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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION APPROVES ALABAMA’S PLAN TO PROVIDE EQUAL ACCESS TO EXCELLENT EDUCATORS

Montgomery, Ala. – As part of its Excellent Educators for All initiative—designed to ensure that all students have equal access to a high-quality education—the U. S. Department of Education today announced the approval of Alabama’s plan to ensure equitable access to excellent educators.

Alabama is among 17 states receiving approval for plans that will aid in eliminating the gaps some students face in access to excellent educators by implementing strategies and innovative solutions to challenging problems that meet local needs. The other states are: Alaska, Arizona, California, Georgia, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

“All parents understand that strong teaching is fundamental to strong opportunities for their children. We as a country should treat that opportunity as a right that every family has—regardless of race, ethnicity or national origin, zip code, wealth, or first language,” said U. S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tommy Bice said Alabama is committed to improving student outcomes for all students, noting the purpose of the state’s plan is to improve access to excellent educators who are highly qualified for Alabama’s most disadvantaged youth without decreasing the focus on the need for high-quality educators for all districts, schools, and classrooms.

“It is our aim to narrow and ultimately eliminate the gap between the number and percentage of highly qualified teachers in the state’s high-poverty and low-poverty schools,” Bice said. “Our comprehensive approach will strengthen and maintain teacher and principal effectiveness across the state with an emphasis on our schools and classrooms with the greatest need.”

The Alabama State Department of Education engaged a variety of stakeholder groups to ensure that Alabama’s plan not only includes strategies that will be effective in eliminating identified equity gaps, but also that these strategies are meaningful for the students, teachers, and communities in which they will be implemented.
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Some of the highlights of Alabama’s plan include:

- Working to pilot “Professional Pathways for Alabama Teachers”—a tiered certification system to provide career development pathways for educators in the state designed to help attract and support new teachers and retain and recognize effective ones.

- Taking steps to increase data-driven decision-making to help ensure that schools and districts have access to accurate, timely information necessary to make knowledgeable decisions.

- Making a commitment to be publicly accountable for meaningful progress in eliminating identified equity gaps by publicly reporting their progress. This public reporting will help ensure that students, schools, communities, and stakeholders continue to have information about the state’s progress in this critical work.

In July 2014, the U. S. Department of Education announced a comprehensive Excellent Educators for All Initiative. As part of this initiative, states were asked to create new, comprehensive plans that put in place locally developed solutions to ensure every student has equal access to effective educators. These plans are required by Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have submitted their plans for review by the Department.

In September, the Department approved 16 states’ plans to ensure equitable access to excellent educators. Those states were: Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maine, Missouri, Minnesota, New York, Nevada, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Wisconsin.

The Department is currently reviewing the remaining state plans to determine whether they meet all of the requirements set in ESEA and will make determinations regarding the plans on a rolling basis. The determinations and the plans in their entirety can be found here.

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