas requires that this performance data is sent directly to parents, as well as being available on the Web.<sup>x</sup> Further, *Texas Monthly* magazine has produced highly detailed annual ratings on each school ([www.texasmonthly.com](http://www.texasmonthly.com)). North Carolina also publicizes its school ratings and makes data available to the public.

The public availability of data has also created new points of influence to drive student achievement. As noted earlier, real estate agents and economic recruiters use school performance data to “pitch” communities to potential residents and businesses. In one famous example of parents using available data, a group of activist parents in Brazosport, Texas, “brought their own charts and graphs, drawn from the accountability data,” to the first school board meeting over which the new superintendent presided.<sup>xi</sup> The ready availability of data makes schools and districts increasingly accountable, not only to the state, but also to other interests—parents, students, media, federal judges, community activists and the broader community.

### NORTH CAROLINA: TEACHER INCENTIVES TIED TO STUDENT PERFORMANCE<sup>xii</sup>

Rating	Measure	Consequence
Exemplary Growth Schools	10 percent growth over state targets	\$1,500 bonus to teachers
Expected Growth Schools	Meets state standards	\$750 bonus to teachers
Low Performing School	Fails to meet state standards	Competency testing for teachers

## SUMMARY: TOOLS FOR IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING

A closer look at the common characteristics of the successful standards-based reform efforts in North Carolina and Texas shows that, in many cases, Alabama is indeed moving in the right direction.

### • *Clear Standards and Benchmarks for Learning*

Teachers in Texas and North Carolina have access to curricular guides that organize into content areas the specific kinds of information and skills students are expected to obtain at each grade level and the state tests are wholly aligned to the standards. Alabama teachers receive a course of study for which their students will be responsible, some appearing on the SAT-9 standardized test, others not.

In order to better measure student performance, the State Department of Education is in the process of determining which of Alabama's content standards should be mastered for basic, proficient, and advanced levels. By doing so, the state can create assessment tools to accurately measure student learning.

### • *Criterion-referenced Testing*

Texas' and North Carolina's assessments are criterion-referenced, which means that student performance is scored against 100 percent mastery of the skills and knowledge communicated by the state's own standards. For instance, a "70" indicates that a student reached 70 percent of the state standards.

Alabama's major assessment tool, the SAT-9, is a norm-referenced exam, with scores compared against a norm that represents the 50th percentile. For the SAT-9, the norm is the average performance of students on the exam in 1995. A "70" means that a student has outperformed 70 percent of 1995's—not today's—students. Schools are accountable to improve on the 1995 results, not mastery of particular content knowledge.

Fortunately, Alabama has already initiated a move to criterion-referenced testing by adding the Alabama High School Graduation Exam and the writing assessment for grades five and seven to the accountability system. The "Principles Of A Revised Student Assessment Program" were adopted by the Alabama Board of Education in July 2002. The plan consists of seven guiding principles, including using a combination of criterion- and norm-referenced tests and designing criterion-referenced tests for grades three through eight that reflect the rigor, format, and reporting of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

### • *Alignment of Assessments to Content Standards*

The statewide assessment tests—North Carolina's ABCs and Texas's TAAS—have remained relatively unchanged since the early 1990s, providing a measure of consistency. Increasing achievement on the national assessments, like NAEP tests, have coincided with better results on statewide tests,<sup>xiii</sup> suggesting that skills and knowledge assessed by the national and state tests are in sync.<sup>xiv</sup>

Alabama is making progress in this area, as well. The "Principles Of A Revised Student Assessment Program" include aligning criterion-referenced tests with the Alabama Courses of Study. By testing students on what they are actually supposed to be learning, we will be able to assess how well they are learning and how well the material is being taught.

### • *Symmetry of Consequences*

Both North Carolina and Texas developed systems of clear financial rewards and levels of public recognition for improvements in student performance and for high levels of performance. Likewise, both used the power to fire principals and

## ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PRINCIPLES OF A REVISED STUDENT ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

- Provide for long-term stability while allowing for refinements.
- Use a combination of criterion- and norm-referenced assessments (CRT and NRT).
- Align CRTs with Alabama Courses of Study.
- Design CRTs in Grades 3-8 to reflect NAEP-type rigor, format, and reporting.
- Design assessments that are developmentally appropriate to emphasize application of knowledge as well as content recall.
- Provide assessment data in a timely manner and in easy-to-understand formats that guide instruction and inform parents and citizens.
- Balance testing needs with instructional delivery time.

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
PRINCIPLES OF A REVISED ACADEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

- Focus on improving student achievement for all students and include multiple criteria to determine improvement.
- Provide for long-term continuity and stability, allowing for refinements.
- Provide useful information about progress of all students that has meaning for all involved and interested parties.
- Report on improvements made by schools and school systems as students achieve at higher levels.
- Provide rewards for school and school system improvements.
- Identify schools and school systems with large numbers of low-achieving students and provide assistance.
- Sanction schools and school systems that do not demonstrate adequate progress.
- Disaggregate student data to provide information that will lead to narrowing and ultimately closing any achievement gaps among student groups.
- Ensure assessment reporting guides improve instruction, increase student achievement, create better awareness of parents and policymakers, and encourage schools and educators to learn from one another.

superintendents and even reconstitute, close or take over schools, when achievement goals were consistently not met.

The “Principles Of A Revised Academic Accountability System,” adopted by the Alabama Board of Education in July 2002, provides nine guiding principles to report improvements made by schools and school systems as students achieve at higher levels. The accountability plan calls for identifying schools and school systems with large numbers of low-achieving students and providing assistance to those schools.

- *Slow, Steady Implementation*

Both states introduced systems that focused on achievement and equity, with attention to raising standards over a number of years as comfort with the new testing grew. In the first year in Texas, 50 percent of students had to pass the TAAS to earn recognition for a

school; by the second year, the target moved up to 60 percent. In piloting the ABCs, North Carolina evaluated the program and improved it before launching it statewide. In 1996, 10 districts participated in the ABCs pilot program. In 1997, the program was implemented statewide,<sup>xv</sup> and North Carolina has added end-of-course testing in a number of subject areas since 1997.

- *Multiple Factors Used in Reporting*

By tracking both improvement and excellence and by taking into account teacher and student mobility, limited English proficiency, the prevalence of lower-income students and other key demographic factors in evaluating results, North Carolina and Texas created fair reporting systems that have built trust among educators.

Alabama is in the process of developing a similar reporting system in which teachers and students

are recognized for the progress they make from year to year.

- *Disaggregation of Student Performance*

North Carolina and Texas have created robust data systems that enable evaluation of objective data ranging from such input measurements as budgets and enrollments to such output measurements as state assessment scores and dropout rates. Student performance data can be disaggregated not only by school, district, or classroom, but also by race, ethnicity and family income level. Both states have led the nation in analyzing trends in subgroup performance and directly addressing the needs of particular students and groups.

The federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation made it mandatory for states to disaggregate student test scores. Alabama released its first disaggregated test scores in August 2002, illustrating the historic achievement gap between students of different races and poverty levels. The disaggregated data will help educators create programs and initiatives to address the needs of all student populations.

- *Public Access to School and District Information*

North Carolina and Texas permit the public to download and print specific disaggregated information with more specificity. Alabama has followed suit, making school and district “report cards” and the recently released disaggregated student test scores available at [www.alsde.edu](http://www.alsde.edu).

- <sup>i</sup> Joanne Scharer and S. D. Williams, “Random Acts of Public School Reform,” *North Carolina Insight*, October 2000, 64.
- <sup>ii</sup> “Random Acts of Public School Reform,” 65.
- <sup>iii</sup> “Random Acts of Public School Reform,” 65.
- <sup>iv</sup> *Rapid Achievement Gains*, 27.
- <sup>v</sup> Representative Edd Nye (D-Braden), quoted in “Random Acts of Public School Reform,” 72.
- <sup>vi</sup> North Carolina State Board of Education, *ABCs of Public Education in North Carolina: A Journey Toward Excellence* (Raleigh: 1998) 1.
- <sup>vii</sup> North Carolina State Board of Education, *The New ABCs of Public Education: Reorganization Study*, Department of Public Instruction, (Raleigh: May 1995).
- <sup>viii</sup> *Rapid Achievement Gains*, 29.
- <sup>ix</sup> Craig D. Jerald, *Real Results, Remaining Challenges: The Story of Texas Education Reform*, The Business Roundtable, April 2001, 3.
- <sup>x</sup> John O’Sullivan, Telephone Interview, January 21, 2002. The data is made available on the Web by Just For the Kids at <http://www.jftk.org/>.
- <sup>xi</sup> Charles A. Dana Center, *Equity-Driven Achievement-Focused School Districts: A report on Systemic School Success in Four Texas School Districts Serving Diverse Student Populations*, (Austin: September 2000) 12.
- <sup>xii</sup> *Rapid Achievement Gains*, 92.
- <sup>xiii</sup> *Rapid Achievement Gains*, 7.
- <sup>xiv</sup> *Rapid Achievement Gains*, 7.
- <sup>xv</sup> “Random Acts of Public School Reform,” 96.

**TWO LEGISLATIVE HISTORIES: TEXAS AND NORTH CAROLINA**

Year	Texas	North Carolina
1984	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• House Bill 72:                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Instituted standards</li> <li>2. “No pass, no play” law</li> <li>3. Teacher competency testing</li> <li>4. Redirected school finances to poorer districts</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Instituted public pre-kindergarten for low-income students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot program to expand the school day and school year</li> </ul>
1985 - 1986	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of Public Education Information Management System</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic Education Program, establishing a standard curriculum and providing adequate resources to all schools to teach the curriculum</li> <li>• Dedicated funding to “standing blue ribbon commission” that would become the Public School Forum of North Carolina</li> </ul>
1989		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senate Bill 2, creating a voluntary performance-based pay structure</li> </ul>
1991	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site-based decision making to encourage district self-governance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low Wealth and Small Schools Fund, which set aside extra state money for small and low-wealth schools in property-poor areas.</li> </ul>
1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) rolled out with minimal performance standards, build-in scheduled</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smart Start, which created local partnerships to coordinate provision of pre-kindergarten and supporting services to children ages birth - five.</li> </ul>
1995-1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Texas Education Code revamped to:                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Decentralize resources from Texas Education Agency to local districts and vendors to provide instructional support to schools;</li> <li>2. Change governance model to move from an elected to an appointed state superintendent; and</li> <li>3. Institute formula for school funding equalization</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Safe Schools Act, with zero tolerance for violence</li> <li>• Charter Schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABCs—Accountability, the Basics, and local Control—a new comprehensive accountability system, piloted in 10 schools</li> <li>• Charter schools permitted at local districts’ discretion</li> </ul>
1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Texas Reading Initiative</li> <li>• K-3 reading Assessment</li> <li>• Passage of TEKS standards, which will be basis of new statewide assessment beginning in 2003</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statewide rollout of the ABCs accountability system</li> <li>• Excellent Schools Act—increased teacher salaries and bonuses for credentials, while creating new accountability for teacher colleges.</li> </ul>

## CHAPTER THREE

# Building Capacity for High Achievement: Teachers, Administrators, and School Districts

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*...real improvements in student achievement require both a focus on results and a commitment to provide both human and financial resources to programs and initiatives that enhance educators abilities to teach and students abilities to learn. This is the key difference between these two states and Alabama.*

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Throughout the nation, the reform pendulum has swung, at least partially, from a resource-driven approach to educational management toward a results-driven approach. The change has occurred because “in the face of substantial aggregate increases in resources [between 1960 and 1995], little evidence suggests that student performance has increased,” according to education finance expert Eric Hanushek.<sup>i</sup> However, North Carolina and Texas became an exception to the rule of generally flat student achievement after moving toward comprehensive accountability. “The shift in thinking from resources to results, more than any one thing, has brought the reform movement closer to finding new answers,” the Public School Forum of North Carolina concluded in 1992.<sup>ii</sup>

Experiences in North Carolina

and Texas suggest that real improvements in student achievement require both a focus on results and a commitment to provide both human and financial resources to programs and initiatives that enhance educators abilities to teach and students abilities to learn. This is the key difference between these two states and Alabama.

In North Carolina and Texas, the effort to strengthen the teaching workforce began as a response to needs identified after the passage of a new accountability measures, and the effort continues to evolve. Under accountability plans of the mid-1990s, both states moved away from “one-size-fits-all approaches,” says John Dornan of the Public School Forum of North Carolina.<sup>iii</sup> Earlier failures, such as North Carolina’s “Career Ladder” and Texas’ attempt to determine a state-mandated concept of effective instruction, proved subjective and unwieldy.

“In looking for schools that are highly effective, I found that every school is different,” says Uri Triesman, executive director of the Charles A. Dana Center in Austin, which provides staff development programs to schools and school systems. “I started by promoting strategies anchored in my own experience. It turned out I really misunderstood what school was

about.” Triesman contends that schools should have the flexibility they need to meet the diverse needs of their individual students.

When Texas and North Carolina implemented standards-based reforms in the mid-1990s, they loosened classroom and local autonomy over instructional method in return for “one-standard-fits-all” accountability for student performance results. As part of their collective reform efforts, both states decentralized the central staff and resources from the state education departments and offered more authority to local school districts and regional professional support centers. The states established standards of achievement and accountability, but largely left it to local schools to decide how those standards would be met.<sup>iv</sup>

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*“The shift in thinking from resources to results, more than any one thing, has brought the reform movement closer to finding new answers.”*

—*The Public School Forum of North Carolina*

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To ensure that schools have the tools to provide quality teaching and learning to all students, both North Carolina and Texas established centers of excellence. These

centers provide ongoing research-based technical assistance to schools (see below).

Both states implemented school-based decision making, empowering teachers and principals to write multi-year School Improvement Plans. Under school improvement plans, many state administrative rules may be waived or adapted.

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*North Carolina and Texas established standards of achievement and accountability, but largely left it to local schools to decide how those standards would be met.*

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In North Carolina, teacher-preparation reform and pay hikes in 1997 coincided with the implementation of the ABCs plan. This nearly simultaneous policy shift amounted to a fundamental restructuring in the development of the teaching workforce in the

state. Efforts to improve teaching quality in both states have sought to address recruitment, preparation and retention of highly qualified teachers and principals. In addition to investing in improving educators' skills, the states also found ways to enhance the learning capabilities of students by providing pre-kindergarten and childcare. Moreover, to ensure equity and stability, they built school finance systems that brought school systems closer to adequate resources.

### **CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Texas' professional development resources have become more focused on enhancing districts' ability to meet student performance standards. The Texas Education Code was changed to require that staff development efforts be predominantly school-based. To support schools in their work, the state provides clear, well-aligned standards and comprehensive data collection, as well as

guidelines about content areas staff development may cover.

In partnership with the federal government and local foundations, the state has also developed 10 subject-area-specific Educator Support Centers, such as the Charles A. Dana Center, to enhance the professional development capacities of local districts. In an effort to meet critical needs while creating more of a career ladder for educators, Texas also created its own brand of "master teacher" designation. The state provides \$5,000 stipends to teachers trained as specialists who receive appropriate training and certification as "Master Reading Teacher" in association with the Texas Reading Initiative or "Master Math Teacher" in association with the Texas Math Initiative and agree to serve as a mentor to a district in need.<sup>v</sup>

Like Alabama and other southeastern states, North Carolina has provided strong incentives for teachers to pursue National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) national certification as "master teachers." The state pays the application fee and compensates teachers for three days of release time to prepare for the certification process. Certified teachers receive a 12-percent pay hike.

The National Board "is for my money the best staff development for individual growth you can get," says Dornan. "Where you get two or three teachers with board certification, you get whole schools moving together to reflect on teaching, focus on the craft, compare strategies, and build true learning communities."

### **BUILDING CAPACITY FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT: THE CHARLES A. DANA CENTER**

- Established in 1993 at the University of Texas
- Major funding from the Dana Foundation of New York, the National Science Foundation, the Texas Education Agency and a host of public and private partnerships
- Annual budget of approximately \$10 million; a staff of about 100
- As one of 10 contracted Texas Educator Support Centers, the Dana Center takes on several roles, such as:
  1. Compiling and disseminating research on instructional practice
  2. Giving graduate students the opportunity to do field-based policy research in education
  3. Providing how-to guidelines to schools and districts in school finance reporting and other administrative tasks
  4. Identifying technologies, practices and vendors to enhance student instruction
  5. Pursuing grants for statewide initiatives

Alabama is making great strides in the area of professional development for teachers. The Alabama Reading Initiative provides an excellent model for professional development and has been recognized nationwide for its focus on enhancing the skills of teachers in order to boost student achievement.

In June 2002, the State Board of Education adopted state standards for professional development based on the national standards created by the National Staff Development Council. Further, the state offers incentives to teachers who complete the National Board Certification process.

### RECRUITING AND TRAINING LEADERS

North Carolina and Texas have made significant efforts to upgrade

the quality of their school principals and district superintendents. North Carolina implemented a Principal Fellows Program (PFP) modeled on its successful Teaching Fellows Program. Scholarship recipients complete one-year internships in addition to their normal MSA coursework. By December 2001, PFP's eighth year, 96 percent of all program graduates were working as school administrators, accounting for 20 percent of the state's principals and assistant principals.

Another highly regarded school leadership training program in North Carolina is the Principal Education Program, which has provided support programs to more than 2,000 school leaders. "In the 19 school districts in which more than 400 school administra-

tors are graduates of PEP programs, 100 percent demonstrated growth in the number of schools meeting or exceeding performance growth targets last year," according to the PEP Annual Report.<sup>vi</sup> These instructional leaders are working with teachers to create school environments where teachers have both the time and the encouragement to help each other develop as professionals.<sup>vii</sup>

"As core and as vital as good teaching is, it takes leadership primarily from the principal to ensure that the condition that allow good teaching and learning to exist," says PEP Director Ken Jenkins. "Principals who are true instructional leaders bring teachers together and facilitate the process by which teachers can learn together."<sup>viii</sup>

North Carolina also has

### RECRUITING TEACHERS IN NORTH CAROLINA AND TEXAS

State	Programs	Eligibility	Benefits	Obligations	# per year (approx.)
North Carolina	Teaching Fellows	Top 12th Graders in North Carolina	\$20,000 conditional grant for college, mentoring by teacher	Teach for four years in NC public school	400
	NC Teach	Career-changing professionals	Fast-track licensure, mentoring	Teach for three years	150 - 200
	NC Teacher Consortium	K-12 office staff, paraprofessionals with Associate's Degree	Example: Teacher Assistant Scholarship, \$3,500	Complete certification at NC community college	not available
Texas	Troops to Teachers	Discharged military personnel in Texas	Temporary certification, mentoring and grant to pursue certification	Teach in district with critical shortage	150 - 200
	Teach for Texas	College students pursuing education degree	\$5,000 conditional grant	Teach for three years in Texas public school	400 - 450

worked to align its principal preparation programs with educational standards developed by the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), a consortium of 32 education agencies and 13 education administrative associations. North Carolina is working with ISLLC to develop portfolio-based assessments for principals and new assessment tools for superintendents. For more information on the ISLLC, visit [www.ccsso.org/isllc.html](http://www.ccsso.org/isllc.html)

Texas has worked to improve its local leadership through local and regional support programs designed to help principals and superintendents meet high standards. The state leans heavily on data-driven accountability systems, with student performance data being the central factor in appraisals of school and district leadership. Regional Education Support Centers and schools sponsor programs on a center-by-center basis to enhance leaders' professional abilities. For example, the Texas Superintendent's Certification Institute provides part-time field-based training toward certification as a superintendent.<sup>ix</sup>

The Alabama State Department of Education, with the direction and assistance of John Bell, launched the Principal Leadership Academy in 2000. However, the program only has enough resources to assist principals in struggling schools where intervention is imminent.

### **RECRUITING NEW TEACHERS**

North Carolina and Texas invested in efforts to increase the

number and quality of teaching recruits. North Carolina, one of the 10 lowest-paying states in 1995, increased its pay scales 6.5 percent annually.<sup>x</sup> Still, faced with imminent teacher shortages, both states funded initiatives to attract students and other professionals through alternative paths to certification. The Public School Forum of North Carolina helped create the Teaching Fellows Program for high school students considering teaching careers. The program has graduated more than 4,000 teacher candidates, with more than 2,000 currently teaching in the state.<sup>xi</sup> North Carolina principals report that Fellows "far exceed other new teachers in their performance."<sup>xii</sup>

Alternative paths to entering the teaching profession in North Carolina and Texas have been developed as well. Nearly one in four of all new teachers trained in Texas are prepared through post-baccalaureate alternative certification programs, which allow professionals who have attained a bachelor's degree to complete a master's degree in education more quickly. The state's Troops to Teachers (TTT) program, which also has been implemented in Alabama, has placed 1,300 former military personnel in teaching positions since 1995.<sup>xiii</sup>

### **RETAINING NEW TEACHERS**

All states face stiff challenges in keeping new teachers beyond the make-or-break first and second years. "According to an analysis of federal data, nearly 20 percent of those who graduated in 1993 and

became teachers the following year quit the field after three years," writes Jeff Archer in *Education Week*. "Those who did not go through an induction process are nearly twice as likely to give up as those who had support."<sup>xiv</sup> Alabama is no exception: it lost 10 percent of its novice teachers after the first year in 1999-2000 and continues to lose 20 percent of its math, science and special education teachers within the first three years of teaching.<sup>xv</sup>

North Carolina's retention program requires a mentor for every incoming teacher and provides a salary bonus of up to \$10,000 annually for expert teachers who mentor several novice teachers.<sup>xvi</sup> Under 1997's Excellent Schools Act, each novice teacher gets paid for three additional days of employment for orientation and classroom preparation.

In Texas, the Texas Beginning Educator Support System (TxBESS) similarly provides grants to experienced educators who are willing to mentor first- and second-year teachers. In 2000, 3,400 administrators and teachers received training to support 915 first-year teachers.

"While we normally lose nearly 20 percent of our first-year teachers in the state, about 88 percent of the new teachers who have been involved in TxBESS returned for a second year of teaching," according to State Board of Educator Certification Executive Director William Franz. "Of those teachers who received a second year of support from the TxBESS program, almost 98 percent returned for a

third year. Such data underscores the need for this program.”<sup>xvii</sup>

These policies make professional development a habit and expectation among incoming teachers.

Currently, Alabama is piloting a similar mentoring program for teachers in nine school systems across the state.

## IMPROVING TEACHER PREPARATION AND CERTIFICATION

Common sense and research tell us that well-educated and well-prepared teachers are more effective in the classroom. To that end, North Carolina has invested heavily in restructuring its teacher education programs. North Carolina has made a special effort to prepare teachers to pursue certification as “master teachers” per the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Furthermore, under threat of losing state accreditation, the 15 teacher preparation programs with the University of North Carolina system created “University-School Teacher Education Partnerships.” The retooled master’s programs, which must address the ABCs standards in their curriculum, emphasize intensive field-based learning, coordinated planning, research and professional develop-

ment among university and school personnel. Moreover, the schools have instituted Professional Development School (PDS) relationships with K-12 schools.

Texas, on the other hand, has provided incentives for local improvements rather than prescribing changes at the state level and has encouraged the decentralization of education preparation programs. As part of the rewrite of the Texas Education Code in 1995, Texas created a new State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) responsible for implementing rules as needed to improve teacher preparation and certification.<sup>xviii</sup> In Texas, a wide range of universities, local K-12 districts and regional professional development centers are licensed as teacher-preparation programs.<sup>xix</sup>

Both North Carolina and Texas have created certification systems that align teacher practice with state education standards. Governing a diverse array of education preparation entities, Texas’s SBEC rolled out new educator standards and implemented a new certification exam for all Texas teachers in fall 2002.

The ExCET, the teacher competency exam that was created as part of the reform package of the mid-1980s, was regarded as “a joke” by some educators. Building on the lessons learned from the ExCET examination, the State Board has developed and approved a new series of exams (TExES) that are aligned with state standards for educators and content standards for students. Like North Carolina’s teacher candidates, Texas teacher

candidates will have to pass both a general knowledge test and a subject-area examination.

Recently, the Alabama State Board of Education approved a resolution establishing the Alabama Prospective Teacher Test. This basic skills test is administered to rising juniors in teacher preparation programs throughout Alabama. It does not assess a candidate’s skills in terms of developing into an effective educator; it merely assesses whether the candidate has the basic skills required to pursue teacher certification.

Alabama still lacks a subject-specific test that would measure an educator’s skills in his or her teaching field. However, the State Board of Education is accelerating their process for developing such a test in order to meet the “highly qualified teacher” requirements of *No Child Left Behind*.

## IMPROVING LEARNING THROUGH EARLY EDUCATION

North Carolina and Texas have both undertaken significant measures to increase students’ capacity to succeed in school. One of the Perot Commission’s lasting legacies is its pioneering work to better prepare Texas’ young at-risk children for success in school. In 1985, Texas passed a law mandating lower class sizes for kindergarten through the fourth grade, the years in which research suggests that class sizes have the greatest impact on learning abilities.<sup>xx</sup> They also instituted preschool programs, targeted especially at children in need. In 1999, after seeing impressive gains among 4th graders, Texas

### NORTH CAROLINA’S UNIVERSITY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP AT-A-GLANCE

- Teacher candidates gain classroom experience in year-long internships
- Increased access to new technology for teachers and administrators
- K-12 educators serve as practitioners-in-residence at universities

committed \$200 million to further expand pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs for poor, homeless and limited-English-proficiency students.<sup>xxi</sup>

The North Carolina Legislature mirrored the Perot Commission's effort with 1993's "Smart Start" local early-childhood health and education efforts. Through Smart Start, local partnerships administer a flexible menu of childcare resources. The North Carolina Partnership for Children provides technical assistance and training for local Smart Start partnerships and ensures compliance with accountability measures.<sup>xxii</sup> Smart Start, which won a national "Innovations in American Government" award in 1998, has succeeded in improving the quality of and access to childcare.

In Alabama, the Governor's Commission on Early Learning, chaired by Van Richey, published a

#### SINCE SMART START BEGAN:

- 155,140 families have received childcare subsidies so the parents can work
- 387,800 children have received important preventative health screenings to detect health problems before they become serious
- 424,000 children have been educated in higher quality childcare facilities
- 246,500 parents have received health and parenting education

report in 2001 detailing 45 specific recommendations designed to improve the quality of early learning for children birth to five. This blueprint is guiding the state as we work to improve early childhood education.

#### INVESTING IN EDUCATION

Courts in North Carolina and Texas have consistently argued that while public education does not require a "magic number" or dollar-for-dollar parity to pass constitutional muster, good faith efforts to ensure stable and adequate resources are necessary to meet legal and moral requirements implied by state law. In the 1990s, both states took steps to close funding gaps among local districts that have yielded greater systemic stability.

In 1991, the North Carolina Legislature created the Low-Wealth and Small Schools Fund in 1991. Counties receive funds if their property tax base is below the state average (the measure of low wealth) and their tax rate (the measure of local tax effort) is above the state average. The law also provides supplemental funds to small districts.

"Without the low wealth and small county supplemental funding, the current spending gap between the top and bottom spending counties would have

swelled to \$1,363.00 per pupil or \$35,438.00 per classroom," according to the Public School Forum of North Carolina. The group believes that "money matters, [but] how money is spent matters more than how much is spent."<sup>xxiii</sup>

In 1993, after several earlier attempts that state courts ruled unconstitutional, the Texas Legislature passed the so-called "Robin Hood" law. The bill rejected past attempts to set local property tax rates and instead uses a complex formula that gives property-rich local districts several options to share their wealth with property-poor "partner districts," based on a calculation of property wealth per student.

By contrast, the Alabama Supreme Court ended a long-standing school equity lawsuit without addressing additional funding or accountability. However, the State Superintendent of Education and the State Board of Education have developed a comprehensive funding plan called R.E.A.C.H., which is discussed at the end of this report.

<sup>i</sup> Eric Hanushek, "The Confusing World of Educational Accountability." *National Tax Journal*, June 2001: 365.

<sup>ii</sup> Public School Forum of North Carolina, *School Reform at a Crossroads*, (Raleigh, 1992) 27. Italics added.

<sup>iii</sup> John Dornan, Phone Interview, April 2, 2002.

<sup>iv</sup> "Random Acts of Public School Reform," 91.

<sup>v</sup> Texas Education Agency, "Texas Master Reading Teacher Program Frequently Asked Questions," <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/curriculum/mrt/qa.html>.

<sup>vi</sup> Principals Executive Program, "Annual Report 2000-2001," 3, <http://www.ga.unc.edu/pep/AP01-02F.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> John O'Sullivan, Telephone interview, January 21, 2002.

- <sup>viii</sup> Ken Fisher, interview with Charles Coble, *Principal Executive Program*, <http://21stcenturyschools.northcarolina.edu/center/>.
- <sup>ix</sup> Education Support Center 20, "About the Institute," *Texas Superintendents' Certification Institute*, <http://www.esc20.net/tsci/institute.html>.
- <sup>x</sup> Bess Keller, "Quality Counts 2001: Texas Policy Update," *Education Week on the Web*, <http://www.edweek.com/sreports/qc01/>, 5 of 6.
- <sup>xi</sup> The Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, *Teaching Quality in the Southeast: Meeting the Challenges*, 12, <http://www.teachingquality.org/resources/pdfs/MTC.pdf>.
- <sup>xii</sup> The Task Force on Teaching and Student Achievement, *Teaching and Learning: Meeting the Challenge of High Standards* (Montgomery, 1998), July 1999, 25.
- <sup>xiii</sup> *Troops to Teachers* Web page, <http://voled.doded.mil/dantes/ttt/>.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Jeff Archer, "Earning Their Stripes," *Education Week*, 13 January 2000: 39.
- <sup>xv</sup> Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 16.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 15. "North Carolina," *Education Week*, 13 January 2000: 142.
- <sup>xvii</sup> State Board for Educator Certification, "Mentoring Program Helps Address Teacher Shortage." News Release, 9 April 2002. Available at <http://www.sbec.state.tx.us/txbess/newsrelease042002.pdf>
- <sup>xviii</sup> *Troops to Teachers*
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## CHAPTER FOUR

# Sustaining Reform: States that Learn about Learning

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*North Carolina and Texas have made constant “learning about learning” a priority, and students have been the primary beneficiaries.*

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The movements to increase accountability and capacity in North Carolina and Texas schools continue to evolve, nurtured by a supportive infrastructure created during the reform process. These learning networks are the joint efforts of business people, educators and policymakers. Each group made significant contributions, built reservoirs of trust and made long-term commitments to changing the status quo. Districts and schools built upon the networks of mutual support, leveraging outside partnerships with businesses and foundations and working to improve instruction. In subtle ways, at multiple levels, North Carolina and Texas have made constant “learning about learning” a priority and students have been the primary beneficiaries.

In the early 1980s, business leaders in Texas and North Carolina became increasingly aware of the challenges of training a skilled workforce for a changing economy. As a solution, they began to look to school reform. They

brought a bottom-line mentality that drove reform efforts, demanded useful performance data and spearheaded systemic strategic planning.

Educators in these two states had long been aware of their low national rankings and they wanted better resources and better results. They chose to forego “turf wars” in favor of leveraging relationships with business leaders for the betterment of schools and students, providing the technical expertise and practical know-how to ensure that restructuring policies were feasible.

Policymakers invested in coalition-building as well, making the most of the willingness of business people and educators to stay engaged over the long term. In North Carolina, for example, a strong history of public-private partnerships, like the successful Research Triangle Park that linked academics and entrepreneurs, provided a useful model to follow in building a sustainable coalition for

educational change.<sup>i</sup>

### **COMING TOGETHER: BUSINESS LEADERS, EDUCATORS AND POLICYMAKERS**

In North Carolina, business people saw value in building education-reform coalitions to learn about education and improve it. This energy led to 1985’s creation of the Public School Forum of North Carolina, conceived as a “floating peace conference” that would break gridlock among business, education and policy leaders. The Forum—launched with public and private funding—served as a “standing blue ribbon commission on education and the economy.”<sup>ii</sup> The partnership hired John Dornan, former head of the state’s largest teacher union, as its executive director and quickly became a powerful voice in the education-reform debate.

Similarly, business leaders in Texas began to see that long-term results demanded an unrelenting combined effort. In 1989, attorney

### THE PUBLIC SCHOOL FORUM OF NORTH CAROLINA: A BRIDGE AMONG BUSINESS PEOPLE, EDUCATORS AND POLICYMAKERS

In support of its mission to contribute to a state school system that is “second to none,” the Forum’s goals are:

1. To create a bridge among elected officials, educators and business leaders committed to school improvement.
2. To build consensus around solutions and initiatives aimed at strengthening schools
3. To serve as a credible source of information and research on education issues

Tom Luce, former Coca-Cola President Charles Duncan; Exxon President Bill Stevens; Paul Roth, president of the Texas Division of Southwestern Bell; and financial executive Charles Miller, among others, capitalized on the Perot Commission's momentum by creating the Texas Business & Education Coalition (TBEC).<sup>iii</sup>

TBEC quickly found that it needed to incorporate the professional and political know-how of educators. Fortunately, some education organizations had contributed their time and energy to the reform movement during the Perot Commission's work and saw it in their interest to continue to be involved. The Texas Federation

of Teachers, which represents approximately 40,000 teachers located primarily in Texas's major urban areas, came to the table.

"By and large we serve low-income populations," explains the federation's Secretary-Treasurer John O'Sullivan, a TBEC board member.<sup>iv</sup> "We knew that they didn't get what they needed to compete, and we knew that business as usual and the status quo was not going to bridge that gap. When I say 'we,' I don't mean the leadership. I mean the teachers."

### CREATING A COMMON AGENDA

Business leaders brought a focus on results-and accountability-that drove the process of change. The Public School Forum of North Carolina and TBEC also started an ongoing dialogue between business and education professionals. Educators involved in reform efforts came to see high standards and rigorous accountability as elements of professional respect and compensation.

"Teachers want to be part of a respected profession," says O'Sullivan. "They want to be able to focus on helping the community, show that they have the expertise and be able to solve clients' problems with some measure of certainty." Although instituting accountability for teachers "hasn't always been pristine ... We've shown sustained improvement in reading, writing and arithmetic, and no one wants to give back those gains."<sup>v</sup>

While educators became comfortable with accountability, business leaders learned to appreciate

the need for better-directed professional development efforts. "The business community probably didn't think the educators knew what they were doing," says James Nelson, commissioner of the Texas Education Agency under Governor George W. Bush. "There was a lot of misunderstanding on both sides."

The coalitions challenged policymakers to develop a vision for education and avoid partisan battles that might derail reform. Moreover, "the business community gave credibility to the needs of the education community with the Legislators," says Bill Kirby, TBEC's first education co-chair and later state Commissioner of Education.<sup>vii</sup>

TBEC, like the Public School Forum of North Carolina, fought to ensure the state adopted a long-term strategy. The group provided major support for passage of accountability legislation, working directly with the bill's author, Senator (now Lieutenant Governor.) Bill Ratliff.<sup>viii</sup> TBEC provided research support when the Legislature rewrote the Texas Educational Code, and some prominent members testified in favor of decentralization of the system.

"We told the Legislature we would fall out on them if they did not clean up public school governance," says TBEC's Darv Winick.<sup>ix</sup>

The coalitions have gained credibility and influence in sustaining the efforts to build accountability and capacity. Policy proposals supported by TBEC or the Public

### THE REVOLVING DOOR: BUSINESS LEADERS AND EDUCATION REFORM

- Phil Kirk (NC) - former state Senator; now State Board chair and head of the state Chamber of Commerce
- Charles Duncan (TX) - former CEO of Coca-Cola, former member of State Board of Education; and founding member of TBEC
- Martin Lancaster (NC) - former congressman; now head of state community college system
- John Stevens (TX) - former American Federation of Teachers organizer; TBEC executive director
- James Nelson (TX) - businessman and lawyer; former state superintendent; former local school board member; board member, TBEC
- John Dornan (NC) - former teachers union president; now executive director of the Public School Forum of North Carolina

School Forum of North Carolina already have been vetted by a wide range of business and education leaders before going to the statehouse. TBEC, for instance, has become “a very effective wholesaler” of new policies, says Winick.

Finally, the groups have nurtured a beneficial revolving door among business and education leaders that allows for sharing of ideas across fields of expertise.

“Not only do they (coalition members) begin to like being together ... they begin to see how they fit in to the system as a whole ... and begin to work on strategies to improve their part of the system,” says Lynda McCulloch, an adviser to North Carolina’s former Governor James Hunt.<sup>x</sup>

### **LEADING EDUCATION REFORM: THE GOVERNORS**

In both Texas and North Carolina, goal-oriented, politically pragmatic governors significantly accelerated the process of education reform. Two successful leaders were Texan George W. Bush (Republican governor, 1994-2001), who has carried his reform ideas to the White House, and North Carolinian James B. Hunt (Democratic governor, 1977-1985 and 1993-2001). Both Bush and Hunt worked with bipartisan legislators to build broad coalitions around core goals, and they endorsed policies based on nonpartisan research rather than ideology.

Hunt began his third term as an experienced policymaker with a “laser-like focus” on education reform, says McCulloch. “It may sound schmaltzy, but we put

together something called the Hunt Agenda, and we had little cards with the agenda on it. It was about getting priorities aligned and staying on message.” The items later become major elements of the “ABCs Plus” strategic plan for excellent schools.<sup>xi</sup>

Hunt, in particular, institutionalized relationships between business and education lobbies and state government. He housed the NC Business Committee for Education, which facilitates business-focused pilot programs in the Governor’s Office. He helped to secure the endorsement of the powerful North Carolina NEA affiliate creating a Teacher-Advisor, naming a former fifth grade master teacher and union president, with direct access to him.

Hunt also convened and chaired the “Education Cabinet,” which brought together presidents of the state university system, the community college system and the association of independent college and universities, along with the state superintendent and the state school board chair. Hunt, therefore, got diverse education-related constituencies on his side, in part by putting them on his team.

The James B. Hunt Institute for Educational Leadership, based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which houses seven teacher and principal professional-development and research organizations within its “campus,” represents a fitting legacy to a governor who built broad coalitions for change and continued to learn through research how to improve the system, according

to a former Hunt aide.

Bush also demonstrated an ability to focus on education and to build bridges among diverse constituencies. He proved able to sidestep partisan infighting on education matters. “If he liked your idea, he would take it and run with it,” said O’Sullivan of the Texas Federation of Teachers.

Moreover, when Bush listed education as his number one priority as governor, he specifically committed Texas to the goal of having every child reading by the third grade and continuing to read at grade level or better throughout public school.<sup>xii</sup> His 1997 Texas Reading Initiative matched money to the ideal.<sup>xiii</sup>

“Bush’s commitment to set aside partisan bickering when it comes to children ... usually meant voting with Democrats and Republicans who were intelligent, competent, not too ideological ... people who would listen,” says Winick.

### **CREATING SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS THAT TEACH AND LEARN**

Schools in North Carolina and Texas that have outperformed traditional expectations have created learning-friendly organizational cultures where principals, teachers and students know their job is to learn. These cultures believe that all children are capable of high achievement, use individual student performance data tied to state standards as the basis for curriculum decisions and pursue professional development opportunities.

For example, in North Carolina, “we’ve created an envi-

ronment where teachers have to talk to each other, and the local school boards provide professional development,” says Jane Worsham, executive director of the North Carolina State Board of Education.<sup>xiv</sup>

The focus on high standards forces individual schools to learn how best to serve each student. Texas’s award-winning Brazosport Independent School District developed an “eight-step instructional process” that begins with looking at disaggregated data to determine which weak skill areas merit extra instruction time, basing the instructional calendar around this

baseline.<sup>xv</sup> “Success encourages success,” in the words of one Brazosport, Texas, teacher, who notes that high performance on tests quickly “snowballs” into a culture of high achievement.

In creating learning cultures at their schools, principals now focus on being instruction leaders, not mere building managers. Programs like North Carolina’s Principal Education Program and professional development provided in Texas’ regional support centers open new lines of feedback and communication to address instructional issues and reward innovation.

“Proactive redundancy” is a key

factor in excellent schools in Texas, according to Dana Center Director Uri Triesman. North Carolina’s and Texas’ commitment to providing ongoing support to principals and teachers has created informal learning networks that encourage teachers to work together to identify successful classroom practices. National Board certification for teachers, principal training programs and standards-based reform that puts a premium on results—all generate ripple effects that, taken together, add up to systemic change.

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<sup>i</sup> SERVE, 3.

<sup>ii</sup> SERVE, 3.

<sup>iii</sup> “TBEC: A History of Commitment.” Texas Business & Education Coalition, <http://www.tbec.org/history.htm>.

<sup>iv</sup> John O’Sullivan, Telephone interview, 21 January 2002.

<sup>v</sup> O’Sullivan.

<sup>vi</sup> Achieve, Inc., Conference brochure, *1999 National Education Summit*, 5.

<sup>vii</sup> “TBEC, A History of Commitment.”

<sup>viii</sup> “TBEC: Policy Results.”

<sup>ix</sup> Darv Winick, Interview.

<sup>x</sup> Lynda McCulloch, Interview.

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<sup>xii</sup> “George Bush,” *State of Texas*, <http://www.cemetery.state.tx.us/>.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

# Moving Forward: A+'s Recommendations for Alabama

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*North Carolina and Texas spent education dollars on initiatives designed to improve teaching and learning and to bolster standards and accountability. In order to be successful, Alabama must do the same.*

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**T**exas and North Carolina have been on the journey to academic excellence for almost 20 years, while Alabama began the journey in 1995. By studying the lessons learned in these two states and by implementing similar initiatives, we in Alabama can accelerate our pace toward change. All Alabama students can achieve provided they have access to an adequate education. The talents and skills demonstrated by O'Neal, Logan, Rice, Jemison, Raines, Kirkland and diPiazza can be discovered and cultivated in public school students throughout the state. Texas and North Carolina have shown how the interests of children, parents, educators, business people and policymakers can converge and contribute to significant gains in student performance. The A+ Education Foundation believes that Alabama is ready to press ahead with similar initiatives focused on high standards, accountability and fairness for all

students.

So what should be our first step? For the last six years, revenue from growth in the Education Trust Fund has been directed toward reducing class sizes and increasing teacher compensation. Alabama can be proud that our class sizes are shrinking and that we are committed to ensuring that teacher salaries reach the national average. However, the successes of Texas and North Carolina have shown us that these two measures must not be the sole focus of improvement efforts.

These two states spent education dollars on initiatives designed to improve teaching and learning and to bolster standards and accountability. In order to be successful, Alabama must do the same. A+ has developed the following recommendations to ensure that all Alabama schoolchildren are well-prepared and have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE TEACHING AND LEARNING**

*1. Invest in current educators' knowledge and skills by providing content-specific professional development to ensure that each teacher is able to reach every student.*

The most logical way to improve student achievement is to provide support and training to

current educators. Fortunately, Alabama already has in place an outstanding model for professional development. The Alabama Reading Initiative is a homegrown success story and it is based on the latest research on effective reading strategies. It is successful because it provides both initial training and ongoing technical assistance to teachers. The ARI enables teachers to teach all students to read effectively and to expand their reading skills. Schools that have access to a full-time, well-prepared reading specialist are showing the most significant and sustained results. When implemented properly, the Alabama Reading Initiative can result in the type of whole-school reform that can improve teaching and learning dramatically. Therefore, we recommend providing full funding for the ARI so that existing sites can continue to succeed and so that all other Alabama schools can participate.

A recent evaluation of the third year of the ARI resulted in several recommendations that would make the initiative even more effective as it is taken to scale. These recommendations include:

- Provide each ARI Literacy Demonstration Site with a well-prepared reading specialist who spends half-time assisting faculty members to expand and perfect their reading strategies. The other

half of the reading specialists' time is devoted to working with struggling readers.

- Provide refresher training for ARI faculties every three years to address faculty and principal turnover and to sharpen the skills of ongoing staff.
- Secure a diagnostic test, to be given three times a year, to help teachers gauge specific student needs and progress.
- Establish a "Gold-Star Schools" program to recognize outstanding ARI sites. Gold-Star Schools would become training sites for principals and serve as models for visits by principals and faculties from other ARI schools, as well as schools considering involvement in the ARI.
- Increase grants to participating schools for professional development to reinforce and advance the learning and knowledge of ARI faculty and staff.

The recent infusion of federal dollars from the Reading First grant will enable Alabama to implement some of these changes. The award of \$15 million per year for six years will allow our state to provide reading specialists and professional development to some of the state's most challenged schools, to implement a diagnostic test statewide and to give initial training to K-3 teachers. However, additional funding is required to take the ARI to scale.

The Alabama Reading Initiative offers an excellent model for the state's ongoing commitment to professional development efforts. All of the elements of an effective professional development program

are included in the ARI:

- It deepens teachers' knowledge of the content they teach.
- It provides teachers with additional strategies to reach all of their students successfully.
- It provides regular opportunities for work with colleagues and experts during the school day and at other times.
- It requires teachers to monitor each student's progress and to respond to specific learning needs.
- It is based on the best research about effective teaching and learning.

Alabama recently adopted professional development standards that are aligned with the elements found in the ARI. Alabama should use these standards to upgrade the professional development planning process in all schools and to provide technical assistance that will improve the overall professional development practice in the state.

## *2. Increase the chance of having every Alabama student succeed in school by funding the Alabama Success Initiative—the state's effort to eliminate social promotion and retention.*

To begin closing the gap in student success, the Alabama Legislature should fund the Alabama Success Initiative, a comprehensive plan designed to eliminate social promotion and retention over time. Based on the Texas Success Initiative, this plan includes the following components:

- *Training for teachers on effective reading strategies*, as included in the Alabama Reading Initiative, start-

ing with Kindergarten teachers and adding a grade level each year.

Alabama's award through the federal Reading First grant will enable the state to begin to implement this part of the Success Initiative.

- *A similar type of effective professional development in mathematics.* Currently, the State Department of Education is piloting a Math, Science and Technology Initiative in the Huntsville area. The state should evaluate the pilot program and develop a strategy to take it to scale.

- *Ensuring children enter Kindergarten ready to learn.* Texas, North Carolina and most other Southern states have invested substantially in pre-school programs. Alabama should provide preschool education for our most at-risk three- and four-year-olds. Pre-school providers and parents should have access to training on how to enhance the early language and pre-reading skills of pre-school children. The state also should improve the knowledge and skills of early-childhood care providers through rigorous accreditation.

- *Closing the "Achievement Gap" by investing in proven intervention efforts for students who are falling behind.* In August 2002, for the first time, schools received student achievement data broken down—or disaggregated—by race, gender, poverty and other factors. This information will help teachers and principals identify and assist struggling students by implementing successful intervention strategies like those embedded in the Alabama Reading Initiative.

In order for the implementa-

tion of the Alabama Success Initiative to be effective, educators must consider the external factors that affect students. Many at-risk students face significant barriers to learning. The state should expand its efforts to eliminate these barriers by encouraging state agencies to work together effectively to address critical student and family needs.

### ***3. Make principal recruitment and training a top priority.***

Successful schools are managed by principals who are both effective managers and instructional leaders. Simply put, where you find an effective school, you'll find an effective principal. To guarantee that Alabama has an ample supply of well-prepared principals, the state should require the higher education community to upgrade its principal preparation programs. Alabama can learn from such programs as North Carolina's Principal Education Program. Additionally, the state should consider providing incentives to effective teachers and mid-career individuals to pursue the additional rigorous training to prepare them to become a principal. Further, the state should expand and increase support for the Alabama Principal Leadership Academy.

### ***4. Recruit the best and brightest into the teaching profession.***

Not enough talented high school students in Alabama are pursuing teaching as a profession. We can change that by providing incentives to high-achieving high school students. For example, the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program

provides a four-year tuition scholarship in return for a commitment to teach in the state for four years. Additionally, the Fellows Program provides supplemental training and education to its cadre of college students.

But Alabama should not stop there. The nationally recognized South Carolina Teacher Cadet program encourages talented high school students to explore teaching as a profession while they are still in high school. North Carolina has linked the Cadet Program to its Teaching Fellows Program in an effort to develop a reliable pipeline of talent into the teaching profession. Alabama should consider developing an identical teacher-training program to ensure that our state develops and benefits from the talents of our own high school students.

### ***5. Help new teachers be more successful by developing a two-year "induction" program that provides each new teacher with ongoing training and a mentor.***

A recent study conducted by the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama for the Alabama Teaching Quality Enhancement Project found that a large number of new teachers were leaving teaching during their first three years. Particularly disturbing are the numbers of math, science and special education teachers who depart early in their teaching careers. These positions are difficult to fill and the state should do everything possible to ensure those teachers' success once hired.

Other professions like law,

accounting, architecture and medicine would never consider letting their new hires fend for themselves with no help or support. Like North Carolina and Texas, Alabama should invest in providing additional professional development to new teachers to ease their transition into teaching. This training should be developed in conjunction with teacher education programs and other quality service-providers and should include the provision of a mentor for each new teacher.

### ***6. Begin planning now to meet the teacher quality standards of the "No Child Left Behind" legislation.***

The Bush Administration's No Child Left Behind legislation specifies that every public school teacher must be highly qualified by 2006. There are four critical components to ensuring a teacher is highly qualified: recruitment, professional development, testing and evaluation. Recommendations #4 and #1 above address the first two components respectively. This recommendation addresses teacher testing and the teacher evaluation process.

Under this new law, a highly qualified elementary school teacher must hold a bachelor's degree and demonstrate mastery by passing a rigorous test in reading, writing, math and other areas of the curriculum. A highly qualified middle or high school teacher must hold a bachelor's degree and demonstrate competency in subject area taught by passing a rigorous state test or through completion of an academic major, graduate degree, or com-

parable coursework

Alabama presently does not test teacher candidates, either on the basic skills level or on their knowledge of a particular subject. Under provisions of a consent degree, a new Alabama Prospective Teacher Test has been developed and was given to students in teacher preparation programs in December 2002. The test measures basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. While this is a solid start, the state should make subject-specific testing a top priority to comply with the new federal legislation and to help guarantee that teachers are qualified and well-versed in their subject area.

Currently, Alabama uses the Professional Education Personnel Evaluation (PEPE) to evaluate all its public school teachers. This process involves a series of scheduled classroom visits from a principal or assistant principal who has completed the PEPE evaluator training, but the tool lacks a direct link to a teacher's overall effectiveness on student achievement. Alabama should refine PEPE to create a tool that will help all our teachers become more effective in the classroom.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future advocates a content-specific teacher evaluation process—one that measures teacher's goals, intentions, plans or student outcomes. The state also should consider incorporating effective professional development into the evaluation process to guarantee that teachers possess the knowledge and skills needed to be successful with all students.

### *7. Compensate teachers and principals as professionals.*

Currently, Alabama's teachers are paid according to a clearly defined salary schedule. Salaries increase according to a teacher's experience and education, but the salary growth potential over a career is very limited. While this is a simple system, it does not focus on results, nor does it reward excellence or encourage professional growth. Alabama should redesign its teacher compensation system so that teachers and principals are paid on par with other professionals but also in the same manner as other professionals, compensating them for extra responsibilities and paying for demonstrated knowledge and skills.

Flexibility is critical to such an effort. Like North Carolina, Alabama should decentralize central staff, allowing local school personnel to determine how teachers are rewarded and compensated. Some suggestions include providing financial incentives for teachers who work as mentors, serve teacher colleges as K-12 Practitioners-In-Residence and pursue designation as a lead teacher, a role similar to that of a reading specialist. The state also should consider conditional grants, additional stipends and mortgage assistance for teachers who agree to teach in hard-to-recruit areas.

New principals hired after the year 2000 work under a contract and can negotiate their salary. Principals hired before that time are tenured and systems are provided funding for salaries based on a salary schedule. Because tenure is

considered to be a property right, it cannot be revoked without a due process hearing. The state should consider providing incentives for existing principals to exchange tenure for a performance-based contract that carries an increased salary.

### *8. Provide tools for teachers.*

Teachers surveyed in North Carolina and Texas indicate that they have adequate resources to support teaching and learning. Currently, there are many schools and school systems in our state with woefully inadequate resources. Students must share textbooks. The shelves of the libraries are bare. The technology available to teachers and students is outdated.

Teachers must have the resources necessary to support learning. Alabama must increase funding for textbooks, technology and libraries if our students are going to succeed and be prepared for the 21st century.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN STANDARDS AND IMPROVE ACCOUNTABILITY**

### *1. Strengthen and improve Alabama's assessment system.*

The Alabama State Department of Education is already at work revising its assessment system to provide more meaningful information about how well teachers are teaching and students are learning. This work will move the state away from the over-reliance on "off-the-shelf" norm-referenced testing to the use of criterion-referenced tests that are better aligned with

Alabama's academic standards and provide a more accurate measure of achievement.

The new assessment system should provide better information about how well Alabama students are performing, by race, gender, poverty and other important factors. It also should provide information about how well each school is doing to help all of its students achieve academically. An enhanced assessment system can also help identify areas in which a school should focus its professional development and intervention work. Federal funds will help defray some of the cost of developing the new system, but additional funding will be necessary to develop it fully.

***2. Revise Alabama's accountability system to include incentives and support for schools that improve the performance of all students.***

Alabama's current accountability system requires only the lowest performing schools to improve. Any school that has a simple majority (50%) of its students scoring at the 40th percentile on the Stanford Achievement Test is "in the clear" under our current system. A school that is in the clear by this low standard has no statutory incentive to improve the performance of its students. Additionally, our current accountability system allows gaps in student performance to be "masked" because it takes into account only the average score, not the scores of different subgroups of students. Large numbers of students can be failing without the school having to address their specific learning needs.

Alabama can learn from North Carolina's work in low-performing schools. In the vast majority of schools that have been designated "low-performing," a strong intervention team model has led to quick turnarounds and monetary bonuses for quick improvement, where both teachers and students win. The accountability system must ensure that all students progress toward performance at proficient levels. School systems should provide rewards to individual schools that make progress in this area so that improvements can continue.

While focusing on the "low-performing" students remains crucial, we must not neglect "average" or "high-performing" students. The No Child Left Behind legislation requires teachers to monitor the progress of all students. Each student should be challenged to better his or her academic performance. Excellence should be expected from all.

***3. Enhance the State Department of Education's information system to provide teachers, administrators, parents and students with important information about the academic progress of students in individual schools, systems and the state.***

Currently, Alabama lacks the kind of statewide student information system that allows solid tracking of attendance, dropout rates and mobility. In order to give parents, students and educators information about student performance from year to year and to identify areas in need of attention, Alabama

must improve its information system.

The Just for the Kids database in Texas is a good model for Alabama to consider. This independent organization collects and analyzes state test data from Texas schools to determine how well individual schools are performing. For more information, visit Just for the Kids at [www.just4kids.org](http://www.just4kids.org).

***4. Provide increased flexibility to local school systems that meet or surpass the state's accountability standards.***

Alabama's education system is highly centralized, with most major decisions being made in Montgomery by the Legislature or the State Board of Education. This system runs contrary to principles of effective management and discourages innovation and the type of problem-solving needed to address the specific needs of a school or school system. Management practices that are successful in one system may fail miserably in another. Alabama must ensure that local school leaders have the flexibility they need to meet the diverse needs of their individual schools.

North Carolina and Texas demonstrate that "one-standard-for-all" entrepreneurial approaches work better than "one-size-fits-all" central decision-making. In Texas and North Carolina, charter schools, enhanced administrative flexibility and more school-based management have created opportunities for new leaders to emerge, new strategies to be tested and innovative school-community partnerships to be nourished.

While these recommendations are quite comprehensive, they do not stand alone. The Alabama State Department of Education recently unveiled R.E.A.C.H (Realizing Every Alabama Child's Hopes), an education adequacy plan that calls for \$1.6 billion in new education dollars. This funding is critical to achieving any measure of success, as well as to meeting the recommendations set forth here and those outlined in R.E.A.C.H. (view the entire proposal at [www.alsde.edu](http://www.alsde.edu)).

As the state takes steps to provide more revenues, it is important

that the strategic investments outlined above take priority. In addition to funding these recommendations, which are closely aligned with those in R.E.A.C.H., A+ strongly believes that hiring new teachers must be a priority. An infusion of new teachers would provide sufficient numbers of special education, arts and physical education instructors, as well as provide the staffing necessary for teachers to collaborate on improving instruction and provide extra time for struggling students. Further, the addition of teachers is necessary if Alabama is to maintain the reduction in class sizes that has been accomplished over the last six years.

Of course, raising money for education funding is not easy. And convincing policymakers to appropriate education dollars for initiatives designed to improve teaching and learning and to bolster standards and accountability is no small task either. However, the business communities in North Carolina and Texas demanded this be done.

Now it is time for Alabama's business leaders to take the helm on our journey and work with educators and parents to guide our state toward education excellence—for the sake of our children; for the sake of our future.

# **A+ Education Foundation**

**WORKING FOR EXCELLENCE IN ALABAMA**

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