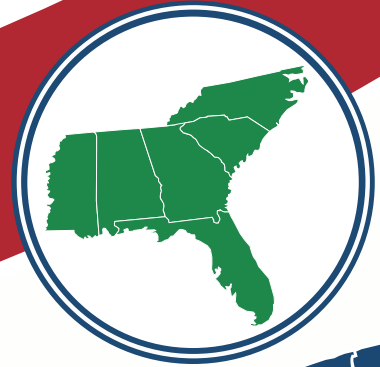
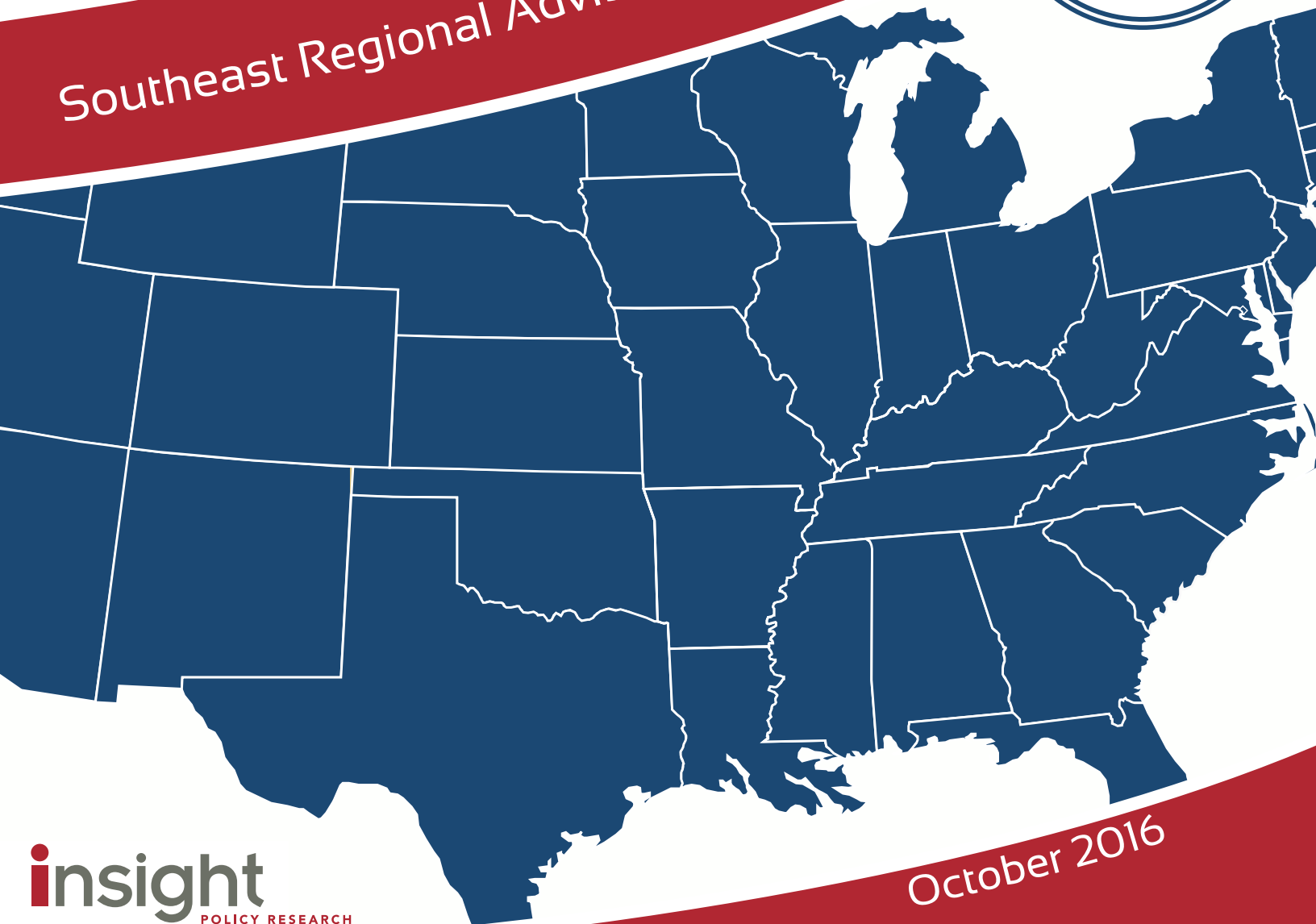


Identifying and Addressing Regional Education Needs

U.S. Department of Education



Southeast Regional Advisory Committee



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The Southeast Region:

A Report Identifying and Addressing the Region's Educational Needs

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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the activities and results of the Southeast Regional Advisory Committee (RAC), 1 of 10 RACs established under the Educational Technical Assistance Act of 2002 (20 U.S.C. § 9601 et seq.). The RACs were formed to identify the region’s most critical educational needs and develop recommendations for technical assistance to meet those needs. The technical assistance provided to state education agencies (SEAs) aims to build capacity for supporting local education agencies (LEAs or districts) and schools, especially low-performing districts and schools; improving educational outcomes for all students; closing achievement gaps; and improving the quality of instruction. The report represents the work of the Southeast RAC, which includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

Committee members convened three times and reached out to their respective constituencies between July 19, 2016, and August 18, 2016. Members of the Southeast RAC represented a variety of stakeholders, including LEA superintendents, teachers, and other school and district staff members; state chief school officers and other SEA staff members; and institutions of higher education administrators, professors, and researchers. The members shared resources, communicated, and collaborated using Communities360^o, an interactive online platform hosted within the larger GRADS360^o system and housed within the secure U.S. Department of Education environment. Table A provides a list of committee members and their affiliations. An additional stakeholder from South Carolina (representing school boards, businesses, and parents) declined the invitation to participate in the Southeast RAC.

Table A. Southeast RAC members

Member Name	Affiliation	State
Kim Benton ¹	Mississippi Department of Education	Mississippi
Michael Bracy	Jones County Public Schools	North Carolina
Michelle Easley	Georgia Library Media Association	Georgia
Bill Hussey	North Carolina Department of Public Instruction	North Carolina
Lynne Patrick	Auburn University College of Education	Alabama
Gerrita Postlewait ²	Charleston County School District	South Carolina
Maria Pouncey	Panhandle Area Educational Consortium	Florida
Tony Thacker	Alabama State Department of Education	Alabama

¹ Assisted by Rana Hood and Stacey Donaldson

² Assisted by Laura Donnelly and Michael Lower

Members reviewed a regional profile containing educational statistics and other relevant data to inform their individual assessments of the challenges facing their region. The following summary of the Southeast region’s characteristics help contextualize the state and regional needs identified by the RAC:

- ▶ Nearly 8 million students were enrolled in approximately 12,000 public schools, and more than 830,000 students attended private schools across the region. The size of the state school systems varied dramatically. Florida had the largest school system in the region and Alabama had the smallest. The overwhelming majority of districts in all states except Florida are categorized as rural; only 10 percent of the region’s school districts are city districts.

- ▶ The percentage of the population, including school-aged children, living below the poverty level is higher than the national average in all states in the region. The annual median household income is lower in all states, and the unemployment rate is higher in five of the six states in the region compared to national averages. Participation in free or reduced-price lunch programs in all states is higher than the national average of 52 percent, ranging from a low of 54 percent in North Carolina to a high of 72 percent in Mississippi. In the 2010–11 school year, 72 percent of the more than 13,000 schools in the region had Title 1 status.
- ▶ The student population throughout the region is predominately White. The second largest subgroup is Black, with a significant Hispanic student population in three of the region’s six states. Throughout the region, the predominant language spoken at home by those 5 years and older is English. There is a relatively higher percentage of Floridians who speak Spanish at home (21 percent) compared to other states in the region.
- ▶ The per-pupil expenditures in all six states in the region are lower than the average nationwide per-pupil expenditures (\$12,020).
- ▶ During the 2013–14 school year, almost 25,000 of nearly 55,000 individuals enrolled in teacher preparation programs in the Southeast region completed their training. Teacher preparation programs are reported to address shortages of highly qualified teachers by area of certification or licensure and subject in all six states, and by specialty in four of the six states in the Southeast region. See appendix A for detailed tables on the educational characteristics of the region.
- ▶ High school graduation rates for two of the region’s six states (Alabama and North Carolina) are higher than the national rate of 82 percent. However, in all states in the region, a lower proportion of students receive a bachelor’s degree or higher than the national average. Educational achievement on standardized assessments and indicators of performance (e.g., 4th grade National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], ACT, SAT exams; ACT college-readiness indicators) varies across the region with the majority of states performing at or slightly below the national reported average scores on most measures.

Members also collaborated to develop a plan for soliciting information on the region’s educational needs. Members engaged stakeholders and disseminated information by providing a link to the online needs-sensing survey to selected individuals or listserv members and discussing state and regional needs during small in-person meetings. Members focused their efforts on providing access to the online survey to the widest possible group of stakeholders.

As a result of the committee’s outreach efforts, a total of 2,030 individuals from all 6 states in the region responded to the request for input. Of the respondents, 892 represented individuals at the classroom level (e.g., teachers), 758 represented individuals at the school level (e.g., parents, curriculum specialists, principals), 203 represented local district- or regional-level administrators or school board members, 101 represented individuals from within the community (e.g., higher education faculty or staff, members of the public), and 67 represented state-level education or other government staff and school board members. Nine respondents did not provide their role or described roles without sufficient detail to be included in the analysis.

Each committee member prepared a report containing a needs assessment and specific recommendations for future technical assistance based on his or her assessment of the region’s unique educational environment, the survey results, and the results of other data collection efforts.

Committee members in the Southeast region identified the following seven needs. They are listed in ranked average order of priority as listed by RAC members:

- ▶ preparing students to be college and career ready;
- ▶ supporting the lowest performing schools and closing the achievement gap;
- ▶ ensuring equity including addressing issues of disproportionality;
- ▶ improving assessment and accountability systems;
- ▶ ensuring an equitable distribution of highly effective teachers and leaders;
- ▶ improving access to early childhood education; and
- ▶ ensuring innovative and effective use of technology and digital learning.

Committee members also developed recommendations for technical assistance to better address the educational needs. These recommendations are summarized in four categories identified below and described in more detail in table 3 in chapter 2:

- ▶ **Training and technical assistance for states.** Committee members' recommendations relate to providing training and technical assistance for SEA staff to address various needs. This training and technical assistance includes the review and analysis of available research evidence, identification of best practices and exemplary resources, and strategies for providing this information and relevant training at the school level.
- ▶ **Collaboration and networks.** Members' recommendations focus on helping to build new partnerships and collaborative relationships and/or expand existing professional relationships among groups and individuals interested in addressing a specified need or problem of practice. Coaching and training should be available to create and maintain these arrangements, which can range from loosely coupled partnerships to a more formal community of learning.
- ▶ **Development and dissemination of evidence-based tools and best practices.** In addition to recommendations to identify supporting research and existing resources, committee members' recommendations focus on developing evidenced-based, user-friendly tools and trainings and effectively disseminating content knowledge and practice to educators and administrators in the field.
- ▶ **Professional development.** Committee members' recommendations focus on helping SEAs identify and disseminate information about how to develop pre- and in-service trainings and ongoing professional development for current and future educators.

See appendix B for each committee members' individual needs assessment and recommendations for addressing each of the regional needs identified.

Chapter 1. Introduction

This report represents the regional needs assessment of the RAC for the Southeast region, which includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. The RAC members used statistical data from the Southeast regional profile (appendix A); conducted data collection and outreach activities to obtain input from various constituent groups; and had three meetings between July 16, 2016, and August 18, 2016, to assess regional needs and how to address the needs identified.

A. Legislative Background

The RACs are authorized by the Educational Technical Assistance Act of 2002 (20 U.S.C. § 9601 et seq.). Section 203 of Title II of the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (P.L. 107–279) directs the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education to establish not less than 20 comprehensive centers to provide technical assistance to state, local, and regional educational agencies and to schools. The technical assistance is to be directed toward implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and to achieving goals through the use of evidence based teaching methods and assessment tools for use by teachers and administrators in the following areas:

- ▶ core academic subjects of mathematics, science, and reading or language arts;
- ▶ English language acquisition;
- ▶ education technology;
- ▶ communication among education experts, school officials, teachers, parents, and librarians;
- ▶ information that can be used to improve academic achievement; closing achievement gaps; and encouraging and sustaining improvement for schools, educators, parents, and policymakers within the region in which the center is located; and
- ▶ teacher and school leader in-service and preservice training models that illustrate best practices in the use of technology in different content areas.

B. Regional Background Information

A variety of educational data sources informed the development of the Southeast regional profile, which provides a descriptive snapshot of the educational landscape in the region. The RAC members used the data to inform their individual assessments of the region’s most pressing needs. The regional profiles include sections on demographics; SEA capacity; educational resources; teacher preparation, qualifications, and certification; and student educational attainment. Summaries of the data presented in each section of the profiles appear below. See appendix A for the descriptive tables and charts that represent this regional profile.

The Southeast region is composed of six states that are relatively similar in their geographic characteristics and population demographics. Nearly 8 million public school children were enrolled in the region’s state public education systems in fall 2013. Despite the similarity in the characteristics of states and the education populations served in the Southeast region, the size of the region’s six state education systems varies dramatically. The systems range from just under 500,000 students in 900 schools in Mississippi to more than 2.7 million students in nearly 4,000 schools in Florida. An additional

833,000 students attend the almost 5,000 private schools operating in the region. These students are distributed across the states proportionally to public school enrollment. Collectively, the private school student enrollment adds about 10 percent to the public school enrollment for a total regional student population of nearly 8.8 million students. Notably, nearly half of the private schools are in the state of Florida. Per-pupil expenditures in all six states in the region are below the national average of \$12,020, ranging from a low of \$8,637 in Mississippi to a high of \$11,091 in South Carolina. The human capital and financial resource challenges facing the region are significant, although they are different from state to state.

The state school systems in the Southeast region are operating predominantly in communities with high rates of poverty. Between 54 percent and 72 percent of the public school children in each of the region's six states were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch during the 2013–14 school year. Participation in free or reduced-price lunch programs in each state was higher than the national level; overall nearly 57 percent of the region's children were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch in the 2013–14 school year. More than 58 percent of schools in each state have Title 1 status, and in the 2010–11 school year, 72 percent of the region's 13,000 schools held Title I status. In all states across the region, the median annual household income was well below the national average of \$53,700 in 2014, and more than 25 percent of school-aged children were living in poverty, well above the national average of 20 percent in 2014. The unemployment level exceeds the national average of 5 percent in 2016 in all but the state of Florida, which reported unemployment at 5 percent.

The schools in the region are overwhelmingly rural; fewer than 10 percent of districts are city districts. Only Alabama, which serves fewer than 50,000 students, has more than 10 percent of its school districts located in cities. Between 41 percent and 78 percent of the school districts in the region's six states are classified as rural. To ensure equity across their public education systems, SEAs and LEAs in this largely rural region must continually evaluate the extent to which students have equal opportunities to learn, equal access to educational resources, and access to highly qualified teachers and leaders regardless of school location.

All the states in the region are similar in their racial/ethnic demographics, with the majority of students being White. The region's student population is approximately 50 percent White, 30 percent Black, 15 percent Hispanic, and 5 percent other races/ethnicities. The Spanish-speaking Hispanic student population is largely concentrated in three states: Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina. In these states in particular, there is a need to direct resources to ensuring all students have access to a high-quality education.

The rate of high school completion in each of the region's six states is at or below the annual national rate of high school completion; and all six state have a lower percentage of adults earning a bachelor or higher degrees compared to the national average. The percentage of students performing at or above the proficient level on the 4th grade NAEP reading assessment ranges from a low of 26 percent in Mississippi to a high of 39 percent in Florida. The percentage of students meeting the ACT college readiness benchmarks across the region's states ranges from 47 percent to 64 percent in English and from 21 percent to 38 percent in mathematics. Educational attainment on standardized assessments and indicators of performance (e.g., 4th grade NAEP, ACT, SAT exams; ACT college-readiness indicators) are at or slightly below the national average scores.

State boards and chief state school officers in the region are a mixture of elected and appointed positions. In the last 2 years, all states have had relatively stable leadership in the governor's office, on

the state boards of education, and in the state departments of education. New chiefs were elected in both Georgia and South Carolina in 2015.

An overwhelming majority of the region's teacher preparation programs are traditional in design. Of the nearly 55,000 individuals enrolled in the states' teacher preparation programs in 2013–14, almost 25,000 successfully completed their preparation. These programs are designed to address shortages of highly qualified teachers in areas of certification, subject, and most specialties. Each state is actively addressing teacher shortages through ongoing monitoring and forecasting of teacher needs, alternative certification processes, standardizing testing of educators, and the provision of incentives for working in areas of high need and critical shortage. See appendix A for detailed tables on the educational characteristics of the region.

C. Challenges Affecting Regional Needs

RAC members' data collection efforts identified several challenges affecting the Southeast region's education needs. Differences in specific state contexts resulted in varying approaches to addressing the challenges. The challenges affecting education outcomes in the Southeast region are briefly summarized below:

- ▶ **Low high school graduation rates and lower than average rates of adults with college education.** Across the region, a relatively high percentage of students fail to complete high school, and a relatively low percentage of students complete a bachelor's or higher degree across the region. Students in the region score slightly below average on standardized assessment and college-ready benchmarks. This leads to a cycle that is difficult to change, particularly in the lowest performing schools.
- ▶ **Inequitable access to financial resources and human capital.** Given the demographic and geographic similarities of the states in the region, collaborative arrangements among the six states could help address equitable access and distribution of financial resources and human capital.
- ▶ **Large numbers of English language learners.** Although the graduation rates for White, Black, Hispanic, and other racial/ethnic student groups are at or only slightly below the national rates, Black and Hispanic students tend to graduate at rates 10–15 percentage points below those of White students throughout the Southeast region. Given the particularly high proportion of Hispanic students in Florida (30 percent), this state has a unique requirement to address the needs of English language learners as a key element of its statewide equity plan.

D. Data Collection and Outreach Strategies

A main priority of each RAC was to solicit input from numerous constituencies, including teachers, principals, SEA and LEA administrators, governors, institutions of higher education/community colleges, postsecondary technical programs, school boards, parents, education professional organizations, teacher unions, local government, youth organizations, community-based organizations, chambers of commerce, and business leaders.

RAC members received briefs, PowerPoint presentations, and other RAC-related materials that describe the purpose of the Comprehensive Centers program and how technical assistance builds the capacity of

SEAs and LEAs. These materials were disseminated to their educational organizations and their professional networks.

RAC members conducted needs-sensing and data collection between July 19, 2016, and August 18, 2016. Data collection methods included disseminating a link to an online survey through email, posting on social media and public websites; making personal phone calls; and holding small meetings and focus groups. The online survey asked respondents to identify their state and affiliation and allowed them to identify needs and make recommendations through open-ended responses in comment boxes.

RAC members had access to a Communities of Practice website to help facilitate interactions and align data collection activities across team members. The website was used to share project and meeting calendars, provide RAC-related resources to the committee members, report interim data collection progress and statistics to the committee, data collection updates, and provide guidance to the Southeast committee members as they prepared their reports. Southeast RAC members participated in three committee meetings held in multiple sessions to accommodate member schedules. The purpose of the meetings was to orient committee members to their roles and responsibilities, plan data collection efforts, address questions and concerns of the committee, review the data collected, and discuss the needs identified and the strategies proposed to address those needs.

A total of 1,978 individuals took the online survey. An additional 52 individuals provided feedback through phone calls, small meetings, and focus groups. Table 1 illustrates responses received through the survey and other data collection efforts in each of the states.

Table 1. Members of the public submitting comments by state

State	Number of individuals providing feedback	Percent
Alabama	144	7
Florida	124	6
Georgia	221	11
Mississippi	271	13
North Carolina	247	12
South Carolina	1,023	51
Total Southeast region	2,030	100

Note: Some percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.

Table 2 shows the number of responses received by major education stakeholder groups.

Table 2. Members of the public submitting comments by stakeholder group

Role	Number of individuals providing feedback	Percent
State level	67	3
SEA staff	47	2
Other, state level	20	1
Local district or regional level	203	10
Superintendent or director of schools	66	3
School board member	18	1
LEA or central office	81	4
Other, local or regional level	38	2
School level	758	37
Principal or other school administrator	219	11
Librarian	319	16
Curriculum specialist or instructional coach	66	3
Parent/grandparent/guardian	87	4
Other, school level	67	3
Classroom level	892	44
Teacher	892	44
Community level	101	5
Higher education	65	3
Community member	15	1
Other, community level	21	1
Other or missing	9	< 1
Total	2,030	100

Note: Some percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.

Chapter 2. Educational Needs and Recommendations for Addressing the Needs

Each of the eight members of the RAC used information from the regional profile, input from constituencies, and their experience and expertise to identify the region’s most pressing educational need areas. Each committee member chose up to five priority needs and recommended at least one potential strategy to address the need (see appendix B for individual needs assessment reports from eight Southeast RAC members). Overall, the members of the Southeast RAC identified the following seven needs:

- ▶ **Preparing students to be college and career ready.** All but one RAC member identified preparing students to be college and career ready as a regional need. This need includes the identification of an accepted set of state content standards, the creation of challenging curricula aligned to those standards, and the use of both social-emotional supports and sound instructional practices in the classroom to prepare graduates to successfully participate in the region’s workforce or successfully pursue advanced degrees.
- ▶ **Supporting the lowest performing schools and closing achievement gaps.** Seven committee members identified supporting the lowest performing schools and closing achievement gaps as a priority need. All states in the Southeast region have developed continuous improvement plans that explicitly call attention to the needs of the lowest performing schools and the reduction of the achievement gap among student racial/ethnic subpopulations. Reliance on findings of quality research for the identification of best practices, professional development for leaders and educators working in poorly performing schools, and adequate funding are viewed as elements of this need.
- ▶ **Ensuring equity, including addressing issues of disproportionality.** Seven of the RAC members identified ensuring equity as a need in each state education system in the Southeast region. This need encompasses access to quality curriculum, programs, and services and the equitable distribution of available funding and other resources across schools and districts.
- ▶ **Improving assessment and accountability systems.** Two members identified a need to improve assessment and accountability systems, recognizing the importance of maintaining fair and meaningful operating standards and expectations for students across all schools in a state system. This need includes using unbiased and consistently applied assessments to measure outcomes and improve existing accountability plans.
- ▶ **Ensuring equitable distribution of highly effective teachers and leaders.** Student performance depends largely on the quality of teachers and leaders. Two committee members targeted the recruitment and ongoing development of quality teachers and leaders as a critical need in their states. The equitable distribution of these highly effective educators across jurisdictions, regardless of a school’s geographic location or the demographic characteristics of the student population served, was a key element of this identified need. Two members identified the need for an adequate pipeline of highly skilled and effective principals, superintendents, and state administrators. Preservice and professional development programs need to be designed (or redesigned) to meet this need.
- ▶ **Improving access to early childhood education.** One member identified a need to improve access to early childhood education in the region. Research suggests early childhood education

leads to positive outcomes in both elementary and high school student achievement. There is a need for states to include childhood education in their strategic plans to the extent permitted by available resources.

- ▶ **Ensuring innovative and effective use of technology and digital learning.** One member identified ensuring innovative and effective use of technology to promote digital learning as a priority need. Access to quality curriculum, instruction, and content area specialists is often related to rurality of a school. Adequate staff training in and student access to technology and digital learning can reduce equity gaps in rural areas and enhance the education experience in urban and suburban jurisdictions.

The committee members made recommendations in four broad categories to help address the identified needs:

- ▶ training or technical assistance for states;
- ▶ collaboration and networks;
- ▶ development and dissemination of evidence-based tools and best practices; and
- ▶ professional development.

Table 3 provides a high-level summary of the recommendations expressed related to the priority need areas.

Table 3. Summary of needs and recommendations by committee member

Member name	Recommendations
<i>Preparing students to be college and career ready</i>	
Michael Bracy Kim Benton Michelle Easley Bill Hussey Gerrita Postlewait Maria Pouncey Tony Thacker	Analyze data to identify gaps in students’ college and career readiness Develop evidence-based approaches to addressing gaps, and support states in developing formative and summative evaluation tools that measure students’ progress toward achieving college and career readiness Identify and disseminate research and best practices related to achieving college and career readiness goals. Include a focus on middle school.
Kim Benton Bill Hussey	Improve teacher professional development/resources by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● developing data-driven and evidence-based models of professional development and training to support educators in providing all students high-quality instruction and support. Include a focus on meeting both students’ social emotional (i.e., behavioral) and academic needs ● creating resources such as exemplar curricula and models of alternative pathways and dual enrollment programs
Michelle Easley Maria Pouncey	Bridge gaps between K–12 schools, colleges, and workforce agencies by supporting coordination and collaboration across early childhood, K–12, higher education, and workforce government agencies and organizations in preparing students for college and careers

Member name	Recommendations
<i>Supporting the lowest performing schools and closing achievement gaps</i>	
Michael Bracy Kim Benton Michelle Easley Bill Hussey Gerrita Postlewait Maria Pouncey Tony Thacker	Identify and disseminate evidence-based strategies related to school improvement and closing achievement gaps. Start with the following topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improving teacher quality • stakeholder engagement • access to and participation in accelerated courses
Michelle Easley	Improve teacher professional development/resources by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting the development of state plans to leverage technology for implementing personalized and blended learning • identifying and disseminating examples of online and in-person professional development aimed at assisting teachers with educating all students
Lynne Patrick Michelle Easley Gerrita Postelwait	Engage stakeholders and parents by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • helping SEAs educate parents and policymakers on the work of school improvement • supporting the creation of parent engagement centers in low-performing school districts
Kim Benton Maria Pouncey Lynne Patrick	Foster collaboration and coordination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on school improvement efforts both within and between states across the region • between teacher preparation programs and SEAs • to encourage sharing (among districts) of best practices to reduce achievement gaps
Gerrita Postlewait	Support states and districts in identifying and accessing additional funding opportunities
Kim Benton Maria Pouncey	Support the transition to new assessment standards and legislation by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coordinating state-specific training and resources to support the transition to ESSA, including planning for recruiting and retaining effective educators in high-need schools. Effective teachers are needed in lowest performing schools • providing technical assistance to help districts understand state and federal regulations • developing and disseminating metrics and tools for measuring schools' progress toward closing achievement gaps
<i>Ensuring equity including addressing issues of disproportionality</i>	
Michael Bracy Michelle Easley Bill Hussey Lynne Patrick Gerrita Postlewait Maria Pouncey Tony Thacker	Identify successful models and best practices by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying and disseminating best practices in ensuring equity in and access to high-quality curricula, programs, and services. Topics should include a focus on developing and retaining effective educators • supporting states in improving their Educator Equity Plans through research and technical assistance • working with states to develop indicators that districts and schools could use to ensure the needs of all students are met

Member name	Recommendations
Maria Pouncey	Improve teacher professional development/resources by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing and sharing guidance on ways to handle discipline proactively. This may include establishing a bank of online resources for positive behavior interventions • assisting states in developing and/or facilitating regional or state-specific online and face-to-face professional development opportunities focused on equity
Lynne Patrick Tony Thacker Kim Benton	Support SEAs efforts to collaborate and coordinate with educators, students, families, and community members to develop strategies for addressing key equity issues within the region
<i>Improving assessment and accountability systems</i>	
Kim Benton Maria Pouncey	Identify and disseminate research supporting improved assessment and accountability systems. Topics should include development of robust career-ready indicators and accountability and assessment reporting methodologies
Kim Benton Maria Pouncey	Provide technical assistance and support to states in the development of their accountability plans, including collecting stakeholder feedback on state assessment and accountability systems
Kim Benton	Develop and implement a regional community of practice for state assessment and accountability staff
<i>Ensuring equitable distribution of highly effective teachers and leaders</i>	
Kim Benton Maria Pouncey Lynne Patrick Tony Thacker	Work with states to develop and disseminate resources, research, and a rigorous set of leadership standards and best practices to support the development of principals and administrators (including formal principal mentors)
Kim Benton Gerrita Postlewait	Support improved professional development for instructional leaders and teachers by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing guidelines and training for the development of a regional leadership academy focused on providing professional development to school leaders • providing research and technical assistance to states in supporting new educators through state-specific induction programs, virtual communities of practice, and mentorship models • assisting states in developing and providing ongoing professional development for teachers. Professional development opportunities could include training modules on classroom management and cultural competency • fostering coordination and collaboration among states, districts, and institutions of higher education to provide effective professional development for current and future school leaders
<i>Improving access to early childhood education</i>	
Kim Benton	Identify and disseminate best practices in developing or acquiring an early childhood data collection system
Kim Benton	Support states in developing a strategic, regional approach to supporting early childhood education initiatives. This could include support for the development of a family and community engagement plan

Member name	Recommendations
Kim Benton	Foster collaboration and partnerships in support of early childhood education. Consider supporting a regional community of practice of state early childhood providers and partnerships between states and educator preparation programs
Kim Benton	Develop and disseminate early childhood resources and tools, including preschool and kindergarten diagnostic measures and procedures for monitoring and evaluating early childhood programs
Kim Benton	Develop training and professional development models to support early childhood educators and administrators. Topics might include early learning curricula, standards, instructional practices, and transition programming
<i>Ensuring innovative and effective use of technology and digital learning</i>	
Michelle Easley	Support states in analyzing data to identify student needs and opportunities to address those needs with digital resources, such as adaptive software
Michelle Easley	Provide models for job-embedded virtual and in-person professional learning around effective technology integration
Michelle Easley	Develop and disseminate an online database containing curated, standards-aligned digital resources

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Appendix A. Region Educational Profile

Demographics

Understanding the demographic makeup of the states in each region helps to establish the context for the educational issues that are most pressing. This section presents tables from the *Digest of Education Statistics*, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and *American Fact Finder* related to:

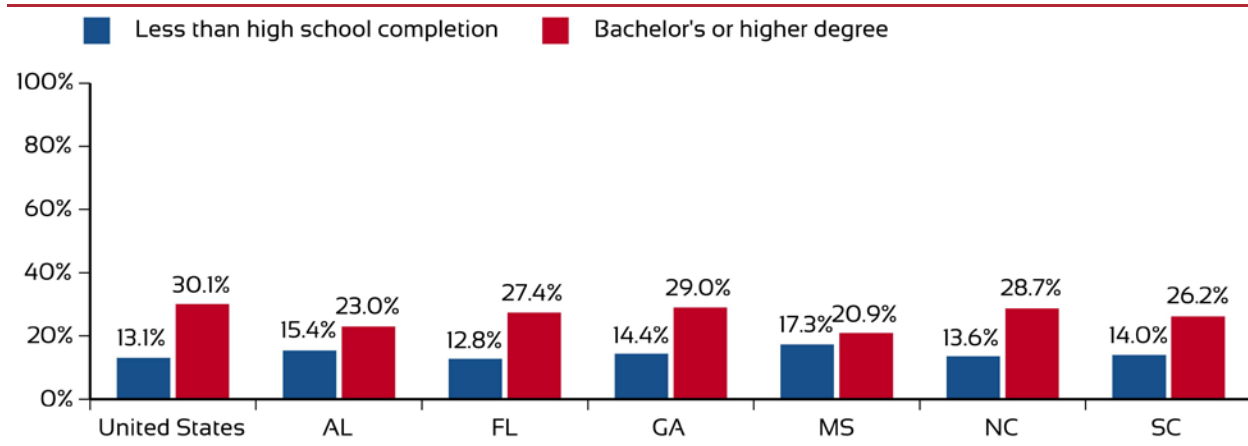
- ▶ the educational attainment of the adult population;
- ▶ the poverty rate, median household income, and unemployment rate;
- ▶ the overall number of students, teachers, and schools, both public and private;
- ▶ the racial/ethnic distribution of students served by public schools;
- ▶ participation in public school services (free or reduced-price lunch program, English language learners, students with disabilities, gifted and talented students, state-sponsored pre-kindergarten); and
- ▶ the percentage of the population who speaks a language other than English at home.

A. Educational Attainment

The highest level of education completed by the adult, working-age population (25- to 64 year olds) is a proxy for human capital - the skills, knowledge, and experience possessed by an individual or population. Higher educational attainment (a bachelor's degree or higher) is associated with better income and employment. Figure 1 displays the percentage of the adult population with less than a high school diploma in 2014, and the percentage with a bachelor's degree or higher in 2014.

Additional information about the **educational attainment of young adults**, and differences by race/ethnicity can be found in the latest *NCES Condition of Education*.

Figure 1. Educational attainment by state, 2014



Source: 2015 *Digest of Education Statistics*, table 104.80. Retrieved July 5, 2016 from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_104.80.asp

B. Economic Indicators

Table 1 displays socioeconomic indicators such as the percentage of persons and percentage of children below the poverty level in 2014. The table also displays the median annual household income in 2014, and the unemployment rate in May 2016.

Table 1. Selected economic indicators, by state

State	Percent of Persons in Poverty, 2014 ^a	Percent of Children Ages 5 to 17 in Poverty, 2014 ^a	Annual Household Income (Median), 2014 ^b	Unemployment Rate, May 2016 ^c
United States	15.1	20.3	\$53,700	4.9
Alabama	18.9	26.8	\$42,800	6.1
Florida	16.2	22.5	\$47,500	4.7
Georgia	18.1	25.3	\$49,300	5.3
Mississippi	21.4	29.5	\$39,700	5.8
North Carolina	16.8	22.9	\$46,600	5.1
South Carolina	17.5	25.6	\$45,200	5.6

Source: ^a 2015 Digest of Education Statistics, table 102.40. Retrieved July 5, 2016 from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_102.40.asp?current=yes;

^b 2015 Digest of Education Statistics, table 102.30. Retrieved July 5, 2016 from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_102.30.asp?current=yes;

^c Bureau of Labor Statistics Monthly Unemployment Report. Retrieved July 5, 2016 from <http://www.bls.gov/web/laus/laumstrk.htm>

C. Schools and Students

Tables 2 through 5 contain school and student demographics such as the total number of schools, teachers, and students; the racial/ethnic distribution of students in public schools; the percentage of schools by urbanicity; and the percentage of Title I schools.

Number of schools, teachers, and students. Table 2 displays the number of schools, teachers, and students in fall 2013 for public and private schools.

Table 2. Count of schools, teachers, and students, by sector and state, fall 2013

State	Public			Private		
	Schools ^a	Teachers ^b	Students ^c	Schools ^d	Teachers ^d	Students ^d
United States	94,758	3,113,764	50,044,522	33,620	441,500	5,395,740
Alabama	1,349	47,162	746,204	400	6,180	76,400
Florida	3,975	177,853	2,720,744	2,140	29,420	372,790
Georgia	2,293	109,441	1,723,909	740	13,760	150,360
Mississippi	901	32,292	492,586	310	4,170	50,330
North Carolina	2,552	99,327	1,530,857	690	11,050	118,090
South Carolina	1,190	48,151	745,657	430	5,310	65,350

Source: ^a 2015 Digest of Education Statistics, table 216.43. Retrieved July 5, 2016 from

http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_216.43.asp?current=yes;

^b 2015 Digest of Education Statistics, table 208.30. Retrieved July 5, 2016 from

http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_208.30.asp?current=yes;

^c 2015 Digest of Education Statistics, table 203.40. Retrieved July 5, 2016 from

http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_203.40.asp?current=yes;

^d 2015 Digest of Education Statistics, table 205.80. Retrieved July 5, 2016 from

http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_205.80.asp?current=yes

Percentage of public school students by race/ethnicity. Table 3 displays the racial/ethnic background of public school students in fall 2013.

Table 3. Percentage distribution of enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools, by race/ethnicity and state, fall 2013

State	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Pacific Islander	American Indian/Alaska Native	Two or More Races
United States	50.3	15.6	24.8	4.8	0.4	1.0	3.0
Alabama	57.0	33.6	5.5	1.4	0.1	0.8	1.6
Florida	40.9	22.9	30.0	2.6	0.1	0.3	3.2
Georgia	42.7	37.0	13.3	3.5	0.1	0.2	3.1
Mississippi	45.4	49.3	2.9	1.0	N/A	0.2	1.1
North Carolina	51.4	26.0	14.5	2.8	0.1	1.4	3.8
South Carolina	52.5	35.1	7.5	1.4	0.1	0.3	3.1

Source: 2015 Digest of Education Statistics, table 203.70. Retrieved July 12, 2016 from

http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_203.70.asp

Percentage of school districts by urban-centric locale. Table 4 displays the percentage of school districts classified by the Census locale codes. The large, midsize, and small city codes were summed to create the total number of city districts. The large, midsize, and small suburban codes were summed to create the total number of suburban districts. The fringe, distant, and remote town codes were summed to create the total number of town districts. The fringe, distant, and remote rural codes were summed to create the total number of rural districts. The percentages of districts within each of the four major locale codes are presented.

Table 4. Percentage distribution of public school districts, by urban-centric locale and state, 2013/14

State	City	Suburban	Town	Rural
United States	5.7	22.9	18.4	53.0
Alabama	12.4	19.0	21.9	46.7
Florida	9.0	41.8	19.4	29.9
Georgia	8.3	12.8	26.7	52.2
Mississippi	3.3	6.6	34.4	55.6
North Carolina	9.6	13.0	12.2	65.2
South Carolina	9.5	23.8	20.2	46.4

Source: *National Center for Education Statistics Rural Education in America*, table A.1.a.-1. Retrieved July 12, 2016 from <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ruraled/tables/a.1.a.-1.asp>

Percentage of Title I schools. Table 5 presents the total number of schools and the percentage of schools that were eligible for Title I in 2010-11. A Title I eligible school is one in which the percentage of children from low-income families is at least as high as the percentage of children from low-income families served by the local education agency (LEA) as a whole, or because 35 percent or more of the children in the school are from low-income families.

Table 5. Number of schools, and percentage by Title I status, 2010–11

State	Number of Operating Schools	Percent Title I
United States	98,817	67.4
Alabama	1,600	57.8
Florida	4,131	71.0
Georgia	2,449	63.9
Mississippi	1,083	81.0
North Carolina	2,567	79.6
South Carolina	1,214	82.4

Source: *Number and Types of Public Elementary and Secondary Schools from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2010-11*. Retrieved July 12, 2016 from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/pesschools10/tables/table_02.asp

D. Participation in Public School Services

Tables 6 and 7 provide information about participation in public school services.

Public school services. Table 6 provides the percentage of students in public schools who were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, participated in English Language learner programs, were served under the Individuals with Disabilities Act Part B, or participated in programs for gifted and talented students.

Table 6. Percentage of public school students participating in school services

State	Free or Reduced-Price Lunch, 2013-14 ^a	English Language Learners, 2013-14 ^b	Students with Disabilities, 2013-14 ^c	Gifted and Talented, 2006 ^d
United States	52.0	9.3	12.9	6.7
Alabama	58.4	2.3	10.8	5.5
Florida	58.4	9.2	13.1	4.7
Georgia	62.1	5.3	11.1	9.3
Mississippi	72.2	1.3	13.3	6.1
North Carolina	54.0	6.5	12.6	10.8
South Carolina	57.4	5.5	13.3	11.0

Source: ^a 2015 Digest of Education Statistics, table 204.10. Retrieved July 6, 2016 from

http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_204.10.asp?current=yes;

^b 2015 Digest of Education Statistics, table 204.20. Retrieved July 6, 2016 from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_204.20.asp?current=yes;

^c 2015 Digest of Education Statistics, table 204.70. Retrieved July 6, 2016 from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_204.70.asp?current=yes;

^d 2014 Digest of Education Statistics, table 204.90. Retrieved July 6, 2016 from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_204.90.asp?current=yes

Prekindergarten participation and per-student spending. The National Institute for Early Education Research publishes a yearly *State of Preschool* report with **profiles of each state**. The state profiles provide detailed information on access to preschool, quality standards, and resources. Table 7 displays the percentage of 3-year-old and the percentage of 4-year-old population enrolled in prekindergarten, and state spending per child enrolled in prekindergarten.

Table 7. State-funded prekindergarten programs, 2015

State	State Spending per Enrolled Child	Percent of 4-Year-Old Population Enrolled in State Funded Program	Percent of 3-Year-Old Population Enrolled in State Funded Program
United States	\$4,489	29	5
Alabama	\$5,333	12	N/A
Florida	\$2,304	76	N/A
Georgia	\$3,880	59	N/A
Mississippi	\$1,778	4	0
North Carolina	\$4,601	22	N/A
South Carolina	\$1,981	47	4

Source: National Institute for Early Education Research. Retrieved July 2, 2016 from <http://nieer.org/research/state-preschool-2015-state-profiles>

E. Other

Table 8 contains linguistic indicators such as the percentage of the population who speak English only at home, the percentage who speak Spanish at home, the percentage who speak another Indo-European language at home, and the percentage who speak an Asian or Pacific Islander language at home.

Table 8. Percentage of population 5 years and older by language spoken at home and by state

State	Language Spoken at Home, Percent of Population 5 and Older				
	English Only	Spanish	Other Indo-European Language	Asian and Pacific Islander Languages	Other Languages
United States	79.1	13.0	3.7	3.3	0.9
Alabama	94.8	3.3	0.8	0.8	0.2
Florida	72.2	20.5	5.2	1.5	0.6
Georgia	86.6	7.9	2.5	2.2	0.8
Mississippi	96.1	2.4	0.6	0.7	0.3
North Carolina	88.9	7.4	1.6	1.5	0.5
South Carolina	93.1	4.4	1.3	0.9	0.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *American Fact Finder*.

State Education Agency Capacity

State Education Agencies (SEAs) are the primary customers of the Comprehensive Centers. Understanding the capacity in the SEA, the number of districts served, and the governance structure of each state provides context. Data in this section come from the *2015 Digest of Education Statistics*, the Education Commission of the States report, *50-State Comparison: K-12 Governance Structures*, and Achieve’s report, *Leadership Turnover: 2015 Year of Significant Change in State Education Leadership*.

Table 9 displays the number of agencies in each state. Table 10 displays the governance model (e.g. who is elected, who is appointed). Table 11 shows changes in education leadership over the past 2 years (2015 and 2016).

Table 9. Number of education agencies in 2013–14, by type and state

State	Total	District/LEA	RESA	State	Independent Charter Schools and Other
United States	18,194	13,491	1,522	255	2,923
Alabama	177	137	0	40	0
Florida	76	67	0	3	6
Georgia	218	180	16	7	15
Mississippi	162	151	0	11	0
North Carolina	265	115	0	4	144
South Carolina	102	84	11	4	3

Source: *2015 Digest of Education Statistics*, table 214.30. Retrieved July 6, 2016 from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_214.30.asp?current=yes

NOTE: RESA = Regional Education Service Agency

Table 10. State governance

State	Governance Model	Legislature	Local School Boards
Alabama	Elected board, board appoints chief	The legislature has a house education committee, a house education finance and appropriations committee, a senate education committee and a senate finance and taxation education committee.	128 local boards; members appointed and elected.
Florida	Governor appoints board, board appoints chief	The legislature has a house education K-20 committee and a senate education committee.	67 local boards; members elected.
Georgia	Appointed board, elected chief	The legislature has a house education committee and a senate education committee.	181 local boards; members elected.
Mississippi	Governor appoints board, board appoints chief	The legislature has a house education committee and a senate education committee.	152 local boards; members appointed and elected.
North Carolina	Appointed board, elected chief	The legislature has a house education committee, a senate education/higher education committee, a senate appropriations committee on education/higher education and a joint legislative oversight committee.	117 local boards; members appointed and elected.
South Carolina	Legislature appoints State Board; Elected Chief	The legislature has a house education and public works committee and a senate education committee.	85 local boards; members appointed and elected.

Source: Education Commission of the States. (2013). *50-State Comparison: K-12 Governance Structures*. Retrieved July 12, 2016 from <http://www.ecs.org/k-12-governance-structures/>

Table 11. State education leadership changes in 2015 or 2016

State	New Governor	New State Board Members	New Chief State School Officer	New State Higher Education Officer
Alabama	N/A	2/8 voting members	N/A	N/A
Florida	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Georgia	N/A	N/A	Richard Woods-R, Jan 2015	N/A
Mississippi	N/A	2/9 voting members	N/A	Glenn Boyce, Apr 2015
North Carolina	N/A	1/13 voting members	N/A	Margaret Spellings, Mar 2016
South Carolina	N/A	N/A	Molly Spearman-R, Jan 2015	Gary Glenn, Sep 2015

Source: Achieve. (2015). *Leadership Turnover: 2015 Year of Significant Change in State Education Leadership*. Retrieved July 12, 2016 from <http://www.achieve.org/files/LeadershipTurnover2015.pdf>

Educational Resources

Indicators of educational resources include school finance information such as revenues and expenditures, access to fiber and broadband connectivity, and pupil to teacher ratios. Data for the tables presented in this section come from the *2015 Digest of Education Statistics, American Fact Finder*, and *Education Superhighway's 2015 State of the States* report on broadband connectivity in public schools.

Table 12 provides the total revenue for each state by source of funds.

Table 12. Revenues for public elementary and secondary schools, by source, 2012/13

State	Total Revenue (in Thousands)	Percent Revenue From Federal	Percent Revenue From State	Percent Revenue From Local
United States	\$603,686,987	9.3	45.2	45.5
Alabama	\$7,188,210	11.8	54.8	33.4
Florida	\$24,506,837	12.6	38.6	48.8
Georgia	\$17,492,816	10.7	43.6	45.8
Mississippi	\$4,394,942	16.1	50.4	33.5
North Carolina	\$13,107,879	12.6	62.2	25.2
South Carolina	\$8,414,913	10.0	46.4	43.6

Source: *2015 Digest of Education Statistics*, table 235.20. Retrieved July 6, 2016 from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_235.20.asp?current=yes

Table 13 provides the per-pupil expenditure, and the percentage of expenditures spent on instruction, support services (student support, instructional staff, general administration, operations and maintenance, student transportation, and other support services), and other (food services, capital outlay, interest on debt).

Additional data on total current expenditures for elementary and secondary education, by function, subfunction, and state is available through NCES. See http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015301/tables/table_03.asp.

Table 13. Per-pupil expenditures, 2012-13, by function

State	Per-Pupil Expenditures	Percent Instruction	Percent Support	Percent Other
United States	\$12,020	54.4	31.3	14.3
Alabama	\$9,824	51.3	31.8	16.9
Florida	\$9,403	56.2	31.0	12.8
Georgia	\$10,218	55.4	28.7	15.9
Mississippi	\$8,637	53.5	34.6	11.9
North Carolina	\$8,745	59.2	30.8	10.0
South Carolina	\$11,091	48.1	32.3	19.6

Source: *2015 Digest of Education Statistics*, table 236.75. Retrieved July 6, 2016 from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_236.75.asp?current=yes

Table 14 provides another look at education expenditures. The last column provides an index state and local education expenditures (excluding capital outlay) to total expenditures (excluding capital outlay, utilities, and intergovernmental expenditures).

Table 14. State expenditures on education, fall 2013

State	Total Enrollment ^a	Total Direct State and Local Expenditures ^{b,c}	State and Local Education Expenditures ^{b,d}	Percent Education to Total Expenditures
United States	50,044,052	\$2,366,783,591	\$796,049,064	33.6
Alabama	746,204	\$32,223,073	\$11,778,415	36.6
Florida	2,720,744	\$121,695,727	\$35,074,721	28.8
Georgia	1,723,909	\$58,026,161	\$22,676,991	39.1
Mississippi	492,586	\$21,524,789	\$6,788,545	31.5
North Carolina	1,530,857	\$66,108,727	\$23,188,662	35.1
South Carolina	745,657	\$31,927,638	\$11,391,658	35.7

Source: ^a 2015 Digest of Education Statistics, table 203.20. Retrieved July 5, 2016, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_203.20.asp?current=yes

^b American Fact Finder, United States Census Bureau. Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/govs/local/>

^c Total direct expenditures do not include capital outlay, utilities, and intergovernmental expenditures

^d Total education expenditures do not include capital outlay

Table 15 displays school district broadband connectivity for each state. The Federal Communications Commission (CC) set a minimum Internet access goal of 100 Kbps per student. The table provides the percentage of school districts in each state meeting that goal. Districts with access to fiber connections are more likely to meet the minimum connectivity goal. The second column of table 15 presents the percentage of school districts in the state with access to fiber connections. The FCC funds upgrades to fiber networks. The FCC also subsidizes the deployment of wired and wireless networks in schools. Accessing the E-rate budget for Wi-Fi networks is an indicator of whether districts are aware their E-rate budget can be used to upgrade Wi-Fi networks. Lastly, \$3/Mbps is a price target that will enable school districts to meet Internet access goals.

Additional information and maps of district fiber connectivity are available through the Federal Communications Commission website (<https://www.fcc.gov/reports-research/maps/e-rate-fiber-map/>).

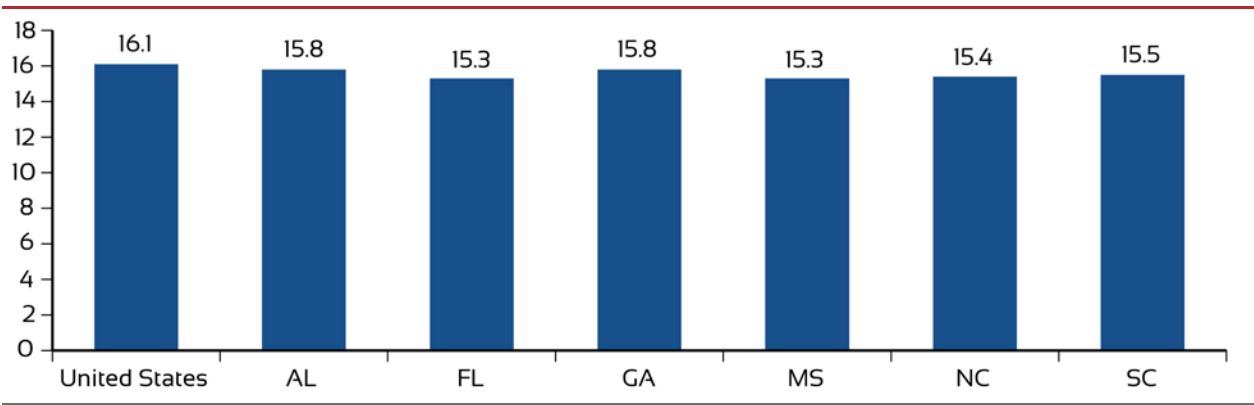
Table 15. School district broadband connectivity, 2015

State	Percent of School Districts			
	Meeting the Minimum 100 Kbps per Student Goal	That Have Fiber Connections To Meet Bandwidth Goals	That Accessed Their E-Rate Budget for Wi-Fi Networks	Meeting the \$3/Mbps Internet Access Affordability Target
Alabama	86	92	67	5
Florida	40	91	80	19
Georgia	88	95	74	30
Mississippi	75	97	69	9
North Carolina	44	94	75	0
South Carolina	97	93	77	1

Source: Education Superhighway. (2015.) 2015 State of the States. Retrieved July 12, 2016 from http://stateofthestates.educationsuperhighway.org/assets/sos/full_report-55ba0a64dcae0611b15ba9960429d323e2eadbac5a67a0b369bedbb8cf15ddb.pdf

Another educational resource is teachers. Figure 2 presents the pupil-to-teacher ratio.

Figure 2. Pupil-to-teacher ratio, fall 2013



Source: 2015 Digest of Education Statistics, table 208.40. Retrieved July 6, 2016 from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_208.40.asp?current=yes

Teacher Preparation, Qualifications, and Certification

Tables 16 through 20 display data on teacher preparation programs, the percentage of teachers who completed their training in a different state from where they are teaching, and ways teacher preparation programs are addressing shortages of highly qualified teachers.

All the data come from the Title II Reports National Teacher Preparation Data file.

Table 16. Number of completers of teacher preparation programs in 2013–14, by program type and state

State	Total Enrollment	Total Completers	Completers by Program Type		
			Traditional	Alternative, IHE-Based	Alternative, not IHE-Based
United States	465,540	180,745	149,369	13,011	18,365
Alabama	5,195	2,506	2,016	405	85
Florida	14,439	6,418	4,837	1,020	561
Georgia	11,651	5,556	4,989	N/A	567
Mississippi	3,896	2,326	1,324	709	293
North Carolina	14,318	5,530	4,270	800	460
South Carolina	4,962	2,341	2,128	N/A	213

Source: 2015 All States Report Data File, Title II Reports: National Teacher Preparation Data. Retrieved July 12, 2016, from <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Home.aspx>

NOTE: IHE = Institute of Higher Education

Table 17. Percentage of completers of teacher preparation programs in 2013–14, by program type and state

State	Total Completers	Program Type		
		Percent Traditional	Percent Alternative, IHE-Based	Percent Alternative, not IHE-Based
United States	180,745	82.6	7.2	10.2
Alabama	2,506	80.4	16.2	3.4
Florida	6,418	75.4	15.9	8.7
Georgia	5,556	89.8	0.0	10.2
Mississippi	2,326	56.9	30.5	12.6
North Carolina	5,530	77.2	14.5	8.3
South Carolina	2,341	90.9	0.0	9.1

Source: 2015 All States Report Data File, Title II Reports: National Teacher Preparation Data. Retrieved July 12, 2016 from <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/DataTools/2015/AllStates.xls>

Table 18. Number and percentage of newly licensed teachers who received their credential from a teacher preparation program in a different state

State	Total Number Receiving Initial Credential in the State in 2013–14	Total Number Who Completed Their Teacher Preparation Program in Another State	Percent Who Trained Out of State
United States	254,272	56,718	22
Alabama	3193	1,639	51
Florida	17,441	3,448	20
Georgia	10,501	3,086	29
Mississippi	1,541	656	43
North Carolina	4,383	2,377	54
South Carolina	2,358	310	13

Source: 2015 All States Report Data File, Title II Reports: National Teacher Preparation Data. Retrieved July 12, 2016 from https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Report/DataFiles/DataFiles.aspx?p=5_01

Table 19. Do teacher preparation programs address shortages of highly qualified teachers by area of certification or licensure, subject, or specialty

State	Area of Certification or Licensure	Subject	Specialty
Alabama	Yes	Yes	Yes
Florida	Yes	Yes	No
Georgia	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mississippi	Yes	Yes	No
North Carolina	Yes	Yes	Yes
South Carolina	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: 2015 All States Report Data File, Title II Reports: National Teacher Preparation Data. Retrieved July 12, 2016 from https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Report/DataFiles/DataFiles.aspx?p=5_01

Table 20. Description of ways teacher preparation programs are addressing shortages of highly qualified teachers

State	Description of the Extent to Which Teacher Preparation Programs Are Addressing Shortages of Highly Qualified Teachers
Alabama	When the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was enacted, Alabama was still operating under a court decree that precluded subject matter testing of teachers. Thus, the vast majority of employed teachers could not use a standardized test score as a basis for documenting their highly qualified teacher (HQT) status. In 2003, the Alabama State Board of Education (ASBE) revised teacher education program approval standards to indicate that individuals recommended for initial certification after June 30, 2005, must have met the requirements of an arts and sciences (A&S) type major in the subject to be taught and that the major must include at least 32 semester hours of credit, of which at least 19 hours must be at the upper division level. Alabama IHEs revised their programs accordingly. Thus, for example, a program completer at an Alabama IHE might earn a single A&S major in mathematics when she completes the requirements of a state-approved program in secondary mathematics, or she might have earned a dual major -- A&S mathematics and secondary education or mathematics education. It is interesting to note that completion of the A&S mathematics major often requires a 2.0 GPA on a 4-point scale, while the prospective teacher is required to earn a GPA of at least 2.50 for the same mathematics courses. In summary, many Alabama IHEs made a significant effort to support Alabama's commitment to increasing the number of HQTs.

State	Description of the Extent to Which Teacher Preparation Programs Are Addressing Shortages of Highly Qualified Teachers
	<p>Another example of the commitment of Alabama IHEs to increase the number of HQTs was the fact that special arrangements were facilitated to allow teachers to enroll in content courses using a special post-graduate status. For example, a teacher who held a certificate for elementary education, grades 1-9, with 35 years of experience teaching mathematics in grades 7-8, might have needed 6 additional hours of credit in mathematics to meet the Alabama HOUSSE minimum content credit requirement of 18 semester hours.</p> <p>Eleven Alabama IHEs are state-funded to provide a regional inservice center (RIC) for employed teachers in specified geographic areas. Since professional development credit could be used in partial fulfillment of HOUSSE requirements, several if not all RICs increased the PD activities in the core academic subjects for which teachers, especially elementary teachers, were most likely to need to earn credit. On a space-available basis, some RICs facilitated the enrollment in PD activities of teachers who were not employed but who planned to seek employment and thus needed to document HQT status.</p> <p>When an agreement was reached through an amendment to the Allen Case (District Court of the United States for the Middle District of Alabama, Northern Division), Alabama moved quickly with cooperation from both IHEs and LEAs to validate 43 Praxis II content knowledge tests and to prescribe the scores required for certification. State requirements pertaining to alternative approaches to earning a Professional Educator Certificate were revised to require program completers to meet the test requirements applicable to completers of traditional programs who apply for a Professional Educator Certificate. In addition, Alabama's test requirements must be met by teachers coming to Alabama from other states.</p> <p>Thus, all teachers who earn an initial Alabama certificate meet NCLB criteria to be deemed HQ. Efforts have continued to encourage experienced teachers to achieve HQT status and to assist them in doing so.</p> <p>The first criterion for an employed teacher to be deemed HQ is for the teacher to be assigned all day to the subject(s) for which the teacher is properly certified. For the 2009-2010 scholastic year, the State Superintendent of Education reinstated the out-of-field penalty assessed against LEAs that assigned one or more teachers to teach subjects for which they were not certified. It is most difficult for LEAs to employ HQTs in the same teaching fields for which there is a general shortage of teachers -- mathematics, science, special education, etc. With IHE cooperation, Alabama has funded at least two major scholarship initiatives to increase the number of teachers available for those subjects. The current financial crisis eliminated those initiatives.</p> <p>Mathematics and some areas of science continue to be critical shortage areas in terms of both certificated teachers and highly qualified teachers.</p>
Florida	<p>Annually, by statute, the Florida State Board of Education must identify critical teacher shortage areas based on identification of high-need content areas and high-priority location areas that include (1) the number and percentage of positions in each discipline filled by teachers not certified in the appropriate field; (2) the annual supply of graduates of state-approved Florida teacher education programs for each discipline; (3) the number and percentage of vacant positions in each teaching discipline; and (4) critical teacher shortage areas which may be identified pursuant to rules adopted by district school boards. In addition to its traditional teacher preparation programs, Florida has approved alternative routes to certification via the Educator Preparation Institutes and Professional Development Certification Programs to provide instruction for baccalaureate degree holders or higher to become certified teachers. These programs increase routes to the classroom for mid-career professionals, including baccalaureate degree holders in critical shortage areas such as mathematics and the sciences. In addition, because of the increased need for teachers in these identified areas, the statutorily required performance metric, production of critical teacher shortage completers, signifies the importance that Florida has placed on production of teachers in these areas. As a result,</p>

State	Description of the Extent to Which Teacher Preparation Programs Are Addressing Shortages of Highly Qualified Teachers
	<p>teacher preparation programs that increase the annual production of teachers in one of these critical shortage areas by at least two teachers, receive a bonus percentage point that is added to the scoring/rating of the preparation program’s Annual Program Performance Report (APPR), otherwise known as the annual report card for teacher preparation programs. Not only has Florida addressed critical teacher shortage areas through state-approved teacher preparation programs that include state-approved alternative routes to certification, it has provided recognition to these programs by awarding bonus points as part of their annual report cards that are part of continued approval decisions. Florida and its teacher preparation programs continue to address and increase the overall percentage of core courses taught by highly qualified teachers.</p>
Georgia	<p>For Georgia state-approved educator preparation program providers from public institutions, the University System of Georgia continued to refine the “20,000 by 2020” program by highlighting a focus on higher education and K-12 school partnerships as the vehicle for better identifying and meeting teacher workforce and students’ needs.</p> <p>In addition, Georgia’s Title II, Part A funds, in part, help support recruitment and retention initiatives, and each Local Education Agency (LEA) addresses their intentional and targeted efforts to not only work with their stakeholders, including IHEs, to recruit and retain as equity indicators in their required state equity plans, which are published on Project EQ. Georgia continued to refine its innovative data system, Project EQ, to support achieving equity across the teacher and leader continuum throughout the equity indicators, including how local school districts and their partners in higher education work together to recruit, induct, and retain highly qualified, highly effective teachers and leaders. Project EQ provides policy makers, program providers, and school systems with a library of effective equity initiatives as well as a forum for discussions among school systems and their higher education partners as they implement, improve upon, and realize results from their equity programs and partnerships. Project EQ is available at http://eq.gapsc.org.</p>
Mississippi	<p>Educator preparation programs around the state have implemented initiatives to enhance their recruitment and training efforts for more teacher candidates to complete the programs of study identified as the critical shortage subject areas within our state and those identified by the Secretary: math, science and special education.</p>
North Carolina	<p>Many colleges and universities are developing creative strategies for recruiting students into high needs teaching areas. One example is UNC-BEST, baccalaureate education in science and teaching, which is housed at UNC-Chapel Hill. This program focuses on high needs science and math areas such as physics, biology, calculus, etc. Another example is Mount Olive College's CORE, Consortium for Orchestrating Regional Education, program which is designed to certified students who already have a baccalaureate degree in high needs teaching areas such as special education, math, and science. Additionally campuses of the UNC system are required to develop teacher recruitment plans that specifically highlight critical shortage areas (math, science, exceptional children, middle grades, etc). The recruitment plans also identify specific production goals for individual campuses and are updated on an annual basis.</p>

State	Description of the Extent to Which Teacher Preparation Programs Are Addressing Shortages of Highly Qualified Teachers
South Carolina	<p>The educator preparation units at Clemson University, Winthrop University and Newberry College have received a National Science Foundation Robert C. Noyce Grant to provide programmatic and financial support to students majoring in mathematics or science who plan to teach at the secondary level.</p> <p>Special Education - CREATE - The chief mission of CREATE is to grow a highly qualified special education teacher force in the State's public schools. Through a partnership with 11 leading colleges and universities in South Carolina, all with NCATE/State-approved teacher preparation programs in special education, the project underwrites course tuition and textbooks costs for qualified individuals to obtain add-on, alternative, or initial certification in special education.</p> <p>Institutions offer courses to allow elementary and high school certified teachers an opportunity to "add-on" middle level certification.</p> <p>Institutions offer contract courses to districts to offer courses that help teachers add-on new certifications in areas of need.</p>

Source: 2015 All States Report Data File, Title II Reports: National Teacher Preparation Data. Retrieved July 12, 2016 from https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Report/DataFiles/DataFiles.aspx?p=5_01

Student Educational Attainment

Indicators of student educational attainment include:

- ▶ Fourth grade literacy;
- ▶ Advanced Placement participation and performance;
- ▶ performance on college readiness assessments (ACT and SAT);
- ▶ averaged freshman graduation rates; and
- ▶ college completion rates.

A. Fourth Grade Literacy

Research has shown that students who are not reading well by third grade have a higher probability of dropping out of high school. Each state uses different assessments of reading and literacy. Table 21 presents results from the 2015 4th grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading assessment.

Table 21. Percentage at each achievement level on the 2015 4th grade NAEP reading assessment, 2015

State	Achievement Level				
	Below Basic	Basic	Proficient	Advanced	At or Above Proficient
United States	32	33	27	8	35
Alabama	35	36	24	5	29
Florida	25	36	30	8	39
Georgia	32	34	26	7	34
Mississippi	40	34	21	5	26
North Carolina	27	34	29	9	38
South Carolina	35	31	25	8	33

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. *The Nation's Report Card*. Retrieved July 12, 2016 from www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2015/#reading/state/acl?grade=4

B. Advanced Placement Participation and Performance

Participation in Advanced Placement (AP) courses and performance on AP exams are predictors of college enrollment and performance. By taking AP courses, students are exposed to college-level course material while in high school. There are currently more than 30 AP courses. At the end of the school year, students in AP courses have the opportunity to take the associated AP exam. The exams are scored on a scale of 1 to 5. Many colleges and universities grant college credit depending on the score. Each college has discretion for awarding credit based on AP exam performance, but generally a student must earn at least a 3 to receive college level credit. Table 22 provides the number of students who took an AP course in 2015, the number of exams taken, the average exam score, and the percentage of exams scored 3 or higher. There are more exams taken than students taking AP courses because individual students may take more than one AP course in a given year. The College Board provides detailed reports for each state, available [here](#).

Table 22. AP participation and exam performance, 2015

State	Number of Students Taking AP Course	Total Number of Exams Taken	Average Exam Score (1 to 5 Scale)	Percent of Exams Scored 3 or Higher
United States	2,416,329	4,343,547	2.82	57
Alabama	26,383	47,931	2.28	38
Florida	200,061	365,132	2.61	50
Georgia	93,208	161,863	2.78	56
Mississippi	7,831	12,054	2.24	37
North Carolina	74,982	140,513	2.70	53
South Carolina	28,987	46,341	2.82	58

Source: *College Board State Summary Reports*. Retrieved July 12, 2016 from <https://research.collegeboard.org/programs/ap/data/participation/AP-2015>

C. Meeting College Readiness Benchmarks

The two primary college readiness assessments in the United States are the ACT[®] and the SAT. Both tests have historically been taken by high school students planning on attending college. The test taken is largely a function of the state where a student attends high school. Recently, several states began providing all students the opportunity to take college readiness assessments. In 2015, 13 states had 100-percent participation of graduates in the ACT[®] assessment: Alabama, Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, North Carolina, North Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, and Wyoming. Because not all students participate in the ACT[®] and/or SAT assessments, it is not appropriate to make comparisons between states. When larger percentages of students in a state participate in the assessment, the average score is generally lower because students from all ability levels are tested. In states with lower participation rates, the students tested are often more likely to be higher achieving.

The ACT[®] consists of four subject area tests (English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science), which are often combined for a composite score. ACT[®] sets benchmarks for each subject-area test. The ACT[®] benchmarks are the scores associated with a 50-percent chance of earning a B or higher in corresponding first-year college courses. The ACT[®] benchmarks are 18 in English, 22 in both Mathematics and Reading, and 23 in Science.

The SAT consists of three subject area tests (Critical Reading, Mathematics, and Writing). The College Board sets a benchmark for the SAT composite score associated with a 65-percent probability of obtaining a first-year GPA of a B-minus or higher. The SAT college readiness benchmark is a 1550 composite score. The College Board produces detailed program results for each state. The state reports provide additional details and breakdowns by student subgroup. See more at <https://www.collegeboard.org/release/2015-program-results>.

Table 23. ACT® and SAT participation and mean scores, 2015

State	Percent of Graduates Taking ACT® ^a	Average ACT® Composite Score (Benchmark 21.25) ^a	Percent of Graduates Taking SAT ^b	Average SAT Composite Score (Benchmark 1550) ^b
United States	51 to 60	21.0	N/A	1,490
Alabama	91 to 100	19.1	0 to 10	1,616
Florida	71 to 80	19.9	71 to 80	1,434
Georgia	51 to 60	21.0	71 to 80	1,450
Mississippi	91 to 100	19.0	0 to 10	1,713
North Carolina	91 to 100	19.0	61 to 70	1,478
South Carolina	61 to 70	20.4	61 to 70	1,442

Source: ^a *The Condition of College and Career Readiness 2015*. Retrieved July 2, 2016 from <http://www.act.org/content/act/en/research/condition-of-college-and-career-readiness-report-2015.html?page=0&chapter=9>.

^b *The College Board Program Results, SAT State Profile Reports*. Retrieved July 15, 2016 from <https://www.collegeboard.org/release/2015-program-results>

Table 24. Percentage of ACT® and SAT test takers meeting college readiness benchmarks, 2015

State	Seniors Taking ACT® ^a	Met ACT® College Readiness Benchmark				Seniors Taking SAT ^b	Met SAT College Readiness Benchmark ^b
		English ^a	Reading ^a	Mathematics ^a	Science ^a		
United States	59	64	46	42	38	N/A	42
Alabama	100	53	34	23	25	6	59
Florida	79	54	42	34	29	74	36
Georgia	58	64	46	38	36	77	36
Mississippi	100	52	31	21	21	3	71
North Carolina	100	47	34	32	26	63	40
South Carolina	62	61	43	38	34	65	35

Source: ^a *The Condition of College and Career Readiness 2015*. Retrieved July 2, 2016 from <http://www.act.org/content/act/en/research/condition-of-college-and-career-readiness-report-2015.html?page=0&chapter=9>.

^b *The College Board Program Results, State Reports*. Retrieved July 15, 2016 from <https://www.collegeboard.org/release/2015-program-results>

D. Public High School Graduation Rates

The adjusted cohort graduation rate (known as ACGR) measures the percentage of public school students who attain a regular high school diploma within 4 years of starting 9th grade for the first time.

Table 25. Adjusted cohort graduation rate for public high school students overall and by race/ethnicity, 2013/14

State	All	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	American Indian/Alaska Native
United States	82	87	73	76	89	70
Alabama	86	88	84	85	91	88
Florida	76	82	65	75	89	74
Georgia	73	80	65	64	83	67
Mississippi	78	84	72	80	89	66
North Carolina	84	87	80	77	91	79
South Carolina	80	83	76	77	88	74

Source: 2015 *Digest of Education Statistics*, table 219.46. Retrieved July 5, 2016 from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_219.46.asp?current=yes

E. College Completion Rates

One way that secondary schools measure their performance is by the transition of high school graduates into post-secondary education or the labor force. One source of longitudinal data on postsecondary enrollment and completion is the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). Following are data from a new report that shows 6 year outcomes for students aged 20 or younger at time of first entry. A detailed report and data tables are available for download from NSC (see <https://nscresearchcenter.org/signaturereport10-statesupplement/>).

Table 26 shows 6 year completion rates for students aged 20 or younger who were first time degree-seeking students who started their postsecondary studies in fall 2009. The states refer to the state where a student entered an institution of higher education, not the state where a student graduated from high school.

Table 26. Overall 6-year completion rates for students aged 20 or younger who were first time degree-seeking students in postsecondary institutions in fall 2009, by institution type

State	4-year Public	4-Year Private Nonprofit	2-Year Public
United States	64.97	76.02	40.72
Alabama	62.05	59.28	N/A
Florida	60.78	74.33	55.90
Georgia	61.82	72.21	33.46
Mississippi	63.39	N/A	47.17
North Carolina	71.70	74.31	39.77
South Carolina	74.39	62.82	39.27

Source: Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Wakhungu, P., Yuan, X., and Harrell, A. (2015, February). *Completing College: A State-Level View of Student Attainment Rates* (Signature Report No. 8a). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Appendix B. Needs and Recommendations From Committee Members

Individual Needs Assessment

Name: Dr. Kim S. Benton

Affiliation: Chief Academic Officer, Mississippi Department of Education

Priority Need 1. Preparing students to college and career ready

Justification: Considering stakeholder responses, this priority need was top ranked and is a goal set by the Mississippi State Board of Education.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance:

1. Provide support for the development of a data base that allows educators to assess their professional needs
2. Identifying best practices and exemplary resources to support College and Career Ready Standards
 - ▶ Support rigorous College- and Career-Ready Standards (CCRS) by developing evidence based, exemplar resources and units of study including dissemination of periodic updates
 - ▶ Provide professional development and evidence based resource guidance for working with high need populations including students with disabilities, English learners, migrant, homeless and students in foster care to ensure that all subgroups have access to rigorous instructional supports that are aligned to CCRS/expectations
 - ▶ Increase content specific professional development, training and on-line opportunities for K–12 teachers aligned to CCRS
 - ▶ Provide support for the development of formative and summative evaluations of progress that specifically measure college and career readiness
 - ▶ Develop universal design for learning training resources that are focused on creating school and classroom environments which are designed to meet both the academic and socio-emotional needs of students
 - ▶ Identify specialized training geared toward middle school educators (STEM, ELA, Mathematics)
 - ▶ Support SEAs in developing and implementing a comprehensive data-driven, research- based professional development plan across multiple grade levels
3. Building partnerships and collaborative relationships
 - ▶ Provide support to build strong networks of support across K–12 and postsecondary institutions
 - ▶ Expand the view of education by disseminating resources designed to support stakeholders in understanding the link between the educational system within their local setting and economic prosperity
4. Maximizing funding streams
 - ▶ Provide guidance and support on ways to maximize federal funding to provide a well-rounded, evidence-based educational program in low-performing schools

Priority Need 2. Supporting the lowest performing schools and closing achievement gaps

Justification: Based on the number of stakeholder responses, this need received the second highest response rating. It is also a goal set by the Mississippi State Board of Education.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance:

1. Equitable access to effective educators
 - ▶ Provide strong evidence-based models for closing teacher quality gaps
 - ▶ Provide state-specific technical assistance and professional development related to recruiting and retaining effective teachers and leaders in low performing schools
2. Training and resource development
 - ▶ Provide resources and support in the areas of integrated programming focused on equity, differentiated systems of support, innovation in educational policy, instructional management, rigorous standards, and assessments
 - ▶ Research and provide reports on schools and communities that have successfully closed achievement gaps and ensured all students are college and career ready
 - ▶ Provide support for development of metrics and tools for measuring the progress in low-performing schools in closing achievement gaps for all subgroups of students
 - ▶ Provide training and support in the design of evidence-based strategies to maximize the school improvement funding set-aside and other flexibilities associated with ESSA requirements
 - ▶ Provide resources and training to support a smooth transition to ESSA requirements (i.e. new classifications of schools, differentiated interventions, continuum of both incentives and consequences, etc.)
3. Community engagement strategies
 - ▶ Provide support for increasing stakeholder engagement including identification of resources and provision of training

Priority Need 3. Improving access to early childhood education

Justification: Stakeholder responses determined this need to be the third most important issue on the list. Improving access to early childhood education is heavily supported by research and proven to be effective. This is also a goal included in the Mississippi Board of Education's Strategic Plan.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance:

1. Training and resource development
 - ▶ Provide training and strategic planning focused on a regional approach to support early childhood initiatives
 - ▶ Help make connections to national experts in multiple early learning domains who can assist with creating broad professional development (videos, guides, checklists, etc.)
 - ▶ Develop or identify training/professional development to aid classroom teachers and administrators around early learning curriculum, standards, best instructional practices, and seamless transition programming

2. Stakeholder engagement strategies
 - ▶ Provide guidance on engaging community (health, childcare, nutrition, education) groups in early childhood education partnerships and provide support on the development of a family and community engagement plan
 - ▶ Facilitate committees of stakeholder groups to provide feedback on policies, procedures, metrics and tools
 - ▶ Provide support for the establishment and implementation of a regional collaborative/community of practice of state early childhood providers
 - ▶ Provide support with the coordination of states and institutions of higher learning regarding current practices for early childhood educators
3. Evaluation and Assessment Design
 - ▶ Design comprehensive PK and K diagnostic measures that address all domains
 - ▶ Provide support for the development of tools and procedures for monitoring and evaluation of PK classrooms and early childhood programs
 - ▶ Identify methods to acquire an early childhood data collection system

Priority Need 4. Improving assessment and accountability systems

Justification: Stakeholders ranked this need fourth on the list of priorities that need to be addressed. This priority is also in the Mississippi Board of Education’s Strategic Plan.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance:

- ▶ Provide research for the design of accountability systems that include robust Career Ready indicators and meet all of the required ESSA components
- ▶ Serve as a thought partner in the development of a state’s accountability plan particularly in regards to equity and high needs populations including students with disabilities, English learners, migrant, homeless, rural students, students living in poverty and students in foster care
- ▶ Provide support for the collection of internal and external stakeholder feedback on state assessment and accountability systems
- ▶ Develop and implement a regional collaborative /community of practice of state assessment and accountability staff
- ▶ Provide technical assistance to districts in understanding the methodologies of accountability and assessment reporting
- ▶ Help establish quality assurance checks for accountability reporting
- ▶ Provide assistance to districts in developing their data improvement plans

Priority Need 5. Ensuring equitable distribution of highly effective teachers and leaders

Justification: This need ranked fifth on the list of priorities and is also a focus based on ESSA regulations. This is also a goal included in the Mississippi Board of Education’s Strategic Plan.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance:

1. Exemplar recruitment and induction programs
 - ▶ Provide research and support for the development of virtual communities of practice for mentoring new teachers and administrators
 - ▶ Develop guidelines and training to support development of a regional leadership academy
 - ▶ Provide support for the identification and analysis of the correlation between critical teacher shortage areas and low-performing schools
 - ▶ Assist states in designing a plan to promote National Board Certification as a part of the teacher career continuum
 - ▶ Provide support for the development of a state teacher recruitment plan
 - ▶ Develop a mentorship model that empowers veteran teachers to mentor new teachers and thereby positively impact education retention rates
 - ▶ Provide support for the development of state specific induction program for new educators
 - ▶ Provide support in the design of a teacher leadership initiative
 - ▶ Assist in the development and implementation of training modules for cultural competency training
2. Leadership training
 - ▶ Design a rigorous set of leadership standards for principals and administrators
 - ▶ Provide support for the development and support of a regional leadership academy to link equitable access and school improvement efforts at the state and district levels
 - ▶ Provide professional development to administrators to provide high quality feedback and coaching of teachers
3. Stakeholder engagement
 - ▶ Assist in the dissemination of equitable distribution of educators training modules through variety of venues (face to face, online, webinars, tool kits)
 - ▶ Provide support for increasing stakeholder engagement in state and district equity processes and procedures

Individual Needs Assessment

Name: Michael Bracy

Affiliation: Superintendent, Jones County Schools, North Carolina

Priority Need 1. Supporting the lowest performing schools and closing the achievement gap

Justification: This need received the highest number of responses on the survey.

Recommended Strategies for Technical Assistance:

1. Disseminating content knowledge and practice to educators and administrators
2. Provide examples from other states on supporting lowest performing schools that meet federal legislation requirements
3. Create a clearinghouse of strategies and resources for closing achievement gaps

Priority Need 2. Equity for all student groups

Justification: This need received the 2nd highest number of responses on the survey.

This was a common thread throughout the survey.

Recommended Strategies for Technical Assistance:

1. Cataloging what resources exist for different schools or subgroups, and identifying gaps.
2. Identify successful strategies used to close the achievement gaps wherever gaps are found between subgroups

Priority Need 3. Continue to increase the graduation rate among all groups of students

Justification: This need received the 3rd highest number of responses on the survey.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance:

1. Advise states on ways to differentiate support for schools with high poverty and high minority populations
2. Share resources with middle schools, particularly planning guides and resources for counselors to begin having conversations with students
3. Regional and state support is needed for those schools with low graduation rates that serve the mentioned populations

Individual Needs Assessment

Name: Michelle Easley

Affiliation: President, Georgia Library Media Association

Priority Need 1. Stakeholders in the state of Georgia indicated the highest priority need is preparing students to be college and career-ready.

Justification: In the Southeast region, the top priority identified by all stakeholder groups was preparing students to be college and career-ready. The classroom, community, local district/county/region, school and state stakeholder groups all indicated *preparing students to be college and career-ready* as the highest priority in the Southeast Region. Furthermore, stakeholders in the state of Georgia identified preparing students to be college and career-ready as their top priority. Many respondents indicated a need to prepare students for success in college and careers. One respondent expressed that schools should “guarantee that students are college and career ready upon graduation from high school.”

Low levels of funding create challenges for preparing students to be competitive as evidenced by the following comments.

- ▶ “We need funding to provide teachers and staff for all of the above mentioned areas. We live in a technologically advanced world but our students are challenged financially and therefore limited to access, but most importantly, they are not provided with technology instruction at the elementary age which restricts them for competing with students from other systems in reference to being college and career ready.”
- ▶ “Ensuring that funding is adequate and goes where needed in the classrooms and provide tutoring and support for our students to help them bridge achievement gaps to prepare them to be college and career ready - high standards and high expectations.”
- ▶ “Lower class sizes to assist in preparing students to be college and career ready.”

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance: The comprehensive centers could—

- ▶ provide general guidance on how high schools could offer different pathways for students;
- ▶ provide structures or guidance on dual enrollment programs which allow students to earn college credits while still in high school;
- ▶ facilitate or help to establish relationships and working agreements between institutions of higher learning and public secondary schools; and
- ▶ support SEAs in effective use of data to identify student needs and establishing personalized learning pathways for students.

People answering the survey shared that professional learning for teachers in low-performing schools would be beneficial. The centers could provide professional development courses and online resources to address needs specific to teachers working in low-performing schools.

In Georgia, a respondent stated, “it would and can help improve instruction, assist and aid low-performing schools, increase student learning by providing instructional necessities such as professional

learning to equip teachers, provide updated technology to ensure students are college and career ready, fund instructional and media specialist positions to increase the quality of instruction in the classrooms.”

One respondent felt that the Comprehensive Centers should collaborate with teachers in the geographic area and utilize teachers’ knowledge and expertise to help devise strategies to improve student learning in their specific geographic locations.

Additional activities suggested for the comprehensive centers are outlined in the respondents’ comments that follow.

- ▶ “Parent education and awareness campaign that emphasizes that high expectations yield more college and career success. Parents look for the quick and easy way to get grades, complete tasks, etc. instead of emphasizing work ethic and commitment to excellence.”
- ▶ “[The centers should catalog] classroom strategies to help students become college and career ready.”
- ▶ “It would be great if the Centers could identify specific examples of district/school turnaround, and share best practices and strategies.”

Priority Need 2. Stakeholders in the state of Georgia indicated supporting the lowest performing schools and closing the achievement gaps as a priority.

Justification: Stakeholders in the state of Georgia indicated that the lowest performing schools needed more support. The classroom, local district/ county / region, school and state stakeholder groups also felt that supporting the lowest performing schools and closing the achievement gaps was a priority. Funding was an identified barrier to implementing and utilizing technology to close the achievement gap. Lack of Internet access, access to Wi-Fi and devices were cited as factors in underperforming schools in rural areas. Moreover, the scarcity of parental involvement was pointed to as a reason for low performance in some schools.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance: The comprehensive centers could make relevant research available on best instructional strategies targeted specifically to under performing schools. “The centers could [provide assistance]... field test[ing] the curriculum with existing students and staff with student populations in schools to find what really works with their specific student population.” Furthermore, the center could “promote best practices; address cultural needs that must be recognized to better understand how students actually learn, utilize what works in other countries.”

The centers could provide templates or guides on developing plans to use blended and personalized learning to help close the achievement gap and outline strategies to help them leverage the use of technology. These resources could be placed in a central repository. The comprehensive center could disseminate information about accessing and using the repository.

The centers could provide lists of hands-on professional learning that guides teachers in developing a concrete understanding of the standards, deconstructs the standards to ensure that all teachers have a common understanding, and identifies learning targets to help students master the standards.

The comprehensive centers could step out of their traditional roles and try a more hands-on approach by creating parent engagement centers (or working with SEAs and LEAs to identify local partners who

could create centers) in every low performing school district throughout the state of Georgia. These centers could offer workshops for parents, provide resources and parenting classes.

Priority Need 3. Stakeholders in the state of Georgia indicated ensuring innovative and effective uses of technology and digital learning as a priority.

Justification: Stakeholders in the state of Georgia indicated that ensuring innovative and effective uses of technology and digital learning as a priority. Feedback showed that teachers and librarians see technology and digital learning as a viable method for increasing student achievement and preparing students to be college and career ready. Furthermore, access to devices and digital resources was impacted by limited funding. A need to obtain funding, whether through grants or the school district, was also highlighted as a need.

One individual noted, “The centers could provide information and assistance to any educator who has a desire to develop a grant proposal to implement or promote programs that support students in creative learning and lifetime application of skills. This would certainly require access to and use of cutting edge technology and preparation for careers of tomorrow.”

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance:

- ▶ The comprehensive centers could provide models for job-embedded professional learning around effective technology integration.
- ▶ Additionally, the comprehensive centers could develop an online database containing curated digital resources specifically aligned to standards.
- ▶ Furthermore, the center could offer webcasts for teachers making professional learning personalized for teachers and available on-demand. Innovative instructional practices that incorporate the use of effective instructional technology could be highlighted and presented to teachers.
- ▶ The center could analyze the performance data of low performing schools and recommend specific digital resources, such as adaptive software, to address the needs of the students.
- ▶ The centers could help States identify needs for virtual technology coaches to assist schools with effective and sustained technology integration as a method of offering continuous professional development and understand cost implications of funding positions like that.

Priority Need 4. Stakeholders in the state of Georgia indicated effective school library programs need adequate and sustained funding and support as a priority.

Justification: In the Southeast region, in the state of Georgia, the educational need identified most by the librarian stakeholder group was a need for funding and support of school library programs. In the state of Georgia, librarians were the largest stakeholder role participating in the survey. Librarians indicated that media programs are in need of funding to ensure their ability to support the students and staff at their schools. The following responses illustrate this point.

- ▶ “Continue to provide funds for media centers, the hub of each school, to spend in ways that best address the needs of the school and community.”
- ▶ “Support mandates for charter systems to have full-time, media specialists in all schools.”

- ▶ “Funding for a full time, certified Media Specialist AND clerk for each school, separate from school point allotment.”
- ▶ “School libraries with qualified librarians in every school” [are needed].

Stakeholder respondents indicate that library media programs support reading, literacy and technology instruction as evidenced by the following responses:

- ▶ “Reading is the most important foundational skill students can have.”
- ▶ “Using media centers to equip students to be lifelong learners and thinkers” [is essential].
- ▶ “School librarians in an effective school library program are critical to the educational needs of our students!”

Feedback illustrated the point that school library programs need funding to create effective programs which can positively impact student achievement. For example, one respondent stated, “Ensure that librarians/media specialists are at every school, supporting effective library programs, realizing that school librarians and media specialists are assets to education and can implement technology in the school.” Another asserts, “Placing a focus on school libraries is a way to increase student success and prepare students for inquiry and critical thinking.”

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance: The Comprehensive Centers could develop a professional learning program that illustrates how media specialists and media programs can impact student achievement, improve literacy skills among students and provide access to technology and digital resources for all students and staff. The Comprehensive Centers could offer this professional development to Boards of Education, district and building level administrators as suggested by a respondent. Comprehensive centers could provide assistance to SEAs on conducting cost-benefit analyses of media center and paraprofessional staff.

Additionally, the comprehensive centers could provide technical assistance to librarians working to obtain grants to support effective library programs. One respondent indicated, “Grants to support additions to the library area space,” was a need. Additionally, the comprehensive centers could provide repositories of best practices, innovative instructional strategies, effective instructional technology integration, digital resources and tool curation and literacy for librarians and media specialists nationwide. This will help to “Ensure that librarians/media specialists are at every school [working to] support effective library programs. School librarians and media specialists are assets to education and can implement technology in the school.”

Priority Need 5. Stakeholders in Georgia indicated ensuring equity, including addressing issues of disproportionality as a priority.

Justification: Stakeholders in the state of Georgia’s comments indicated a general need for a focus on equity as illustrated by these comments:

- ▶ “equitable access for all students”
- ▶ “provide support for struggling students”
- ▶ “consistent discipline”
- ▶ “fair assessment tools and practices”

- ▶ “focus resources in parts of county with international families”

These statements speak to the fact that stakeholders in Georgia feel that equity and disproportionality should be addressed. Many schools’ student population is comprised of students from varying cultural backgrounds. English Language Learners and diverse student populations may require the use of varied instructional strategies.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance: The comprehensive center could provide trainings, coaching, materials, and resources, including online resources. Materials could be specifically developed to assist teachers in working with English Language Learners. Provide professional learning to assist teachers to be culturally responsive and sensitive when working with diverse student populations. Additionally, best practices could be presented for analyzing data to identify disproportionality issues. Guidelines and protocols for establishing measures to address these issues could be provided.

Provide guidance on ways to handle discipline proactively. Establish a bank of online resources for positive behavior interventions, including online resources to track and monitor student behavior.

Individual Needs Assessment

Name: Bill Hussey

Affiliation: State Director of Special Education, NC Department of Public Instruction

Priority Need 1. Preparing students to college and career ready

Justification: The highest number responding via the survey selected this priority area.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance:

- ▶ The Comprehensive Centers can assist states in researching and developing course such as Reading and Math Foundations – a five day course with ongoing coaching that teaches concepts behind reading and math. This should be taught to all teachers which supports the delivery of specially designed instruction in all classrooms.
- ▶ The Comprehensive Centers can collect Peer Reviewed and Researched Based math and reading interventions used in K–12 settings. Create a curated repository of interventions that work with particular populations. Support additional research on any interventions as they are implemented.
- ▶ Assist SEAs in developing cadres of Co-teaching teams in local LEAs.
- ▶ Helps SEAs develop the use of a Transition tool box – LEA teams could be trained – focusing on post - secondary outcomes.
- ▶ Comprehensive Centers can support state implementation of MTSS as the school improvement model in every LEA and Charter School within the Southeastern Region. This could be done by having states share strategies for implementation and or creating a regional meeting to strategize next steps of MTSS rollouts using implementation science as the basis of the planning.

The following define the Math and Reading Foundations programs.

Math Foundations Course

The Math Foundations professional development 30 hour course has shown to increase regular and special education teachers' mathematical knowledge for teaching (Faulkner & Cain, 2013). The course addresses and supports teachers' deep understanding and knowledge of teaching specialized mathematical content, common barriers students face when learning mathematics, and successful ways to approach such situations. Mathematical content knowledge for teaching is significantly related to student achievement gains after controlling for student and teacher-level covariates (Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005). By increasing teachers' content knowledge, better implementation choices are being made, and teachers are better prepared to support all learners.

The Mathematical content knowledge for teaching, the comprehensive continuum of professional development implemented in at least 53 LEAs in NC offered through the PIPD section in the EC Division, ensures transfer of evidence based practices surrounding explicit, multi-sensory and systematic mathematics instruction. The National Advisory Panel (2008) clearly articulated the role of explicit instruction for students with mathematical difficulties and disabilities, and such practices are present in

the Foundations course. Subsequently, the practices are supported through coaching in the classroom through peer observation, modeling, individual, and group coaching. The methods of instruction provide for moderation of the working memory deficits (a common issue for students who struggle with mathematics) Fuchs, Schumacher, Sterba, Long, Namkung, Malone, Hamlett, Gersten, Seigler, & Changas, 2013.

Reading Foundations

Reading Foundations is a rigorous 30 hour course that was developed to address teacher knowledge related to the instructional needs of students with persistent reading difficulties. There are 94 counties participating as Reading sites. This course is based on the growing body of research conducted over the past 15 years that has helped to clarify the puzzle of why students with above average intelligence have difficulty learning to read. The strongest finding to date is that phonological processing is the primary area in which children with reading difficulties differ from other children (Felton, 2014). National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) studies indicate that about 40% of the general population of students have reading problems sufficient to hinder their enjoyment of reading, but an arbitrary cutoff point of 20% has been used in many research studies to designate students as reading disabled. Through the course, teachers develop a thorough knowledge base to understand and teach reading using explicit, systematic, multisensory strategies and the use of appropriate assessments to diagnose and prescribe instruction to address specific skill deficits. Teachers are provided instruction on how to utilize data collection and progress monitoring of evidence based programs/strategies and coached to deliver instruction with fidelity.

Priority Need 2. Supporting the lowest performing schools and closing the achievement gap

Justification: The 2nd highest response to the survey.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance:

- ▶ The Comprehensive Centers can help support SEAs in the development and support of practice profiles to address how LEAs can problem solve and improve their practices and increase positive outcomes. An example in NC is LEAS and Charter Schools completing an LEA Self-Assessment (LEASA) to determine their Exceptional Children programming priority needs.
- ▶ The Comprehensive Centers can help SEAs address various ways to begin and customize their support in supporting low performing districts. An example is regionalizing support by developing regional teams to respond to LEASAs and within the regions, customizing support to meet LEA specific needs.
- ▶ Supporting the use of MTSS – a school improvement framework - to address both academic and social emotional needs of students.
- ▶ Supporting partnerships and collaboration across divisions in state Departments of Education to focus on restructuring individual low performing schools.

Below is a further explanation of the LEASA and the regionalization of the Exceptional Children Division.

The regionalization is part of the Exceptional Children Division's (ECD) movement to Results Driven Accountability which is focused on improving performance outcomes. The ECD's has developed the LEA Self-Assessment (LEASA) which is designed to look at the issues of performance, academically and

behavior. OSEP has required, through Indicator 17, our State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP), a very specific plan focused on improving our state graduation rate for students with disabilities (SWD). In the SSIP we look at causal factors that need to be addressed to improve the graduation rate. The causal factors are broadly academic under achievement, behavior and a lack of engagement. The ECD recognized that it could not address the causal factors directly. There are no specific interventions/initiatives that could be put into place that would have significant enough impact to move the graduation needle forward. The ECD chose to help support the LEAs and Charter schools address the causal factors themselves but with support from the ECD. The LEASA has been designed to help the LEAs and Charter Schools look at their big picture issues and begin through data collection methods determine the best research based approaches to support positive result in the performance outcomes. The SSIP and the LEASA are examples of the ECDs move to more strongly support RDA.

Each LEA and Charter School was required to use the LEASA to assess itself on 6 core areas; 1) IEP Development, 2) Problem Solving, 3) Research Based Instruction, 4) Communication and Collaboration, 5) Policy and 6) Fiscal. Using data that links to each core area, each system has done a self-assessment that involves the local exceptional children (EC) and general education staff and a broader community stakeholder group. Each LEA or Charter identified three core areas to focus on to improve outcomes for their EC students. Based on the three core areas determined by the LEA or Charter School, the local EC program and the LEASA stakeholder group developed a 3 year action plan with strategies to accomplish changes necessary to improve outcomes for students.

The ECD has used Implementation science to rollout both the SSIP and the LEASA. The ECD is focused on ensuring that districts and charter schools address fidelity, capacity, sustainability and alignment. The ECD spent a year working through the process with directors to support the roll of the LEASA.

Priority Need 3. Ensuring equity, including addressing issues of disproportionality

Justification: The 3rd highest response to the survey.

In attempting to look at individual children and their needs, North Carolina has made a concerted effort to ensure that MTSS addresses EC students as regular education students first in an effort to reduce the misidentification of students being placed into special education services. The following provides further clarification how North Carolina is using implementation science (data rules are an element) as process to ensure appropriate implementation:

Data Decision Rules Determining How Students Receive Services

EC students are served through their Individualized Education Program (IEP) defined through IDEA. The IEP is developed annually by a team including parents and defines the services that match an individual child's needs. These services support academic, behavioral, social emotional, developmental, and functional needs of the students. The IEP also defines related services which are needed for some students to access the general education curriculum as well as the amount of time needed for the various services to be rendered.

Multi-tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) Part II of Data Decision Rules

EC students are regular education students first. MTSS is a framework designed to assist schools and school districts with creating a seamless system of support. This support system addresses the academic

and behavior needs of all students Pre-K through 12th grade. MTSS statewide implementation began in the fall of 2015. .

The MTSS framework is built on six critical components: leadership, building capacity for infrastructure/implementation, communication and collaboration, data-based problem-solving, a three tiered instruction/intervention model, and data evaluation. MTSS focuses its efforts to provide structures to analyze and define appropriate Core, Supplemental and Intensive instructional supports.

In addressing EC students, the MTSS framework looks specifically at where the student needs support. An EC student uses the **same data decision rules as regular education students**, whether the student is moving through the tiers in an initial evaluation mode or is an already identified student with newly assessed academic or behavioral needs.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance:

- ▶ Provide resources and training on use of MTSS – a school improvement framework - to address the core curriculum and instruction practices to ensure that deficits related to basic skills are addressed in low performing and high minority schools.
- ▶ Supporting the development of practice profiles by the SEA that support districts review of assessments and evaluation processes and procedures that address the use of multiple sources of data and ensure valid decisions are made in the determination of minority student’s eligibility for EC services.
- ▶ Supporting the systematic implementation of PBIS or other similar peer reviewed or researched based approaches state wide to make sure rules and expectations for appropriate behavior is equitable provided for all students.
- ▶ Support the development of a plan to systematically train all student services personnel in Mental Health First Aid as well as developing/supporting the development of statewide coalitions to develop recommendations for policy and legislative change to ensure access to mental health supports for all school age children.
- ▶ Supporting the expansion of, through the Free Care changes, school based Medicaid to help support medical and mental health services to all children.

Individual Needs Assessment

Name: Lynne Patrick

Affiliation: Director and Associate Professor, Auburn University, Truman Pierce Institute

Priority Need 1. School Leadership

Justification: It is a firm belief in the colleges of education that effective schools begins with the leadership. As one respondent said, “Making educational leadership a top priority. There are no great schools without great leaders.”

Provide professional development was the main theme in the open-ended responses of the survey.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance:

- ▶ Provide more support and work with higher education institutions to provide professional development
- ▶ Provide resources for formal mentors to principals

Priority Need 2. Closing the achievement gap

Justification: Under the guidance of ALSDE’s Plan 2020, Alabama schools have been working toward closing the achievement gap. Numerous strategies are being written into Continuous Improvement Plans; however, the resources are not always provided to successfully implement the plans.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance:

- ▶ Improve access to high quality teacher-training and professional development that increases the skills and ability of the classroom teachers
- ▶ Support SEAs in facilitating partnerships with schools and the universities
- ▶ Provide strategies (written resources, examples, promising practices, guides)for increasing parental involvement

Priority Need 3. Funding

Justification: Alabama is known for having a very antiquated funding formula. As it has been stated several times, the quality of your education depends on your zip code. Trying to correct this problem has been a battle for many years. Survey respondents expressed a need to educate legislators and block special interest groups from buying legislation.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance:

- ▶ Research the funding formula to fund schools and make recommendations to the states (AL) on how to better fund schools

Priority Need 4. Equity

Justification: As mentioned in Priority Need 3, survey respondents deemed funding inequitable in Alabama. This certainly provides an equity issue in our schools.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance

- ▶ Provide resources and best practices on equitable distribution of highly effective teachers.
- ▶ Create task forces of educators, students, parents, and community members to develop solutions and strategies to address issues.

Priority Need 5. Support Low-performing schools

Justification: Alabama’s legislators create a list each year of “failing” schools. These schools receive extra attention from the media, the ALSDE, and their local central office staff. Many plans are written to address this issue; however, it becomes increasingly more difficult for the schools in Alabama to move off the failing list without the necessary resources. The criteria used by the legislators has been questioned many times by educators.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance:

- ▶ Provide context for best practices and practical examples of what works. Recognize that every area, district, state is different. One size does not fit all.
- ▶ Help SEAs identify and use strategies to recruit quality staffing for rural and under-performing school districts.
- ▶ Ensure resources and technical assistance is appropriate for rural areas.
- ▶ Provide opportunities for educators to meet with politicians about policy decisions and changes affecting teachers and students.

Individual Needs Assessment

Name: Gerrita Postlewait (Laura Donnelly, Michael Lower)

Affiliation: Charleston County School District (CCSD)

Priority Need 1. Preparing students to be college and career ready

Justification: 35.1% of South Carolina survey respondents and 31.9% of southeast states survey respondents rated this as the highest priority. As measures have evolved that allow identification of deficiencies in college- and career-readiness, this has become a high priority goal of CCSD leadership and the South Carolina Department of Education. Need exists to more adequately prepare students for college and/or a post-secondary career.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance:

- ▶ Research curricula to determine those that successfully prepare students to be college-ready and career-ready (best practice).
- ▶ Facilitate school districts in providing challenging curricula and placing students in rigorous coursework (e.g., ACT Core level of preparation).

Illustrative comments from respondents include “provide tutoring and support for students to help bridge achievement gaps to prepare them to be college and career ready – high standards and high expectations”, “work to ensure every school has an effective school library program with a certified librarian and adequate funding”, “provide instruction, assistance, and support for technology and differentiated instruction”, “develop webcasts that teachers can easily access at their convenience”, “provide early reading intervention with trained reading specialists, additional funding to schools with high poverty index, additional funding for AP and dual credit courses”, and “additional funding for teachers and technology, incentives to get parents involved”.

Priority Need 2. Supporting the lowest performing schools and closing achievement gaps

Justification: 13.6% of South Carolina survey respondents and 14.0% of survey respondents in the Southeastern states region rated this as the second highest priority. For the past several years, this has been a high priority goal of CCSD leadership and the South Carolina Department of Education. The South Carolina Supreme Court has ordered the Governor and General Assembly to develop a plan to improve rural schools. Need exists to provide improved teacher training for teachers who work with students living in poverty and low performing students.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance:

- ▶ Provide and promote research to determine successful strategies that improve student achievement in low performing schools and close the achievement gap among groups.

Illustrative comments from respondents are “provide research-based and viable programs to meet the demands of low performing schools and students”, “provide quality training and funding to encourage teachers to work in low performing schools”, “outreach programs that provide educational material and opportunities for students in rural areas”, “provide training for teachers on teaching students in

poverty,” and “serve as a clearinghouse providing research-based assistance to schools with high poverty enrollments”.

Priority Need 3. Ensuring equity, including addressing issues of disproportionality

Justification: 8.3% of South Carolina survey respondents and 7.9% of survey respondents in the Southeastern states rated this as the third highest priority. Equity cuts across various issues (e.g., adequate educational funding, disciplinary issues). The South Carolina Supreme Court has ordered the Governor and General Assembly to develop a plan to improve rural schools. Need exists for more equitable funding among school districts.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance:

- ▶ Research funding strategies/formulas used by states to determine those that are most equitable, and the factors underlying successful strategies. This should include studies to remedy inequities in discipline and other areas. Provide adequate funding and grant opportunities.

Illustrative comments from respondents are “promote technology (e.g., internet access) in rural schools and communities”, “ensure certified librarians and library funding for all schools”, “outreach programs that provide educational materials and opportunities for students in rural areas”, “support early childhood education, school libraries, and professional development”, “share information about strategies that work with local school district and advocate for these policies”, “work with schools to build community engagement,” and “professional development for personalized learning.”

Individual Needs Assessment

Name: Maria I. Pouncey

Affiliation: Administrator of Instructional Services, Panhandle Area Educational Consortium

Priority Need 1. Preparing students to be college and career ready

Justification: Florida’s responses mirror the Local/District/County/Region stakeholder group as well as the Southeast regional group by placing the priority as one of the top three. The priority ranked 3rd in the State of Florida and 1st within the Local/District/County/Region stakeholder group and the Southeast regional group. Florida has and continues to regard the need for students to be “college and career ready” as basic to ensure a successful and productive workforce. This priority is in Statute and State Board Rule. Although the State of Florida has been providing training on implementing the standards with fidelity to raise student achievement, more than half of the school districts are small and rural and do not have the subject matter experts to provide follow-up or conduct targeted professional development. It is also difficult to provide targeted PD when there may only be a couple of subject area teachers per school and in some areas within a district. Similar situations may exist within the Southeast Region.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance: Identify gaps directly related to student readiness. Bringing together representatives from the K–12 , Higher Education, Workforce, Economic Development and community to voice concerns, offer proven solutions and identify best practices to support struggling areas, would be a beginning. An opportunity to work on programs promoting seamless transitions for teachers from higher Ed to the K–12 system with a full understanding of standard based instruction is also seen as a need. Facilitating the communication and developing research based professional development opportunities targeting specific gaps for similar groups is also suggested.

Priority Need 2. Supporting the lowest performing schools and closing achievement gaps

Justification: Authorized under Florida Statutes, the State Board of Education identified *Highest Student Achievement*, as the first Strategic Goal. This priority also ranked in the top three within state, Local/District/County/Region stakeholders, and the Southeast regional groups. Florida has placed a focus on providing support for the lowest performing schools yet additional support is necessary in developing on-site support whether in the classroom and/or thru district training.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance: Working with the SEA to identify proven strategies to increase student participation in accelerated courses; identifying successful school districts who will share best practices with similar districts within the region may prove helpful to educators in establishing the idea that they are not alone. Providing professional learning opportunities across the region using virtual classrooms to bring together educators facing similar student populations is also recommended. Another recommendation is to work with the SEAs to identify or develop programs together with Higher Education that will increase the number of highly effective teachers prepared to teach diverse populations, be technologically savvy, and comfortable in moving into the teacher as facilitator role whether using face-to-face, online, or blended models.

Priority Need 3. Ensuring equity, including addressing issues of disproportionality

Justification: Consistent between the State of Florida, the Local/District/County/Region stakeholder group and the Southeast regional group - *Ensuring equity, including addressing issues of disproportionality* ranked as one of the top three priorities. The priority is also identified within the second goal in the State of Florida’s Strategic Plan described as “Seamless articulation and maximum access”. With the re-authorization of the ESEA: The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states have wider discretion in goal setting, accountability and interventions with poorly performing schools. The SEAs as well as LEAs throughout the region may require support in developing guidance in implementing ESSA with fidelity to ensure equity and avoid issues of disproportionality. This is another opportunity to identify areas for improvement or expansion.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance: Centers should work with SEAs to develop indicators that districts and schools could use to ensure the needs of all students are met, particularly in the performance of each subgroup identified within ESSA. Assisting states in developing and/or facilitating on-going professional development opportunities both on-line and face-to-face across the region and within each state on equity and providing research based options to prevent issues of disproportionality within districts and schools may result in a good return on investment since it can be duplicated for use nationwide. This is also an opportunity for conducting pilot programs within the regions to identify best practices that can be shared with districts of similar demographics.

Individual Needs Assessment

Name: Tony Thacker

Affiliation: Director of Research and Development, Alabama State Department of Education

Priority Need 1. Preparing students to be college and career ready

Justification: This was the runaway #1 choice at both the state and regional level. In Alabama the focus on college and career readiness is not surprising since the vision espoused in the state's strategic plan, PLAN2020, is that "Every child a graduate-Every Graduate Prepared For College/Work/Adulthood In The 21st Century."

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance: From an Alabama perspective, we have 7 indicators of College and Career Readiness and support in maximizing the success of our students in meeting those indicators would be tremendously beneficial. That could come in the form of providing insight into the successful efforts of other states in this area or support in translating current research into a cohesive and systematic approach to improving the college and career readiness of our graduates. As one survey respondent stated, "Point us in the direction to where this is happening and put us with people that we can learn from; where are states that are getting the job done?"

Priority Need 2. Ensuring equity, including addressing issues of disproportionality

Justification: Once again, the 2nd Priority for the region is identical to the second priority for the state of Alabama. Alabama, as are other states, is in the formative stages of developing its Equity Plan in response to the DOE's new requirements. The need for equity seems to be broken down into two distinct categories; ensuring equity by addressing disproportionality and ensuring equitable distribution of highly effective teachers and leaders. A common theme voiced most concisely by one respondent was a request to provide, "Equity in the form of scaled funding and tiered services for all schools."

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance: One respondent suggested that the REL could assist with the equity issue if they would, "Help our SEA look at the entire range of school performance and determine minimum acceptable benchmarks for which all school performance can be evaluated. At all levels build the capacity to decrease targets in order to focus on a few, the ability to gather evidence to assess progress, and how to act on the data." This speaks to the possibility that the wide ranging methodologies utilized to assess students and, by extension, schools might not be appropriate for determining success. The REL could be a useful thought partner in making those determinations. The REL could provide insight into practices across the country that yield teachers with the skill-set and knowledge to address the needs of struggling students and willingness to do that in areas of great challenge. The REL could also be a very effective critical friend and provide research and suggestions for making our Equity Plan more effective and more realistic.

Priority Need 3. At the regional level the third greatest need identified was improving assessment and accountability systems

That was not a major concern in Alabama and that may be because of two things: 1. Our accountability system is determined by state law and we cannot change it, and 2. We use the ACT suite of assessments for our summative assessment and have purchased an enterprise level license from Scantron to provide

formative assessment options to every public school, teacher, and student in the state. That said, the third priority need identified by Alabama stakeholders is improving instructional leadership.

Justification: The consensus amongst Alabama respondents is that educational leaders must master the art of being both the lead teacher and the lead learner in a school. In one respondent's words the state needs, "Astute leadership for schools" that supports the "innovation necessary to remedy poor performance". That requires not only an, "understanding of and commitment to instructional best practices" it demands a willingness to "address teacher preparedness and supports for teacher success in practice." Clearly a leader cannot remove the barriers to teacher success if they do not have the capacity to recognize, identify, and understand those barriers.

Recommended Strategy for Technical Assistance: The primary requests from the respondents in this area are for the Comprehensive Centers to provide resources, research, and best practices for instructional leadership. In addition, there is a need for the Comprehensive Centers to facilitate work with higher education institutions to provide effective professional development for leader both before and after they graduate. Alabama would also appreciate research regarding states that have made a concerted and successful effort to make effective educational leadership a priority. As one respondent from higher education stated, "There are no great schools without great leaders".

