



STATE OF ALABAMA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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 State Superintendent
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Op-Ed to all Media
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A New Day for Public Education in Alabama – Part I

On June 21st, the United States Department of Education (USDOE) approved Alabama’s PLAN 2020 as our state-specific plan for assessing our students’ readiness for college, work, and adulthood in the 21st century. This action allows the state to shift our focus from narrowly defined measures of proficiency (AYP) required under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to a focus on individual students and groups of students and their ability to succeed in their individual pursuits following high school graduation—a goal shared with our partners in Postsecondary, Higher Education, and Business and Industry.

This move by the USDOE is affirmation of the goals of the Alabama State Board of Education that are focused on increasing the graduation rate, closing achievement gaps, moving ALL students to redefined levels of proficiency, and making sure Alabama graduates are prepared for college without the need for remediation and/or a career with industry-recognized credentials.

The foundational step in this new plan is the establishment of a true picture of student learning in our state by student and by school followed by focused and differentiated solutions in areas where improvement is needed – typically referred to as accountability. With baselines established, individual *differentiated annual objectives* for each school and group of students will be established including Black, White, Hispanic, Asian Pacific, Indian/Alaskan, special education, limited-English, and those receiving free/reduced meals. Each student group will have its baseline scores assessed to see how far the group is from reading and performing mathematics at 100% proficiency, or on grade level. Once proficiency rates are determined, schools will be challenged to increase their rates by one-half of the difference to 100% in six years.

For example, if a subgroup scores at 70% proficiency (30% from 100%), it must increase by 15 points (to 85%) over the next six years. This individualized approach does not lower the expectations of these subgroups as each has an overall goal of 100% proficiency but rather provides new motivation to accelerate the learning of those students and groups of students that have traditionally fallen far below their peers with the goal of erasing the achievement gap that has been with us for decades. This individualized goal-setting is one of the greatest strengths of this new system as it has as its foundational belief that ALL students can learn and succeed once their needs are identified and addressed and that

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greater resources and support must be provided to ensure their success. To inform these new accountability measures, a meaningful and parent-friendly student assessment system is also being implemented based on the widely accepted and research-based ACT and WorkKeys as our capstone assessments. All other assessments will be aligned so a learning trajectory for each student can be developed, monitored, and shared between the school, parents, and students in Grades 3-12.

This new assessment system also gives us a common measure of student learning between K-12, Postsecondary, Higher Education, and Business and Industry. This is just one of the many components in PLAN 2020, and each component will be discussed over the next several weeks in subsequent releases of “A New Day for Public Education in Alabama.”