



## **Alabama's Action Plan for Literacy: Birth Through Grade 12**

June 2020 Revisions by  
Alabama Committee on Grade-Level Reading



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## Preface

The Alabama Committee on Grade-Level Reading (ALCOMGLR) was created by the Alabama State Legislature through the *Alabama Literacy Act* in 2019.

The committee was tasked with revising (in conjunction with the Alabama Campaign for Grade-Level Reading) the 2011 *Alabama Action Plan for Literacy: Birth through Grade 12* on or before June 30, 2020 (*Alabama Literacy Act of 2019*, p. 32). This revision is being presented to Governor Kay Ivey, the Alabama State Superintendent of Education, the Alabama State Board of Education, and the Chairs of the House, Education Policy Committee, and Senate Education Policy Committee.

The committee is also charged to “provide recommendations to the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, and the Chairs of the House Education Policy Committee and the Senate Education Policy Committee on implementing this act and shall provide standing oversight over the quality of professional learning and program quality. The committee shall provide recommendations to the State Superintendent of Education, the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, and the Chairs of the House Education Policy Committee and the Senate Education Policy Committee on adopting innovative strategies and programming to improve the effectiveness of this act” (*Alabama Literacy Act of 2019*, p 33).

In addition, the committee is to collaborate with the State Superintendent of Education in creating a formula for incentives for the Alabama Reading Initiative Incentive Program for the distribution of monetary incentives (*Alabama Literacy Act of 2019*, p 28).

To this end, the committee has determined that they will do the following in order to fulfill the responsibilities placed upon them:

- Meet quarterly to discuss implementation.
- Make recommendations as a committee for the improvement of reading in Alabama, including the quality of professional learning, program quality, and the use of innovative strategies.
- Monitor implementation of the *Alabama Literacy Act* of 2019 and provide recommendations for improvement.
- Serve as a resource to the State of Alabama on the implementation and ongoing revision of the *Alabama Action Plan for Literacy: Birth through Grade 12*.

# Alabama Committee for Grade-Level Reading Team Members 2020

(List created by ALSDE)

School Board District	Appointee	Category *	Occupation	Appointed by
1	Veronica Denise Wells Coleman	4	Principal Chastang-Fournier K-8 School	Governor Kay Ivey
1	Christy Roberts	2	7 <sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher Clark Shaw Middle School	Lieutenant Gov. Will Ainsworth
1	Rep. Alan Baker	3	Rep. 66 <sup>th</sup> District	Speaker of the House - Mac McCutcheon
1	Angela Strickland	4	Principal Jim Pearson Elementary School	President Pro tem of the Senate - Del Marsh
2	Betty C. Weeden	4	Coordinator of Elementary Curriculum and Professional Development Auburn City Schools	Governor Kay Ivey
2	Christi Keith	2	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher Wrights Mill Road	Lieutenant Gov. Will Ainsworth
2	Kim Marie Hendon	4	Chief Learning Officer Roanoke City Schools	Speaker of the House - Mac McCutcheon
2	Sonya Yates	4	Curriculum Specialist Mobile County Schools	President Pro tem of the Senate - Del Marsh
3	Christy Swaid	1	CEO & Founder of HEAL (Healthy Eating and Active Living)	Governor Kay Ivey
3	Liz Huntley	1	Author of "More Than A Bird"	Speaker of the House - Mac McCutcheon
3	Amanda Wyatt	2	Teacher Liberty Park Elementary	Lieutenant Gov. Will Ainsworth
3	Ken Kirby	4	School Improvement Specialist Marshall County	President Pro tem of the Senate - Del Marsh
4	Rep. Rod Scott	1	District 55 Representative	Governor Kay Ivey
4	Dr. Mike Daria	4	Superintendent Tuscaloosa City Schools	Lieutenant Gov. Will Ainsworth
4	Caron Elizabeth Wilcox Riley	2	Kindergarten Teacher Pelham Oaks Elementary	Speaker of the House - Mac McCutcheon

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<b>School Board District</b>	<b>Appointee</b>	<b>Category *</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Appointed by</b>
4	Paul Howell	1	Community Stakeholder Pelham City Schools	President Pro tem of the Senate - Del Marsh
5	Mark Dixon	4	President of A+ Education Partnership	Governor Kay Ivey
5	Ms. Traci Kelley	1	Director of Strategic Development ASE Credit Union	Lieutenant Gov. Will Ainsworth
5	Lydia Allen	4	Program Director for Read Write-Dyslexia	Speaker of the House - Mac McCutcheon
5	Kimberly Gray	4	Elementary Reading Specialist Jefferson County Schools	President Pro tem of the Senate - Del Marsh
6	Dr. Laura Fiveash	1 & 4	Executive Director of Spring Valley School	Governor Kay Ivey
6	Paige Raney	4	Chief Academic Officer Guntersville City Schools	Lieutenant Gov. Will Ainsworth
6	Kimberly Hargett	4	Instructional Partner Barkley Bridge Elementary	Speaker of the House - Mac McCutcheon
6	Julia Wall	4	Elementary Curriculum Coordinator/Director of PreK Limestone County Schools	President Pro tem of the Senate - Del Marsh
7	Steve Hannaum	4	Director of Literacy Initiatives Literacy Council of Central AL	Governor Kay Ivey
7	Donny Jones	1	COO Chamber of Commerce West Alabama	Lieutenant Gov. Will Ainsworth
7	Aimee Lynn Turner Rainey	4	Assistant Superintendent Vestavia Hills City Schools	Speaker of the House - Mac McCutcheon
7	Dr. Shelley Vail-Smith	3	Retired Deputy Superintendent of Teaching & Learning Jefferson County Schools	President Pro tem of the Senate - Del Marsh
8	Dr. Denise P. Gibbs	4	Director of Alabama Scottish Rite Foundation	Governor Kay Ivey
8	Kevin Dukes	4	Superintendent Jackson County Schools	Lieutenant Gov. Will Ainsworth
8	Tracy Wilson	2	English Teacher Buckhorn High School	Speaker of the House - Mac McCutcheon
8	Jeana Ross	4	Retired Secretary of Department of Early Childhood	President Pro tem of the Senate - Del Marsh

\* The Alabama Literacy Act specifies that ALCOMGLR members be either:

(1) parent/guardian of state, Grades K-12 public school student, (2) practicing teacher, (3) retired teacher, or (4) employed in the field of education.

This report is the collective effort of the ALCOMGLR, along with additional editing of the final document by Dr. Laura Fiveash, Dr. Denise P. Gibbs, Dr. Shelley Vail-Smith, and Mrs. Sonya Yates. In addition to the ALCOMGLR members, we would also like to thank the following people for assisting with the process and the development of the final report: Mrs. Tammy Coefield, Consultant; Dr. Caroline Novak, Retired President of A+ Education Partnership; and Dr. Michael Walker-Jones, Alabama Commission on Higher Education.





## Background and Purpose

The *Alabama Literacy Act #2019-523* mandated that the Alabama Committee on Grade-Level Reading, as established by the act, revise the *2011 Alabama Action Plan for Literacy: Birth Through Grade 12* in consultation with the Campaign for Grade Level Reading group. This 2020 revision of the *Alabama Action Plan for Literacy: Birth Through Grade 12* (2020 AAPL) contains links to the detailed information and literacy resources compiled through this revision process.

The purpose of the 2020 revision of the *Alabama Action Plan for Literacy: Birth Through Grade 12* is to serve as a living document that offers practical action steps and resources for all literacy stakeholders. The resources support high-quality literacy instruction for all learners, Birth through Grade 12. The 2020 AAPL also includes specific expectations for K-3 literacy instruction, assessment, intervention, and professional learning to meet the requirements of the *Alabama Literacy Act #2019-523*. With the passage of the *Alabama Literacy Act* (ALA), there is a clear expectation that students must demonstrate sufficient reading skills by the end of third grade in order to be promoted to fourth grade.

## Alabama's Literacy Beliefs

As we reflect on our literacy beliefs for Alabama, we consider literacy challenges evidenced by Alabama learners, the continuum of learning and literacy achievement in Alabama including past, present, and future data. As literacy stakeholders in Alabama, we must provide “Every Child. Every Chance. Every Day.” The opportunities for literacy success for all Alabama learners, Birth through Grade 12, must be at the forefront of all Alabama educators.

Alabama's core literacy beliefs include the following:

- Literacy is a fundamental right; is attainable for all students; must be taught through explicit, systematic, instruction; and is an essential gateway to educational, social, emotional, and economic opportunity.
- Literacy instruction in our schools must be (1) based upon the science of reading, (2) delivered by well-prepared and well-supported educators, and (3) designed to meet the needs of all students regardless of their literacy challenges.
- Literacy growth culminating in literacy proficiency, as evidenced by performance on national, state, and local assessments, is a reasonable expectation for all students.
- A continuum of support through the alignment of Birth through Pre-K and K-12 services is essential if literacy proficiency is to be achieved.
- Desired literacy outcomes are dependent upon teacher preparation programs and professional learning opportunities that are solidly grounded in the science of reading.
- A continuum for teacher development in literacy must be created, and it must be aligned to expectations for teacher preparation, instructional delivery, curriculum, and professional learning.

## The State of Literacy Achievement in Alabama

Historically, Alabama has lagged behind the nation in the area of education, with students performing below much of the nation. Although dramatic increases have been seen, the state continues to perform below regional and national levels.

Currently, there are several initiatives within the state that are working to improve literacy, including the Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI), Alabama's First Class Pre-K, as well as other support provided by the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE), nonprofits, and community-based organizations.

The following table shows the percentage of Alabama third grade students who scored proficient (Levels 3 & 4) in reading using state-approved summative assessments, and it provides a preview into literacy proficiency for our youngest learners. The data reveal that over the past six years, less than half of all Grade 3 students scored at or above proficiency, with subgroups such as poverty and English Language Learners scoring below the overall population. While positive trends are evident, the rate at which these trends are improving is well below expectations and thus further substantiates the need for improvement in early reading development.

### 3rd Grade Proficiency Levels for Reading (2014-2019) - All Students

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Level 4	14%	14%	16%	17%	21%	21%
Level 3	21%	21%	20%	21%	27%	27%
Level 3 & 4	35%	35%	36%	38%	48%	48%
Level 2	23%	23%	24%	24%	29%	28%
Level 1	42%	42%	39%	39%	24%	24%

K. Kirby, 2020 based on PARCA data

Obviously, literacy efforts do not stop at third grade and impact many other benchmarks as students' progress through secondary and postsecondary programs.

As we move forward as a state, decisive action needs to occur if all students are to be literate, numerate, and competitive in the global economy. To obtain a more accurate understanding and



monitoring of the true state of literacy in Alabama, it is strongly suggested that an external third-party evaluator provide an annual accounting of literacy outcomes and recommendations. These evaluations should be made available to the public. This, in addition to the internal evaluation that the ALSDE performs, is most likely to provide the breadth and depth needed to inform future actions.

In conclusion, there is a great deal to be done to improve reading in Alabama. As with any truly complex problem, there are many components that will have to be addressed for change to occur. By comparing other states' improvement plans and progress, Alabama should expect this process to take multiple years. Having robust and transparent data systems is essential to monitor and document progress.

- [Historically](#)
- [Currently](#)
- [Moving forward](#)
- [References](#)

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is built upon the science of reading. More than 50 years of scientific reading research has created a body of indisputable evidence regarding the components of reading and essentials for effective reading instruction. The *Alabama Literacy Act* mandates that the science of reading be embraced and implemented in Alabama schools in our efforts to ensure that all Alabama students gain literacy skills that are necessary to become educated and productive members of society. Understanding the science of reading develops as we analyze the following research-based studies:

- [Foundational Models](#)
- [Scientifically recognized skills needed for proficient literacy and academic success](#)
- [Keys to effectively delivering research-based literacy instruction](#)
- [References](#)

## Literacy Challenges in Alabama and the Continuum of Literacy

To rise to the literacy challenges identified through the work of the Alabama Campaign for Grade-Level Reading (which focused on Birth to Grade 3) as well as meeting the needs of students in Grades 4-12, Alabama will need to achieve the following:

- Create, align, and fund support systems for children from Birth through Grade 12.
- Encourage and support family engagement.
- Organize and provide learning opportunities outside the classroom.
- Make available high quality and effective services for students in need of special education, English Language Learners, and struggling readers.
- Enhance and support health and well-being.

As we work to rise to these literacy challenges, we will enhance our literacy outcomes and prepare our students to progress through the continuum of literacy development, achieving success at each stage along the literacy journey. These five stages of literacy development based upon the work of Chall (1996) frame the literacy continuum:

- [Pre-reading](#)
- [Initial reading and decoding](#)
- [Confirmation, fluency, and automaticity](#)
- [Reading for learning](#)
- [Construction, viewpoints, and judgment](#)
- [References](#)



## Curriculum and Instruction

The *Alabama Action Plan for Literacy* is firmly grounded in current research on the science of reading. It provides a foundation for both literacy curriculum and instruction. The goal is to provide a coherent system where instruction, curriculum, standards, professional development, and assessments are aligned to the same goals.

High-quality literacy instruction includes a curriculum with clearly defined learning standards taught by highly skilled teachers using effective instructional frameworks and research-based instructional materials. Alabama's literacy beliefs are centered around a conceptual framework founded on the science of reading.

- [Science of Reading](#)
- [High Quality Curriculum](#)
- [ELA Standards](#)
- [Instructional Framework](#)
- [Adolescent Literacy](#)
- [References](#)

## Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

Alabama's Multi-Tiered System of Support (AL-MTSS) is a comprehensive framework that encompasses the academic, behavioral, physical, mental health and wellness, and social-emotional needs to support the whole child. The AL-MTSS uses a proactive, team-driven approach that involves various stakeholders: state, regional, district, school, higher education, community, family, and students to ensure equitable access to opportunities that will improve outcomes for every student. The purpose is to implement and sustain a continuum of evidence-based practices that align with the needs of all students and eliminate barriers to teaching and learning. Data are utilized at all levels to ensure safe, positive, and personalized services that assist all students along their educational journey... "Every Child. Every Chance. Every Day."

- [Overview](#)
- [Tier 1](#)
- [Tier 2](#)
- [Tier 3](#)

- [Progress Monitoring](#)
- [References](#)

## Assessment System

The purpose of assessment is to gather information about a child's level of development and learning for purposes of making decisions that will benefit the child. This information is used to make instructional decisions and measure progress towards grade-level proficiency. Assessment may be both formal or informal and may be conducted through a variety of methods. A comprehensive assessment system provides a framework that defines which assessments should be administered, when they should be administered, to whom they should be administered, and how the assessment results will be used. Assessments must be aligned to the components of the science of reading. Foundational reading skills must be assessed in Kindergarten through Grade 3 with tools that are backed by evidence as being predictors of future reading success.

- [Assessment Data Collection and Use](#)
- [Reading Screener Required and Recommended Domains](#)
- [Assessment System](#)
- [Alabama Literacy Act Mandatory Reporting Components](#)
- [Assessment References](#)



## Collaborative Leadership

Effective collaborative leadership promotes a shared responsibility and commitment to a collective vision to support literacy development for all children. Additionally, successful collaborative leaders establish organizational structures that promote strong partnerships.

Collaborative leadership is the combined influence that organizational members and stakeholders exert on decisions that impact the performance of the organization. Positive literacy outcomes involve a shared mission, vision, and strong commitment to implementing, supporting, and sustaining plans developed by collaborative leadership at the state, local, district, and/or school levels. Strong collaborative leadership at all levels of schooling – Birth through Grade 12 – is an important determining factor in successfully implementing and sustaining educational change.

Collaborative leadership also involves creating opportunities throughout the state for all stakeholders (e.g., Institutions of Higher Education, state agencies, Children's Policy Councils, private foundations, and economic development groups.) to impact literacy achievement and ultimately the state's economic success.

- [Collaborative leadership goals](#)
- [Collaborative leadership recommendations](#)
- [Collaborative leadership summary and resources](#)

## Professional Learning

In accordance with the *Alabama Literacy Act*, and to improve literacy outcomes in Alabama, the ALSDE is developing a plan to provide statewide literacy professional development and support for Pre-K through Grade 3 teachers along with additional certifications that include dyslexia therapists. Additionally, higher education will increase the amount of science of reading coursework curriculum required for initial teacher certification. Regional ARI staff requirements include advanced coursework on the science of reading along with other minimum requirements. Analysis of student assessment data will drive ongoing professional learning for schools and districts.

Professional learning is a key strategy for supporting significant school and school system improvements to enhance literacy outcomes for all students. When educators are provided with the knowledge and skills to reflect on their practice, to assess their effectiveness, to study research, and to make decisions about students, a professional learning community develops. The professional learning community believes in their ability to change practice and is better

equipped to achieve goals. Professional growth is essential to continuous improvement and an investment that provides effective instruction for all students.

**Birth through Pre-Kindergarten.** The Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE) continues to provide education and professional learning for families, teachers, and community stakeholders.

**Kindergarten through Grade 3.** The *Alabama Literacy Act* compels state education agencies to provide ongoing professional development to help Kindergarten through Grade 3 educators teach each student the basic language and literacy skills necessary for school success.

**Beyond Grade 3.** Literacy demands increase as a student progresses beyond Grade 3. Adolescent learners need continued literacy instructional support and engagement with digital and print text to apply literacy skills for specific content areas in various contexts. These priorities require a content-rich curriculum based on literacy standards, morphology, and connected reading and writing. The ALSDE courses of study require explicit, skill-based instruction for reading, speaking, and writing in all subject areas.

**The defining element of professional learning must be the capacity to change teaching practices when data indicate instruction is not improving learning.** The primary activity envisioned in *Alabama's Literacy Plan* is investment in educators' knowledge and skills in order to achieve improvements in literacy. The *Alabama Literacy Act* charges the Literacy Task Force, teacher preparation programs and regional in-service centers to establish a continuum of teacher development for approved science of reading that will reflect levels of development from pre-service, to reading specialist, to instructional leaders.

The continuum should be based on a set of standards for the science of reading such as the *International Dyslexia Association Knowledge and Practice Standards* for the teachers of reading. The Literacy Task Force should review and assess current professional learning offered by the ALSDE for in-service teachers in early grades in order to accurately report the degree to which the training meets the standards. The ALSDE should develop and maintain a current listing of professional learning opportunities that (1) meet standards set by the Literacy Act for Kindergarten through Grade 3; (2) are aligned to Alabama's content standards; and 3) are evidence-based and evaluated for outcomes. As the English Language Arts standards are revised, attention should be paid to the limited support for Grades 4 through 12 educators' professional learning.

- [Standards for professional learning](#)
- [Professional learning goals](#)

- [Professional learning recommendations](#)
- [Professional learning opportunities](#)
- [Resources](#)

## Support from all Stakeholders

Everyone in a child's life contributes to the development and learning of that student from birth to adulthood. For Alabama to reach its literacy goals, educators must work collaboratively to engage families and communities to ensure all students have access to important supports that will ensure their ability to read and read well.

Community partners refer to individuals, local businesses, organizations, and agencies that are concerned with literacy development. Community partners may do any of the following: commit to partner with educators, assess community needs for literacy services, identify gaps in services, establish a literacy coalition to enhance literacy support in the community, and identify and/or leverage resources in support of local literacy activities.

Literacy development is the shared responsibility of all literacy partners. Local partners play a vital role in supporting educators, parents, and learners in community literacy efforts. Strong literacy partnerships are an investment that can change lives and brighten the future of the community.

- [Measures of Success Framework](#)
- [Understanding the Role of Community Partners](#)
- [Keys to Creating Community Partners](#)
- [Recommendation: The Need for Transparency](#)
- [Resources for Parents and Community Partners](#)
- [References](#)



## Effective Implementation

Implementation of the 2020 revision of the *Alabama Action Plan for Literacy Birth Through Grade 12* (AAPL 2020) will be central to achieving Alabama's goal of elevating literacy outcomes and ensuring that we offer "Every Child. Every Chance. Every Day." Comprehensive recommendations included throughout the AAPL 2020 can chart a pathway to literacy success for all Alabama students.

Completion of the action steps included in this Priority Action Plan identified by age and grade levels will ensure effective and timely implementation of the *Alabama Action Plan for Literacy Birth Through Grade 12* (AAPL 2020).

### Priority Action Plan

Action - Birth to Pre-K	Responsible
Communicate to parents and childcare providers on how to help children develop language skills and the advantages of Pre-K and Kindergarten.	DECE Community Partners
Publicly report data on access to Pre-K.	DECE
Train 100% of Pre-K teachers in science of reading, including new teachers.	DECE
Action - Kindergarten to Grade 3	Responsible
Evaluate teacher training continuum for alignment <i>with International Dyslexia Association (IDA's) Knowledge &amp; Practice Standards</i> in order to then provide aligned teacher training.	ALSDE, LEAs LTF, RICs, IHEs
Require Kindergarten through Grade 3 teacher graduates to demonstrate competency in reading theory and practice by obtaining a passing score on a foundational reading assessment for teachers of reading.	ALSDE IHEs

Textbook adoption process should be amended to meet the requirements of the ALA and best practice.	Legislators with advice of LTF & GLR
<b>Action – Grades 4-12</b>	<b>Responsible</b>
Provide professional learning for upper elementary and secondary teachers in content literacy strategies and helping struggling readers.	ALSDE LEAs
Collect and provide to the public ninth-grade students on-track indicators.	LEAs
<b>Action - All Age Groups</b>	<b>Responsible</b>
Improve the rigor of teacher and administrator certification programs by focusing on evidence-based literacy practices and the science of reading. Annually review teacher preparation data from the ALSDE and LEAs to determine strengths and weaknesses in programs for the purpose of continuous improvement.	IHEs ALSDE
Third-party annual evaluation of literacy data, work, processes, and needs.	Alabama Legislature
Collect data on the use of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM).	ALSDE LEAs
Develop and implement a plan for the use of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) for K through Grade 12.	ALSDE LEAs

## **Related Literacy Documents and Resources**

The following represents an evolving list of documents that may be helpful as we progress along the journey to enhancing literacy skills to provide “Every Child. Every Chance. Every Day.”

***Alabama Literacy Act***

**Alabama Standards/Courses of Study**

**Alabama Campaign for Grade Level Reading**

**Alabama Dyslexia Services**

**ALSDE Literacy-Related Memoranda**

**Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI) Documents**

**Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Framework**

**Other State Literacy Plans**

**Adolescent Literacy**

**Pre-Reading and Early Reading**

**Language Development Birth to Five**

#### Literacy Websites

- [International Dyslexia Association](#)
- [National Center on Intensive Intervention](#)
- [Shanahan on Literacy](#)