



STATE OF ALABAMA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Eric G. Mackey, Ed.D.  
State Superintendent of Education

September 8, 2021

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** City and County Superintendents of Education

**FROM:** Eric G. Mackey *EGM*  
State Superintendent of Education

**RE:** Alabama Teacher Observation Program (ATOP)

The Alabama Teacher Observation Program (ATOP) is a new formative observation tool designed to assist educators in identifying areas of needs, strengths, and growth opportunities. This new tool has been developed through collaborative efforts with a taskforce of teachers, administrators, superintendents, and other educational stakeholders from across the state. The taskforce has served as an advisory group to guide this work that has been led by the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) and Cognia. Through this developmental process, the tool has been field tested and piloted across the state. Additionally, it meets the *Every Student Succeeds Acts* (ESSA) federal reporting requirements, aligns with the goals identified in Alabama Achieves (Highly Effective Educators), and correlates to the Alabama Core Teaching Standards. This observation tool has been designed to observe classroom instruction during a 20-minute timeframe; the tool is not designed to serve as a stand-alone evaluation system by local education agencies (LEAs). Through the use of the formative observation tool, this instrument can assist educators with conversations regarding effective teaching practices in classrooms.

During this transition, EDUCATEAlabama and LEADAlabama will still be available in the Alabama Identity Management (AIM) Portal. However, to assist LEAs with the transition to ATOP implementation beginning in January 2022, the ALSDE will **not** require LEAs to participate in EDUCATEAlabama in fall 2021. Nevertheless, local board policies concerning teacher observations or evaluations depose ALSDE recommendations. Please consult your LEA policies for specific requirements. Also, please remember the ATOP will only be used as an observation tool for teachers, so any current policies and procedures for administrators will not apply to this transition period.

To assist LEAs in the transition to the ATOP, the ALSDE has developed a variety of overview training components that will be offered this fall, including the following:

- Through a partnership with Cognia, an awareness video series titled “Improving Instruction with Alabama’s New Teacher Observation Tool” will be released for all LEAs to view. The video series provides a brief overview of the process used to develop the instrument and the dynamics of the observation tool. The videos can be found on the website at <https://www.alabamaachieves.org/teacher-center/teacher-evaluation/>
- Superintendents will receive additional information and guidance at the SSA Fall Conference in October.

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- Regional one-day trainings will be hosted for building-level administrators in all 11 regions, with multiple opportunities to attend the one-day training. These initial training dates are designed for principals and assistant principals to provide information and guidance on how to effectively use the teacher observation tool, as well as provide an overview of the ATOP. All LEAs are encouraged to send administrators to a training session to ensure that school leaders are prepared for implementation in January 2022.
- Multiple overview sessions will be provided during the fall and spring through conferences hosted for principals and assistant principals by CLAS and its affiliate organizations. These sessions are designed to provide a condensed overview of the ATOP.

We know there will be new administrators and other district instructional leaders who want to attend the training, but at this time we are prioritizing the initial training for building-level principals and assistant principals to ensure that they are prepared to use the new teacher observation tool during the spring 2022 semester. However, ongoing trainings will occur concurrently throughout the spring semester for new administrators and district instructional leaders who want to attend.

We anticipate the regional sites' one-day training sessions will begin in October 2021, and those specific dates will be communicated in Midweek Matters and through Regional Inservice Centers in the next few weeks. Once the training logistics are communicated, all administrators who are assigned to conduct teacher observations will need to register for the training in PowerSchool (Course Title: Alabama's Teacher Observation Tool: An Overview for Administrators). Dates, times, locations, parking details, contact information, and other logistics will also be available in PowerSchool. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Angie Pelton by email at [apelton@alsde.edu](mailto:apelton@alsde.edu) or by telephone at (334) 694-4886.

EGM/ED/DM

cc: Principals  
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Mrs. Angela Martin  
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Dr. Angie Pelton

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